



27 November 2020

Committee Secretary
The Standing Committee on the Environment and Energy
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the inquiry conducted by The Standing Committee on the Environment and Energy, which has been tasked with reviewing and reporting on the Climate Change (National Framework for Adaptation and Mitigation) Bill 2020 and Climate Change (National Framework for Adaptation and Mitigation) (Consequential and Transitional Provisions) Bill 2020.

This submission is from the **Bayside Climate Crisis Action Group (BCCAG)**, a non-profit community organisation that works to reduce the impact of climate change and promote sustainability. Our submission is endorsed by the following community groups in and around the City of Bayside, Victoria:

- Bayside Seniors Action Group (BSAG)
- Beaumaris Conservation Society Inc (BCS)
- Black Rock & Sandringham Conservation Association Inc (BRASCA)
- Brighton Residents for Urban Protection Inc, (BRUP)
- Elsternwick Park Association
- Glen Eira Emergency Climate Action Network (GECAN)
- Marine Care Ricketts Point (MCRP)
- Port Phillip Emergency Climate Action Network (PECAN)
- Sandringham Foreshore Association (SFA)
- The Wilderness Society (TWS) Bayside

Together, we share a vision of 'A Safe Climate for All'.

Overview

We strongly support the enactment of the Climate Change Bill 2020.

The impacts of climate change on Australia are here already, from rising temperatures and numbers of extreme heat days, to worsening droughts and bushfires, exemplified by the 2019/20 summer of what were described not as bushfires, but 'megafires'. According to the State of the Climate Report 2020¹, Australia's climate has already warmed by 1.44°C on average.

While progress has been made in some sectors such as building capacity for renewable energy, including at household level where over two million Australian households have installed solar panels, much more

ambitious and urgent action must be taken in order to meet the objective of the 2015 Paris Agreement which has the stated intention of limiting the increase in global warming to well below 2°C and pursuing efforts to limit it to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. This compares to Australia’s current emissions trajectory which conforms to warming of at least 3°C with all the catastrophic consequences that entails.²

Like a growing number of countries around the world (UK, France, Germany, New Zealand, China, South Korea and Japan) and indeed all Australian states and territories, the federal government needs to support its rhetoric around ‘doing our part’ with legislation that sets a target. A target will provide the clarity and certainty needed to guide efforts and investment to achieve an orderly and planned transition to net zero emissions by 2050.

US President Elect Biden has named climate change as one of his top priorities, thus increasing the pressure on Australia to embrace zero by 2050. Of note, public concern regarding climate impacts and the need for action is growing as demonstrated by the recent report from The Australia Institute report “Climate of the Nation 2020”, in which 80% of Australians think that we are already experiencing the impact of climate change, and over two thirds of Australians (68%) support a national target of net zero emissions by 2050.³

While the federal government often cites concerns about the economic cost of taking action on climate change, this view has been rightly challenged by a new report from Deloitte Access Economics. This report concludes that inaction will have the effect of curtailing Australia’s economic growth to the tune of \$3.4 trillion and 880,000 fewer jobs in just 50 years.⁴ We risk losing the capacity to become a renewable energy superpower if we fail to act now.

The human health consequences are also severe, with health professionals and organisations locally and globally declaring that climate change is a medical emergency.^{5,6} Our health, our safety and our very way of life is at risk.

Objectives and long-term emissions reduction commitment

The Climate Change Bill 2020 will ensure that Australia responds proactively to the environmental and economic challenges of our changing climate, providing a legislated path to zero emissions by 2050, and allowing for five yearly reviews of this target in accordance with the best available scientific advice. Years of delay and disagreement on climate policy by government have meant that our emissions reductions to date and those likely to occur with a business as usual approach will be nowhere near enough for us to achieve a safe climate.

In its September 2020 update on Australia, the Climate Action Tracker (CAT), an independent global scientific analysis that tracks government climate action, stated that there is a lack of climate action, including use of ineffective policies (the Climate Solutions Fund), continued support for coal and gas, with gas touted as a means of economic recovery post COVID rather than a low carbon renewables led recovery, and no updated renewable energy target set following the 2020 target.⁷ CAT rated Australia’s Paris target of 26-28% by 2030 as ‘insufficient’ i.e. not consistent with holding warming below 2°C let alone the Paris Agreement’s stronger 1.5°C target. If other countries’ commitments were similar to Australia’s, warming would reach over 2°C and up to a catastrophic 3°C. This is not doing our fair share as a wealthy nation, nor is it meeting our obligations under the Paris Agreement. Furthermore, the latest Climate Transparency Report, comparing G20 climate action and responses to the COVID-19 crisis, described Australia as one of only two countries in the G20 not implementing or planning any sort of carbon price scheme, one of only four without a national policy to increase renewable energy and ranks us last in cutting greenhouse gas emissions from transport.^{8,9}

In the absence of a clear science-based plan for long-term emissions reduction, Australia is relying on others to do the 'heavy lifting' on climate and as such, while not only putting at risk our economy and environment, Australia is also abrogating its moral and ethical responsibilities to safeguard human rights, health and the safety and wellbeing of future generations of Australians, as well as jeopardising our national security.¹⁰

This is in contrast to a proud history and reputation of strong action to protect ourselves, the environment and the global community through participation in, for example, military action supporting our allies, banning whaling in Australia and advocating protections for whales, for preserving the Antarctic wilderness and for world leading health and scientific advances such as being one of only a small number of countries on track with our 2016 commitment to eliminate viral hepatitis (hepatitis B and C)¹¹ and cervical cancer¹² and much more.

