

**Submission  
No 78**

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

**Organisation:** Protect Our Water Catchment Incorporated

**Date Received:** 25 October 2023

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# Submission to the Planning and Environment Committee

## Regarding the proposed Climate Change (Net Zero Future) Bill 2023

23 October 2023

Dear Committee members,

I write to you on behalf of Protect Our Water Catchment Incorporated (POWC Inc), to offer **qualified support** for the proposed Net Zero Future bill. The primary stated aim of the bill is “to establish guiding principles for action to address climate change”, but we caution against placing heavy reliance on targets and offset mechanisms. Gaming of emissions targets and offsets is an industry in itself that delivers perverse outcomes (see **Appendix A**). Naïve policy development could see an increase in emissions along with increased cynicism that government are unable to deliver meaningful action on climate, even when faced with existential threat (see **Figure A**).

We also offer **qualified support** for the establishment of the Net Zero Future Commission (NZFC) to advocate for immediate and effective climate action. The charter for the NZFC should allow for the likely possibility that many emitters will seek to manipulate restrictions imposed on their capacity to make money.

POWC Inc is a not-for-profit, non-partisan, non-charitable community group whose purpose is to take actions associated with protecting the Sydney Water Catchment including protection from fossil-fuel mining and its impacts. POWC Inc’s activities include actions that are directly legal in nature as well as actions that have legal implications. All members of POWC Inc are volunteers; industry has money to gain access and buy influence, whereas volunteers remain grateful for the opportunity to write submissions.

POWC would be happy to meet with any committee members interested in our experience tracking the ambitions of coal companies seeking to expand mining in our water catchment. We can point you to the creative use of offsets used to retire obligations for water theft, increased fire risk and biodiversity losses.

POWC Inc has direct experience with the overwhelming influence of fossil fuel companies in politics and inside government. We have studied the Environmental Impact Statements of many mining projects. We have followed various inquiries and read many reports from experts, and contributed our own submissions. We see a pattern within government to deliver project approval to mining companies despite all red flags. In particular, POWC have witnessed the political attack on the Independent Planning Commission who ruled against the Dendrobium mine expansion. We note the censorship and suppression of the voices of academics and scientists employed by government to look into the future. We note that the Dendrobium expansion failed to proceed after extensive flooding, as predicted.

Our concern is that history will repeat and that climate targets will evaporate as surely as atmospheric CO2 continues to rise. Climate denialism will continue to be propagated by the companies and the politicians most invested in denying reality and making money by sidelining science.

The proposed NZFC has the capacity to effect real change, but only if it is constituted with an awareness of the systemic pressure to continue business as usual.

We do wish you every success.

Yours sincerely,

Tom Kristensen  
President POWC Inc., [contact.powc.inc@gmail.com](mailto:contact.powc.inc@gmail.com)

## Appendix A

### Perverse Carbon Offset Outcomes (in which offsets contribute to entrenched fossil fuel extraction)

#### Example 1

**British American Tobacco awarded carbon neutral certification** by Climate Active, an Australian government-backed carbon neutral certification scheme. Big Tobacco is the recognised world-leader in self-funded fake science, used to deny tobacco is addictive or a health risk. Providing Carbon-neutral cover for any industry despite demonstrated dishonesty is to facilitate **Green Washing**.

#### Example 2

**Fugitive methane emissions are burnt to claim carbon credits.** Coal mining in the Illawarra occurs largely in the extremely gassy Bulli seam. The gas needs to be vented to make mining safe. These emissions are not monitored by the EPA. Where the operator is motivated to flare the flammable gas, it counts as a carbon credit because resulting CO<sub>2</sub> emissions have lower Global Warming Potential than the unburnt methane. Had the coalmine not been operational the methane would of course remain safely stored underground.

As fugitive methane becomes more accurately mapped by satellite, and more effectively burned, more credits will be sold on. This new line of business of releasing and burning methane will enable miners to make a profit selling carbon credits and easily satisfy the encouragingly low requirements of the Federal Safeguard Carbon Mechanism.

Ironically, fugitive emissions that have been unmonitored and unreported to date are now increasingly detected by satellite, providing a bonanza for the industry that has previously sought to conceal the extent of their atmospheric pollution. The Safeguard Mechanism will of course rely on self-reporting to establish carbon credits, providing further opportunity to game the system.

Figure A

