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CONSERVATION COUNCIL
ACT REGION

Reducing Australia's Greenhouse Gas Emissions Targets and Progress Review

Joint Submission: the Conservation Councils of Australia

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Introduction

The Conservation Councils of Australia represent nearly 500 local and regional environmental organisations from each state and territory in Australia.

We are democratic peak organisations, representing member organisations from rural, regional and metropolitan areas across Australia.

We welcome the opportunity to comment on the *Reducing Australia's Greenhouse Gas Emissions – Targets and Progress Review*.

The Climate Change Authority

The Councils value the role that the CCA plays in public debate as an independent organisation with a strong commitment to climate science and policy rigour.

The Councils believe that the CCA has an essential role to play bringing an evidence-based and long-sighted view to the intensely politicised Australian climate policy arena.

The Review

- The Conservation Councils of Australia commend and congratulate the Climate Change Authority on the work that it has gone into its draft *Reducing Australia's Greenhouse Gas Emissions – Targets and Progress Review*.

- The Councils commend the CCA for the transparent approach that it has taken to determining appropriate decarbonisation trajectories for Australia.
- The Councils urge the CCA to develop recommendations that are in the long term interests of the Australian environment and the Australian community, and that are founded on transparent and impartial application of public policy principles and climate science. The Councils urge the CCA to disregard short term political considerations that may dampen ambition.
- The Councils urge the CCA to consider the legacy that the Review will leave the Australian community – a rigorous, clear-sighted, and impartial assessment of the decarbonisation trajectory that represents Australia’s fair contribution to global attempts to respond to the greatest threat that has faced human civilizations in modern times. This report is a genuinely important contribution to Australia’s efforts to confront this challenge, and will outlive any single government.

Carbon Budget

- The Conservation Councils of Australia endorse the carbon budget methodology.
- The Councils believe that structuring recommendations to government around a 67% chance of limiting global warming to two degrees is unacceptable. While the potential impacts of two degrees warming are frightening, those predicted for a three degree world are alarming. It is appropriate for the CCA to provide recommendations to government that appropriately weight the environmental damage and social and economic dislocation and loss that may flow from more significant climate impacts.
- For this reason, the Councils urge the CCA to develop recommendations that would provide Australia with a basis for making an equitable contribution to global efforts that give an 80% chance of keeping warming below 1.5 degrees.

Targets and trajectories

- The Councils’ main focus is on ensuring that Australia hits appropriately strong decarbonisation targets; we thus favour a pollution trajectory that allows for steady structural adjustment in the Australian economy as the pathway most likely to ensure robust political commitment to decarbonisation efforts.
- The Councils believe that leaving decarbonisation efforts to late in the 2013-2050 period:
 - Risks medium term exposure of the Australian economy to carbon-budget driven shock
 - By placing the onus for decarbonisation on future generations fails to satisfy principles of intergenerational equity
 - Signals a lack of political will to the international community and may undermine international carbon pollution mitigation efforts, with a consequent increase in risk of severe climate impacts to Australia

- Australian Treasury modelling has shown that early action is more economically efficient than delayed action.[1]
- The Conservation Councils of Australia believe that the Climate Change Authority should recommend a greenhouse gas pollution trajectory with:
 - Strong short term targets. The Councils recommend a 2020 target of 40%
 - Strong medium term targets. The Councils recommend a 2030 target of 60%
 - The Councils believe that Australia should aim for and achieve a zero net GHG pollution target by 2050.

Public support for climate action

- Climate change is the issue that most engages and concerns the hundreds of thousands of supporters of Conservation Councils in every state and territory.
- The Councils also note strong recent evidence of public engagement and concern with climate issues
 - Recent ‘aim higher’ rallies held nationally draw over 60,000 people, in 130 communities – from Alice Springs, to Brisbane, to Penguin, Tasmania
 - Strong public response exhibited during the CCA’s recent RET review process
 - 61 per cent of Australians believe the Government should do more to tackle global warming (Vote Compass)[2]

Climate change impacts

The Councils note that the environmental case for setting ambitious decarbonisation targets is compelling. Climate change will devastate Australian environments.

- Environmental damage on the scale projected will equally be devastating to Australian communities and to the Australian economy.
- Under all warming scenarios species will be lost and the integrity of ecosystems undermined; however, higher warming scenarios are associated with much greater levels of environmental damage - 3 degrees of warming will harm the Australian environment more than will 2 degrees, which will harm Australia more than will 1.5 degrees of warming.
- Global warming has emerged as the single greatest threat to Australia’s biodiversity. Scientists predict that a 1.5°C global temperature rise may see 25% of the Earth’s animals and plants disappear; a 3°C rise may see 30% disappear;[3]
- The Councils note that the economic case against setting ambitious decarbonisation targets is weak. CCA’s modelling shows that the cost to the Australian economy of adopting a 25% decarbonisation target over a 15% target is 0.02% of per capita GNI

[1] cache.treasury.gov.au/treasury/carbonpricemodelling/content/report/downloads/Modelling_Report_Consolidated.pdf

[2] <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-08-26/vote-compass-climate-change-environment/4908224> - August 2013

[3] http://www.ipcc.ch/publications_and_data/ar4/wg2/en/ch19s19-3-4.html

Other issues

- The Councils also recommend that longer term targets should be based on the carbon budget. We view the 80% 2050 target as arbitrary, and strongly urge the Climate Change Authority to stick to its chosen budget methodology
- The Councils believe that Australia should recognise international GHG pollution abatement permits, but that government must require such pollution permits to satisfy strong environmental integrity tests.