

18 January 2013

Submission to the Senate Extreme Weather Inquiry

The national annual gathering of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Australia took place in Canberra from 5 to 12 January 2013. A key topic of the meeting was the multifaceted impacts of climate change on Australia. The record-breaking high temperatures and bushfires across the country during the week emphasised the urgency and validity of our deliberations.



We are pleased to know that the Senate is concerned enough to hold an Inquiry into extreme weather events. We ask Senators as a matter of urgency to take the impact of climate change into the forthcoming election as a key plank of their party's platform for action.

During the week, the World Economic Forum Global Risks report warned of a 'perfect global storm' of intertwined financial and ecological collapse. At the same time, in the lead-up to the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change international meeting in Hobart, climate scientists urged Australian authorities to prepare for rising sea levels that, according to real estate agents, could put some \$300 billion worth of commercial property, infrastructure and homes at risk. As you are aware, approximately 85% of the Australian population lives in coastal regions. The impact of increased sea levels on our Pacific Island neighbours is well known. Further, this week the government's Climate Commission has found that the current excessive heat and bushfires are 'exacerbated' by global warming.

It is clear that the impacts of climate change on the Australian ecological systems we depend on, both economically and for basic life needs including food and clean water, are taking place more quickly and more severely than previously forecasted.

The Global Risk Report also cites two other causes for concern: a false sense of security over health, and the role of the Internet to cause panic. To these we would add a third, an increase in social tensions resulting from rising uncertainty. This last point, in particular, would jeopardise the social policy gains of the Australian government in the areas of social inclusion and multiculturalism.

The children, teenagers and young adults at our national meeting discussed global warming issues at length, and feel that there is no more important issue. We expect that a letter from them to the Prime Minister, urging action, will be forthcoming.

For more than 350 years Quakers have opposed war and have worked to remove the causes of war. The anticipated economic and social dislocation resulting from climate change would be comparable to that suffered in war and would jeopardise Australia's domestic and regional stability, as well as our international influence.

Thank you for the opportunity to place these views before you.

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