

Climate Action Hobart

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Submission to Senate Select Committee on Climate Policy – April 09

INTRODUCTION

Climate Action Hobart is a newly formed and rapidly growing group of ordinary Tasmanians who are deeply concerned about climate change. We come from all walks of life and are united under the common goal of increasing community awareness of the climate emergency and creating the action necessary to minimise its effects.

Climate Action Hobart is a signatory to the Joint Submission formulated and signed by over 50 Climate Action Groups from across the country. Climate Action Hobart made significant contributions to this submission, which we support unequivocally.

Climate Action Hobart believes that climate change is such an important issue that we are also making this separate submission, to further emphasise our concerns and recommendations. We will not however, repeat every recommendation covered in our Joint Submission.

It is Climate Action Hobart's view that the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS) as proposed by the Rudd Government is so fundamentally flawed that we strongly oppose its becoming legislation. We feel that the current form of the CPRS will not adequately reduce emissions in Australia, and in fact, hinder the capacity of both Australia and the rest of the world to reduce emissions enough to ensure a safe climate.

Climate Action Hobart feels that climate change cannot be addressed via one mechanism but needs a suite of bold measures, including urgent policies in the areas of renewable energy, energy efficiency, public transportation and the protection and restoration of our natural environment.

There is increasing unease in the community about the direction of climate change policy in Australia. Climate change is already affecting the ecosystems that support all species, including people right across the world. Australian's are some of the world's highest individual emitters of greenhouse gases. Our per capita emissions are among the highest in the world and under a business-as-usual scenario we are forecast to increase these emissions by 33% between 2006 and 2020¹. Climate Action Hobart believes that we have a strong ethical responsibility to every other person, plant and animal species we share this planet with to urgently rein in our personal and national emissions. This is a responsibility that must be shared by our whole

¹ Treasury (oct 08), "Australia's Low Pollution Future: The Economics of Climate Change" Chart 3.21. p. 48

society and lead by all tiers of government. We feel the current government response has been grossly inadequate and is in fact, steering us towards locking in a dangerous climate.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. GLOBAL CO₂

Like other Climate Action Groups across the country, Climate Action Hobart recognises that “if humanity wishes to preserve a planet similar to that on which civilisation developed and to which life on Earth has adapted” then “CO₂ will need to be reduced from its current 385ppm”².

The current level of atmospheric CO₂ is already having catastrophic impacts on the Earth’s systems and its residents (both human and non human).

For example:

- In Australia we need only look to the increasing frequency and intensity of drought, the recent tragic bushfire disaster in Victoria, the demise of the Murray Darling Basin and the threats to the Great Barrier Reef.
- Ice sheet loss is accelerating in Greenland and West Antarctica, with increasing evidence of the instability of ice sheets globally and increasing concerns about sea level rises. On Saturday the 4th April a massive 40km ice bridge shattered in the Antarctic, which scientists have linked to global warming and fear could herald further collapse in the region³.
- The lives of millions of people in the Himalayas, Andes and Rocky Mountains, are threatened due to the rapid retreat of alpine glaciers which supply their fresh water.
- Indigenous peoples and island communities world wide are threatened with displacement, by searing temperatures and rising sea levels.

According to respected climate scientist Dr James Hansen “an initial “initial objective of reducing atmospheric CO₂ to 350ppm” and that this “target must be pursued on a timescale of decades” as it would be “foolhardy to allow CO₂ to stay in the dangerous zone for centuries”⁴.

Climate Action Hobart firmly believes in the position by over 150 Australian Climate Action Groups of working towards returning global atmospheric CO₂ to 300ppm, to ensure the survival of aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems through enabling the Arctic sea ice to refreeze and stabilisation of the

² Hansen, J. et al, (Nov 08) “Target Atmospheric CO₂: Where should humanity aim?” p. 1

³ http://www.news.com.au/story/0,23599,25292212-1702,00.html?from=public_rss

⁴ Hansen, J. et al, (Nov 08) “Target Atmospheric CO₂: Where should humanity aim?” p. 13

Antarctic ice sheet and northern permafrost, thereby facilitating a return to a safe climate zone⁵

RECOMMENDATION – we call on Government to:

Adopt a position of working towards returning global CO₂ to 300ppm within the next few decades and, in this context, push for global agreement at Copenhagen for a 300ppm target.

