

**Submission
No 33**

INQUIRY INTO CLIMATE CHANGE (NET ZERO FUTURE) BILL 2023

Organisation: Doctors for the Environment Australia (DEA)

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Climate Change (Net Zero Future) Bill 2023

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Doctors for the Environment Australia (DEA) is an independent, self-funded, non-government and non-partisan organisation of doctors and medical students in all Australian states and territories. We have over 650 members in NSW. DEA's members work across all medical specialties, including academia and public health.

At our heart is the recognition that human health is inextricably dependent on a healthy environment, along with a healthy society and economy – Healthy Planet, Healthy People. A health sustaining environment includes clean air and water, healthy soils producing nutritious food, complex ecosystems rich in biodiversity as well as a society that leaves no one behind.

Human induced climate change is an immediate and urgent threat to all components of a health sustaining environment and is already having a direct impact on human health, in NSW and globally. Health and medical organisations in Australia and globally now refer to this as a Climate Health Emergency (see below)

Consequently, DEA is keen to support any genuine effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and reverse or limit anthropogenic climate change. We are also keen to support any genuine effort to adapt to current and future climate change, to minimize the inevitable health impacts.

Recommendations

DEA supports the current Bill.

Our organisation, in concert with the Australian Medical Association (AMA) and the great majority of medical specialty colleges, strongly supports the [recent WHO statements](#) that the climate crisis is unequivocally a health crisis and that climate change is the biggest threat to health in the 21st Century.

DEA notes that the Bill's guiding principles recognise the urgency of the threat posed by climate change and specifically refer to the need to meet Paris targets. The guiding principles also specifically recognize the need to reduce the risk that climate change poses to health.

The Bill is clearly a centrepiece of the government's efforts to respond to climate change and has many similarities to the federal Climate Change Act 2022.

We also note that the target of 50% reduction in total greenhouse emissions by 2030 (from 2005 levels) is unlikely to be adequate to meet the Paris target of 1.5 degrees warming and is less ambitious than the targets of some other states, such as Victoria. It is however more ambitious than the current Federal Government target of 43%. Our interpretation of the Bill in its entirety is that this target represents a minimum or 'floor' rather than a 'ceiling', and that the Net Zero Commission has the capacity to increase this target, depending on local and international developments and in response to advice from multiple sources.

The science is now telling us that we need to have more ambitious targets if we have any chance of keeping global temperatures at levels which will allow for a safe environment and consequently, a safe population. Consideration should be made to introduce an interim target of 75% by 2035 (from 2005 levels). The logic for this is outlined in DEA's recent federal submission, [Setting, measuring and achieving Australia's emissions reduction targets](#).

The intent of the Bill appears to be to create a Net Zero Commission that is largely independent from the Minister and parliament and is able to provide frank and fearless advice that cannot be ignored. DEA questions whether the appointing of commissioners should involve a parliamentary committee or some other body and not just the Minister?

The intent and effect of *Section 9 – Targets for reducing net greenhouse emissions* as a whole is not clear. Subsection 3 seems to prevent targets being set. We assume that this relates to allowing more ambitious targets to be introduced at a future date and not locking in fixed targets, but this requires clarification.

The intent of the Bill also appears to be to include all emissions within NSW and DEA requests clarification that this also includes the transport sector.

Climate and health

The latest [Synthesis Report \(SYR\) of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change \(IPCC\) Sixth Assessment Report \(AR6\)](#) on climate change confirms the urgent need for ambitious action to limit global warming.

The report highlights the profound impacts climate change is already having around the globe and that these will continue to intensify. Every increment of warming will intensify multiple concurrent hazards, with the people most affected being those least responsible.

The IPCC report makes numerous references to human health, ranging from the mental health impacts associated with increasing temperatures, to trauma from extreme events, and loss of livelihoods and culture.

Human health is also well covered, along with adaptation responses, in the latest [Medical Journal of Australia–Lancet 2022 report](#) on health and climate change.

A useful overview is also provided by the following DEA resource, [How climate change affects your health: the facts](#). It is also included as a separate document.

There is no doubt in the medical and scientific community that global health, and consequently the health of the people of NSW, is fundamentally dependent upon limiting climate warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.

The Public Interest Statement associated with the Bill makes clear that the Government is well aware that the increase in average temperature in NSW is 1.4 times the global average. The health and wellbeing of the people of NSW has not yet recovered from the heat, smoke and fire of our Black Summer in 2019-20. Nor has it recovered from the subsequent flooding that impacted so many individuals and communities around our state. This spring we are already facing catastrophic fires near Kempsey on ground so recently burnt, and with an El Niño event now upon us, we all face the coming fire season with trepidation and fear.

The Public Interest Statement includes staggering projections for the cost of natural disasters of \$15.8 to 17.2 billion per year by 2060. This does not include the impacts of heat, coastal inundation, disruption of food production in the Murray-Darling basin or the consequences of social and economic breakdown that may well accompany such an existential crisis.

Physical and mental health and wellbeing are the final common pathway that will be damaged by each of these direct impacts of climate change. Those of us who care for the health of the people of our state are essential stakeholders in climate change policy.