

**Submission  
No 41**

## **INQUIRY INTO CLIMATE CHANGE (NET ZERO FUTURE) BILL 2023**

**Organisation:** Climate Change Balmain-Rozelle

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## To Portfolio Committee No. 7 - Planning and Environment

### Climate Change (Net Zero Future) Bill 2023

#### Submission

Climate Change Balmain-Rozelle (CCBR) is an independent community group in inner west Sydney with over 1000 supporters. We campaign to promote local and national action to reduce fossil fuel use, increase the adoption of renewable energy, and head off catastrophic global warming.

#### Recommendation

We welcome introduction of this framework climate change bill, and its requirement for monitoring and reporting to Parliament, and the establishment of a Net Zero Commission. Our submission details changes needed to strengthen the Bill.

We ask for a moratorium on approvals for new projects that could increase emissions until the Net Zero Commission is operational.

#### Key points

CCBR members and supporters are very concerned that the pace of change to reduce our emissions is far too slow. While we need and support massive efforts to, for example, shift our electricity supply to renewables with storage, the task does not stop there. We see this Bill, with amendments as we describe below, as an opportunity to ensure real rapid reductions in all sectors, and to prevent decisions made now that will worsen climate chaos in future.

- Action under the Act should be faster
- Commission should provide science-based advice on emissions
- Climate change targets should apply to all government decisions
- Planning decisions and mining sector could derail other climate action

Our more detailed explanation of these points follows.

Submission prepared on behalf of CCBR Committee  
AM 24 October 2023

## Action under the Act should be faster

Action to reduce emissions now is far more efficient than action pushed to the future, so we should ensure rapid reductions happen within a shorter time frame, allowing only those most difficult to shift to continue beyond this decade. Without a requirement for interim targets, the risk of “leaving it to the last minute” is increased, especially if a government without a strong commitment to action were in power.

The Bill should be amended to require the Commission to recommend targets for each 5-year period, as we understand the *Victorian Climate Act 2017* has done. As well, it could be required to recommend percentage reductions each year, against which progress in particular sectors can be monitored.

CGBR is very concerned that the targets set in the Bill are out of date before it has even been passed. The Climate Council for example calculated ([July 2023 submission to Climate Change Authority](#)) that we have likely passed some tipping points that make it impossible that global warming, already around 1.2 degrees C above pre-industrial levels, can be kept to 1.5 degrees. It maintains, based on careful analysis of IPCC Assessment Reports and on calculation of carbon budgets taking into account new science on carbon cycle feedbacks, that:

Based on our current high level of emissions, our natural advantages, and responsibilities under the Paris Agreement as a developed country ... the Climate Council assesses that Australia should aim to achieve **net zero emissions by 2035**, and **reduce emissions by 75% below 2005 levels by 2030**. [our emphasis]

We therefore contend that to achieve NSW's fair contribution to limiting global heating in line with the Paris Agreement, we need to adopt the targets given above. The proposed target of “at least 50% reduction by 2030” falls well short.

We understand that the Bill sets a specific prohibition on setting more ambitious targets without Parliamentary approval. We would support instead an absolute prohibition on setting **less** ambitious targets – the current trajectory of damage from the climate crisis makes it inconceivable that going slower could be a good idea at any time this century.

We understand that under the Bill the Minister will commission a review after five years, with a report to be tabled within 12 months. Even then, there seems no requirement of timely action on that review. Working from detectable evidence to scientific consensus is a process that already involves delay. The Bill must include the ability to respond more rapidly.

We contend that the Net Zero Commission should be able to recommend new targets as science provides new information, and expect that these will be adopted by the government of the day for the good of the people of NSW.

## Commission should provide science-based advice on emissions

As methane is a particularly potent greenhouse gas, rapid methane reductions now can make a significant improvement to our greenhouse contributions. While we continue to work on solutions in agriculture and improve our methane reduction and capture in waste management, energy sector reductions are crucial. The International Energy Agency recommends a target for energy sector methane emissions, particularly from coal mining, of a 75% reduction by 2030.

The Bill should enable the NSW Government to set sectoral methane targets.

The Commission should be empowered to advise on sector-specific recommendations, and given sufficient resources to do so, so that one section of the economy is not increasing reductions while others reduce them.

Science also tells us that we need actual carbon emissions reductions, not offsets. Real reductions in atmospheric pollution is more than an accounting procedure: we must require each sector to make significant change in their processes, **as well as** good management in other areas that can help draw down carbon dioxide. Even the best offsets do not directly do the job. Currently allowing offsets encourages businesses to choose the cheapest offsets regardless of their effectiveness, rather than reducing emissions at source. These businesses are further not held responsible for downstream emissions.

