



5 October 2016

Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Treaties
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Via email: jsct@aph.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam

Australian Parliament Inquiry into the Paris Agreement

The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) welcomes the opportunity to make submission to the Australian Parliament Joint Standing Committee on Treaties, on the importance of the Paris Agreement, adopted by the consensus of 195 countries, in December 2015. The ANMF takes this opportunity to urge the Australian Government to honour its commitments to the Paris Agreement, and, further, to ratify the Agreement.

Established in 1924, the ANMF is the largest professional and industrial organisation in Australia for nurses and midwives, with Branches in each State and Territory of Australia. Our core business is the professional and industrial representation of ANMF members and the professions of nursing and midwifery.

Our membership of over 258,000 nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing, is employed in a wide range of settings in urban, rural and remote locations in both the public and private health and aged care sectors.

As the largest professional organisation for nurses and midwives in Australia, the ANMF has, on behalf of our members, a genuine interest in, and concern for, matters relating to the public health of this nation. Climate change is undeniably a public health issue¹. This makes it our issue, as health care is the core business of the nursing and midwifery professions.

As the foremost front-line health care professionals, nurses and midwives witness the health consequences of changes in our natural environment. We see the impact of climate, and climate change, on the health of individuals and communities for whom we provide care. We see the direct effects from storms, drought, floods, bushfires, and heatwaves. We experience the indirect effects from altered water quality, air pollution, land use change and ecological change; and, we anguish over the senseless effects such as mental illness, cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, infectious disease

¹ World Health Organisation. The Health and Environment Linkages Initiative (HELI). Climate change and health references/resource links. WHO website: <http://www.who.int/heli/risks/climate/climatedirectory/en/index1.html>

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Canberra Office

Unit 3, or PO Box 4239
28 Eyre Street
Kingston ACT 2604
Australia

T +612 6232 6533
F +612 6232 6610
E anmfcanberra@anmf.org.au
W www.anmf.org.au

.....
Melbourne Office

Level 1, 365 Queen Street
Melbourne VIC 3000
Australia

T +613 9602 8500
F +613 9602 8567
E anmfmelbourne@anmf.org.au
W www.anmf.org.au

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Midwifery Journal**
E anmj@anmf.org.au

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Advanced Nursing**
E ajan@anmf.org.au

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epidemics, injuries and poisoning, and the loss of homes, livestock, land and livelihood.

The message from nurses and midwives on their lived experience of health effects from climate change is put succinctly by a colleague from the United States when she says: "...We're talking about the health impact of what we're seeing with our patients. It's about real people."²

Adverse health effects on individuals and communities will obviously also impact health systems and health care delivery, with the treatment of climate change-related health conditions adding to the burden of an already stretched Australian health care workforce. Nurses and midwives, as the largest cohort within this workforce, will take the brunt of this impact.

The ANMF has a particular concern for the impact of climatic change on people living in poverty and other vulnerable groups, such as people in rural and remote areas, including isolated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. We are concerned for our Pacific Islander neighbours and nursing and midwifery colleagues there, who are already suffering the effects of climate change, very much disproportionately to their contribution to it's causes.

It is for the reasons outlined above that the ANMF calls on the Australian Government to honour its commitments to the Paris Agreement, particularly from the perspective of 'the right to health' as articulated in the preamble to the Agreement, as follows:

*Acknowledging that climate change is a common concern of humankind, Parties should, when taking action to address climate change, respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights, the right to health, the rights of indigenous peoples, local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations and the right to development, as well as gender equality, empowerment of women and intergenerational equity...*³

As a founding member of the Climate and Health Alliance (CAHA)⁴, the ANMF has contributed to the development of the CAHA document: *Towards a National Strategy on Climate Health and Well-being for Australia*. We therefore join with other CAHA members in contending that a comprehensive national strategy is required to ensure health is a central issue in all climate policies. From our perspective, it is imperative the health risks of climate change and benefits to health of climate mitigation and adaptation actions, are the focus of the Government's national strategy.

² Domrose, C. The climate connection: Nurses examine effects of climate change on public health. Posted on Nurse.com on October 12, 2015. Retrieved from:

<https://news.nurse.com/2015/10/12/44479-on-18/11/2015>

³ Paris Agreement. United Nations. 2015 Available at:

http://www.who.int/globalchange/mediacentre/events/COP21_climateagreement_health/en/

⁴ Climate and Health Alliance. CAHA website: <http://caha.org.au>

A national strategy will provide the transparency of actions called for in the Paris Agreement, as well as facilitating tracking and reporting on progress, as required under the Agreement. In supporting the Paris Agreement, the ANMF highlights items under the Agreement's Article 7, which we consider of particular importance for inclusion by the Australian Government in a national strategy. Actions on these items will positively impact on the health of the Australian community as well as meeting our responsibilities to our neighbours in the South East Asia and Pacific regions. These are as follows:

[Item]1. Parties hereby establish the global goal on adaptation of enhancing adaptive capacity, strengthening resilience and reducing vulnerability to climate change, with a view to contributing to sustainable development and ensuring an adequate adaptation response in the context of the temperature goal referred to in Article 2.

[Item]5. Parties acknowledge that adaptation action should follow a country-driven, gender-responsive, participatory and fully transparent approach, taking into consideration vulnerable groups, communities and ecosystems, and should be based on and guided by the best available science and, as appropriate, traditional knowledge, knowledge of indigenous peoples and local knowledge systems, with a view to integrating adaptation into relevant socioeconomic and environmental policies and actions, where appropriate.

[Item]6. Parties recognize the importance of support for and international cooperation on adaptation efforts and the importance of taking into account the needs of developing country Parties, especially those that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change.

Without the approach of a national strategy to identify and drive activities to mitigate adverse effects of climate change, it is difficult to envisage how Australia will fulfil its international obligations under the Paris Agreement.

Should you require further information on this matter, please contact Julianne Bryce, Senior Federal Professional Officer, ANMF Federal Office, Melbourne on 03 96028500 or julianne@anmf.org.au.

Yours sincerely

Lee Thomas
Federal Secretary

Additional references for consideration by the Committee:

The Lancet Commission. *Health and climate change: policy responses to protect public health*. Published online June 23, 2015. www.thelancet.com

Australian Nursing & Midwifery Federation. ANMF Policy: *Climate change*. Reviewed and re-endorsed May 2015. Available at: <http://www.anmf.org.au>