
The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia

Report 100

Treaties tabled on 25 June 2008 (2)

Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

March 2009
Canberra

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Foreword

In conducting this inquiry, the Treaties Committee has adopted a science-based, evidence-based approach to the issue of global heating. The report uses the most up to date scientific evidence to make recommendations about how Australia should approach the climate change problem in the post-Kyoto world.

The scientific evidence detailed in this report shows that climate change is happening faster and at lower levels of CO₂ than the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has been predicting. The scientific consensus is that it would be dangerous to allow the amount of carbon in the atmosphere to exceed 450 parts per million.

After examining the evidence, the Committee has concluded that it is in Australia's interests to get global action delivering deep cuts in carbon emissions in order to stabilise greenhouse gases in the atmosphere at 450 parts per million or lower by 2050.

The Committee also concerns itself with emissions targets. It is hard to see how the world can meet the 450 parts per million or lower figure unless developed countries are willing to cut greenhouse gases by 80 per cent by 2050. So the Committee recommends that Australian Government be willing to adopt an 80 percent target and take this as a negotiating position to Copenhagen in December this year.

Generally, greenhouse gas emissions are measured against a 1990 baseline. This is very onerous for Australia, because we were expressly permitted to increase our emissions by eight percent in the first Kyoto period. So it may be that our commitment to an 80 percent cut should be a commitment to cut by 80 percent from now on – this would amount to a cut of two percent every year from 2010 to 2050 – challenging, but achievable. We cannot change our past, but we must change our future.

In January, my home city of Melbourne experienced a very uncomfortable foretaste of things to come under climate change. We had the second driest January ever, with negligible rainfall. To make matters worse, in the last week of January we had day after day of 40-degree-plus temperatures.

Melbourne was not the only city to experience extraordinarily hot and dry weather. Adelaide and much of South Australia, Victoria and the ACT were similarly afflicted. People died in the heat. Power systems failed. Public transport systems failed. This is the shape of things to come in south-eastern Australia, and it underscores the seriousness and urgency of the climate crisis.

To quote the United States' President Barack Obama:

...the time for delay is over. The time for denial is over. We all believe what the scientists have been telling us for years now, that this is a matter of urgency and national security and it has to be dealt with in a serious way. That's what I intend my administration to do.

The majority of the Committee concurs with this view.

Kelvin Thomson MP
Chair



Membership of the Committee

Chair	Mr Kelvin Thomson MP	
Deputy Chair	Senator Julian McGauran	
Members	Hon Kevin Andrews MP (until 10/11/08)	Senator Simon Birmingham
	Mr Jamie Briggs MP (from 11/11/08)	Senator Michaelia Cash
	Mr John Forrest MP	Senator Don Farrell
	Ms Jill Hall MP	Senator Scott Ludlam
	Mrs Julia Irwin MP (from 6/2/09 until 12/3/09)	Senator Louise Pratt
	Hon John Murphy MP (from 13/3/09)	Senator Dana Wortley
	Ms Belinda Neal MP	
	Ms Melissa Parke MP	
	Mr Luke Simpkins MP	
	Mr Chris Trevor MP (until 5/2/09)	
	Ms Maria Vamvakinou MP	

Committee Secretariat

Secretary	Jerome Brown (from 24/11/08)
	Russell Chafer (from 6/9/08 until 23/11/08)
	Siobhán Leyne (until 5/9/08)
Inquiry Secretaries	Kevin Bodel
	Julia Searle
Research Officer	Geoff Wells
Administrative Officers	Heidi Lushtinetz (from 19/1/09)
	Dorota Cooley



Resolution of Appointment

The Resolution of Appointment of the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties allows it to inquire into and report on:

- a) matters arising from treaties and related National Interest Analyses and proposed treaty actions and related Explanatory Statements presented or deemed to be presented to the Parliament;
- b) any question relating to a treaty or other international instrument, whether or not negotiated to completion, referred to the committee by:
 - (i) either House of the Parliament, or
 - (ii) a Minister; and

such other matters as may be referred to the committee by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and on such conditions as the Minister may prescribe.



List of abbreviations

ACE CRC	Antarctic Climate and Ecosystems Cooperative Research Centre
ACF	Australian Conservation Foundation
BCA	Building Code of Australia
BEV	Battery Electric Vehicles
CCS	Carbon Capture and Storage
CPRS	Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme
CRC GGT	Cooperative Research Centre for Greenhouse Gas Technologies
CSIRO	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation
GBRMPA	Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority
HEV	Hybrid Electric Vehicles
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
MRET	Mandatory Renewable Energy Target
NABERS	National Australian Built Environment Rating System
ppm	parts per million
RET	Renewable Energy Target
SRES	Special Report on Emissions Scenarios
WALFA	West Arnhem Land Fire Abatement



List of recommendations

2 Global heating

Recommendation 1

The Committee finds that it is in Australia's interests to secure global agreement to deliver deep cuts in emissions so as to stabilise concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere at 450 parts per million or lower by 2050.

3 Addressing climate change

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government be willing to adopt a policy setting to reduce Australia's emissions of greenhouse gases by 80 percent by 2050 in seeking agreement from other developed countries to also cut emissions by 80 percent by 2050.

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government pursue the creation of an international carbon market as the primary mechanism for reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government take the following position to the 15th Conference of the Parties to the United National Framework Convention on Climate Change in Copenhagen, Denmark:

- that the international community reach an agreement to stabilise greenhouse gas emissions at around 450 parts per million or lower of carbon equivalent;

- that the agreement distribute responsibilities for reducing greenhouse gas emissions across nations by requiring developed nations to reduce emissions by 80 percent by 2050, with the residual reductions distributed fairly between developing and transitional nations; and
- that the agreement establish an international carbon market as the primary mechanism for achieving the necessary reductions.

4 Greenhouse gas reductions in Australia

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work through the Council of Australian Governments to establish a high quality integrated public transport system including light rail technology.

Recommendation 6

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government endeavour to move to 'full carbon accounting' to ensure that emissions resulting from forestry activities as well as biosequestration are accurately accounted for.

Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, through both the Council of Australian Governments and ongoing work on the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme, and in consultation with relevant indigenous communities, explore ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from savannah burning.

Recommendation 8

The Committee recommends that promising renewable energy technologies which are not cost-competitive at the moment, including geothermal, solar thermal, large scale photovoltaic and wave energy, are further supported.

Recommendation 9

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government establish a coordinating mechanism through the Council of Australian Governments to ensure integration and coordination of greenhouse gas reduction actions across all States, Territories and levels of government, including local and State government planning processes.

5 Climate change adaptation in Australia

Recommendation 10

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government direct the Australian Building Codes Board to review the Building Code of Australia to ensure that it better provides for energy efficiency standards suitable for varied climate zones.

Recommendation 11

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government investigate using revegetation as an adaptation mechanism to reduce temperature and increase rainfall in applicable parts of Australia.

Recommendation 12

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government conduct an inquiry into adaptation strategies for climate change. This inquiry should include consideration of projected sea-level rise due to climate change and its impact upon Australian coastal communities and neighbouring countries.