The Bill should acknowledge that actual reductions are needed in all processes flowing from the Bill.

## Climate change targets should apply to all government decisions

Climate change impacts should be a core feature of all decision-making by the NSW (and other!) governments. While electricity generation is obvious, industry, construction, agriculture, transport, waste management and resource extraction are also highly significant.

We note that the Bill says “This Act prevails to the extent of an inconsistency with another Act or law”. Yet it does not seem to interact with any others – unlike, for example, the *Victorian Climate Change Act (Part 3)* which embeds climate considerations into seven other Acts. As the Victorian act puts it, “Decision makers must have regard to climate change” – although that act appears to be qualified to cover only decision makers spelt out in a Schedule of Acts.

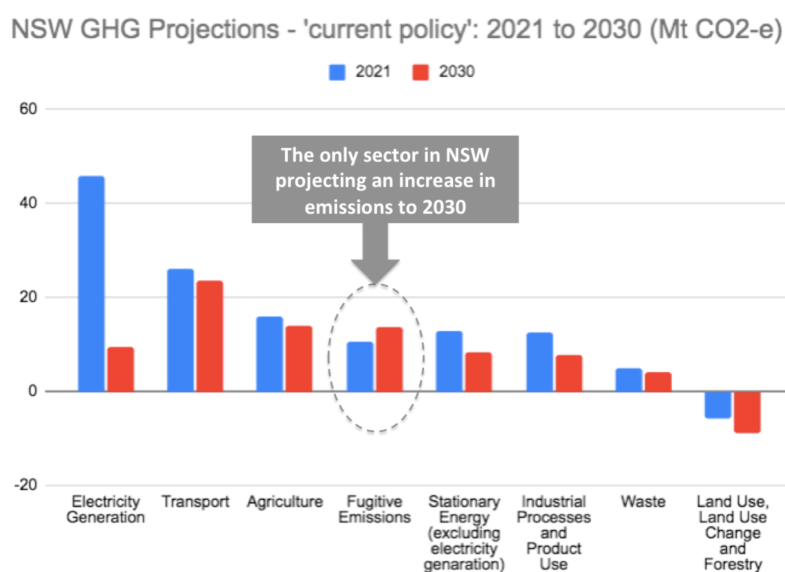
Without a stronger emphasis on **all** government decisions, a decision maker such as a Minister in one department can choose a path that worsens climate change, hoping, assuming or expecting that another department will make reductions instead towards a target some years away, and that the government will thereby achieve a target – which as we have pointed out is currently inadequate.

We are particularly concerned about such decisions occurring as new projects are considered. If the Bill were amended to include mention of key Planning legislation, the Planning Minister and other decision makers would be required to have regard to climate change. The reasons for this particular point are discussed below.

## Planning decisions and mining sector could derail other climate action

NSW faces challenges to meet the emissions targets proposed in this Bill, adequate or not. Yet new coal mining approvals have the potential to outstrip any emissions savings made elsewhere. The mining sector is currently increasing its emissions, and at the same time is proposing new projects.

According to the [NSW State of the Environment Report 2021](#), fugitive emissions were expected to grow due mainly to increased coal mining activity and natural gas developments, such as the Narrabri Gas Project. The [latest projections](#) show a predicted increase in direct emissions from coal mining of 29% by 2030 from 2021. Fugitive emissions (about 95% from coal mining) are the only sector expected to increase this decade, according to Lock the Gate's analysis of the [NSW Greenhouse Gas Emissions Projections, 2021-2050](#).



Thirteen coal mine expansions are proposed in NSW. If approved, they would emit more than 2 billion tonnes of lifecycle greenhouse gas emissions, equivalent to 14 years of annual NSW emissions. To allow these to be considered for approval before the Bill is passed and the Commission established will drastically undermine the purpose of the Bill.

We therefore ask for a moratorium on approvals of major projects until that time.

An immediate separate but related step would be to amend the *Strategic Statement on Coal* put in place by the previous government, which predicts and supports expansions of the coal industry. This statement is influencing decisions in the Independent Planning Commission PC, while the impact on climate change is being minimised by trivialising the contribution of each project to the whole.

CCBR asks this enquiry to note that this Statement should be amended or withdrawn so that relevant Ministers and the Independent Planning Commission can properly consider the climate impacts of any projects before them.