

Adelaide Hills Climate
Action Group
adelaidehillsclimateaction.org

31 August 2014

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RE: Inquiry: The Abbott Government's attacks on Australia's environment, and their effects on our natural heritage and future prosperity.

The Adelaide Hills Climate Action Group (AHCAG) are pleased to provide comment on issues covered by the Terms of Reference

About AHCAG

The Adelaide Hills Climate Action Group is a community group started in mid-2007 and made up of people with a wide range of backgrounds, from all over the Adelaide Hills region, who are concerned about climate change and its impacts, and who want to promote and take part in positive action.

Our members backgrounds include meteorology and climate science, climate policy, education at all levels, primary industries agencies, water utilities, local council, small business, hills agricultural enterprises, permaculture, students, sustainable architecture, concerned mums and a couple of Al Gore trained climate change presenters.

Since the inception of the group, we have conducted many public awareness raising sessions through the Adelaide Hills, hosted two pre-Federal election local candidate climate change and social justice question sessions, as well as taking stalls into hills agricultural, eco and sustainability fairs. Several members have strong interests and expertise around climate mitigation policy and contribute strongly to this area. We also have good links into local councils with members on the Adelaide Hills Council Sustainability Group, and

with Mount Barker Council. Other activities include re-vegetation projects and film and discussion nights around sustainable community.

We take an interest in our local area in the context of policies of local state and federal policy and planning matters, particularly as they apply to climate policy and ensuring the resilience of communities and protection our environment as we adapt to a changing climate.,

(a) Attacks on carbon pricing, the Clean Energy Finance Corporation, the Australian Renewable Energy Agency and the renewable energy target, the Climate Change Authority and the Climate Commission

Carbon Pricing

The Abbott Government has abolished carbon pricing with no credible alternative policy in place. We have not seen any credible scientist or economist speak in defense of the Direct Action Plan.

Sadly, the Abbott Government sought to infer that both emissions trading and a carbon levy on emissions equated to the same policy being a carbon tax. This approach was fundamentally untrue as the two alternatives work in very different ways and have different advantages and disadvantages. By naming these two different policies as "a great big tax on everything" the Australian people have been denied the opportunity to participate in a proper debate on the merits of each.

In this regard the Abbott Government has politicised climate policy to an extreme level.

Renewable Energy Target

The Review of the Renewable Energy target was carried out in such a way as to maximise the harm to the renewables sector from the day that the Terms of Reference were released in February 2014.

The Abbott Government had previously pledged its support for the RET and if it was genuinely interested "to make sure it is working efficiently and effectively" as Energy Minister Ian Macfarlane had indicated, then this could have been achieved without stalling the entire large scale renewables sector.

Instead the Terms of Reference were written with a background that fundamentally misrepresented the intent of the Renewable Energy Act.

Rather than acknowledging that the RET was to achieve 45,000 GWh (41,000 GWh from large scale and 4,000 GWh from small scale renewables by 2020), The Abbott Government adopted the Energy Australia viewpoint that the RET was intended to achieve a 20% outcome rather than undertake the Review in the Context of the Objects of the Renewable Energy (Electricity) Act).

Based on the modeling and submissions, the findings should easily demonstrate the RET is affordable, effective and has created downward pressure on the wholesale price of electricity and will ultimately result in lower long term prices to consumers as well as lower emissions. Despite the weight of evidence in favour of the RET, in Late June 25 Coalition MPs sought their own outcomes to reduce the RET and seek 100% exemption for the aluminium industry (ignoring that the industry already benefits from the lower wholesale prices and majority exemption) even before the RET Review had been completed.

The final RET Review Report has now been released and as expected presents a distorted view of the objectives of the RET. It fundamentally demonstrates that those chosen to undertake the review fail to comprehend the need for deep cuts the 200+ MT CO₂-e of stationary electricity sector as well as in all other sectors that is needed. We will need much greater scale of reductions than what is available through energy efficiency and grassland management as suggested by the Warburton RET Review Report.

Australian Renewable Energy Agency

The Australian Renewable Energy Agency (ARENA) was established by the Australian Government to make renewable energy solutions more affordable and increase the amount of renewable energy used [produced] in Australia.

The role of ARENA is important to enhance diversity and deployment of renewable energy technologies across Australia which is an important step for the sector to achieve its full potential and to transition away from fossil fuels as quickly as possible.

Under current arrangements, the development of wind and household solar renewable energy has increased as a direct result of the RET, but the necessary diversification of the sector has not occurred. ARENA funding is vital to fully diversify across large scale solar thermal, solar PV, energy storage, wind and other renewables with integrated technology and systems. Once systems can be demonstrated at large scale, then further cost savings are

achievable as has been demonstrated with wind and household solar PV systems.

