

**Submission
No 68**

INQUIRY INTO CLIMATE CHANGE (NET ZERO FUTURE) BILL 2023

Organisation: Surfers for Climate

Date Received: 25 October 2023



Attention: Portfolio Committee No. 7 - Planning and Environment

RE: The Inquiry into the Climate Change (Net Zero Future) Bill 2023

Thank you for providing the opportunity for Surfers for Climate to provide its submission to this inquiry.

Surfers for Climate is an Australian charity dedicated to helping the surfing community turn the tide on climate change. Surfers for Climate is a community of thousands surfers, many in New South Wales, and ocean lovers across Australia coming together to take off on the 'party wave of climate action' and become part of the solution to reduce emissions.

Surfers for Climate successfully delivers high-impact educational experiences across Australia, builds deep relationships with a diverse set of Australians, and focuses on building bipartisan support for sensible policies by working with politicians on all sides of politics.

Our members love our coastal environment, and many live by the beach. The physical and natural resources from the oceans and beaches are critical to our wellbeing and the local coastal economies which many of us rely on.

Legislating climate targets and establishing a Net Zero commission are great steps forward - this is the type of leadership we want to see from politicians. While the ambition levels of the climate targets can always be strengthened, the continuation of supporting any new fossil fuel projects concurrently sends a mixed message to communities, and negates the positive impact being sought through this legislation.

Overall, our feedback is that the parliament should demonstrate true climate ambition by setting deadlines for new fossil fuel projects in the state of NSW, and the best time for these deadlines is yesterday. Surfers for Climate would also appreciate the opportunity to appear at any public hearing in relation to this bill.

Sincerely,

Josh Kirkman
CEO Surfers For Climate

Surfers want ambitious leadership on climate change

The Climate Change (Net Zero Future) Bill 2023 is good news for our community of surfers and ocean lovers in NSW who all want bold climate action from politicians. Legislating emissions reduction targets demonstrates that the state of NSW is serious about reducing its emissions, and we are keen to see NSW position itself as a leader in the country.

Surfers want to ensure a clean and healthy ocean. The ocean is an environment that provides us with so much in terms of economic opportunities, whether they be from tourism, whale watching or the fishing industry. It is also a space that holds tremendous value in terms of natural capital, from the marine mammals that migrate along the coastline every year, to the humble marine flora that absorbs carbon dioxide and provides a home to so many fish species.

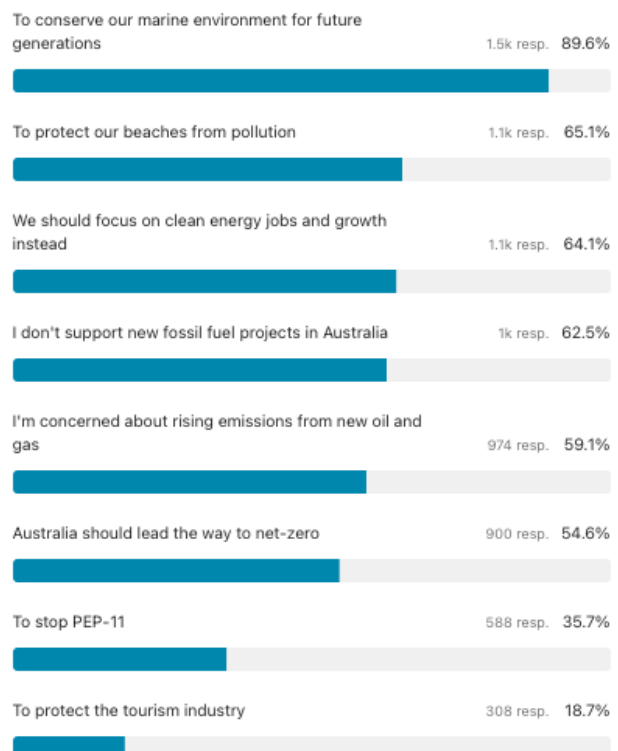
Inaction on climate and a continuation of business-as-usual when it comes to fossil fuels in our society puts so much at risk. Surfers don't want to risk their waves and the ocean.

Surfers for Climate recently surveyed supporters in relation to offshore oil and gas exploration in NSW coastal waters. The survey results informed [our submission](#) to the Legislative Assembly Committee on Environment and Planning in relation to the inquiry into the Minerals Legislation Amendment (Offshore Drilling and Associated Infrastructure Prohibition) Bill 2023.

Over 1600 people completed our survey, with 99% supporting a ban on offshore oil and gas exploration in NSW. The reasons provided by respondents illustrate that they are keen to see action from governments to preserve our way of life and unique marine environment for future generations. They also demonstrated a strong desire for ambitious climate action from the government.

