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**Submission to Climate Change Authority on the Targets and Progress Draft Report**

Dear Climate Change Authority members and staff

Thank you for your work: I have found reading your Draft Report valuable for understanding the issues.

I appreciate the opportunity to make a submission. I write as a research student, studying the politics of climate change and approaches to climate change communication.

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I share the views of others who have written to you, calling for the strongest possible emissions reduction targets based on a clear view of Australia's responsibilities, given

> (i) Australia's capacity to respond
> (ii) our contribution to emissions per capita and in absolute terms – particularly the contribution made by our coal exports

Having read a range of literature, including a report by James Hansen, Jeffrey Sachs, Konrad Steffen and a number of other eminent authors *Scientific Case for Avoiding Dangerous Climate Change to Protect Young People and Nature ,*[1] I **regard 25% not as the upper end of a spectrum between beginning at 5 or 15, but as a minimum starting point.**

**In this submission I would like to make some comments on:**

- **Draft conclusion C2 and the acceptable range of risk**
- **Presentation of the findings of the final report in a way that is intelligible and accessible for the broad public**
- **The place of Australia's coal exports in the national debate and in the CCA's analysis**

[1] Available at arxiv.org/pdf/1110.1365.pdfâ€

**Emissions Budget and draft conclusion C.2**

In relation to the Draft Report's conclusion C.2

> *"A global emissions budget that provides at least a likely (defined here as a 67 per cent probability) chance of limiting warming to no more than 2 degrees above pre-industrial levels should be used as a reference for the Review. This equates to a global budget of no more than 1 700 Gt CO2-e emissions of Kyoto gases from 2000 to 2050"*

**Recommendation:** that the CCA revise this conclusion in the light of the level of risk involved: 67% is not within an acceptable range of risk for other kinds of activity, for example the risk of our house burning down or the risk of a plane crashing.

Thinking of risk as *likelihood multiplied by the adversity of the consequences*, can we afford to base public policy on this level of risk?

The debate about two degrees is difficult: if 2 is acceptable, surely 2.5 is not so bad, which means we will end up tolerating 3 and reaching 4 (… on our eventual way to 5 or 6?)

Don't we need a spirit of much greater caution and "conservatism" in thinking about these kinds of risks to what we value?

**Presentation of the findings of the final report in a way that is intelligible and accessible for the broad public**

**Publishing a short summary version for the general public**

Clearly, few Australians are going to read the full final report.

However a brief version could be widely shared by email and via social media and thus reach a wide audience.

For this to be successful, it needs to be a *different kind of document to a copy of an executive summary:* it needs to be specially-designed to be readable, and **written in language and using graphics that are accessible to audiences outside the public policy community.**

**Making the report a compelling document to read**

The **graphs and diagrams** in the document are invaluable for helping readers to understand the issues and dramatizing or illustrating the choices that face Australia and what they mean.

I have appreciated, for example,

- Figure 2.6: "Projected impacts for Australian locations under 4 degrees of warming."
- Figure 2.5: "Global impacts projected to result from rising temperatures"
- Figure 3.3: "Probability of staying below specific temperature increases above pre-industrial levels given carbon dioxide equivalent stabilisation levels"

Some suggestions based on some examples in the report:

<u>Re: Table 4.1 Key countries – emissions , development and trade analysis</u>

> **Australia's contribution through export of coal** is missing from this table: Australians need to confront this issue given the contribution the burning of this coal makes to climate change.
>
> **A table of per capita emissions by country and another showing emissions relative to GDP** would help Australian readers to locate Australia's contribution to climate change within an international context.

<u>Re: the figures in Chapter 5 that locate Australia's targets in relation to other countries according to absolute emissions, emissions intensity, deviations from business as usual and per person emissions</u>

> These graphs are important for readers to gauge whether Australia is "pulling its weight". However as a "lay reader" I had to look at these graphs a number of times to be clear about what they meant.
>
> I would like to suggest **annotating graphs like these,** for example by including a caption describing in 1-2 sentences what the graphs mean, and not assuming a high level of familiarity with the policy issues in designing the graph.
>
> Not everyone will be reading the whole report: some will pause and look at a graph but then move on because the information provided with the graphs did not make their meaning sufficiently intelligible.

<u>Re the statement: "Emissions per person: 25 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (t CO2-e) (11th in the world in 2009, highest of any developed country)" (table 5.1)</u>

> **"highest of any developed country" is startling and is far from being widely understood in the Australian community. If it was widely recognised - if it was a fact that politicians, community leaders and the general public could not sidestep - debate about climate change in Australia would be different.**

This is mentioned in the report however **how could it be communicated in a more compelling way?**

**A "league table" which highlights this fact** would add to the impact of the report.

**Policy instruments and the place of coal in Australia's economy**

In profiling policy instruments available to governments in forms such as Table 4.3: "Policies and measures of key countries", the contribution made by Australia's coal exports is not currently made visible.

I believe that decarbonisation options need to be considered in terms of the full range of ways Australia contributes to climate change, and their significance relative to each other.

**Recommendation:**

*That the CCA builds emissions from fossil fuel exports into the analysis of Australia's contribution to climate change.*

Australia's fossil fuel exports clearly make a major contribution to global emissions. In a report prepared by Ecofys, Greenpeace reports

> By 2025, [Australian] coal exports would increase to 408 million tonnes a year above 2011 levels, pushing associated CO2 emissions up by 1,200 million tonnes a year once the coal is burned. By then, the CO2 emissions caused by Australian coal exports would be three times as large as the emissions from Australia's entire domestic energy use.[2]

**Australia's place** as the world's largest exporter of coal, and the second largest exporter of thermal coal **needs to be linked in the public imagination to Australia's contribution to climate change.**

In an open letter written in 2008 to Australia's then-Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, NASA's James Hansen wrote

> *Due to the dominant role of coal, solution to global warming must include phase-out of coal except for uses where the CO2 is captured and sequestered. Failing that, we cannot avoid large climate change, because a substantial fraction of the emitted CO2 will stay in the air more than 1000 years.*

[2] Available at http://www.greenpeace.org/international/Global/international/publications/climate/2013/PointOfNoReturn.pdf

> ***Yet there are plans for continuing mining of coal, export of coal, and construction of new coal-fired power plants around the world****, including in Australia, plants that would have a lifetime of half a century or more.* ***Your leadership in halting these plans*** *could seed a transition that is needed to solve the global warming problem.*[3]

The CCA is well-placed to help Australians reflect on our responsibilities in this regard.

**Concluding note**

Are we indeed facing the risk of global catastrophe resulting from the possibility of a human-induced end to the Holocene?

This is hard for anyone to contemplate, and in this context we look to organisations like the CCA to outline the choices before us, highlight the responsibilities we need to take on, enable us to understand the meaning of the issues and point out the consequences of the action that we take.

Political will and leadership seem to be in short supply – not just in our political parties but also within civil society.

I hope that the CCA's Final Report is written with a level of directness, urgency and gravity which is commensurate with the danger we confront.

Internationally, we have good examples of urgent public policy responses to urgent crises: instances such as the 1930s Depression, the Second World War, the need for postwar reconstruction and the Global Financial Crisis demonstrate how concerted action by government is possible when a crisis is recognised and when governments are prepared to lead.

The threat posed to our future because of climate change is clearly avoidable if urgent measures are taken:

*how can the CCA's Final Report inject something new into the Australian debate-*
*and do so with real clarity?*

Thanks for considering this submission

Don McArthur

[3] Letter available at http://www.onlineopinion.com.au/view.asp?article=7196&page=0