



St Vincent de Paul Society
NATIONAL COUNCIL of AUSTRALIA Inc. *good works*

Chair
House Standing Committee on the Environment and Energy
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

27 November 2020

Inquiry into Climate Change (National Framework for Adaptation and Mitigation) Bills

Dear Chair

The Salvation Army and the St. Vincent de Paul Society thank the House Standing Committee on the Environment and Energy for the opportunity to share our experiences relating to the Climate Change (National Framework for Adaptation and Mitigation) Bill and the Climate Change (National Framework for Adaptation and Mitigation) (Consequential and Transitional Provisions) Bill 2020 (**the Bills**).

The Salvation Army and the St. Vincent de Paul Society combined provide a significant proportion of social services and programs in Australia. As recognised in many state emergency management plans, we play a key role in supporting first responders and affected communities respond to natural and manmade disasters. Recently we have walked alongside communities through the 2019-20 bushfires, floods in Queensland and ongoing drought. These experiences have illustrated to us the imperative for Australia to act, addressing climate change with a target to reduce emissions, and adequate ongoing monitoring and emissions budgeting.

Prevention and early intervention have been shown to have a much higher return on investment when compared to crisis intervention. In our work, we have witnessed a trend of more severe and frequent natural disasters for some time now. We continually work to improve our training, equipment, resources and processes but it is vital that action is taken at the national level to address the mounting risks posed by climate change and to support communities to adapt to current risks and mitigate future impacts.

For this reason, we welcome the vision set by the Bills.

Guiding Principles

The Salvation Army and the St. Vincent de Paul Society support the development of Guiding Principles for decisions, particularly the principles of effective, efficient and equitable action, of fair employment transition, and of community engagement and self-determination.

International experience is that climate change disproportionately affects people already experiencing high levels and multiple forms of disadvantage. Climate change also poses risks to physical and mental health, which will be felt most keenly by people on low incomes, who cannot afford access to health care and ongoing medication.

Climate Change Mitigation

We support the setting of a clear target for zero emissions by 2050 and five-year emissions budgets and emissions reduction plans, as advised by experts from a range of sectors through a Climate Change Commission. By setting a firm goal in legislation, the Bill, if passed, will demonstrate Australia's commitment to respond to climate change. It will provide a concrete signal to the market, and to the world, that climate change mitigation and adaptation is a priority for our nation. It is important that we also continue to demonstrate this commitment by adhering to the budgets and taking steps to achieve the target.

We are pleased that the intention is for changes to the target and budgets to "only increase in ambition" but recommend that this be more explicitly outlined in the Bill. We have seen many national frameworks and strategies fail to meet their targets for various reasons, including competing priorities, insufficient funding and too easily amended goals. It is vital that implementation of the Bills be given the resources to succeed.

Climate Change Adaptation

We are pleased that the Bill requires governments to develop an adaptation plan at a national level. In our view this creates an evidence-based accountability feedback loop and incentives for governments to effectively address climate change risks. It is critical that the needs of people experiencing high levels and multiple forms of disadvantage are recognised to ensure no one is left behind in the transition to a zero emissions economy.

In committing to equitable action, we must ensure that every individual, family and community, particularly people experiencing hardship and disadvantage, have access to resources to reduce their own emissions and adapt to a changing climate. This should include through distributive energy and higher energy efficiency. Our experience through delivering programs like the Actsmart Household Energy Efficiency Program and providing emergency bill relief is that rising energy prices and energy inefficient homes results in people living in conditions that lead to poor physical and mental health.

Research by the St. Vincent de Paul Society also shows that people experiencing significant disadvantage are at greater risk of electricity disconnection.¹ This includes people on low incomes, older people and single parent families, as well as people living in areas with high unemployment or housing affordability issues.² We commend to the Committee the work of countries like the United Kingdom in setting energy efficiency targets for 'fuel-poor' households, which has seen initial positive progress.³

Australia already has a shortage of affordable housing and climate change will only decrease the number of properties as well as the areas that are safe and affordable to live in.⁴ This is specifically pertinent as the areas prone to bushfire or affected by drought grow over time. This will disproportionately affect First Nations people, who have a strong and continuing connection to country, as well as people who do not have the resources to simply relocate.

¹ St Vincent de Paul Society & Alvis Consulting. (2019). Households in the Dark II: Mapping electricity disconnections in South Australia, Victoria, New South Wales and South East Queensland.

https://www.vinnies.org.au/icms_docs/310289_Households_in_the_Dark_II_2019.pdf

² Ibid.

³ UK Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. (2020, April 20). Annual Fuel Poverty Statistics in England, 2020 (2018 data). https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/882404/annual-fuel-poverty-statistics-report-2020-2018-data.pdf

⁴ Mallon, K., McKinlay, M., Houghton, N., Hamden, R., Tedder, R. and Lamb, J. (2019). *Climate Change Risk to Australia's Built Environment: A Second Pass National Assessment*.

Our experience after the Black Summer fires is that, faced with impossible decisions, many will remain in disaster prone areas but forgo prohibitively expensive home insurance, and with little to no buffer when hit by extreme weather and natural disasters. Similar to providing for compensated redundancy and redeployment for workers affected by industry transitions, we must provide for people living in increasingly risky areas.

Climate Change Commission

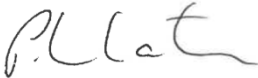
We are also supportive of the establishment of the Climate Change Commission (**the Commission**), which will support the Bill’s detailed reporting and goal setting mechanisms by providing advice, prepare reports and giving guidance for emissions reduction.

We would observe that there appear to be some minor technical changes that could be drafted to maximise the Committee’s oversight of termination of Commission members’ employment and the appointment of acting Commission members. This will ensure that the Commission can truly act independently of government. We would argue that these technical concerns should not be an impediment to the passage of the Bills.

The Salvation Army and St Vincent de Paul Society also believe that sections 22 (1) and (2)(a) to the Climate Change (National Framework for Adaptation and Mitigation) Bill should commence on the same day as sections 1 and 2. The symbol, and signal of setting this target is too important to be allowed to be put off until the date of appropriation for the Commission. We encourage the Committee to consider this target become enforced by the legislation from the day of Assent.

The Salvation Army and the St. Vincent de Paul Society support the Bills and recommended that they be passed.

Yours faithfully



Paul Hateley, Major
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