Australia's Emission reduction Targets

The Abbott Government has sought to undermine Australia's greenhouse gas reduction targets committed to reductions of up to 15 % to 25% by 2020 where certain global agreements had been achieved. It is now apparent that no matter what global agreement is undertaken, the Abbott Government will not seek emission reductions beyond only a 5% cut.

We understand that the 80% emissions reduction by 2050 has also been erased. No updates on the status of Australia's greenhouse targets has been provided since carbon pricing was abolished.

Australia's Emission Reduction Targets ¹- As shown 26-8-2014

2020

Australia will reduce its greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 25 per cent compared with 2000 levels by 2020 if the world agrees to an ambitious global deal capable of stabilising levels of GHGs in the atmosphere at 450 ppm (parts per million) carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂-e) or lower.

Australia will unconditionally reduce its emissions by 5 per cent compared with 2000 levels by 2020 and by up to 15 per cent by 2020 if there is a global agreement that falls short of securing atmospheric stabilisation at 450 ppm CO₂-e under which major developing economies commit to substantially restraining their emissions and advanced economies take on commitments comparable to Australia's.

These targets have been anchored under the Cancun Agreements. A detailed statement of Australia's target conditions can be found below.

2050

Australia will reduce GHG emissions by 80 per cent compared with 2000 levels by 2050.

Clean Energy Finance Corporation

The role of the Clean Energy Finance Corporation (CEFC) is to mobilise capital investment in renewable energy, low-emission technology and energy efficiency in Australia. There is every likelihood that the CEFC can

¹ (<http://www.climatechange.gov.au/climate-change/greenhouse-gas-measurement-and-reporting/australias-emissions-projections/australias>)

invest for a positive returns, on its direct investments and projects co-financed under aggregation programs expected to achieve a positive average financial yield. This is good use of taxpayers money

If the Abbott Government had a genuine commitment to tackling Australia's impact on climate change it would not only continue the CEFC but would maintain the economy wide support for a low emissions economy to attract further low emissions investment.

Climate Change Authority

The abolition of the Independent Climate Change Authority would give rise to a situation where there could be no confidence in the process of setting credible emission reduction pathways and targets in Australia.

Significant problems that may occur within the implementation of Government climate policy as a result of Government Policy would be less likely to be raised by government departments and staff that are restrained or prevented from rocking the boat.

When government departments or consultants are asked by government to provide advice on work and policy that the Government promotes, there is an inherent barrier to raising the alarm on the biggest issues which may bring the entire policy into question. . The Solar Credits Multiplier and buy-back of older vehicles schemes provide examples of unsustainable policies that were not fully evaluated before being implemented.

When it comes to key national policies such as the setting of renewable energy targets, interim and long term greenhouse reduction targets, it is absolutely essential to have the Climate Change Authority in operation to provide independent advice.

The Adelaide Hills Climate Action Group supports that the Climate Change Authority role is as important as the role of the Productivity Commission. The Abbott Government already has a credibility problem with its Direct Action Plan which will only be re-enforced should the Climate Change Authority be abolished.

Climate Commission

The defunding of the Climate Commission was a direct attack on communicating the science of climate change to the Australian Community. In the midst of misinformation asserted in Australia's mainstream media, it is important to have the voice of a Government established Climate Commission to work through the science and propaganda to distill clear informative messages that the community can understand.

By de-funding the Commission, the Abbott Government has chosen to abandon this vital service, and replace it with Abbott Government messaging arguing that it is “particularly important that we do not demonise the coal industry”, and that “We have massive reserves of coal, massive reserves of gas; let’s make the most of them”. Whilst it is sad that the obvious needs to be stated, the problem of tackling climate change can never be addressed without the phase out of fossil fuels. This is a message understood by the science community whilst the Abbott Government stays in denial.

On climate mitigation, renewable energy and the future development of a sustainable low carbon economy, the Abbott Government has completely failed to recognise the risks to Australia's future prosperity. On climate impacts the Abbott Government fails to comprehend the plausible impacts that future climate will have on our will being. The Abbott Government backs fossil fuels for domestic use and export markets despite all the evidence that fossil fuels both are the problem, not the solution.