When asked why they supported a ban on offshore oil and gas exploration in NSW:

- 90% said they wanted to conserve our marine environment for future generations
- 64% said they wanted the government to focus on clean energy jobs and growth
- 63% said they did not support any new fossil fuel projects
- 59% said they were concerned about rising emissions from oil and gas
- 55% said that Australia should lead the way to net zero.



The initiative taken by the NSW Government is therefore supported by surfers, but could be stronger and more definitive in a couple of ways.

Surfers want climate action the way they want their waves - big and as close to perfect as possible

The initiative shown to legislate emissions reduction targets is the type of leadership surfers want to see from politicians. Unfortunately, this bill needs strengthening if NSW is to truly become a leader for climate action in the country. The following are some recommendations for strengthening the bill:

1. Don't come second to Victoria. The targets proposed in the bill are not science-based and Victoria has stronger targets. The targets in the bill should seek to achieve net zero emissions by 2035. The sooner the better, and the surfing communities of NSW will appreciate it.
2. There exists an abundance of climate ambition in the NSW Parliament and this ambition should be harnessed. The Coalition has a stronger target of 70% emissions reduction on 2005 levels by 2035, while the NSW Greens support net zero by 2035. Collectively, this parliament has all the right ingredients for real leadership and emissions reductions.
3. There needs to be a way to be more ambitious as emissions reductions are achieved. A mechanism needs to be added to review and ratchet the emissions targets. There should be a schedule to ensure that these targets are reviewed and updated regularly. 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.
4. Carbon budgets need to be based on science, and a fair contribution to the Paris agreement goal of limiting warming to 1.5 degrees. NSW should strive to be a leader rather than just following carbon budgets determined by the Commonwealth government. NSW can set and achieve budgets that are more closely aligned with climate science, not limited by political will from another jurisdiction.
5. Every dollar spent on climate action is an investment that will pay economic, environmental and societal dividends. We are concerned by, and recommend deleting, Section 8(4)(a) of Part 2, which sets a principle that 'Action to address climate change should be taken in a way that is fiscally responsible'. This is likely to be used as a reason to not take action to address climate change. Fiscal responsibility is already a core principle of government and does not need to be embedded in this legislation.
6. Catch every wave. As opportunities come to the Minister for climate action, the speed at which the Minister responds and takes action is important. We recommend that the time period for the Minister to respond to a report or recommendation of the Net Zero Commission be reduced to a maximum of three months in all circumstances.

Surfers want clarity on what it means to be in a ‘net zero transition’

Legislating ambitious emissions reductions and enabling the opportunity to ratchet up ambition is commendable and necessary at this moment in time. The elephant in the room is the continued expansion of new fossil fuels projects and continued extractive behaviour on natural carbon sinks even as ambition is raised towards net-zero goals.

Communities are confused about the true ambition of politicians towards net-zero and climate action when they continue to approve new fossil fuel projects. In short, leaders can't have ambitious net zero legislation and continue to support new fossil fuels or damaging land-clearing practices and expect communities to be on board.

Luckily, there is a legislative opportunity that presents itself right now for bipartisan action to oppose new fossil fuel projects in NSW and an example from another jurisdiction concerning land-clearing and securing viable carbon sinks.

The NSW Legislative Assembly is currently conducting an inquiry into a Private Members Bill to ban offshore oil and gas exploration and related onshore infrastructure in NSW. Surfers for Climate provided a detailed submission into this inquiry and gave evidence at the public hearing on 9 October. In both our submission and our in-person evidence we highlighted the risks to coastal communities and the marine environment from offshore oil and gas exploration, and the strong support from the surfing community for a decisive ban on offshore oil and gas exploration in NSW coastal waters. Government support for a ban on offshore oil and gas exploration in NSW would send a clear signal that the Government is genuinely committed to action on climate change as it embarks on this net-zero journey.

Earlier this year the Victorian Labor government announced plans to end native forest logging in Victoria by 1 January 2024. The NSW Department of Planning and Environment has previously prepared plans to end native forest logging without any impact to the budget. These plans could be implemented by the NSW Labor Government with support of the cross-bench, thus reducing emissions from the forestry sector, supporting biodiversity and enabling the state to absorb more carbon dioxide while racing towards net zero.

Concluding Remarks

Surfers for Climate would like to reiterate its support for strong and legislated emissions reduction targets and investments in renewable and clean energy, but also acknowledge the opportunities for strengthening this bill in line with science. We also reiterate that the continued extraction of fossil fuels for energy production is out of sync with the government's net zero ambitions and that the government needs to set deadlines on new fossil fuel projects in the state while ratcheting up ambitious emissions reductions targets through this net-zero legislation.

Surfers for Climate would appreciate the opportunity to appear at any public hearing in relation to this bill.