

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

18 January 2013

Dear Sir / Madam

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on this very important topic.

My submission as a concerned individual is overleaf.

Yours sincerely

Caroline Kades

Submission on recent trends in and preparedness for extreme weather events

Your grandchild, born today, may experience a 4 – 6 degree warming of Earth.

He or she will see extinctions of many species of animals, the frozen Arctic may be gone along with polar bears, while here in Sydney your grandchild will be living with cane toads, more violent weather more frequently, coastal erosion, inundation of low lying areas such as Narrabeen and Manly, and paying high insurance premiums – if insurance is even available.

Today local government prepares its disaster plans, the Coastal Council researches the impacts of sea level rise, scientists meet again for another IPCC report and the World Bank weighs in with a gloomy report that gets climate change, formerly known as global warming, back into the mainstream media.

The bushfires and heatwaves this summer require immense funding with property losses and disaster areas declared. The cyclone season hasn't started yet, the monsoon is late, native vegetation, crops and animals suffer. If this is indeed the new normal then governments better increase taxes to pay for these disasters. Volunteer RFS workers are not sufficient, the water crane helicopters are not sufficient and the Coonabarabran fire burns on relentlessly as I write.

But for the state and federal governments it's business as usual: coal and coal seam gas mining licences increase, it's good news when record numbers of new cars are sold, urban sprawl and the necessity of motor vehicle travel continue, while public transport languishes.

Disasters are an opportunity for politicians to demonstrate concern for the brave people affected, to demonstrate the generosity of their government, to view first-hand the destruction nature can bring. While comfort is appropriate, not enough is being done to stop the causes.

Our fossil fuel economy is thriving. Petrol is cheap. We drive to the shops, to exercise class, to work, to school, factoring in the costs and the time to find a parking space. Plastic bags and packaging increase 'like there's no tomorrow'. Ships ply in and out of Newcastle taking vast quantities of coal to China while Beijing suffocates from fossil fuelled air pollution. While our fossil fuel electricity and gas prices have increased recently, they are still too cheap because the environmental impacts of their use are not factored in to the costs.

There seems to be a huge gulf between the reality that is confronting us and any action to slow or avert the impacts.

This very Senate inquiry is a Band Aid approach – how prepared are we to deal with the impacts – rather than the government delivering plans and policies to move from fossil fuel energy towards renewable energy sources.

The government needs to take the high moral ground, take risks by increasing the costs and reducing the amount of coal exported, relying less on commodities that have no value-added, and encouraging Australia to be the clever country it could be and should be. Government support for any business based on fossil fuels such as the mining and automotive industries should be reduced

State governments need to focus on infrastructure for wider benefit – high speed rail for freight and passengers, not motorways. Focus on health, increase walking and cycling opportunities, rather than making it ever easier to drive. Focus on reducing waste, re-use and recycling.

Focus on reducing the costs of the impacts climate change by increasing costs to protect people and properties at the outset – increase the requirements of SEPP BASIX, require construction from the beginning to reduce the impacts of expected hazards, require hazard and evacuation planning.

Get the message out to organisations and individuals to prepare and expect the worst, expect the public to be resilient and responsible for themselves, not focussing on the unthinking emotional responses.

The children born today will face unprecedented impacts from climate change and the growing human population.

There is an old Irish proverb that goes something like this: if you're in a hole, the first thing to do is to stop digging.

We need to stop digging.