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COOLmob submission to Senate Select Committee on Climate Policy

COOLmob welcomes the opportunity to comment to the Select Committee on Climate Policy to inquire into policies relating to climate change.

COOLmob is a non profit, community-based, sustainable living organisation hosted by the Environment Centre NT and based in Darwin, NT. Our mission is to motivate and support our community to achieve sustainable living by helping households and community groups to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and water use. Our members, "Cool Households", aim to use less electricity, water and petrol and send less rubbish to landfill.

Since we began in 2001 we have delivered hundreds of sustainability audits to Top End households. We also provide sustainable living information through published booklets, fact sheets, newsletters, television community service announcements, other media opportunities and our web site. We conduct special events and talks to community groups, and research and advocate for improved sustainable living in the Top End. More information on COOLmob is available at coolmob.org.

COOLmob welcomes any mechanism to set appropriate price signals to the Australian and global economies by pricing carbon pollution at a level which drives investment in efficiency and clean technologies. COOLmob recognises that emissions trading is only one macro-economic tool for pricing carbon, however it appears to be an option with considerable support at an international level. COOLmob believes that an emissions trading scheme could achieve the goal of setting an appropriate cost on carbon.

However the recently drafted Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS) suffers numerous significant structural flaws that render it inadequate for this important task. Among these flaws are grossly weak targets and penalties, that fail to provide an adequate incentive for local investment; unlimited scope for international offsets, that further discourages such investment; poor coverage of emission sources, by way of

broad exemptions for trade exposed industries and handouts of pollution permits to big offenders; and too much of the scheme's revenue wasted on handouts to polluters, rather than being redirected to innovation and deployment of efficiency solutions and renewable alternatives. Each of these aspects of the CPRS successively attenuates the intended price signal, as to render it too weak to encourage investment in reducing the carbon burden of our economy.

Of primary concern to COOLmob is the failure of the scheme to adequately factor into the carbon caps our efforts encouraging voluntary emissions reductions from the community. Under the CPRS, efforts made by individuals, households, schools and community groups - such as those programs and actions supported by COOLmob - merely reduce the price pressure on those big polluters covered or partly covered by the scheme.

For example, we have encouraged households around the NT to purchase 'Green Power' yet while this voluntary contribution to reducing emissions is eminently accountable, the proposed scheme makes no effort to demarcate these additional voluntary efforts from the emission reduction targets set for electricity producers. In fact, any voluntary offset purchases should be recognised and valued appropriately in terms of Assigned Allocation Units, which can then be immediately retired unused. While clearly the structures for such action already exist for purchase of Green Power and voluntary investment in other offsets, just a little more effort could see other individual actions, even the purchase of energy efficient light bulbs, accommodated similarly.

Another recent activity of ours has been to facilitate the bulk purchase of solar power equipment for local dwellings. Here the accounting of units would be a little more involved - given that there are anticipated savings on electricity bills to those households. However, given that this investment remains sub-economic (savings do not outweigh the costs) it is required to calculate a net cost for such purchases, in order to translate items into an appropriate number of units for retirement.

Other voluntary household investments – such as building upgrades for energy efficiency, or increasing household use of public transport – are clearly additional voluntary measures. While these are examples of voluntary action that are harder to measure, it is clearly still possible to arrive at some mechanism that accounts for this action, and at least partially values these additional efforts under a national emissions trading scheme. It's all about where to draw the line – clearly there is a point at which it becomes unwieldy to account for some individual actions. However when we look at the complex web of exclusions and compensation offered to big polluters under the draft CPRS, COOLmob are convinced that more effort can be made to value and reward voluntary individual and community level action to reduce the carbon intensity of our lives, our homes and our neighbourhoods.

We are concerned that, under the current CPRS design, community members will become cynical about the impact of their efforts to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions – and will use this as an excuse not to change their consumption patterns.

COOLmob is particularly supportive of complementary measures including a strong Mandatory Renewable Energy Target and a gross national feed in tariff for renewable energy. While Australia's total emissions are a small part of the global

picture, we can punch above our weight, and play a greater role in international efforts to reduce global emissions by taking a leadership role on renewable energy. A strong set of targets and appropriate structural support in an emissions trading scheme will help achieve this, however if we are to make the most of the opportunities presented by our abundant natural resources, we need to use every tool at our disposal to help Australia leap ahead in those renewable energy industries and technologies which will inevitably play a pivotal role in global energy markets over the next few decades.

COOLmob will endeavour to participate in further policy processes that advance action on climate change. We trust that you will ensure that an Australian emissions trading scheme recognises the substantial commitment by current and future generations of Australians to reduce our personal carbon footprints.