

Australian Youth Climate Coalition

Submission to the Climate Change Authority's Targets and Progress Review

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Contact

Lucy Manne
National Co-Director



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1. About the Australian Youth Climate Coalition

The Australian Youth Climate Coalition (AYCC) is an entirely youth-run organisation with the mission of building a movement of young Australians who are empowered to take action on climate change.

We believe that climate change is the single greatest threat facing humanity, and puts young people and future generations at risk. We also believe that addressing the climate crisis is our biggest opportunity to create a world that is more sustainable, just and fair.

Since our Founding Summit in 2006, we have grown from a handful of students to one of Australia's largest youth-run organisations, and now have a membership of 115,568 young people and 100 active grassroots groups around the country. We work with these young people to run effective, strategic campaigns that have a real impact on Australia's domestic carbon emissions, our renewable energy, and our international contribution to climate change.

2. The threat climate change poses for young Australians

Climate change represents a huge threat for humanity, and will have a disproportionately severe impact on young people, future generations, and the world's most vulnerable.

Climate science is telling a clearer story than ever: anthropogenic climate change is already exacting a terrible toll on Australia and the world, and unless we avoid a further increase to the global temperature then the consequences will be catastrophic.

The most recent IPCC Report shows with extreme certainty that climate change is real, caused by human activity, and requires urgent action. If we don't take decisive action,

someone born in Australia today could witness devastating impacts in their lifetime, including: up to 10,000 more heat related deaths annually; up to a 90% decline in irrigated agriculture; widespread species loss; destruction of the Great Barrier Reef; \$226 billion of damages to buildings and transport infrastructure due to sea level rise; and more frequent and severe extreme weather events like heatwaves, bushfires, and floods.¹

The last 12,000 years of stable climate have allowed humanity to flourish, creating the civilization we now take for granted. Young Australians have a simple vision - we want to be able to enjoy a stable climate similar to that of our parents, grandparents and generations of human beings before us. Yet business as usual will condemn young people and future generations to catastrophic climate change.

3. Significance of the CCA's Progress and Targets Review

The AYCC believes that the CCA's Progress and Targets review represents a critically important opportunity to communicate the cost of inaction and the level of ambition required by our Government.

It's regrettable that in Australia the problem of climate change has become highly politicised, and that this has meant that despite the urgency of the issue, and public support for action², our major parties have failed to deliver policies in line with what the science demands. The focus of our policy makers must shift from political points-scoring to the scientific and moral imperative of more ambitious action - and that can only happen if independent and credible bodies such as the CCA provide decision-makers, the media, and the public with robust and fearless advice.

In our dealings with stakeholders in the community, the media, business, and Government at all levels, we have consistently witnessed the ability of strong, independent advice to dramatically alter the terms of reference for public policy debates. The Garnaut Review, AEMO's modelling of a 100% renewable energy future, and the Climate Commission's "Critical Decade" report all provide excellent case studies of how robust independent analysis has the potential to influence policy debates in the long-term, and beyond a single political cycle.

¹ The Climate Institute (2013), "Media Brief: Climate Risks Around Australia", http://www.climateinstitute.org.au/verve/resources/TCI_MediaBrief_IPCC_September2013.pdf

² According to Vote Compass, 61% of Australians believe the Government should do more to tackle climate change. Vote Compass (August 2013), <http://www.abc.net.au/votecompass/>

It's therefore crucial that the Climate Change Authority considers the long-term ramifications that this review process will likely have on the climate debate in Australia - and the consequent need to not shy away from the ambitious end goals dictated by climate science.

With that in mind, the AYCC commends the excellent work that informed the draft report, and urges the CCA to ensure that final recommendations accurately reflect climate science, and give us the best possible chance of securing a safe climate future.

4. Recommendation: Increasing the recommended 2020 target to at least 40%

AYCC urges the CCA to recommend a short-term target of at least 40%. We believe the strongest possible short-term target should be adopted for several reasons.

Firstly, the strongest possible 2020 emissions reduction target is in Australia's national interest. Australian Treasury modeling has shown that the longer Australia waits before acting, the higher the costs of cleaning up Australia's economy will be³ - and this means that a strong 2020 target will allow Australia to more smoothly transition away from reliance on high-pollution technologies. Furthermore, renewable technology is being rapidly taken up around the world⁴, and waiting will result in Australia missing out on economic benefits associated with the "first mover advantage".

