

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the review of the Climate Change Act. I admire the ambition for this to be a world-leading Act. I have a number of comments - I have researched my submission to the best of my ability, and could supply plenty of sources if you require them.

Declare a Climate Emergency.

As COP 26 closes, the urgency for action this decade is strikingly clear, and so is our shared responsibility to achieve the goals of the Paris agreement.

The Bill should declare Climate Change as an emergency that requires a comprehensive collaborative approach to action, equivalent to a state of war where the enemy is emissions. In this case, we would all pull together, making sacrifices as needed, caring for the victims and supporting each other. The science is now clear and the danger is no longer distant, or even imminent, it has started and is escalating. We need this Act to be so inspiring that it stands above politics. This was the stated aim of this bill. Unfortunately this document does not deliver - but it could.

Separate emissions and sequestration in all reports.

This is the 7th iteration of a Climate Change policy yet in that time we have seen actual emissions rise. The 'Net Zero' of which we seem so proud is the product of balancing the emissions we produce for energy (more than half of all energy produced is from fossil fuels, given that renewable electricity production accounts of around 42% of the total) with the carbon stored in the trees we didn't cut down but might have. This value is very hard to quantify and is vulnerable to sudden major losses of stored carbon in bushfires, though that is not counted. Apparently we are only counting anthropogenic contributions, which includes trees growing but not trees burning. This carbon storage value decreases with time as trees mature. We should not be relying on this for our 'success' though we should certainly be protecting our forests.

Therefore, all future reporting should separate emissions and sequestration.

Time frame far too long - we need more action this decade.

The Bill suggests a review period of 5 years. Given this is the critical decade, that is far too long a time frame. An independent commission with interim second yearly reporting and plan adjustments would be better.

We must have mandated targets.

The Bill does not mandate targets in any meaningful way that I can see. To make the world-leading positive contribution we could strive for, we need a well-funded independent body to oversee plans in each sector to reduce emissions to be net zero by 2030 without relying on off-sets by 2050. A clear pathway to make substantial gains by each sector should be developed for each sector. There needs to be accountability built in for the head of each department. These targets should be mandated to meet net zero without relying on LULUCF.

Climate Change is a Medical Emergency.

The Climate Emergency is also a Medical Emergency, as proclaimed by the AMA. I do not know why the Health sector was left out of the Act or the Independent Review. Each of the Jacobs focus groups had at least one doctor representing Doctors for the Environment and/or the AMA, and spoke strongly about the fact that Climate Change is the biggest threat to health. The Health Sector in other jurisdictions contributes about 7-8% of emissions so it should be included in sectors needing to plan for emissions reduction. The Health Sector is also going to face very substantial increased pressure from climate change. The social determinants of health that are so important are being driven in the wrong direction by climate change already. Both primary health care and the hospitals are already stretched. Focused planning on climate change needs would help safeguard our capacity to meet the impacts of a changing planet.

Homelessness driven by climate refugees.

The rate of homelessness is escalating as climate refugees buy up Tasmanian properties and this will continue as more and more of Australia and the rest of the world becomes unliveable. In my last 5 years in general practice, where it was our policy not to take new patients who had already seen a doctor in Hobart, it was very clear that climate was the driving motivation for migration. There are two issues here. In the past the poor have had to move 'out' to what were less attractive and cheaper rural areas to find affordable housing, but that was always a small finite resource and 'out' is pretty much full now. This leaves nowhere to go for too many, and clearly it is hard to manage illness living in tent, let alone attend to nutrition and well-being. Second, the incoming migrants are no longer largely Tasmanians returning but are socially unconnected and come from a diverse ethnicity. The best indicator for how a community copes with a disaster is social connectedness, so there needs to be specific planning to support social integration and infrastructure and address barriers like racism.

The Health Sector must be at the table.

The Health Sector should be represented at the table in planning for dealing with climate change. This is particularly true given the fact that our system is already broken and struggling, yet much more will be required of it. A major concern is the mental health of our young people. A very recently released report by Unicef found that 86% of Australian children and youth are already very concerned about climate change. I have met many young adults seriously considering never becoming parents. They don't need baseless reassurance, they need to see action from their leaders.

Climate change requires more planning for disasters, including health resources.

As Climate Change brings repeated disasters, there should be specific provision in this Act to address this reality - whether fire, floods, droughts, extreme weather events, high heat days, storms, and sea level rise. Safety, health, food security, transport, communications, domestic violence and social dislocation all need to be considered. As for a fire threat, being prepared is the key. Where is this in the Act?

Identification and planning around specific vulnerabilities missing.

Every single vehicle from all of Tasmania south of Macquarie Street HAS to cross Macquarie St to go north, including to get to the Royal Hobart Hospital. This is an unacceptable vulnerability, yet this Bill does not seem to have made any provision for identifying and addressing such risks, and no doubt there are more.

There is a gap in identifying and supporting newer technologies to urgently get to scale.

There also seems to be a gap in the Bill in providing mechanisms for identifying and supporting new technologies that can help, such as the seaweed projects providing CO2 drawdown and methane reduction in cattle, or green hydrogen. The problem with getting newer technologies to actually make a difference at scale is that they need both time and a great deal of up-front investment while they compete with established cheaper offerings or demonstrate their worth. We don't have the time for the business as usual way of letting these technologies slowly emerge. We need active support with substantial investment.

Where are the lines of accountability?

One of the most concerning features of this bill is that there do not seem to be any lines of accountability. There are no teeth. It seems that some counting and consulting should go on - but that is simply not enough when it is Code Red for the planet.

Transport emissions and stranded assets for the poor.

A major source of emissions is transport. Australia accepts dirty fuels and dirty vehicles that no other OECD country would tolerate. As fossil fuels prices have to go up, there is going to be a very high rate of stranded assets in the car in most people's driveways in a state highly dependent on private transport. This burden is going to fall hardest on those least able to afford it, as they have no hope of buying an electric vehicle. Can Tasmania go it alone and start demanding lower emissions on our car importers to get the plentiful cheaper electric cars elsewhere into showrooms here?

We need a plan that is not up to the Government of the Day.

At this time of Code Red for the planet, we need a serious plan with real power for change that is not vulnerable to short political cycles. A robust legislative framework will provide the framework for the investment and development we need to achieve a real and substantial decrease in emissions.

No more gas and oil exploration or extraction - land or sea.

No more exploration or extraction of new fossil fuels - not coal and not gas, not in Tasmanian and not in our waters. There can be no excuse. The revenue streams can never make up for the harms. These will definitely include exposure to litigation for compensation as the science is clear - as Big Tobacco also found out.

What we DON'T need: Blah blah blah.

There is a great deal of community appetite for something real and significant. We all now that massive change is upon us and it is not going to be a pain-free process. We need to make sure the load is spread with the poor protected. Let's have a really strong and visionary climate change bill that really delivers.

I strongly support a robust and much more ambitious Climate Change Act, with an independent Climate Commission to administer it.

Dr Clare Smith