



28 March 2022

The Hon Scott Morrison MP
Prime Minister of Australia
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Prime Minister,

Re: Urgent action needed on Climate Change

We have received with thanks your response, written on your behalf by Ben Morton MP. In the past few weeks, Australia has endured devastating floods on the Eastern Coast of Australia, caused by extreme rain conditions, which have resulted in loss of life, housing, infrastructure, livelihoods, animals and the natural environment.

These floods coincided with the release of the latest instalment of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) Sixth Assessment Report, which has declared that the impacts of Climate Change are speeding up around the globe, with only a narrow window of opportunity left for urgent and drastic action to reduce global emissions, before irreversible and catastrophic damage occurs. The report has made clear in Chapter 11 that Australia is not immune to the impacts of Climate Change, and we are already witnessing in real time a climate-changed Australia, evidenced by the occurring frequency of previously unprecedented bushfires, floods, storms, droughts and heatwaves, as well as devastating loss of biodiversity, evidenced most recently by the mass bleaching event in the Great Barrier Reef.

We therefore urge the government to take the necessary national action to rapidly reduce Australia's contribution to global emissions, as it has a responsibility to mitigate further climate catastrophes in an already climate-changed Australia, to minimise the impact on Australians and our natural world. The toll on Australians of inadequate mitigation, adaptation and response has been seen through the 2019-20 bushfires, and now the 2022 floods, and the government should be doing all they can to prepare now for inevitable future events, recognising however that these will only increase in intensity if emissions are not reduced immediately.

In the reply letter to us, the government's current plan for achieving net zero emissions by 2050 was outlined, and we would like to respond to some points raised about the national plan that concern us.

Net Zero Emissions by 2050

The entirety of the government's current plan is geared towards the target of net zero emissions by 2050. Yet, the IPCC have made clear that this timeframe will be too late to prevent catastrophic global warming

over 1.5 degree Celsius. The IPCC has instead alerted the world that we are likely to exceed 1.5 degrees Celsius of warming by 2030, if our current emissions trajectory continues.¹ The most recent IPCC Report of March 2022 has also demonstrated that, even under 1.5 degrees Celsius of warming, there are mounting key regional risks for Australia, through loss and degradation of coral reefs, kelp forests, alpine biodiversity and forests, as well as threats to human life and wellbeing through heat-related mortalities, coastal erosion and disruption and decline in agricultural production.² Every degree we can maintain below 1.5 degree Celsius of warming can therefore only be in our best interest.

Under the 2015 Paris Agreement, signatories are expected to update their targets every 5 years, consistent with emerging science, and Australia was therefore expected to update its 2030 goals in 2020. Other signatories to the Paris Agreement have already done so, such as the United Kingdom, who have lifted their 2030 target from 57% to 68% below 1990 levels; Germany, who have lifted their target from 55% to 65% below 1990 levels; the United States, who are aiming for a 50-52% reduction below 2005 levels; and Japan, whose goal is a 46% cut on 2005 levels.³ Australia, on the other hand, has not made any changes to its 2030 target since 2015, a target to reduce emissions by 26–28% below 2005 levels by 2030. As claimed in your letter, Australia is expected to exceed this target, with emissions likely to be around 30-38% below 2005 levels by 2030. However, this is still comparatively lower than the US and Japanese goal. On 21 March, the UN Secretary-General António Guterres applauded other countries for their efforts, but criticised Australia, saying, "a growing number of G20 developed economies have announced meaningful emissions reductions by 2030, with a handful of holdouts, such as Australia."⁴ By not updating our target at all, Australia does not show any firm commitment to the Paris Agreement, nor does it show our highest possible national ambition.

A 50% reduction below 2005 levels by 2030 is the absolute minimum needed to ensure that Australia remains on track to keep warming below 1.5 degrees Celsius, but ideally, a 65-75% reduction below 2005 levels by 2030 would give us more certainty.⁵ Such a goal necessitates that emission reductions occurs 21 times faster than the current government plan, and aims to reach net zero by 2035. We therefore call on the government to commit to this strengthened, science-backed 2030 emissions reduction target. By doing so, we would show our commitment to a global solidarity in emissions reductions to other Paris Agreement signatories and our key trading partners, whose own goals exceed our own, and most importantly, avert a climate catastrophe. Furthermore, we call on the government to enshrine this target in law, similarly to countries such as the UK, Austria, Denmark and Scotland, who have all instituted climate laws with accompanying mechanisms for reviewing and requiring progress towards long-term and short-term emission reduction targets.⁶ This will ensure that Australia is rightly held accountable for its progress.

