



Queensland Conservation Council welcomes the chance to comment on the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Climate Trigger) Bill 2022*.

Queensland Conservation Council is the peak environmental body for conservation groups in the state of Queensland. Since 1969, we have worked with groups and communities to restore and nurture the environment, leading state-wide campaigns and supporting local and regional campaigns. Climate change is the biggest threat facing Queensland's environment, communities and species. The Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act cannot fulfill its aims without addressing climate change.

Australia's climate has already warmed by 1.4 degrees from 1910 to 2020, according to the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report<sup>1</sup>. We are already feeling the impacts of this change in climate with increased frequency and severity of floods, droughts and bushfires in Queensland.

Queensland is also home to the Great Barrier Reef and surrounding World Heritage Area, a globally renowned tourism icon that, in addition to its inherent natural wonder and value, brings \$6.4 billion into the Australian economy and supports more than 60,000 jobs<sup>2</sup>.

Climate change is the most significant threat to the Great Barrier Reef, according to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA)<sup>3</sup>. The GBRMPA's 2019 'Outlook Report' described the impacts of climate change, in the form of severe cyclones, ocean acidification, sea temperature rise and sea-level rise, on the Reef and downgraded the overall outlook for the Great Barrier Reef from 'poor' to 'very poor'<sup>4</sup>. Even at 1.5 degrees warming, the Great Barrier Reef would likely suffer coral losses of 70 - 90%, but this increases to >99% if warming reaches 2 degrees.<sup>5</sup>

Recognising the immense impacts on communities and ecosystems such as the Reef, Australia signed onto the Paris Agreement in 2015, to aim to limit 'the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels'<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/sixth-assessment-report-working-group-i/>

<sup>2</sup> Great Barrier Reef Foundation, '[The Value](#)' (Website, 2022).

<sup>3</sup> Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, '[Position Statement: Climate change](#)' (Report, 25 June 2019).

<sup>4</sup> Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, '[Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report 2019](#)' (2019)

<sup>5</sup> Bindoff et al, '[Changing Ocean, Marine Ecosystems, and Dependent Communities](#)' in Portner et al (eds), *The Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate: A Special Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (2019)

<sup>6</sup> United Nations Framework on Climate Change, Paris Agreement, art 2(1)(a).

The IPCC's Special Report on 1.5 degrees<sup>7</sup>, identified a global carbon budget to keep temperature increases under 1.5 degrees. Contributing IPCC authors have translated this to a 4.0 GtCO<sub>2</sub>-eq carbon budget for Australia, to have a 50% chance of staying under 1.5 degrees<sup>8</sup>.

Despite the massive impacts on communities and ecosystems, there is no framework which allows the Environment Minister and Government to consider the climate change implications of new developments. Under the current EPBC Act, climate change impacts can only be incidentally considered to protect listed matters of national environmental significance, such as threatened species or world heritage areas, like the Great Barrier Reef.

This means that projects such as new coal mines, which would cause Australia to exceed our carbon budget and condemn Queensland communities and the Great Barrier Reef to devastating climate impacts, can continue to be approved in Queensland.

This inquiry into setting up a climate trigger and implementing a national carbon budget, provides an opportunity to embed the impacts of climate change into decision making.

Australia needs to urgently ramp up its efforts to meet the Paris Agreement with an economy-wide legal framework and carbon budget that is consistent with limiting warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius (°C).

A new trigger inserted into the EPBC Act would link Australia's carbon accounting and emissions reduction targets with impact assessment and development conditions.

This would be a significant improvement on the current EPBC Act, but we believe it is time for a national Climate Act to set the path to real net zero, define responsibilities and incentivise innovation to stay within a carbon budget that will limit warming to 1.5°C degrees<sup>9</sup>.



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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/>

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.climate-resource.com/reports/wwf/WWF\\_March2022\\_a.pdf](https://www.climate-resource.com/reports/wwf/WWF_March2022_a.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.edo.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/EDO\\_ClimateReport\\_Web.pdf](https://www.edo.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/EDO_ClimateReport_Web.pdf)

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QCC acknowledges that we meet and work on the land of the Jagera and Turrbal.

We wish to pay respect to all Elders — past, present and future — and acknowledge the important role all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people play in protecting, conserving and sustaining Queensland's environment.