

23 August 2019

Dear Climate Change Authority,

Friends of the Earth Australia are a community-driven environment group with over 55,000 supporters. We welcome the opportunity to make this submission to the consultation on updating advice on meeting Australia's Paris Agreement commitments.

Friends of the Earth believe our country has a chance to focus our attention the challenge before us. Australia needs to implement substantive and effective policies to drive transformation towards a zero-carbon economy. We can build trust and goodwill with our international neighbours with policies that reflect scale of the climate crisis.

POLICIES THAT ARE SCIENCE-BASED & AMBITIOUS

As an independent statutory authority, you have an opportunity to make recommendations to the government that are based on the latest climate science and an accurate assessment of the global carbon budget. We call on the authority to make recommendations that:

1. reflect the latest science on climate change, and
2. ensure Australia has a credible plan to meet our Paris Agreement commitments.

We also urge the authority to consider the role of drawdown of greenhouse gas emissions. We note the following observations:

- The Climate Change Authority's recommendation for Australia to cut emissions by up to 65 percent below 2005 levels by 2030.
- For Australia to meet its carbon budget constraints, Professor David Karoly and Professor Clive Hamilton state that Australia would have to reach net zero emissions by 2035.
- The United Kingdom has set a legally binding target to cut emissions 57 percent below 1990 levels by 2032 and net-zero emissions by 2050.
- Scotland, with a similar population as Victoria, will cut emissions 66 percent below 1990 levels by 2032 (with the additional aim for a 100 percent renewable electricity sector by 2032).
- California, the world's sixth largest economy, will cut carbon emissions 40 percent below 1990 levels by 2030.

Sound decision making on Australia's policies to meet our Paris Commitments will require the greatest level of accuracy about our current emissions profile. We encourage the authority to account for the emissions associated with aviation, shipping and land use (including prescribed burning and fire regime associated with logging).

Friends of the Earth Australia encourage the authority to limit any offsetting included in the policy recommendations. There are known human rights abuses and negative environmental impacts associated with some international offsetting schemes. Limiting offsets to Australian based projects will mean our country captures the full economic and employment benefits of such schemes.

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands of Victoria and that sovereignty has never been ceded. We pay respects to Elders past, present and emerging. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continue to play a pivotal role in environmental and social justice struggles, and any vision of the future must be done in direct consultation and collaboration with First Nations People.

POLICY OPTIONS TO DRIVE EMISSIONS REDUCTIONS

In terms of policy tools, there are significant underdeveloped opportunities for Australia to rein in emissions.

In May 2018 Friends of the Earth Melbourne made a submission to **Victoria's interim Emissions Reduction Targets**. This submission canvassed a wide variety of policy options that can be supported by the federal government. Many of these can be adapted to be applicable across Australia.

ENERGY

- Powering Melbourne's train network—the state's second-largest consumer of electricity—with renewable energy. Solar, wind, and storage will soon power Melbourne's iconic tram fleet as well as the Laverton Steelworks. It would create a truly sustainable mode of transport for Victorians.
- The creation of a publicly owned retailer backed by 100 percent renewable energy will be needed to ensure all Victorians have access to clean, fair, and affordable electricity.
- Allocate substantial funds (minimum \$80m per year) to drive the rapid transition and economic diversification in the Latrobe Valley.
- To commit no further public funding or support for new coal technologies (including experimental coal to gas, hydrogen, fertiliser, and carbon capture and storage (CCS) programs.

FORESTS AND LAND USE

- The creation of the Great Forest National Park (GFNP) and East Gippsland Emerald Link Reserve. Victoria is home to the world's most carbon-dense forests. Protecting them is a simple first step towards avoiding emissions and will help forest ecosystems and species that depend on them cope with climate change impacts.

TRANSPORT

- A commitment to a community focused transport plan for the future of Melbourne. The transport sector is the second largest—and fastest growing—source of emissions in Victoria. It is essential for Victoria to shift the balance of funding from roads to critical public transport infrastructure such as Melbourne Metro 2 to provide zero-carbon transport options for the community.