2. A 5-15% TARGET IS WOEFULLY INADEQUATE

An emissions reduction target of 5-15% is woefully inadequate, and locks in atmospheric carbon dioxide at 550-650ppm, locking us into dangerous climate change. This is not only grossly irresponsible but flies in the face of the Labor's government election mandate to undertake urgent action on climate change.

These targets do not make sense ethically, environmentally or economically. The Federal Treasury's own modelling found that "Australia's aggregate economic costs of mitigation are small."⁶

It is also important to note that in regards to weak targets, scientists say "weaker targets for 2020 increase the risk of crossing tipping points and make the task of meeting 2050 targets more difficult."⁷

Climate Action Hobart STRONGLY OPPOSES the 5-15% target.

- It is completely out of step with current climate science which calls for developed countries to reduce their emissions by at least 40-50% by 2020.
- If every country agrees to 5-15% reductions by 2020, we would very likely be facing a scenario of 550-650ppm of atmospheric CO₂, locking the world into catastrophic climate change and the IPCC's worst case scenarios.
- It will severely undermine the chance of a meaningful 2020 target as part of the new climate deal to be negotiated in Copenhagen. To undermine this global agreement is a betrayal of and great injustice to every person and nation in the world.
- It undermines targets announced by the other countries. The US have announced their intention of a 30% reduction on 2005 levels by 2020

⁵ Position adopted by 150 climate groups on Feb 2, 09 at "Australia's Climate Action Summit" in Canberra.

⁶ Federal Treasury (30 Oct 08) "Australia's Low Pollution Future: The Economics of Climate Change" pg. 137

⁷ International Scientific Congress on Climate Change (March 2009), "Congress Key Findings – Final Press Release", http://climatecongress.ku.dk/newsroom/congress_key_messages/.

(equivalent to 20% of 1990 levels)⁸ and the Eu and UK have committed to 20-30% and 26-32% below 1990 levels respectively.⁹

- Undermines efforts by developing countries, for example Brazil has committed to reduce deforestation by 70% by 2017, which is equivalent to a 72% cut in their emissions¹⁰ by 2017.
- It also tells the world Australia is not serious about climate change, we are not willing to take responsibility for our huge per capita emissions, and are happy for the rest of the world to deal with the mess we helped create while producing our incredible wealth.
- If 5-15% is locked into the CPRS legislation it cannot be changed before 2020 without paying compensation to the industries covered by the scheme.

RECOMMENDATIONS - we call on Government to:

- 1. Honour their election promise to “take strong measures to avoid dangerous climate change”.**
- 2. Urgently change Australia’s 2020 emissions reduction target band to reflect the best available science to date, which calls for cuts of at least 40–50% by developed countries by 2020.**
- 3. Set Australia’s targets based on the UN reference year of 1990, not 2000, thereby enabling meaningful comparisons of national targets.**
- 4. Assure the Australian people that it will do ALL that it can to facilitate international agreement for strong 2020 emissions reduction targets for other developed countries at the upcoming climate talks in Copenhagen.**
- 5. Push for global agreement at Copenhagen for net global emissions to be reduced to zero as quickly as possible.**

3. INTERNATIONAL OFFSETS

By allowing companies to offset their emissions overseas, the Labor government has effectively given them a ‘get out of jail free’ card to continue in business-as-usual mode and emit as much as they like until 2035. This ‘pass the buck’ mentality betrays every person who is taking personal measures to reduce their emissions and proves the Labor government is not willing to face up to climate change and respond responsibly, happy instead to ‘outsource’ our response through international offsets.