Last year, executives from the United Nations called on Member States to take more action to mitigate the existential threat posed by climate change, with the leaders of more than 30 UN agencies and entities issuing a formal, joint appeal for governments everywhere to '*step up ambition and take concrete action*' ahead of the September 2019 Climate Action Summit in New York.¹³ The Climate Change Bill 2020 provides a means for the Australian government to step up and join with others around the world to lead action on climate rather than continue to act as a 'global deviant for climate action' (Dr Martin Rice, the Climate Council).¹⁴

A commitment to long-term emissions reduction would provide certainty for all and signals to the local and global community that Australia is serious about addressing climate change.

Why legislating Net Zero by 2050 with regular 5 year budgets is vital

Legislation works - studies have demonstrated that national climate legislation leads to a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.¹⁵ Legislating net zero and regular five year budgets are essential for Australia, both for guiding our current and future efforts to reduce carbon emissions and to give us a chance to mitigate the worst predicted impacts of climate change that would occur with a business as usual approach. Other benefits of achieving net zero will include improvements to human health through improved air quality and a better protected natural environment. Importantly, enacting the Climate Change Bill 2020 would also mean formalising bipartisan support and accountability for government actions to deliver on this.

The Bill is based on successful models in the UK and Victoria. The UK's climate legislation is a useful reference point here. In 2008, the UK legislated an 80% reduction in emissions by 2050 and in the last year, upped this ambition to net zero by 2050.¹⁶ The UK's non-departmental public advisory body, the Committee on Climate Change (CCC), recently concluded that "net-zero is necessary, feasible and cost-effective". Historically heavily reliant on coal, which supplied 70% of electricity to the UK in 1990, the UK now only derives 3% of its electricity from coal, and this year achieved two months straight without burning coal to generate electricity, the longest period since the 1880's.¹⁷ Refreshingly, rather than shy away from ambitious action to reduce emissions in the context of contributing less than 1% of global emissions, the UK hopes to set an example that other countries can follow, and recognises a moral case given the UK's history as a major producer of greenhouse gases along with its role in the industrial revolution. Chris Skidmore, when minister for energy and clean growth, stated that the UK was "*pioneering the way for other countries to follow in our footsteps, driving prosperity by seizing the economic opportunities of becoming a greener economy*".

As global economies transition from carbon intensive fuels to zero carbon fuels over the next three decades,

the Australian economy will need, not only to match the trend, but to anticipate it. Investors with stakes in fossil fuels who are slow to respond will find themselves stuck with stranded assets. Those who anticipate the trend will be seeking to build on Australia's emerging competitive advantage in abundant and cheap renewable energy resources, the foundation for new, job rich and energy intensive manufacturing industries. Without a target in place, we risk losing out to more resourceful and forward looking nations.

For Australia, legislating net zero by 2050 and determining 5 year budgets provides a target and a robust pathway to get to that target. This is supported by the majority of Australians and big business, with a growing list of global companies committing to net zero by 2050. The Business Council of Australia (BCA) supports transitioning to net zero emissions by 2050, with CEO Jennifer Westacott stating *"I reckon if we could get the two political parties to agree to that [net zero emissions by 2050] and legislate it, we would have made a massive advance in this country because we would know where we're going... For business that does want to take action in this space, that would at least give us a kind of certainty about where are we heading."*¹⁸

Guiding principles to be applied

We believe the guiding principles outlined in the Climate Change Bill 2020 provide a sensible framework upon which progress can be planned, enacted, reported on and monitored on the path to net zero by 2050. We support adoption of all the guiding principles in the Bill which include:

- Principle of effective, efficient and equitable action
- Principle of informed decision making – ensures use of the best available scientific evidence from credible and reputable local and international sources
- Principle of risk based, integrated decision making
- Principle of fiscal responsibility – includes acknowledgement of the cost of direct damage from climate change both now and in the future, the likelihood that the cost of early action on mitigating climate change will be substantially lower than later action and that inaction will likely incur a growing burden of debt on future generations. This highlights the issue of intergenerational justice associated with the climate emergency.
- Principle of fair employment transition – calls for a just transition for workers impacted/likely to be impacted by the move to net zero emissions, in particular our exit from fossil fuels, have been largely ignored to date.
- Principle of community engagement and self determination – ensures community involvement, particularly vulnerable or marginalised communities. We note that climate change disproportionately impacts poor and/or marginalised communities.
- Principle of national and international cooperation

Risk and adaptation assessments for all sectors

'Unprecedented is not a reason to be unprepared. We need to be prepared for the future.' These are the words of Air Chief Marshal Mark Binskin AC, Chair Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements, October 2020.¹⁹ This year's Royal Commission into the 2019/20 bushfires highlighted the importance of planning for and adapting to our changing climate.