Secondly, it is likely that the 2020 target adopted by the major parties, rather than a 2030 or 2050 target, will continue to provide the basis for climate policy-making. This means that even if the same level of emissions reductions by 2030 is technically possible with a low target of 15% by 2020, it would be politically impossible due to the context within which public policy is created.

Thirdly, as the CCA draft report indicates, an important consideration when determining Australia's 2020 targets is the capacity of our domestic target to help build momentum for international action - and in particular a strong global agreement in 2015. As we recently witnessed at the UN climate talks in Warsaw, Australia's current lack of ambition is a major roadblock to international progress.⁵

³ Australian Treasury (2011), "Strong Growth, Low Pollution: Modelling a Carbon Price,"

<http://archive.treasury.gov.au/carbonpricemodelling/content/default.asp>

⁴ In many parts of the world, wind and solar energy has reached parity or is cheaper than fossil fuels, signalling a "disruptive economic shift" in the global energy market. Paul Gilding (2013), "Victory at hand for the climate movement?", <http://paulgilding.com/cockatoo-chronicles/victoryathand.html>

⁵ John Vidal (November 2013), "Poor countries walk out of UN climate talks", *The Guardian*, <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2013/nov/20/climate-talks-walk-out-compensation-un-warsaw>

Australia must not only stop being a laggard - we must become a leader. Current emissions trajectories would result in +4 degrees of warming.⁶ This would be disastrous for Australia and the world, and our 2020 targets should reflect our fair share of a successful effort to tackle climate change, rather than our share of an inadequate global response.

Finally, AYCC notes that the Climate Change Authority's modelling shows that the cost to the economy of choosing a 25% target over a 15% target is equivalent to 0.02% of economic growth. Given the small economic impact of an ambitious short-term target - compared to the huge benefits here in Australia and in the context of international negotiations - the highest possible 2020 target is clearly necessary.

5. Recommendation: Adoption of a goal of 80% chance of limiting warming to 1.5 degrees rather than a 67% chance of limiting warming to 2 degrees

AYCC recommends that the CCA's final report uses an end goal of an 80% chance of limiting warming to 1.5 degrees. The AYCC commends the CCA for using equity - including intergenerational equity - as a guiding principle for the methodology used to determine Australia's carbon budget. However while this principle may have been used to determine the methodology, its application is inconsistent with the CCA's stated end goal of "a likely chance of staying below 2 degrees of warming."

The UNFCCC goal of limiting global temperature rise to 2 degrees has a political rather than scientific basis. The scientific consensus is that with 2 degrees of global temperature rise, there is a high risk of reaching dangerous tipping points in the earth system. The latest IPCC report confirms that limiting warming to 1.5 degrees is possible, and that a dramatic rise in impacts can be expected if 1.5 degrees is exceeded.⁷

Furthermore, the AYCC believes that a 67% chance of success represents an unacceptably high level of risk. A commitment to intergenerational equity requires a cautious approach that values future interests equally with present interests. A one in three chance of catastrophe is not cautious, it is reckless.

Given the unacceptably high risk associated with a 67% chance of success, and the catastrophic consequences of allowing warming to reach 2 degrees, the AYCC urges the CCA to adopt a goal of an 80% chance of staying below 1.5 degrees of warming.

⁶ IPCC (2013), "Climate Change 2013: The Physical Science Basis," Working Group 1 Report to the IPCC 5th Assessment Report, <http://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar5/wg1/>

⁷ Ibid.

Conclusion

A safe climate future is still possible, but will require urgent action in line with the latest climate science. By providing the community and the Government with robust, science-based, and independent advice, the Climate Change Authority has a critical role to play in securing the ambitious action needed.

We commend the principle of intergenerational equity that has informed the draft report, and urge the CCA to ensure it is applied fully in the final report. The AYCC therefore recommends a carbon emissions reduction target of at least 40% by 2020, and an end goal of an 80% chance of staying below 1.5 degrees.

The AYCC exists because although the future of young Australians depends on choices made today, young people rarely have a seat at the table when these decisions are made. With that in mind, we have attached a collection of photos from just a handful of our 115,568 members - we hope that the CCA will consider their messages when finalising this report.

Appendix: Messages from our members