⁸ US House of Representatives (Apr 2009), “Draft Discussion Summary – The American Clean Energy and Security Act of 2009”, pg 2. [Source for 1990 level equivalency: Milne, C. (Apr 09), “Draft US Climate Bill puts CPRS in the Shade; Time for Rudd to step up”.

⁹ Australian Govt Fact Sheet (Dec 2008) – “What the rest of the world is doing on climate change”.

¹⁰ Government of Brazil (Dec 2008), “National Plan on Climate Change”, pg 14.

RECOMMENDATIONS - we call on Government to:

Urgently exclude international offsets and, in particular, international forestry offsets from being counted towards Australia's 2020 emissions reduction targets, until forest carbon measuring deficiencies have been remedied, problems of leakage addressed, and the impact modelled of a range of international forestry offset restrictions on Australia's domestic emissions reductions.

4. RENEWABLE ENERGY

Australia's stationary energy emissions grew by 47.3% between 1990 and 2006 and by 2006 were responsible for 49% of all emissions¹¹. Renewable energy must a top priority in our emissions reduction plan.

RECOMMENDATIONS - we call on Government to:

- 1. Commit to a policy of 100% renewable electricity in Australia.**
- 2. Establish a high-level Renewable Electricity Taskforce (see page 11 of Joint submission for terms of reference) to report back to the Australian people by the end of 2009.**
- 3. Delay the Energy White Paper Process until the findings of the Renewables taskforce have been finalised.**
- 4. Urgently appoint no less than 3 Renewable Energy experts in the areas of solar-thermal / solar photo-voltaics, wind power and biomass to the high-level committee for the Energy White Paper process.**
- 5. Urgently appoint at least 1 environmental Non-Government Organisation and 1 Organisation that represents energy users to the Energy White Paper Committee.**
- 6. Replace MRET and existing State and Territory FIT's with a Gross National FIT modelled on the German FIT by July 2009.**
- 7. Undertake that the residential solar PV rebate will not be changed for at least 2 years, unless the changes are to increase and/or improve the rebate.**

5. COAL FIRED POWER

RECOMMENDATIONS - we call on Government to:

- 1. Legislate a ban on all new coal-fired power stations in Australia**
- 2. Enact an urgent moratorium on 1) new coal exploration and mining and 2) the expansion of existing coal mines and 3) the expansion of coal infrastructure**

¹¹ Australian Govt Fact Sheet (Dec 08) "Australia's Greenhouse Gas Emissions" pg. 1

6. FORESTS AND FORESTRY IN THE CPRS

Climate Action Hobart is concerned that forestry is included in the CPRS in a manner that will result in perverse outcomes for our native forest ecosystems that continue to be logged and degraded despite their critical role in regulating the Earth's climate.

Recent legislation enabling plantations to be deemed carbon sink 'forests' and eligible to earn carbon credits within the CPRS would, in the absence of a ban on native forest logging, lead to an increase in native forest logging and therefore a net increase in emissions even at quite low carbon prices.¹²

There is no guarantee plantation carbon sink forests will result in permanent sequestration of carbon. Plantations can still be logged at any time while acquiring credits for sequestration prior to this.

Of great concern also is the failure of the CPRS to address deforestation and native forest logging. This could promote the burning of native forest biomass for electricity because emissions from these activities would be "zero-rated".
Climate Action Hobart is strongly opposed to the burning of native forest biomass for energy.

Climate Action Hobart firmly believes that to give our planet the best chance of surviving this climate emergency we must immediately protect the natural 'green carbon' stores present in our old growth and regrowth native forests, in our woodlands, and savannahs, and indeed all of our natural eco-systems.