¹ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), "Special Report: Global Warming of 1.5 °C: Summary for Policymakers," <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/chapter/spm/>

² IPCC, "Sixth Assessment Report: Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability," <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/>

³ Professor Bill Hare, "Yes, Australia can beat its 2030 emissions target. But the Morrison government barely lifted a finger," <https://theconversation.com/yes-australia-can-beat-its-2030-emissions-target-but-the-morrison-government-barely-lifted-a-finger-169835>; The Climate Council, "ALP Joins Business, Global Allies And States In Race To Net Zero, But Moving Too Slow," <https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/resources/alp-joins-business-global-allies-states-in-race-net-zero-but-moving-too-slow/>

⁴ António Guterres, Economist Sustainability Summit, <https://www.unmultimedia.org/avlibrary/asset/2720/2720639/>

⁵ Professor Bill Hare, "Yes, Australia can beat its 2030 emissions target. But the Morrison government barely lifted a finger," <https://theconversation.com/yes-australia-can-beat-its-2030-emissions-target-but-the-morrison-government-barely-lifted-a-finger-169835>; The Climate Council, "Carbon Emissions Creep Down In Australia As Global Warming Accelerates," <https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/resources/carbon-emissions-creep-down-australia-global-warming-accelerates/>

⁶ Professor Peter Christoff, "Australia is undermining the Paris Agreement, no matter what Morrison says – we need new laws to stop this," <https://theconversation.com/australia-is-undermining-the-paris-agreement-no-matter-what-morrison-says-we-need-new-laws-to-stop-this-170198>

A technology-driven, long-term emissions reduction plan

In your response, you specified that a technology-driven, long-term emissions reduction plan would preserve existing industries. We disagree. The preservation of fossil fuel industries is incompatible with any plan to reach net zero emissions. The government's recently announced National Gas Infrastructure Plan, involving the expansion and opening up of new fossil fuel basins, is a clear example of this. Not only was the announcement of this plan, less than a fortnight after more than 100 countries at the COP26 pledged to reduce global emissions of methane by 30% by 2030, glaringly inconsistent with the direction that other countries are moving in to save the future of this planet, but it also places Australia on a path to enable a catastrophic 3.5 degrees Celsius of global warming.⁷ This will be further exacerbated by the ongoing government granting of approval for the opening of new coalmines and extensions of existing ones.

In your response, you have mentioned investment in carbon capture and storage, yet, the Gorgon venture off Western Australia has demonstrated that this is not a viable option, having massively failed to reduce and store carbon emissions at the rate originally promised.⁸ This would indicate that it is not a sufficient mechanism for offsetting the impact of emissions-intensive industries. In fact, no carbon capture and storage project globally has been able to be delivered on time, to budget, nor capture the specified amount of carbon.⁹

We therefore call on the government to immediately commit to no new fossil fuel projects in Australia, and plan for an expedient closing of existing industries. We additionally call for the abandonment of investment in carbon capture and storage, as well as "clean hydrogen" which would be generated from fossil fuels associated with carbon capture and storage. We recognise that this will require great support for the workers currently in those industries, and we call on the government to ensure that these people receive timely and sufficient support needed to be transitioned to new forms of employment.

We urge the government to redirect investment into the electrification of Australia through genuinely clean sources, such as the solar and wind industries, and other largely untapped resources such as tidal energy, wave energy and geothermal energy.¹⁰ Doing so not only economically makes sense, with Australia being more abundant in the renewable resources of solar and wind than many other countries in the world,¹¹ but by switching to renewable energy sources, we will ensure that we remain on target for an expedient and drastic emissions reduction.

