

Gregory Andrews  
Canberra ACT 2607

25 October 2023

Senate Committee on Environment and Communications  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Members of the Senate Committee on Environment and Communications,

I write to you as a deeply concerned citizen of shared First Nations and coloniser heritage, Australia's first-appointed Threatened Species Commissioner, a former Ambassador for Australia, and an Associate Adjunct Professor of Applied Ecology in the Faculty of Science at the University of Canberra. Additionally, I have played an important role negotiating for Australia in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. These experiences have given me unique opportunities to learn about the importance of protecting our environment and ensuring the well-being of current and future generations – both in Australia and internationally.

The Bill currently before the Senate Committee on Environment and Communications, which aims to implement a duty of care to young people by taking their health and well-being into account when making decisions that could impact the climate, is a significant step in the right direction. I wholeheartedly support this initiative, and I am compelled to share my perspective and insights with you, particularly as a former government official with senior executive experience in climate change and environmental conservation.

My career and existing work as an Associate Adjunct Professor of Applied Ecology at the University of Canberra have allowed me to witness firsthand the impact of environmental decisions on our planet, its ecosystems and humanity. It is clear that the health and well-being of current and future generations is intrinsically tied to the state of our environment and a safe and stable climate. The proposed law has the potential to bring about essential changes in Australia's legislation. It would create a new duty for decision-makers, ensuring that they consider the health and well-being of both current and future children in Australia when they are making decisions that could worsen the climate crisis.

Climate change poses a profound threat to our society, particularly to young people. Rising global temperatures and extreme weather events endanger our environment, prosperity, national security and the stability of future generations. Authoritative [science published just this month](#) shows that global carbon emissions are soaring and pushing planetary systems into dangerous instability. By the end of this century, an estimated 3 to 6 billion people - approximately one-third to one-half of the global population – could find themselves confined beyond livable regions, encountering severe heat, limited food availability, and elevated mortality rates because of the effects of climate change. My children will very likely be alive then. Climate change is not a future emergency. Its consequences such as heatwaves, wildfires, and floods, are already apparent. It is our duty to avert the worst impacts of climate change and halt approval of all new fossil fuel developments.

Australia's status as the third-largest exporter of fossil fuels highlights the urgency of this issue. Continuing to approve new fossil fuel projects exacerbates the climate crisis, leading to more warming and increased climate harm. The decisions made in Parliament now will shape the future for years to come, and the Government has a responsibility to demonstrate its commitment to adopting this Bill and upholding its duty to ensure a safe and liveable future for coming generations.

This Bill also addresses a significant gap in Australian law, as demonstrated by the case of *Sharma v Minister for the Environment*, where key decision-makers - like Minister Tanya Plibersek – are not legally obliged to consider the impact of their decisions on children and future generations. The current law is morally corrupt and doesn't pass the pub test.

Furthermore, the Bill would prohibit decisions that support more fossil fuel mining and exploration, or which would lead to levels of greenhouse gas emissions that could harm our children's health and well-being. It promotes intergenerational equity, striking a balance between short-term benefits and the potentially permanent long-term impacts of the fossil-fuelled climate crisis.

Finally, it is essential to emphasise that this Bill will play a pivotal role in safeguarding the well-being of First Nations peoples, who are already among Australia's most disadvantaged and vulnerable. First Nations already face disproportionate challenges as dangerous climate change accelerates, with impacts such as heatstroke, food insecurity, and climate and ecological grief associated with loss of cultural heritage and traditional lands. Failure to establish a Voice to Parliament for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on 14 October highlights the pressing need for comprehensive measures to protect First Nations. By supporting this Bill, you can take a meaningful step towards addressing these inequalities and ensuring a more equitable and sustainable future for all Australians.

In conclusion, I urge the Parliament to support the Bill wholeheartedly. It is a crucial step toward safeguarding the well-being of future generations and ensuring that the decisions made today do not compromise the lives of those who will inherit our planet. By supporting this Bill, you can demonstrate commitment to our children and theirs.

Thank you for considering my submission. If you have any questions or need further information, please do not hesitate to reach out. I hope that the Senate Committee will take this opportunity to make a positive change for the future of Australia and our planet.

Sincerely,

Gregory Andrews