We are increasingly experiencing the impacts of damaging climate change through more extreme heat days, worsening droughts and fires, floods and worsening air quality arising from the burning of fossil fuels (in electricity production, industry and in vehicle emissions) and from bushfire smoke. Coastal erosion is

worsening from storm surges and sea level rise, risking infrastructure (housing, roads, commercial buildings and more) and irreparable damage to coastal ecosystems. Risks to human health, water and food security coupled with biodiversity loss are significant. The inclusion of regular mandatory risk and adaptation assessments across all sectors in the Climate Change Bill is critical.

There are growing calls from health professionals and health organisations for government to develop a national climate and health strategy given the predicted catastrophic impacts of climate change on human health.²⁰ From 2018, the Medical Journal of Australia (MJA) has committed to provide annual reports on health and climate change based on the global Lancet Countdown report. The 2019 MJA-Lancet Countdown report concluded that there continues to be *'no engagement on health and climate change in the Australian federal parliament and that Australia performs poorly across many of the indicators in comparison to other developed countries... Australia remains at significant risk of declines in health due to climate change, and that substantial and sustained national action is urgently required in order to prevent this.'*²¹ Some adaptive measures put in place, such as heat health planning (public warning systems and awareness campaigns, state and local heat health action plans) have been demonstrated to be effective in reducing morbidity and mortality from extreme heat²² and should be expanded and incorporated into coordinated national efforts as part of an overall climate and health strategy.

Other health risks include air pollution, worsening respiratory disease and allergies, adverse mental health impacts, physical injury from extreme weather events and worsening of some vector borne infectious diseases such as Ross River Virus. It is anticipated that strong mitigation and adaptation efforts will quickly bring about health co-benefits such as reducing the extraction and burning of fossil fuels for energy production, electrification of transport (change over to electric vehicles etc) and the resulting better air quality will improve human respiratory and cardiovascular health.

Risk assessment and adaptation planning across all sectors will be the key to effectively managing this aspect of our path to a more sustainable future. We note the recent defunding of Australia's only adaptation research facility, the National Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility (NCCARF)²³, which was acknowledged for its contribution to Australia's 2015 National Climate Resilience and Adaptation Strategy 2015.²⁴ We strongly support NCCARF being revitalised and funded again to continue its critical role in helping build resilience to climate change in government, NGOs and the private sector and contributing insights from adaptation science and research to planning and policy making. NCCARF's initiatives include CoastAdapt, an online coastal climate risk management framework developed by NCCARF to support adaptation to coastal climate change and sea-level rise. For a country where over 80% of the population live within 50km of the coast, this must be an important priority.

Australia's National Climate Resilience and Adaptation Strategy 2015 provides a starting point for looking at adaptation (includes planning regarding coasts, cities and built environment, agriculture, forestry and fisheries, water resources, natural ecosystems, health and wellbeing, disaster risk management and regional resilience and security)²⁴ but now requires a comprehensive review and update. Of note, the strategy was criticised for not acknowledging the breadth of risks to health and for failing to recognise the adverse health impacts of fossil fuel combustion, a key contributor to climate change.²⁵

Independent climate change commission and skills needed on the commission.

We support the legislated establishment of an independent expert body to advise government and to transparently inform the development and review of the proposed carbon emissions budgets, emissions reduction plans, to monitor and report on progress towards meeting the five yearly emissions budgets and

the net zero target, to prepare risk assessments and low emissions technology statements and to report on the implementation of national adaptation plans.

The Bill proposes that the climate change commission include a chair, the Chief Scientist and 5-7 other members. It is reasonably stipulated that 'the Minister must ensure that the Commission (taken as a whole) has experience in, or knowledge of, the following: (a) business competitiveness; (b) climate change policy; (c) climate science; (d) economic analysis and forecasting; (e) energy production and supply; (f) financial investment; (g) regional development; (h) industrial relations; (i) agriculture; (j) technology development and diffusion'. Further, 'The Minister must ensure that, at any time: (a) a minimum of two members of the Commission must hold expertise in climate science and climate policy' – we would suggest that this be amended to a minimum of two members holding expertise in climate science and climate policy, in addition to the Chief Scientist, to ensure that a science-based approach is front and centre to the work of the commission, as has worked well with Australia's approach to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In closing, we offer a quote from Prof Don Berwick of the US based Institute for Healthcare Improvement, particularly apt in the current context:

"Some is not a number, soon is not a time, hope is not a plan"

The Climate Change Bill 2020 provides us with a number, a time and a plan to get there. Let's act now to address the climate emergency confronting us and support the Bill!

Yours sincerely,



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