



# AUSTRALIAN PARENTS FOR CLIMATE ACTION

Australian Parents for Climate Action

**Submission to the Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications:**

[ec.sen@aph.gov.au](mailto:ec.sen@aph.gov.au)

## Climate Change Bill 2022 & Climate Change (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2022

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Australian Parents for Climate Action  
c/o Environmental Leadership Australia  
Level 2, 69 Reservoir Street  
Surry Hills NSW 2010

Email: [info@ap4ca.org](mailto:info@ap4ca.org)

Australian Parents for Climate Action represents over 17,000 parents, grandparents and carers from across Australia. We are Australia's leading organisation for parents advocating for a safe climate. Our supporters are from across the political spectrum, across all Australian electorates, and from varied socio-economic positions. We seek non-partisan responses to climate change and its impacts.

We advocate for Australian governments and businesses to take urgent action to cut Australia's carbon emissions to net zero as quickly as possible. We encourage Australia to take a leadership role on the world stage, leading by example and calling for other nations to take the necessary action to protect our children's futures.

For more information, visit [www.ap4ca.org](http://www.ap4ca.org)

This submission was prepared by volunteer David McEwen and has been approved by Nic Seton, Chief Executive Officer of Australian Parents for Climate Action.

## Submission

Australian Parents for Climate Action **welcomes legislation to enshrine emissions reduction targets.**

However, **we are disappointed by the limitations of the Climate Change Bill 2022** on the following grounds:

1. The target is inconsistent with the objectives of the Paris Agreement. 43% off 2005 by 2030 is **below the average minimum required by all countries**. Australia, as a wealthy nation with outsized cumulative and per-capita emissions, is expected, under the Paris Agreement's equity provisions, to slash emissions faster and harder than developing countries.
2. We note that the targets of 75% off 2005 levels by 2030 and net zero by 2035 are consistent with an Australian contribution that is commensurate with a 1.5 degree pathway. Anything less is not "doing our part." Australia has for several decades been seen globally as a "leaner" on climate action. This legislation does nothing to change that perception. It is unbecoming of our traditional ANZAC spirit.
3. Indeed, the Bill at no point expresses an objective of contributing – consistent with Australia's means and with regard to our outsized cumulative emissions – to averting catastrophic levels of global heating that would materially and irreparably harm the Australian people, our environment and economy. It is as if this doesn't matter.
4. As presented, the Climate Bill 2022 is largely symbolic, with weak means of enforcement (amounting mainly to allowing or requiring certain agencies to consider achievement of the targets in their decision making) and no consequences for non-achievement.
5. While it contains a floor for the 2030 target, it does not include a ratchet mechanism. It merely "does not prevent or limit" a government from setting a new Nationally Determined Contribution. Given the foregoing and the intent of the Paris Agreement, the Bill should mandate an increased NDC at regular intervals. Given election cycles and the extreme urgency we recommend a review frequency of no less than three years.
6. While it refers to an emissions budget for the period 2021 to 2030 (Section 10 (1) (ii)), the budget itself (i.e. aggregate MT CO<sub>2</sub>-equivalent over the decade) is not documented in the legislation. As such it is not clear whether the budget is based on the expectation of a regular downward trajectory for emissions towards 2030, or the (improbable) achievement of a large reduction between 2029 and 2030.
7. This matters, because the heating impact of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions is cumulative as, once released, they persist in the atmosphere for between decades (methane) and hundreds or

thousands of years. Accordingly, the cumulative budget is more important – in terms of the objective of averting catastrophic climate change – than the target itself. With climate action, winning slowly is still losing. While the Memorandum advises (para 16) on a methodology for establishing the budget, we feel there is room for considerable manipulation.

8. The Bill excludes a process for national climate risk assessments and adaptation/resilience planning, which was a sensible feature of the Warringah Independent MP Zali Steggall's pragmatic private member's Climate Bill. Given the manifest inadequacy of Australia's target, in conjunction with global under-achievement, it is imperative that a comprehensive national climate risk assessment be undertaken regularly, which is in turn used to establish priorities and funding for a national resilience and adaptation strategy.
9. The Bill requires an annual climate change statement. However, in section 12, the statement does not specifically require the statement to advise whether Australia's efforts are consistent with what the science tells us is necessary to avert particular levels of warming. We recommend that this requirement be made explicit and that such advice is put in the context of expectations for key metrics such as, but not limited to:
  - a. The survival of the Great Barrier Reef;
  - b. The viability of urban and agricultural fresh water supplies;
  - c. Agricultural production;
  - d. Extreme weather damage;
  - e. Property and infrastructure damage from coastal inundation due to sea level rise;
  - f. Damage to fisheries due to warming ocean temperatures, increasing ocean acidification, deoxygenation and the loss of marine habitats such as coral reefs, sea weeds, sea grasses, mangroves, etc.;
  - g. Insurability of climate-exposed property;
  - h. Valuation impacts to climate-exposed property; and
  - i. Human health impacts from the foregoing, including physical and mental health.
10. The Bill requires the currently emaciated Climate Change Authority (CCA) "to give the Minister advice that relates to the preparation of an annual climate change statement" (section 14) and new "greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets" (section 15). However, the CCA remains as toothless as it was under the former government, given the Bill does not require the Minister to heed its advice and the Minister is free to seek other advice. Effectively this is Clayton's consultation.
11. Further, it is not clear in the Bill or the Consequential Amendments Bill as to how the CCA is to be funded and resourced to perform this role. And there is almost nothing in the current Climate Change Authority Act (2011) to prevent the CCA from being stacked with fossil industry lackeys, or from being starved of the funding that would allow it to perform this role. Of the 8 members of the CCA, apart from the Chief Scientist, all others could be industry representatives, as part 18 of the Act, while listing a number of desirable membership qualities, does not actually stipulate the requirement for a diversity of experiences amongst the members or a minimum number of

