

1/5/2020

Submission to the Inquiry into the Climate Triggers Bill

I thank Senator Hanson Young for her work on this Bill. I appreciate the attention of the Committee into this Bill and the issues involved.

The Bill states that someone should not undertake an “emissions-intensive action” that is expected to have a “significant impact on the environment.” Producing emissions contributes to climate change, which will have serious environmental impacts. Hence the global effort to reduce emissions, which Australia has committed to under Kyoto and Paris Agreements.

Climate change impacts are not limited to the environment - though we should care about preserving the environment for its intrinsic worth and our pride in environmental landmarks, such as the Great Barrier Reef. Climate change is also expected to impact on human health and wellbeing (such as air pollution from bushfire smoke in the 2019/2020 Black Summer Bushfire Season). It will also affect productivity and economic growth, particularly the agricultural sector. These things we need to adapt to and prepare for as much as we can. But we should also make every effort to mitigate climate change by reducing our emissions and directing our lifestyles and economies to a more sustainable paradigm.

This is frankly within our self-interest, as we are expected to see serious impacts within a generation. As a 22-year-old Australian, I am concerned about the impacts of climate change over the course of my life, as are many Australians. Unless there is greater action and leadership on climate action, I am not looking forward to a comfortable retirement. Supposing I retire in 2063 or so, that could be in a much more degraded and harsh world. I would hope that the government embraces a long-term vision and realises the reality of climate change over the coming decades, rather than being constrained by immediate political considerations.

There is sometimes rhetoric that we cannot take any climate change action that will negatively

impact employment or economic growth. I think we need to reverse that thinking somewhat. Sustainable growth is where the actions of present generations to increase their living standards or prosperity, does not hinder the ability of future generations to increase their own prosperity. Currently we are well past the point of sustainability, using up more resources than can be naturally replenished and causing damage to the environment. Rather than saying we will take environmental action only so far as it does not impact the economy (i.e. present material living standards), rather we should not undertake any economic activities that comes at the expense of the environmental conditions for future generations. Having a baseline level of sustainability, I think should be core to public policy.

However, there does not need to be a zero-sum game between present and future concerns, or between the environment and the economy. We can and should embrace the opportunities and exciting developments from transitioning to a decarbonised economy. Economist Ross Garnaut outlines these issues quite well in his new book *Superpower: Australia's Low Carbon Opportunity*. We need to take a long-term view and consider the interests of future generations. As Garnaut writes, "Climate change may greatly diminish human and environmental heritage values that are enjoyed by future generations" (p.63-4). Indeed, we "cannot be sure" that future utility will be greater than it is today with climate change impacts, even with greater material consumption and wealth (p.63-4). The threat to Australian prosperity and wellbeing from climate change is clear. Apart from avoiding negative impacts, there are also positive opportunities. Ross Garnaut writes that "even if we abstract from the effects of climate change itself, we have the most to gain economically from being part of a global transition to a zero-emissions economy" (p.166). With developments in renewable energy technology and supporting infrastructure, "intermittent renewables could meet 100 per cent of Australia's electricity requirements by the 2030s, with high degrees of security and reliability, and at wholesale prices much lower than experienced in Australia over the past half-dozen" (p.101). Low emissions electricity would assist in broader decarbonisation of the economy providing a "foundation for Australia's emergence as a superpower of the post-carbon world economy" (p.69). The concept of a "just transition" is a strong part of the decarbonisation plan as outlined in the Paris Agreement. This aims to ensure that all workers and communities are included and benefit from the transition.

Therefore, I support the principles underlying the Bill. Being a prosperous and high emitting per capita country, Australia has a responsibility to take greater action on climate change and emissions reduction. It is also in our self-interest to take greater action to inspire other countries to do the same. I encourage the government to take advantage of the opportunities of the clean energy transition and lead Australia in that direction. In that way, we can be part of a global effort to reduce emissions to avoid catastrophic climate change impacts and enjoy the benefits of the new low-emissions economic future.

Thank you for considering my submission.

Kind Regards,

Benjamin Cronshaw.

Bibliography

Ross Garnaut 2019, *Superpower: Australia's Low Carbon Opportunity*