

Submission to House Standing Committee on the Environment and Energy

Objectives and emissions reduction commitments are critical to moving from talk to action.

The world has spent 30 years agreeing at various summits that there's a problem and a quick scan of the CSIRO 'State of the Climate 2020' charts makes it even clearer. This prevarication did not occur for the need to eradicate CFCs or halt the current pandemic. Specific objectives to reduce greenhouse gas emissions should be set for all sectors of the economy so that they know what is required of them and can plan and act accordingly.

Legislating net zero emissions by 2050 is important for two reasons: (1) Australia is a significant contributor on a per capita basis; and (2) it sends the clearest signal that Australia is open to as many emission-reduction options as possible across all states and sectors of the economy. While the states are already on board, a federal approach would speed up our response to the challenge and reduce the extent to which Australia will create problems for itself in the future. With the benefit of hindsight, Australia has wasted an enormous amount of time prevaricating. The need to reduce emissions is accelerating and Australia must be proactive if we are to get ahead of other countries' developments and be competitive.

Risk and adaptation assessments for all sectors is key because each sector will necessarily have their own difficulties to overcome in order to achieve zero emissions by 2050. It doesn't help that there are plans to increase the extraction of gas. First, fugitive emissions of methane during extraction are more powerful than carbon dioxide and, secondly, the extraction of gas causes problems with water tables both lowering the table and polluting the water, so it will harm farmers and food production and they don't want it despite the National Party's lack of opposition. See the websites of the National Farmers' Federation and Farmers for Climate Action. Moreover, those who live in regional and rural Australia where the fracking is most likely to occur do not want it either; refer to groups such as Lock the Gate and Coal Free Southern Highlands.

In such a scenario, the risk may be to Australia's commercial interests with international trading partners who have committed to zero emissions by 2050. Tariffs may be applied on goods if Australia has not sufficiently constrained its carbon emissions. Given the limited time now available for implementation, a price on carbon might therefore be necessary.

A readiness assessment will be useful in identifying where we're at in terms of technology. A significant boost to the economy requires that we make a rapid shift to renewables in all its forms. Australia needs a plan for the country's growth over the next 150 years. Even if the climate were not changing, we still need to move away from the fossil fuel industries which generated the growth of the 19th and 20th centuries but now employ few. The next growth phase will be in the exciting industries of solar, wind, hydrogen, quantum computing, microprocessing, and battery storage which will create new types of work and employ many.

The rhetoric that needs to change is personified by the nonsense propagated about protecting tradies' rights to their fossil-fuelled utes. There is no car manufacturing here. We'll be buying whatever vehicles other countries decide to make. We'll have no say in it whatsoever. And this scenario will repeat itself if Australia ignores the potential gains it could make from its comparative advantages in renewable energy initiatives to support the restructure of our economy. Let us not continue in the same way until we can't. Let us accept the challenge and develop the answers.