

Submission
No 3

INQUIRY INTO CLIMATE CHANGE (NET ZERO FUTURE) BILL 2023

Organisation: Hunter Environment Lobby Inc.

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Hunter Environment Lobby Inc.

22nd October 2023

Climate Change (Net Zero Future) Bill 2023

Hunter Environment Lobby Inc.(HEL) is a regional community-based environmental organization that has been active for well over 25 years on the issues of environmental degradation, species and habitat loss, and climate change.

Over this time we have commented on most major development for the Hunter as a whole, including in planning for development in nearby regions. HEL has commented on most plans for coal mining in the Hunter and beyond; on water sharing plans for rivers; and on transport plans.

We are pleased to be able to have the opportunity to place our submission on record on this important issue. HEL sees unfortunately that the targets proposed in the bill are not science-based targets. Other jurisdictions like Victoria have stronger targets. The targets in the bill should be strengthened, ideally to achieve net zero emissions by 2035.

Also HEL sees that a mechanism is needed to be added to review and ratchet the 2030 and 2050 emissions targets, as well as a schedule for setting interim targets. The 2030 and 2050 targets should be reviewed as soon as the commission is established, and there should be a schedule to ensure these reviews are done regularly so that ambition can be ratcheted up. The Victorian Climate Change Act requires the Government to set targets for each five-year period, and a similar approach could be taken in NSW (see [Victorian Climate Act 2017](#))

The existing 2035 target of a 70% emissions reduction should be included in the bill. There is already cross-party support in the NSW parliament for a 2035 emissions reduction target at least this strong, and abolishing it is undesirable. If left in place and reviewed by the commission, this target guarantees *earlier* emissions reductions towards net zero than having no 2035 target. This is extremely important if we are to limit cumulative emissions over the period 2023-2050

HEL also sees that the carbon budgets established by the bill need to be based on science and a fair contribution to the Paris agreement goal of limiting warming to 1.5 degrees, not just the commonwealth carbon budget. This is because the commonwealth carbon budget may be overly generous, or opportunities may arise in NSW to achieve budgets that are more closely aligned with climate science than those adopted by the federal government.

We are afraid that the actual impacts of the bill are questionable because the bill and commission aren't embedded into other laws. The bill should aim to embed action to address climate change as a core feature of all government decision making, and

include requirements that climate impacts are considered in all government policy and decisions. One potential model is the Victorian Climate Change Act (Part 3) which embeds climate considerations into seven other acts.

The functions of the Net Zero Commission should be amended so the Commission is required to provide advice on all new emissions intensive developments such as fossil fuel projects. The Bill as currently drafted has little to no impact on 13 proposed coal mines expansions in NSW which, if approved, would emit more than 2 billion tonnes of lifecycle greenhouse gas emissions. One of those projects is the biggest proposed in NSW since the Paris Agreement - the Hunter Valley Operations Coal expansion. A moratorium on proposed fossil fuel expansions should be in place until the commission is established.

We also believe that the Bill needs to be complemented by immediate action to stop dangerous new coal expansions and put NSW on a pathway to switch away from gas. Policies that promote endless expansion of coal mining, like the 'Strategic Statement on Coal' introduced by former Deputy Premier John Barilaro, should be scrapped or heavily amended to require fulsome climate considerations and the NSW Government needs to start the process of developing it's promised roadmap to gas decarbonisation.

The Bill should enable the NSW Government to set sectoral methane targets, and for the Commission to provide advice on those targets. Notably, rapid methane reductions from the energy sector are crucial to avoid climate tipping points. A new report from the [IEA says](#) that *"[t]argeted actions to tackle methane emissions from fossil fuel production and use are essential to limit the risk of crossing irreversible climate tipping points."* The IEA recommends a target to cut energy sector methane emissions (particularly coal-mine methane emissions) by 75% by 2030.

The net zero commission should be required to audit government agencies and departments to identify opportunities to reduce emissions. For example by requiring the Forestry Corporation of NSW to cease native forest logging and instead shift to sustainable plantation-based operations, or recommending the Department of Education accelerate the Smart Energy Schools program to install solar panels on all NSW public schools.

Yours in trust,

Jan Davis
President Hunter Environment Lobby Inc.