RECOMMENDATIONS - we call on Government to:

1. Develop new domestic forestry policies that support and promote:

- a) Protection of native forests and other natural ecosystems;**
- b) Restoration and ecological recovery of disturbed or damaged forests and other natural ecosystems;**
- c) Ecologically appropriate re-forestation and re-vegetation practices.**

2. Exclude harmful land management practices from these new national forestry policies, including the exclusion of:

- a) Conversion of natural forests and other natural ecosystems to plantations and agricultural land;**
- b) Deforestation / de-vegetation;**
- c) Carbon credits for harvested wood products;**
- d) Bioenergy, biochar and biofuel created from native forests and other natural ecosystems; and**
- e) MRET eligibility for bioenergy from native forest and other natural**

¹² Adjani J., Wood P., (Aug 2008), "Submission to the Commonwealth Government on the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme Paper", pg6 states that: "Emissions will leak from the plantation forestry sector to the native forest logging sector. Because native forests are more carbon dense than plantations, and the proportion of usable wood is lower, the leakage is likely to lead to a net increase in emissions."

ecosystem.

3.Exclude both reforestation and deforestation from the CPRS, thereby alleviating the current market distortion in the CPRS in favour of increasing native forest logging (resulting from the current treatment of including reforestation and excluding deforestation).

7. INDIVIDUAL ACTION UNDER THE CPRS

In addition to setting a loose ‘cap’ on emissions, the current CPRS “will also impose a ‘floor’ below which emissions cannot fall.”¹³

The NSW Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) confirms this perverse outcome of the CPRS, noting that “additional measures to reduce emissions in sectors covered by the scheme would not result in an increase in emissions abatement ... the emissions avoided through undertaking an additional measure would result in an equivalent increase in emissions elsewhere.”¹⁴

This leaves communities, households and individuals disempowered and unable to make a meaningful contribution to preventing dangerous climate change. Climate Action Hobart does not believe this is in the spirit of the shared responsibility we all have to tackle climate change. As concerned members of our society we feel quite angered that our chance to make a meaningful contribution to lowering Australia’s emissions has been taken away.

This ‘floor’, especially combined with such a weak target is not acceptable to climate action groups who represent the community at large.

RECOMMENDATIONS - we call on Government to:

Remove the emissions floor in the CPRS, to ensure that individual, community, local council and state/territory government emissions reduction efforts contribute to additional emissions abatement.

CONCLUSION

Climate Action Hobart advocates for a wide range of mechanisms to be implemented urgently to constrain emissions across all sectors of the economy. We need to roll out bold and innovative policies for renewable energy, energy efficiency, public transport, natural resource management and the protection and restoration of our natural environment – and it needs to be done with emergency speed.

¹³ Denniss, R. (Nov 2008) “Fixing the floor in the ETS – the Role of Energy Efficiency in Reducing Australia’s emissions”, Research Paper No. 59, pg 14-15.

¹⁴ IPART (Dec 2008) “Review of NSW Climate Change Mitigation Measures” pg 28.

Climate Action Hobart could support a revised Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme if the flaws that we have outlined in this and our Joint Submission are addressed and a stronger target of 40% by 2020 is included in it. We call on the Government to pay urgent attention to all of the concerns and recommendations we have outlined in this submission, and in particular our detailed Joint Submission with over 50 Climate Action Groups from across Australia.

Climate Action Hobart sincerely believes that with the right leadership and the right vision Australia could be the global leader when it comes to reducing emissions and rapidly transitioning to a carbon-free economy. Visionary leadership would see climate change as a real opportunity to innovate all sectors of our economy and society, to create thousands of green collar jobs and ensure a sustainable and enjoyable Australia for us, and for the future. We are at a unique time in this planet's history when every single decision we make from this day forward effects not just us but every single person, species and eco-system, today and every day into the future. We are the generation of humans who must decide if we are going to fight for this planet or if we are going to throw our hands in the air and say it's all too hard – the coal companies are pressuring us. Let's be bold, be brave, be excited and create a future and a legacy that we will be proud to hand on to our children.

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Climate Action Hobart is part of an ever growing network of grassroots climate action groups forming right across the country demanding action that secures a safe climate.