Supplementary submission to the Senate Environment and Communications References Committee inquiry into extreme weather events

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This supplementary submission is in response to a point raised by senators during my appearance at the hearing on 11 April 2013 to which I did not have time to respond.

- **Technological solutions to climate change—for example, carbon capture and storage**

Both Senator Cameron and Senator Birmingham raised this point, with Senator Cameron specifically mentioning carbon capture and storage. The notion that we can take minimal action while waiting for some unspecified technological fix for climate change is an argument made by quite a few people. However, the argument ignores the scale of the problem facing us and the length of time it takes for technological developments to penetrate society. For energy sources specifically, two recent examples are illustrative: nuclear power and solar power. After invention, both these energy sources took 50 or 60 years to capture a few per cent of the energy market. It is highly unlikely, given the amount of energy required to power the world, that an energy source could be invented and then deployed at a significant scale within the next three or four decades to make a difference to the climate change problem. We have to solve the problem with the technology that is available to us today. Thinking otherwise is a dangerous delusion.

Regarding carbon capture and storage, at present it is not clear if the technology can be widely applied. However, even assuming that it could be, Treasury modelling does not predict it becoming economically competitive until the late 2030s, 25 years from now, and its deployment on a large enough scale to make a difference would take decades. A lot of carbon is going to be pumped into the atmosphere in that time. We cannot afford to wait.