

Australian Greens' Additional Comments

The Australian Greens generally agree with the committee's conclusions and recommendations, but they make the following additional comments.

1 The urgent need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions

While this inquiry was principally focused on the rising cost of extreme weather events and the need to adapt to climate change, the imperative to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to avoid future climate change impacts received relatively little attention. In reality, however, it is not possible to consider climate change adaptation without recognition of the need to urgently reduce emissions.

The inquiry report does touch on the Climate Commission report *The Critical Decade 2013: Climate Science, Risks and Responses*, noting the Commission said that 'some progress is being made globally to reduce carbon emissions but far more needs to be done'. However more detail would be appropriate. For example the Climate Commission report also said that:

...to have a 75% chance of staying within the 2°C limit, we can emit no more than 1,000 billion tonnes of CO₂ from 2000 to mid-century. In the first 13 years of this period, we have already emitted nearly 400 billion tonnes, about 40% of the total allowable budget. That leaves a budget of just over 600 billion tonnes of CO₂ for the next 35-40 years, after which the world economy needs to be completely decarbonised. Worse yet, the rate at which we are spending the budget is still much too high, and is growing. For example, from 2011 to 2012, global CO₂ emissions rose by 2.6%. Under a business-as-usual model, with emissions growing at 2.5% per annum, we are on track to have completely used up the allowable global emissions budget within the next 16 years, that is, by 2028 [Emphasis added].

While the Climate Commission was discussing global emissions, it is obvious that the weak emission reduction targets of 5–25 per cent by 2020 adopted by Labor and the Coalition are not consistent with the urgent imperative described above.

2 Inadequate national leadership by the Commonwealth government

All tiers of Government are responsible for preparation for and recovering from natural disasters and extreme weather events. The evidence presented to the committee makes it clear, however, that existing plans are frequently unimplemented and preparations are uncoordinated. These failures must be sheeted home to the Commonwealth. The Greens strongly endorse the committee's observation that:

5.131 At the same time, national leadership by the Commonwealth government is also required. The Commonwealth government's own position paper on climate change adaptation identifies the importance of leadership at a national level in terms of managing and responding to extreme weather events. Rather, during the course of the inquiry, it became apparent to the committee that the Commonwealth government's oversight

of its response to climate change and extreme weather events has not achieved all that is required. Key documents, such as the National Climate Change Adaptation Framework, have not been reviewed or properly implemented. Promised reports measuring Australia's progress on adapting to climate change, such as the 'Climate Futures Report', have not materialised.

The Greens contend, however, that is not sufficient for the committee to simply recommend that the Commonwealth government should implement the findings of the Productivity Commission inquiry into *Barriers to Effective Climate Change Adaptation*. Rather, we believe the committee should condemn the government for its failure to lead and coordinate efforts to prepare for and recover from natural disasters and extreme weather events. The buck passing, particularly onto local governments which frequently lack the required capacity, needs to cease.

Further the Greens argue that:

- the Commonwealth government should ensure that risks associated with a range of global warming scenarios should be integrated into all relevant national policies, standards, targets and oversight; and
- Commonwealth agencies should report on climate risk readiness (along with their emission mitigation efforts), for a range of warming scenarios.

3 Serious lack of risk mitigation funding

The Greens contend that the report does not adequately address the problem on inadequate expenditure on risk mitigation.

The Insurance Australia Group commented that the emergency management community generally accepts that one dollar spent on risk mitigation can save at least two dollars in recovery costs. But Australian government spending on mitigation initiatives represents around only 3 per cent of what it spends on post-disaster recovery and reconstruction.

The Productivity Commission has reached a similar conclusion, noting that effective emergency management requires striking the right balance between preventing and preparing for disasters on the one hand, and responding to and recovering from them on the other. The Commission highlighted that compared to the \$6.7 billion spent on disaster recovery over the last 6 years, only \$0.18 billion has been spent on disaster mitigation.

According to the insurance industry we need to increase investment in disaster mitigation and resilience strategies. The \$27 million per annum allocated for mitigation works under the National Partnership Agreement on Natural Disaster Resilience is inadequate.

Additional funding is needed to allow additional protective works including barrages for unusual tides, levee banks, sea walls, properly maintained fire breaks and access trails, improved flood drainage and dams.

Most recently the Australian Business Roundtable for Disaster Resilience and Safer Communities has called for an annual program of Australian government expenditure

on pre-disaster resilience of \$250 million. The Roundtable calculated that at the national level this level of expenditure has the potential to generate budget savings of \$12.2 billion for all levels of government (including \$9.8 billion for the Australian government) and would reduce natural disaster costs by more than 50% by 2050.

The Roundtable makes three key recommendations each of which the Greens strongly endorse:

- (1) Improve co-ordination of pre-disaster resilience by appointing a National Resilience Advisor and establishing a Business and Community Advisory Group.
- (2) Commit to long term annual consolidated funding for pre-disaster resilience.
- (3) Identify and prioritise pre-disaster investment activities that deliver a positive net impact on future budget outlays.

4 Maintaining funding of the National Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility

The committee report rightly noted that many expert witnesses lamented the cessation of funding of the National Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility (NCCARF). We concur for example with the following observations in the report:

5.73 NCCARF focused on delivering information to decision-makers to support climate change adaptation investments and initiatives, and to allow end users of the research to be involved. In this way, NCCARF sought to build the capacity of the Australian community to adapt effectively to climate change impacts.

5.77 Many saw the value in the interdisciplinary work that NCCARF was facilitating, contributing to a cohesive research agenda around adaptation for extreme weather events. Witnesses expressed concern about the future of this good work once funding for NCCARF ceased, and especially about the capacity of decision makers to make evidence based decisions.

The Greens regard this year's cessation of NCCARF's funding as a significant failure of the Commonwealth government. We believe one of the recommendations of the committee should be that the government maintain the National Climate Change Adaptation Facility for a second 5 years funding round.

Recommendation 1

That the Commonwealth government protect communities from extreme weather by increasing expenditure on pre-disaster resilience to around \$350 million a year. A National Resilience Advisory Group should be established to ensure supported projects are appropriately prioritised and targeted.

Recommendation 2

Maintain funding of the National Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility for further 5 years.

**Senator Christine Milne
Senator for Tasmania**