



CLIMATE AND
HEALTH
ALLIANCE

Submission to the Australian Government National Emergency Declaration Act Review

26th March 2021

Contact

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About

The Climate and Health Alliance (CAHA) is a national charity and the peak body on climate change and health in Australia. CAHA and its members work together to raise awareness about the health risks of climate change and the health benefits of emissions reductions and adaptation.

The membership of CAHA includes a broad cross-section of health sector stakeholders with 55 member organisations, representing healthcare professionals from a range of disciplines, as well as healthcare service providers, institutions, academics, researchers, and consumers. For further information see www.caha.org.au

The climate-health emergency

Climate change is having an impact on our health and wellbeing to such an extent that many peak bodies are calling a climate-health emergency. Predictions tell us that there will be more extreme climate induced events that range from natural disasters bushfires, floods, extreme weather events, impacts to our natural resources, food, soil, and air, change in patterns of disease including zoonotic (such as COVID-19), vector and water borne disease, disruption to social and economic systems, and forced migration of communities to find places of safety during and after an emergency event. As such the National Emergency Declaration Act 2020 (The Act) will play a significant role in safeguarding Australians' health and wellbeing during climate induced national emergencies.

The National Emergency Declaration Act 2020

Thank you for the opportunity for the Climate and Health Alliance to provide feedback to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee on the review of the National Emergency Declaration Act 2020.

CAHA would like to acknowledge the work that the Australian Government has done so far in establishing a legislative framework for the declaration of a national emergency, particularly that it enables the Australian Government to declare a national emergency.

CAHA notes that the Act is intended to implement Recommendation 5.1 of the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements (RCNNDAA).

However, after reviewing chapter five of the RCNNDAA Report 2020, CAHA notes that there are several items that can be strengthened to align with the RCNNDAA recommendations.

The RCNNDAA suggest (5.13) that the Australian Government needs to take further action, and do so sooner, to protect lives and property in the future. The Act enables the Australian Government to announce a national emergency, but it does not clearly articulate how the government will be granted powers to take this action, how it will mobilise and support the states and territories and other agencies.

This point is also relevant as to how the Australian government will take action to support states and territories to recover from the impacts of natural disasters. The RCNNDAA suggest providing logistical support, transportation of personnel and equipment, assistance in large-scale evacuations, and provision of financial assistance.