

Joint Standing Committee on Treaties
Electronic submission

Wednesday 5 October 2016

Dear Committee members,

Re: Paris Agreement 2015

I submit that Australia should ratify the Paris Agreement 2015. The scientific research into pollution and our changing climate is thorough and convincing: increased greenhouse gas emissions are causing ocean acidification, and a warmer, more volatile climate. Yet no one needs a science qualification to see the basic signs of pollution damage: plastic littering on beaches, bleached coral in the Great Barrier Reef, or toxic runoff turning the Yarra River a murky shade of sludge.

Australia's impact on pollution and climate change is significant. Australians are among the world's worst polluters on a per capita basis. Furthermore, we import numerous products which are produced via highly polluting methods overseas, and we export resources to be used in polluting industries overseas. Our high GDP puts us in the fortunate position that we have the opportunity to become world leaders in building a sustainable future. We can make polluters pay for the pollution they cause. We can invest in innovative research into, and implementation of, low-carbon cities, energy, construction, and transport.

The Paris Agreement signals a shift in global priorities which should not be ignored. Already, private international investors are looking for sustainable investments, and are slowly but surely shifting away from investments in polluting industries. I believe the government of Australia has a fiduciary duty to its citizens, to safeguard our longterm prosperity. The government should exercise this duty by ceasing to subsidise polluting industries (which, it seems, are not competitive if they demand handsome handouts in the form of the diesel fuel rebate for mining, and direct subsidies in the case of logging), encouraging sustainable alternatives, and strongly investing in education (e.g. public high school science teacher education) and research projects by reputable institutions (I am proud to say the University of Melbourne, where I am studying, is undertaking important research into sustainable design, despite funding uncertainty).

Australian industry is highly reliant on a healthy environment, specifically, we should protect our agriculture, fishing and tourism industries by ratifying the Paris Agreement. In 20 years' time, we do not want to be left an island of abandoned coal and oil projects, ravaged by increased bushfires and drought. By ratifying the Paris Agreement, we will be taking the first steps towards a better future.

In terms of domestic policy, I hope ratification of the Paris Agreement leads to several legislative developments, including:

1. Pollution and greenhouse gas producers pay for the pollution they produce (via an amendment to the current 'Direct Action' legislation, or introduction of other legislation),
2. Investment in public transport infrastructure, and development of city and suburb-wide cycling and walking infrastructure,
3. Stopping logging of native forests on both private and public land, since these are important carbon sinks, with encouragement of industries to rely on reclaimed and plantation timber,
4. Removal of burning forests from the Renewable Energy Target,
5. Charging industries higher rates for waste production, especially the construction and retail industries which are major contributors to unnecessary waste. This will financially incentivise developing reusable or low waste alternatives,
6. Public education campaigns around practical sustainability and climate change, and
7. Investment in research into, and implementation of, low-carbon cities, energy, construction, and transport.

Last but not least, ratifying the Paris Agreement is an important part of Australia's diplomatic engagement. Ratification will demonstrate our goodwill and participation in this current global conversation around climate change. It is a particularly important gesture for us to take in consideration of our Pacific neighbours who are facing the prospect of enormous damage due to rising sea levels.

Thank you for considering my submission