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Submission Of: Rod Mitchell

Your Details

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Preferred means of contact: Email

What is your submission based on? I am making this submission based on my professional knowledge, qualifications or experience or on behalf of a group or organisation

What is your area of professional expertise?

If you are lodging your submission on behalf of a group or organisation, what is the name of the group or organisation? Citizens' Climate Lobby Australia

Your Submission

In your experience, what areas of the bushfire emergency response worked well?

In your experience, what areas of the bushfire emergency response didn't work well?

In your experience, what needs to change to improve arrangements for preparation, mitigation, response and recovery coordination for national natural disaster arrangements in Australia?

Please see attached letter submission.

Is there anything else you would like to tell the Royal Commission?

Do you agree to your submission being published? Yes I agree to my submission being published in my name

Supporting material provided:

CCL Australia - Bushfire Royal Commission Submission - 2020 04 28.pdf



Citizens' Climate Lobby Australia

www.ccl.org.au

28/04/2020

Dear

Air Chief Marshal Mark Donald Binskin AC (Retd),

Doctor Annabelle Claire Bennett AC SC, and

Professor Andrew Kerr Macintosh,

I wish to make a submission to the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements, investigating the 2019-2020 Bushfires season, on behalf of Citizens' Climate Lobby Australia and our 3,000 plus members nation-wide.

Citizens' Climate Lobby (CCL) is a non-profit, non-partisan, grassroots advocacy and education organisation, focused on advancing climate change solutions through democracy. Many of our members have joined us because they are concerned for humanity's future and the planet our children will inherit. Our membership grew rapidly during and after the recent bushfire events. CCL exists to create the political will for a liveable world; i.e. a world in which everything possible is done to preserve cool, moist conditions that reduce bushfire risk.

Therefore our submission focuses on the mitigation of national natural disasters aspects of the third component of your inquiry.

The Commonwealth of Australia's most recent State of the Environment report shows that most indicators of environmental health are in decline. The verdict has been the same every five years since the first report was published in 1996. The latest 2016 report^[1] acknowledges:

¹ State of the Environment Report, 2016 <<https://soe.environment.gov.au/>>.



“Climate change is an increasingly important and pervasive pressure on all aspects of the Australian environment. It is altering the structure and function of natural ecosystems, and affecting heritage, economic activity and human wellbeing. Evidence shows that the impacts of climate change are increasing, and some of these impacts may be irreversible.”

The Garnault Environmental Review of 2008^[2], predicted:

“that fire seasons will start earlier, end slightly later, and generally be more intense. This effect increases over time, but should be directly observable by 2020” due to climate change.

The recent bushfires provide a foretaste of the devastating impact climate change will inflict on Australia as it accelerates in years to come. Without substantial national and global effort to reverse climate change, bushfire emergencies will become increasingly unmanageable and likely to overwhelm our emergency service, and diminish the flora and fauna of the entire continent.

Science and technology offer many solutions to climate change; many of them are covered by Project Drawdown^[3]. Several of these solutions include varying forms of land use that remove the damaging excess atmospheric carbon and deposit it in soils where they are extremely valuable. Removal, or drawdown, of carbon is essential for the mitigation of bushfire risk.

Elimination of human-caused emissions is equally important. The reduction of bushfires itself is an important means of reducing emissions. The Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+)^[4] approach, as recommended by the UN Environment

² <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/how-a-climate-change-study-from-12-years-ago-warned-of-this-horror-bushfire-season>

³ <https://www.drawdown.org>

⁴ <http://www.fao.org/redd/en/>



Programme, argues that integrated fire management processes reduce bushfire risk and enables more carbon drawdown at the same time, thus providing a double benefit. They also estimate bushfire reduction can reduce emissions at a faster rate than fossil fuel reductions.

Reducing carbon emissions is a huge task requiring many complementary solutions. CCL advocates the adoption of a carbon price to underpin a steady and sustained transition to zero carbon emissions as soon as possible. CCL recommends a “Carbon Fee and Dividend” (CFD) pricing system^[5], which is the most efficient and most elector-friendly way to price carbon. Dr. Richard Holden and Dr. Rosalind Dixon at the University of New South Wales have modelled a CFD policy in the Australian economy and presented it as the Australian Climate Dividend Plan^[6]. Only by phasing out emissions and drawing down historical emissions can we hope to reverse warming and return to a safe climate where the frequency and intensity bushfires can return to historical levels. A recent community survey found 73% community support for such a policy^[7].

The effectiveness of carbon pricing is already proven in the Australian context. Our carbon emissions dropped by 1.4 per cent in the second year after the carbon price was introduced in 2012. According to the Centre for Public Impact, this is “the largest recorded annual decrease in the previous decade”^[8]. As mentioned above, expert modelling suggests the Carbon Fee and Dividend proposal is the most effective market-based solution for lowering emissions and encouraging investment in natural and technological solutions, while also stimulating the economy and creating jobs growth.

In order to respond to this accelerating risk, we propose the following actions:

1. Amend the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act) to include clear mechanisms that automatically trigger national and international

⁵ <https://au.citizensclimatelobby.org/a-carbon-fee-and-dividend-policy-for-australia/>

⁶ <https://www.auscarbondividend.com/>

⁷ <https://newsroom.unsw.edu.au/news/business-law/new-carbon-dividend-proposal-gets-community-support>

⁸ <https://www.centreforpublicimpact.org/case-study/carbon-tax-australia/>



responses in addressing the actual causes of climate change and associated environmental threats. With its processes essentially science-based, the Act can be amended and significantly strengthened to ensure ecological sciences and climate science work together in addressing the macro-systemic climate issues.

2. That the Commission acknowledges the clear link between global heating (and drying) and bushfire risk, outlined by the science of climate change, and urges all governments to adopt policies that both reduce emissions as quickly as possible towards zero and rapidly remove historical emissions.

Thank you for your consideration of our submission. If needed, I can be reached at

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Yours sincerely,

Rod Mithcell
National Chair