



AUSTRALIAN PARENTS FOR CLIMATE ACTION

Australian Parents for Climate Action

Submission regarding:

The Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Climate Trigger) Bill 2022 [No. 2]

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Australian Parents for Climate Action represents over 17,000 parents, grandparents and carers from across Australia. We are Australia's leading organisation for parents advocating for a safe climate. Our supporters are from across the political spectrum, across all Australian electorates, and from varied socio-economic positions. We seek non-partisan responses to climate change and its impacts.

We advocate for Australian governments and businesses to take urgent action to cut Australia's carbon emissions to net zero as quickly as possible. We encourage Australia to take a leadership role on the world stage, leading by example and calling for other nations to take the necessary action to protect our children's futures.

For more information, visit www.ap4ca.org

This submission was prepared by volunteer David McEwen and has been approved by Nic Seton, Chief Executive Officer of Australian Parents for Climate Action.

Submission

Australian Parents for Climate Action is **strongly supportive of the introduction of a climate trigger** in the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act.

The [United Nations](#), [International Energy Agency](#) and other [scientific groups](#) have made it very clear that the approval of new projects – particularly fossil fuel extraction and infrastructure – that increase emissions directly (Scope 1 & 2) or indirectly (Scope 3) are incompatible with a safe future for our children.

Indeed, most *existing* coal (90%), gas (59%) and oil (58%) reserves [cannot be burnt](#) to have any chance of limiting global temperature rise within the “safe” threshold of 1.5 degrees.

Macquarie University researchers identified [19 sensitive Australian ecosystems](#) spanning the entire continent and including the Great Barrier Reef are “undergoing some form of collapse, defined as potentially irreversible change to ecosystem structure, composition and function.” Climate change was identified as a factor in most cases.

Against that background, it is *inconceivable and immoral* that the EPBC Act does not prohibit development of high emitting projects, that climate change is not designated as a [matter of national environmental significance](#). The EPBC Act, as it is currently, fails to address the most significant environmental challenge facing Australia. This must change.

Continuing to approve fossil fuel, and other high emitting projects undermines the government's own objectives. It makes the already challenging task of reducing emissions fast enough, to avoid [triggering cascading tipping points](#), harder. The [critical decade](#) for emissions reduction is this one; approval of more emissions intensive projects undermines all efforts.

The approval of high emitting projects locks in emission intensity for decades. We need to rapidly reduce emissions, [75% below 2005 levels by 2030 and to reach net zero emissions by 2035](#) and transition the whole economy to net zero, ideally absolute zero where we can, as quickly as possible. Our capacity to reduce emissions in the future is not assured, approving high emissions projects out for decades is reckless.

Given the scarcity of quality emissions reduction offsets, i.e. those resulting in genuine emission reduction not merely avoidance, the approval of high emitting projects even with offset conditions must be ramped down. A Climate Trigger provides an appropriate mechanism for this.

The approval of projects under what is referred to as the drug dealer defence – if Australia doesn't supply coal and gas to the world market then others will – is not a moral or just reason to avoid applying the Climate Trigger to all projects, whether they are intended for export or not. Equally fatuous is the [debunked claim that Australian coal is somehow “cleaner”](#) – in terms of greenhouse emissions – than that produced in other countries.

Climate change is a global problem requiring a global response and as the world's [third largest exporter of fossil fuels](#) we have more responsibility than most. In not approving new projects, because of their climate impacts, Australia can play a leadership role in hastening the necessary transition globally. This would give a strong signal about the sunseting of the fossil fuel industry, the primary driver of the climate crisis and help Australia take up its leadership role as a renewable energy superpower.

The Climate Trigger would work as [compliment to the Safeguard Mechanism](#) by ensuring there is a mechanism for addressing new projects before they are approved, reducing the burden on the Safeguard Mechanism to achieve its targets. As [The Australia Institute](#) notes:

“The carbon budget for the Safeguard Mechanism is currently shared by the 212 facilities covered under the scheme. However, if new projects emitting more than 100,000 tonnes CO₂e annually begin operating before 2030, the carbon budget must either be shared amongst a larger number of facilities (forcing steeper and more expensive emissions reduction requirements on existing facilities) or greater emissions reduction efforts will be needed from other sectors of the economy.”

Without a way to adequately prevent new projects that far exceed safe emissions levels, single projects have the potential to undermine all efforts in emissions reduction in other sectors. In just one example it is estimated that the [Scarborough gas project](#), if approved, would cause 1.37 billion tonnes of cumulative emissions by 2055, equivalent to nearly three years of Australia's total emissions from all sources.

To achieve the aims of the recently passed Climate Bill the tools to deliver on actual emissions reduction this decade need to be in place:

1. Stronger targets, ratcheting up ambition in line with the science
2. A strong and effective Safeguard Mechanism, without industry aligned loopholes
3. Carbon credits with integrity, durability and additionally AND
4. A climate trigger to prevent the approval of new projects that will add to a crisis already massively challenging to address

We urge Parliament to adopt the climate trigger as proposed.