⁷ The Climate Council, "Carbon Emissions Creep Down In Australia As Global Warming Accelerates,"

<https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/resources/carbon-emissions-creep-down-australia-global-warming-accelerates/>

⁸ Professor Bill Hare, "Yes, Australia can beat its 2030 emissions target. But the Morrison government barely lifted a finger,"

<https://theconversation.com/yes-australia-can-beat-its-2030-emissions-target-but-the-morrison-government-barely-lifted-a-finger-169835>

⁹ The Climate Council, "What is carbon capture and storage?", https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/resources/what-is-carbon-capture-and-storage/?gclid=Cj0KCQiA95aRBhCsARIsAC2xvfxncXwdzp7qG5uRRv0DEL3iIDsF3f85B1JVttK9KcZbMi6rTOFyuEwaAvfsEALw_wcB

¹⁰ The Climate Council, "Crunch Time: How Climate Action In The 2020s Will Define Australia,"

<https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/resources/crunch-time-climate-action-2020s-define-australia/>

¹¹ Saul Griffith, "Electrify everything – a blueprint for decarbonising Australia,"

<https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/bigideas/electrify-everything-%E2%80%93-a-blueprint-for-decarbonising-australia/13765946?fbclid=IwAR2zMOs2qqTbKISNNEaPqjjcysRfHC3YzBgHKMfyVXT445Qo3XcBAvwwwsU>

Support for our Pacific family and Southeast Asian partners

In your response, you have mentioned that Australia is doubling our international climate finance commitment, to support our Pacific family and Southeast Asian partners, to \$2 billion over 5 years. However, Australia's overall commitment is still only a fraction of its fair share, estimated at 2.5 per cent of global climate action based on Australia's wealth and greenhouse gas emissions, towards the (albeit failed) COP-16 global climate finance commitment of USD\$100 billion a year by 2020. Australia has also failed, despite calls from our Pacific Island neighbours, to resume contributions to the Paris Agreement's Green Climate Fund, to support developing countries in developing and achieving low-emissions, climate-resilient pathways.¹² We therefore urge the government to meet its responsibility to our global neighbours by increasing its global climate finance contributions to \$3 billion by 2025; recommitting between \$700-900 million to the Green Climate Fund immediately; and progressively increasing its commitments to contribute its fair share as a major contributor to climate change, of \$12 billion annually by 2030.¹³

Australia and the world's finance shortfall unjustly places the costs of the climate crisis on the developing countries who are least responsible for it, and who also unfairly suffer the most from it, with many already experiencing the effects of a climate-changed world. Our Pacific Island neighbours face the continual existential danger of rising sea levels, and have formally declared climate change the single greatest threat to the region.¹⁴ Australia has a responsibility, as the largest member of the Pacific Islands Forum and in global solidarity, to provide greater assistance to our Pacific neighbours, and to respond to their very real existential concerns through a stronger national emissions reduction commitment.

The impacts of Climate Change are already here in Australia, tragically affecting Australian lives and ecosystems. Australia must therefore act with greater urgency, and with greater global solidarity with other countries around the world, to mitigate any further impacts, and to secure the very future existence of human beings and the planet. Despite the recent Sharma case judgement, we believe the Australian government has a very real duty of care for Australian children, and our Religious Institutes are prepared to continue supporting the nation's children as they fight for their future. We echo Justice Bromberg's claims that Climate Change remains the "greatest inter-generational injustice ever inflicted by one generation of humans upon the next."¹⁵ Climate Change is the most important challenge of our time, impacting the health of people and planet today, and the lives of the next generation. Australian people are more than ready to rise the occasion.

Yours faithfully,



Peter Carroll FMS
President



Anne Walker
National Executive Director

cc. Ben Morton MP

¹² The Climate Council, "Crunch Time: How Climate Action In The 2020s Will Define Australia,"

<https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/resources/crunch-time-climate-action-2020s-define-australia/>

¹³ Edmund Rice Centre, et. al., "Fairer Futures: Financing Global Climate Solutions," <https://www.oxfam.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/OXF063-Climate-Finance-Report-WEB.pdf>

¹⁴ The Climate Council, "Crunch Time: How Climate Action In The 2020s Will Define Australia,"

<https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/resources/crunch-time-climate-action-2020s-define-australia/>

¹⁵ Sharma by her litigation representative Sister Marie Brigid Arthur v Minister for the Environment [2021] FCA 560 at [293].