scientific experts.

12. Additionally, the role of the CCA is limited to advice regarding the preparation of the annual statement (Section 14) and targets (Section 15). It has no role in providing either advice on the means by which reductions could/should be achieved or critiquing the government's emissions reduction policies. Given the rapid development of emissions reduction technologies, and the scope for promotion, by the government of the day, of technologies that may not efficiently achieve the promoted level of emissions reductions (such as carbon capture and storage, or various uneconomic uses of green or non-green hydrogen), we feel it is essential that there be an *independent* expert advisory body that can a) help the government formulate efficient emissions reduction policies (based on the best scientific advice and international efficacy evidence); and/or b) publicly critique the government's proposed policies.
13. The elephant in the room is that the Climate Bill is silent on the Australian government's continued commitment to the expansion of coal and gas extraction. We understand that the scope 1 and 2 emissions associated with any such projects will be subject to the 43% and net zero targets under the proposed legislation, which may reduce the attractiveness of some such developments for their proponents. However, ignoring scope 3 and allowing the industry to continue is aptly akin to pouring trying to put out a fire with a bucket while simultaneously pouring an accelerant on it.
14. Further: while the Australian government continues providing the fossil fuel industry billions of dollars of Australian taxpayers' money in various grants and subsidies; while royalties for our fossil fuels remain paltry; while multinational fossil fuel firms are allowed to pay less tax than an individual nurse or teacher for years at a time while raking in obscene superprofits; while they are allowed to lie to the Australian people and buy social licence and influence through their advertising, sponsorship and political donations (respectively), this Climate Change Bill is likely to remain tokenistic and ineffective at tackling the climate crisis. Australians will not thank their government as they wake up to the gravity of the situation and realise what could and should have been done to avoid it.

It is critical that the Australian government quickly supplements the Climate Change Bill with additional legislation, amendments and regulations that:

- Implement the recommendations of the Samuels review regarding the currently erroneously-named Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act;
- Reform the Australian Carbon Credit market, ensuring that credits meet stringent tests for additionality, permanence (minimum 100 years) and verifiability. Double counting must be eliminated.
- A hierarchy should be established such that removal offsets (that permanently remove GHGs from the atmosphere and therefore can neutralise the purchasing party's emissions) are prioritised over avoidance offsets (which notionally avoid additional emissions, but do not actually neutralise the

emissions of the purchasing party). Similarly, permanent geological sequestration should be prioritised over more ephemeral, nature-based solutions such as tree planting and soil carbon sequestration, which have been found to lack integrity around the world.

- More broadly, genuine emissions reduction by major emitters should be prioritised, recognised and valued over the purchase of offsets;
- Ensure the safeguards mechanism is implemented across *all* major emitters and that existing loopholes are closed down;
- Ensure all government departments, agencies and proposed policies expressly rule out projects or initiatives that increase Australia's emissions, and/or that are inconsistent with the emissions reduction path set within the Climate Change Bill;
- Unwind all subsidies, grants and other taxpayer-funded supports to the fossil fuel industry and other emissions intensive sectors such as beef, air travel, etc.; and, in the absence of the obvious - a universal carbon price - implement a windfall profits tax and/or impose a loss and damage tax on the industry;
- Treats the fossil fuel industry in the same way we treat the tobacco industry, including bans on advertising, sponsorship (with appropriate recompense to organisations that currently receive funding, to be funded via money saved from the reduction in subsidies or introduction of a super profits tax), and political donations;
- Prepares Australia for the hot house future that is now almost inevitable, through adequate risk assessment, resilience and adaptation planning and funding.

Australia's fossil fuel industry and its boosters have demonstrated decades of contempt for the safety of the Australian people and the fragile environment on which we all depend. This must stop.