



# Submission to the Senate Environment and Communications References Committee Inquiry into the National Climate Risk Assessment and National Adaptation Plan

**Submitted by: Sweltering Cities**

## About Sweltering Cities

Sweltering Cities is a national health-promotion charity that works directly with people living in Australia's hottest suburbs and homes. Since 2020 we have partnered with communities, councils, and researchers to document and address the health, housing, and social impacts of extreme heat.

We have:

- Run three national Summer Surveys with more than 5,000 responses; Australia's largest dataset on heat, health, and homes.
- Produced reports on cooling infrastructure, rental housing, urban design, and community adaptation.
- Partnered with universities and local governments on research into heat, energy, and health.
- Engaged directly with people most at risk: renters, people on low incomes, multicultural communities, and people with disabilities.

Our mission is to ensure no one is left behind in deadly hot homes, baking suburbs, or dangerous workplaces as we all face unprecedented temperatures.

## Key Messages

### **1. Heat is a National Climate Risk**

Heatwaves are Australia's deadliest environmental disaster, already killing more people than all other disasters combined. Rising temperatures are making our suburbs, homes, and workplaces more dangerous each summer.

Our 2024 Summer Survey found:

- **68%** of people reported feeling unwell during heatwaves (90% among people with disability).
- **77%** live in low-efficiency homes.
- **61%** said cost-of-living pressures make it harder to stay safe in summer.



This is not just a health issue; it is a question of economic participation, workforce safety, and social equity.

## **2. Adaptation Requires Urgent National Leadership**

The NCRA and NAP are landmark documents that should be released as soon as possible in order for all Australians, businesses of every size and Government at all levels to have access to the best information possible to plan for the future. However, their release must be matched by decisive Federal Government action. National leadership is critical because:

- Housing standards and retrofitting schemes need federal regulation and funding.
- Health system capacity and workforce protections depend on national investment.
- Federal Industrial Regulations laws and regulations are key to ensuring we're all safe at work.
- All government departments and agencies need to actively assess, plan and measure their contribution to adaptation and resilience.
- Local governments and community organisations require direct federal resourcing to deliver tailored, community-led adaptation.

## **3. Inequality Drives Risk**

Our work shows that heat risk is compounded by insecure housing, poverty, disability, and discrimination. Renters in poorly built homes, people who cannot afford air-conditioning, and workers without heat protections are placed at disproportionate risk. Without urgent adaptation, climate impacts will entrench inequality.

## **Recommendations**

We urge the Committee to recommend that the Federal Government:

### **1. Deliver Safe and Healthy Homes**

- Mandate climate-ready building codes based on projected future temperatures, not outdated climate data.
- Fund large-scale retrofits prioritising renters and low-income households.

### **2. Support Community-Driven Adaptation**

- Establish direct federal funding streams for local governments and grassroots organisations to design and deliver heat resilience projects (e.g. cooling centres, check-ins, greening).

### **3. Ensure Safe Work in Extreme Heat**

- Create enforceable national workplace standards for extreme heat, including rest breaks, protective equipment, and temperature thresholds.
- Ensure protections cover insecure, migrant, and on-demand workers.

### **4. Payments not Penalties during Heatwaves**

- Currently, people on Jobseeker and Disability Support Payments who have mandated 'Mutual Obligations' still have to comply with work for the dole, service provider



appointments and other activities. This is leading to illness and stress for people choosing between their safety and their financial security. The Department of Employment and Minister for Employment can pause Mutual Obligations during extreme and severe heatwaves, as they do during severe storms, floods and bushfires.

## Conclusion

Climate change driven shocks and stresses are already impacting Australian communities. The National Climate Risk Assessment is a vital piece of work that for the first time lays out in detail the complex risks faced by both systems and communities. Extreme heat will intensify, and without national leadership, Australians will pay the price in lives, health, and economic stability.

The solutions are known. What is needed now is urgent investment and coordination from the Federal Government to ensure safe homes, resilient health systems, empowered communities, and protections for all workers. The National Adaptation Plan must be fit for purpose to drive just adaptation and avoid maladaptation that will entrench vulnerabilities and increase risk.

Sweltering Cities and our partners stand ready to work with governments to make this happen.