



Australian Education Union

Submission

to the

Climate Change (National Framework for Adaptation and Mitigation) Bill 2020 & Climate Change (National Framework for Adaptation and Mitigation) (Consequential and Transitional Provisions) Bill 2020

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Correna Haythorpe
Federal President

Susan Hopgood
Federal Secretary

Australian Education Union
Ground Floor, 120 Clarendon Street
Southbank Vic 3006
PO Box 1158
South Melbourne Vic 3205

Telephone: +61 (0)3 9693 1800
Facsimile: +61 (0)3 9693 1805
Web: www.aeufederal.org.au
E-mail: aeu@aeufederal.org.au

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The Australian Education Union (AEU) presents this submission on behalf of its 195,000 members who work in public education settings across the country.

The AEU wishes to place on record its strong support for these bills as a pragmatic pathway to achieving the national action on climate change Australia urgently needs.

We also strongly support the submission from the ACTU, to which we are affiliated, and its recommendation that the bills be passed without delay.

Urgent Action

Scientists and Traditional Owners have repeatedly warned successive governments that human-caused climate change will result in more dangerous weather conditions and an earlier start to the fire season due to increasing greenhouse gas emissions.

In 2008 Professor Ross Garnaut AC undertook an independent analysis of the impacts of climate change on the economy. In his final report to Federal Government¹ he stated:

Fire seasons will start earlier, end later and be more intense. This effect increases over time but should be directly observable by 2020.

It is devastating to realise that the catastrophic bushfires last summer were a crisis that could have been averted. It beggars belief that the Federal Government is still refusing to take meaningful action on climate change and continues to ignore the scientific analysis and evidence that climate change and preservation of the natural environment is the most significant challenge confronting our planet today.

Just last month the *Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements Report*² warned against the continuing negligence of Government stating:

Climate change has already increased the frequency and intensity of extreme weather and climate systems that influence natural hazards.

¹ The Garnaut Climate Change Review Final Report (2008), <https://apo.org.au/node/3028>

² Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements Report (2020)
<https://naturaldisaster.royalcommission.gov.au>

The expression 'natural disaster' is something of a misnomer, in part because some naturally-occurring hazards (such as fires and earthquakes) may only turn into a disaster because of what humans do and fail to do.

The Reality of Climate Change

AEU members are dealing with the impacts of this negligence on a daily basis. During the bushfire disaster, they were on the frontline providing refuge to students and communities, fighting fires, defending education settings and providing emotional support.

At the height of the emergency, hundreds of early childhood centres, schools and TAFEs were forced to close as a precaution due to the threat of fire. Many other education sites were forced to take extreme measures, including ceasing operations, to alleviate the hazardous levels of air pollution.

Government's failure to introduce a clear plan for reducing carbon emissions, has left Australia vulnerable and unprepared for the impact of climate change. Last summer, this negligence cost 33 lives and was responsible for thousands of hectares of country devastated and over a billion native animals killed in the bushfires.

AEU members are left to deal with the physical and psychological impacts of climate change, as increasing numbers of students present with growing anxiety about extreme events and the future of the planet.

Representative Governance

This bill goes to the heart of the democratic process by delivering on the clear will of the Australian people, including more than 100 Australian businesses, industry groups and community organisations.

The 2020 State of the Climate report³ found that after the devastating Black Summer, eight in ten Australians (82%) are concerned that climate change will result in more bushfires.

An estimated 300,000 people in Australia attended last year's global climate strike across all eight capital cities calling for investment in renewable energy, a reduction in emissions and a fair employment transition for impacted workers, all of which would be addressed through these bills.

³ Climate of the Nation Report (2020)

<https://www.tai.org.au/content/climate-nation-climate-change-concern-hits-82>

The AEU proudly stands with the students courageously protesting for climate action in school strike for climate. To reiterate our statement at the time:

Education is all about paying attention to the facts. Australia's school children along with students across the globe are calling on the Australian government to do the same. The evidence is overwhelming and unequivocal on the science of human-induced climate change, Australia should be leading by example and taking action to prevent the climate catastrophe instead of ignoring this existential threat in the hope it will go away.

These bills are an opportunity to lead by example and take action to address the key demands of the students – future voters who will stand in judgement of your decision in this inquiry. It charts a rational, judicious and expedient legal and policy framework to ensuring no further harm due to Government prevarication.

Higher Ambitions

Australia is one of the highest polluters per person in the world.⁴ The UK, China, Japan, South Korea and now even the US have all announced net zero emissions targets and the EU has increased its climate targets.

The US election saw a radical change of direction in climate policy and has left Australia alone among trading partners and allies in not taking meaningful action to mitigate the effects of climate change, leaving Australia even more isolated on the global stage.⁵

By legislating for a national net zero emissions target by 2050 and set five yearly emissions budgets and emissions reduction plans, consistent with limiting global warming to well below 2 degrees and pursuing efforts to limit warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, Australia will be able to re-build its credibility as a global citizen.

AEU members carry the privilege of teaching students about the scientific facts of climate change and empower them with the problem-solving skills and knowledge to deal with this global issue.

In future years, we would like to be teaching students that this bill changed the course of Australia's history.

⁴ <https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/fact-checking-scott-morrison-un-general-assembly-speech/>

⁵ ACTU Submission (2020) <https://www.actu.org.au/media/1449311/actu-media-release-201109-steggall.pdf>