EARLY ACTION A PRIORITY

The science of climate change is getting more concerning and more accurate. The impacts of climate change are becoming more obvious too, with alarming melting of the polar ice caps, bleaching of the Great Barrier Reef, and parts of Australia seeing record hot and dry conditions. The level of ambition required of developed countries is on an upward trajectory.

BARRIERS TO REDUCING EMISSIONS

There are few technical barriers to Australia achieving deep emissions cuts. The effectiveness of renewable energy, energy efficiency, business models, public transport, forest protection, and smart urban planning for cutting emissions is well documented.

The main barriers to reducing emissions are political. Blockages from vested interests who benefit from polluting activities stand in the way of the ambitious actions needed to tackle climate change.

IMPACTS & BENEFITS

Failure to take ambitious action to rein in Australia's emissions hinders global efforts to tackle climate change. Failure on this front exposes communities, ecosystems, and our economy to climate change impacts.

The benefits of cohesive and credible policies to meet our Paris Agreement commitments are manifold. It will require, among other things, accelerating the rollout of renewable energy and efficiency technology (and practices) that will create jobs, put downward pressure on power prices, and give Australian entrepreneurs a foothold in new industries.

For example, modelling by E&Y estimates the Victorian Renewable Energy Target will create 10,000 jobs while cutting emissions in the electricity sector by 16 percent. The scheme is expected to save households \$30 on their power bill each year. Small-medium businesses will save \$2,500 a year and big business will save up to \$140,000.

Protecting forests to preserve their vast carbon stores create new opportunities for the tourism sector, open space for Melbourne (a city with a booming population), as well as helps ecosystems and the species that depend on them a chance to adapt to the changing climate.

REGIONAL & LOCAL ISSUES

Firstly, we encourage the authority to engage Traditional Owner groups to ensure that their perspective is heard on the issue of climate change and is part of the government's response.

It is essential for the authority and the government to consider the ways in which climate change impacts, the benefits of action, and implications of action affect communities across the state.

The rollout of renewable energy is an excellent form of jobs creation and economic development. Renewable energy development creates jobs and economic stimulus during construction phase and ongoing operations and maintenance jobs for the community. Solar and wind farms provide drought-proof income for farming communities, are among the largest contributors for rates to local councils, and usually have community benefit schemes.

The continued rollout of renewable energy across Australia will benefit domestic manufacturing and strengthen the supply chain. Beneficiaries include wind tower manufacturing in Portland, transformer manufacturing in Glen Waverley and Benalla, and warehousing and training in Lyndhurst. (Similarly, the rollout of public transport infrastructure is jobs rich during construction and while operating).

Unlike the renewable energy sector whose benefits are dispersed, Australia's fossil fuel sector is concentrated in a few regions. For this reason it is essential for the government to resource economic development, retraining, and transition planning in these communities.

Since 2017, Friends of the Earth Australia have spent a lot of time on the road meeting with people in rural and regional communities. When asked about climate change, community members have told us "the seasons are changing." They are aware of climate impacts and have an appetite for what are often very creative solutions.

In Donald, Victoria, for example, people are concerned about extreme weather events such as heatwaves and dry spells that can result in crop failure. Work is currently underway on a levee to protect vulnerable parts of town from flooding. On the other hand, one local entrepreneur is trying to build a solar-powered data farm.

In the town of Tarnagulla, Victoria, community members are concerned about increased bushfires—an issue compounded by the fact the CFA has shrunk from 40 people to just ten. Yet a town hall meeting organized by locals has built consensus around the need for a solar-powered refuge for the community during extreme events.

In urban areas such as Brunswick, challenges are felt with increasing extreme heat days, the Urban Heat Island effect and an aging population.

These cases reinforce the point that there is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ solution to climate change. Each town, district, and community faces its own challenges and has its own vision for how to respond.

The thing that unites them is the need for government support. That is why Friends of the Earth Australia urge the authority to recommend policy updates such as those outlined above to help prevent climate change impacts from getting worse.

CONCLUSION

Friends of the Earth Australia thank the Climate Change Authority for the chance to make this submission and welcome any correspondence on our submission. We look forward to seeing the government’s response.

Kind regards,

Leigh Ewbank
Act on Climate coordinator

