

Implications of climate change for Australia's national security Response from Friends of the Earth Brisbane – Climate Frontlines Program

Friends of the Earth Brisbane welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Committee's inquiry into the implications of climate change for Australia's national security.

Our program, Climate Frontlines, focuses on those at the frontlines of climate change: Pacific Islanders whose fundamental security in terms of lives and livelihoods are already threatened by rising sea levels, extreme weather events and associated environmental degradation.

We are aware that this issue is already under consideration by several other governments. As argued by Richard Youngs in his 2014 report, “Climate change and the European Union security policy – An unmet challenge”, it is necessary to develop “climate security” strategies that address the strategic and political impacts of climate change. But it is also necessary to make sure that the consideration of climate change in terms of security will not lead to the militarisation of the issue.

It is also crucial that this inquiry into the implications of climate change for Australia's national security does not exclude the consultation and the provision of solutions at the regional and international levels. The national debate needs to integrate international cooperation as a strategy to ensure national security.

We fully support the Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law's submission advocating for the development of a security policy that would focus on the issue of human security rather than national security. Apart from the fundamental need to address the root causes of climate change, one of the best ways to ensure the security of Australian citizens is to provide stability and solutions to those affected by climate change.

We believe that Australia has a moral and political obligation to provide safe pathways for people in the Pacific Islands who would need to leave their homelands as a result of the increasingly disastrous impacts of climate change. Rather than posing a threat to Australia's national security, this would contribute to it. It could take the form of specific Pacific visas, humanitarian visas or extended stay arrangements as well as the enhancement of voluntary migration opportunities and planned relocation programs (cf Kaldor submission for more details).

Also crucial to ensure security, the consequences of climate change must be anticipated and solutions provided before it leads to disaster. Populations must be informed of the projected evolutions of climate change related impacts and prepared for future changes. One of the implications is that conventional development policies and projects need to be re-visioned and restructured with these in focus. Many communities in Australia itself are already grappling with climate change related impacts on the security of their lives and livelihoods.

Most importantly, national security depends fundamentally on our capacity to address climate pollution head on by tackling its root causes. An urgent transition to ambitious national renewable energy and sustainable development policies are required. These should be integrated into national security plans, not only as a way of limiting climate change, but also to ensure energy security through locally-based infrastructure.

We recognise that climate change is increasingly a catalyst for violent conflict in many situations around the globe, and that direct military responses often escalate the emerging violence. In Australia's case, we consider it a critical dimension of policy that significant funding is directed away from the military's conflict role into the creation of a new “green helmets” force, trained to assist affected populations, especially in the Pacific, other neighbouring states, and in Australia itself to respond quickly and effectively to the anticipated impacts of climate change.