

Dear Senators,

Thankyou for establishing your inquiry into Australia's climate policy, which is in my view very necessary and urgent.

I am appalled by the government's weak proposed 5-15% reduction on 2000 levels (or 4% on 1990 levels) target for greenhouse gas emissions. It is in no way adequate to avoid dangerous climate change.

This proposed target is in my view the result of government gutlessness in the face of lobbying from big polluters. The government needs to stiffen its backbone, listen more to the community and less to well-paid lobbyists, and remember that it promised before the 2007 election to take real action on climate change.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change says we must reduce greenhouse gas in our atmosphere by 25-40% on 1990 levels by 2020, or more like 50% on 2000 levels, to avoid paying a huge price later on in damage to our economy, our environment and our way of life.

Being elected to office for only three years is no excuse for putting the short-term GDP ahead of a long-term future of things like the Great Barrier Reef, the Murray-Darling system, our farmers and ability to produce food and our biodiversity, let alone our Pacific neighbours who with dangerous climate change will become refugees.

This week's collapse of another ice shelf in Antarctica is just part of the swathe of new evidence that climate change is happening faster than originally thought. We need to be revising our targets up as this new evidence comes to light. If we raise the planet's temperature above 2 degrees we know we will unleash dangerous climate change.

Australia's weak target is undermining efforts to reach international agreement on targets that are more in line with the established scientific advice. They must be improved before December's important UN Conference on Climate Change in Copenhagen. It's a disgrace that now even the US seems to be taking some real steps in the right direction, while Australia, with a supposedly progressive government, is still dragging its feet as badly as ever.

The Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS) currently proposed by the Government is a badly designed scheme that will do more harm than good. The scheme design over-compensates polluters at the expense of the community and environment. I am reading Guy Pearse's Quarterly Essay on the links between big polluters and the federal government, and am appalled that my tax dollars are being used to prop these unsustainable industries up.

The writing has been on the wall for the coal industry and other big polluters for many years, it's time for the government to step away from them and extend a hand to the new, renewable and sustainable industries of the future. We are losing some of our best innovators in the renewable energy to other countries with more progressive policies, and this brain drain needs to be plugged with proper incentives and support.

Setting a strong greenhouse target with a well-designed scheme will ensure Australia does its fair share to avoid dangerous climate change, and will also help refocus our economy to take advantage of new growth industries in renewable energy.

The CPRS must not have a floor beyond which emissions cannot fall. This is patently absurd, as it will act as a disincentive for individuals and businesses to reduce their emissions, as they will just be creating opportunities for polluters to increase their pollution. It is absolutely unacceptable for the government to in this way further tilt the playing field in favour of cheap, dirty coal (and no matter how much whitewash or greenwash is applied, it will never be clean) and against the development of our vital, fledgling renewable industries.

All the best with your inquiry and thankyou for the opportunity to make a submission.

Yours sincerely,

Alison Clarke