(b) attacks on federal environmental protection through handing approval powers over to state governments, which have poor track records and recent environment staff cuts;

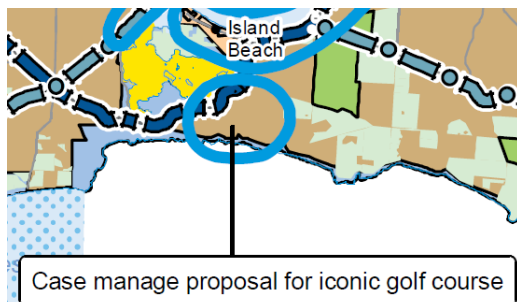
The handing over of approval powers to state Governments is a symptom of a Government that supports development in any place at any cost. The Federal Government has completely abandoned concepts such as cumulative risk assessment spatial mapping and cumulative impact assessments on patterns of development that would support better decision making. Instead they are handing back approval powers to state governments in agencies that have already been decimated and are unable to provide effective independent advice or decision making capabilities. The departments of state governments that are charged with supporting infrastructure, mining and development growth simply walk all over any state departments providing advice on protecting biodiversity. In South Australia for example, it is the State Government that has proposed to build a massive bulk export facility directly over the breeding aggregation site of the northern Spencer Gulf Giant Australian Cuttlefish, and approve a massive diesel facility increasing that will increase the risk of fuel spills. The State Government is a major advocate for these developments ignoring advise of the Alternative Ports Working Party to and ultimately take this important part of Upper Spencer Gulf towards full industrialisation.

Similarly, the State Government establishes task forces to drive through development such as the Olympic Dam Taskforce, the Regional Mining and Infrastructure Task Force. There are even task forces to case manage development proposals such as the Golf Course and Convention Centre on Kangaroo Island which demonstrate the extent of the State Governments conflicts of interest in assessing and approving development proposals.



Figure 1: View of Pelican Lagoon, Prospect Hill and Pennington Bay at the connection between east and west Kangaroo Island

Development planning, NRM planning and marketing of Kangaroo Island reveal the extent of a Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde approach to planning development approvals whilst presenting a clean green image. DEWNR NRM promote this picture of Kangaroo Island as an iconic when developing a new NRM Plan whilst the Planning Department prepare to case manage a golf course and convention centre immediately east (left) of this location. The only thing that may limit such a proposal is the commercial feasibility, not any environmental significance.



This is not to suggest that there are not solutions and alternatives, but when the proposal starts with a location and is then driven by a taskforce any process and good decision making is already compromise.

On matters of state jurisdiction the State Governments already fail the environment on planning matters. When it comes to matters of National Environmental Significance, the State Governments simply cannot make objective decisions that would protect environment and biodiversity.

(c) attacks on funding for community environment organisations and the Environmental Defenders Offices, abolition of the Biodiversity Fund, and cuts to programs including, Landcare and Caring for our Country;

The Abbott Government has embarked on a campaign to diminish the democratic voice and capacity of organisations that provide a voice for the environment that has no voice of its own.

The removal of GVESHO funding has made it much more difficult for key and peak environment organisations to meet basic administrative costs.

Similarly the removal of funding of the Environmental defenders offices has made it more difficult for those seeking to use existing law to protect the environment

The threats to remove the charitable status of organisations that speak out against the destruction of environment and biodiversity is designed to further silence the voice for the environment.

Together these attacks are designed to deliver a 'silent spring' for mining and developments to proceed without proper identification and recognition of environmental risks.

The cuts to Landcare and Caring for our Country are not nearly made up by the Governments green army and smaller initiatives.

(d) undermining Australia's compliance with the World Heritage Convention, the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the Ramsar Convention, in particular by attacking the Great Barrier Reef and the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Areas;

The Abbott Government does not take its compliance with international conventions and agreements seriously. It seeks to pick and choose to suit short term interests which ultimately sets a dangerous precedence that will hinder international cooperation on global sustainability efforts.

Not only is it appalling that decades of progress is being undermined in Tasmania and that the Great Barrier Reef is at extreme risk from land based and sea based pollution (including dredging disposal and cumulative shipping impacts), but the entire framework of environmental protection in Australia has been undermined by the Abbott Government. This is because the Abbott Government through its actions has led a campaign to suggest that is OK to demonise the environment, to revert to three word slogans on complex environmental issues, and to portray those that seek genuine

environment and planning solutions as opponents hindering economic growth.

In conclusion, there is no need for the Abbott Government or any government to embark on such destruction of environmental and climate progress, legislation and culture. Even when future conservative or other governments return to power, the damage caused by this Government on environmental assets and protections will not be able to be fully undone. We are already losing time to protect our climate and biodiversity, whilst the Abbott Government presents three word slogans to justify arguments that were used 50 years ago.

We would be happy to discuss our concerns with the inquiry members in person in Adelaide or the Adelaide hills.

Yours sincerely

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