

Setting, tracking and achieving Australia's emissions reduction targets

Climate and Health Alliance submission

June 2023

Introduction

The Climate and Health Alliance (CAHA) welcomes the opportunity to contribute a submission to the Climate Change Authority (CCA) on the 'Setting, tracking and achieving Australia's emissions reduction targets Issues Paper – May 2023'.

The CCA Issues Paper notes that communities, companies and ecosystems are facing challenges and opportunities as a result of climate impacts and economic change. The Strategic Framework provided by the CCA, however, focuses principally on the challenge of the energy transition and emissions reduction. The Framework needs to also address the interdependent challenges to human health associated with a high emissions economy and climate impacted world.

We urge a closer examination of the implications of emissions on health, and consideration of how to protect population health as we transition to net zero.

Climate change [directly impacts human health](#), and increases both demand for health services and the stress on the [people and institutions providing those services](#). It is also clear that action on climate change is hugely [beneficial for social, environmental, cultural and economic outcomes](#). However, these benefits can only be achieved with urgent and decisive action, coupled with the government policy and funding to execute it.

In Australia, we are fortunate to have the wealth of knowledge and resources necessary to meet the challenge of climate change head-on. A [healthy, regenerative and just future](#) is not just possible, it is scientifically, economically, culturally, socially and technologically feasible. By making the right choices now, we can create a future which benefits everyone.

How the Climate Change Authority can help

Australia has a poor record on addressing the costly health impacts of climate change, despite being one of the most climate vulnerable countries in the developed world. For Australia to have a prosperous, climate-resilient future, protection of health and wellbeing of the population must be a priority in all climate policy decisions, including our Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC).

In ratifying the Paris Agreement in November 2016, the Australian Government formally agreed to consider citizens' right to health in the national climate change response, and to recognise the co-benefits for health in national mitigation strategies. However, almost eight years on, an analysis of 58 NDCs by the Global Climate and Health Alliance gave Australia zero points out of 18 for failing to include any mention of human health.

As the Global Climate and Health Alliance report notes: "Ensuring the integration of health into climate policymaking protects populations, maximises economic benefits, and builds public backing for ambitious climate policies which are so urgently needed. Failure to include health in NDCs is a missed opportunity for people, the public purse, and political support."

We urge the inclusion of health as a priority in Australia's next NDC.

The CCA plays a crucial role in ensuring that Australia fulfils its international commitments, as well as transitioning us to a low-carbon, climate resilient future. The approach and decisions arising from this consultation will significantly impact the health and wellbeing of all people living in Australia now, and into the future. As such, it is crucial that barriers and enablers to better climate and health outcomes are well understood and considered as the next NDC is developed.

As highlighted in the consultation paper, "The Climate Change Authority's purpose is to provide evidence-based advice on the response to climate change". In line with our expertise, CAHA has sought to provide feedback to CCA on how aspects of the consultation paper will impact climate change and human health. As such, we have focused on questions where CAHA can provide expert input and offer solutions. Where we do not have internal expertise, we have consulted and collaborated with our membership and external experts to develop advice and policy positions.

CAHA wishes to thank the contributions of key experts, members (Appendix 1) and stakeholders who contributed to this submission. CAHA is pleased to contribute to this consultation, and looks forward to working with the CCA and our membership on the development of a healthy NDC.

About the Climate and Health Alliance

The Climate and Health Alliance (CAHA) is a national charity and the peak body on climate change and health in Australia. CAHA is an alliance of organisations within the health sector working together to raise awareness about the health risks of climate change and the health benefits of emissions reductions. The membership of CAHA includes a broad cross-section of health sector stakeholders with over 100 member organisations (Appendix 1), representing healthcare professionals from a range of disciplines, as well as healthcare service providers, institutions, academics, researchers, and consumers.

Acknowledgement

The Climate and Health Alliance recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People as the traditional custodians of the land on which we live and work, and acknowledge that sovereignty of the land we call Australia has never been ceded. We commit to listening to and learning from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people about how we can better reflect Indigenous ways of being and knowing in our work.

Healthy Nationally Determined Contributions

In 2016, the Australian Government became a signatory to the Paris Agreement, a legally binding international treaty to hold “the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels” and pursue efforts “[to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels](#).” In doing so, the Australian Government formally committed to exemplifying the right to a healthy and just policy response to climate change through the development of an ambitious Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC).

In 2022, the newly elected Albanese Government increased the initial 2030 target, committing to reduce greenhouse gas emissions 43% below 2005 levels by 2030 and reaffirming its target to [achieve net zero emissions by 2050](#). This increase represented a significant shift in Australia’s approach to climate change, and signalled to the world that Australia is beginning to accept its responsibility to contribute to the global task of reducing emissions. CAHA welcomes this shift, and the commitments being made by the Commonwealth Government to making Australia climate resilient.

But there is still a long way to go.

Given the catastrophic implications for human society and the ecosystems on which we depend, the only acceptable emission reduction targets are those compatible with limiting global warming to less than 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial temperatures. Therefore, as the science indicates, **Australia’s emissions reduction targets should be a 75% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions below 2005 levels by 2030 and net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2035.**

As outlined in the 2022 AR6 WGII report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), climate change is already harming human health and wellbeing everywhere. The IPCC report identifies 11 categories of diseases and health outcomes that are influenced by climate change, or are “climate-sensitive”. In many regions including Australia, the limits of human tolerance to extreme heat are being reached. In Australia, the annual number of days over 35°C is projected to increase 20-70% by 2030. Heat-related excess deaths in Australian cities are projected to increase by 200-400% during 2031-2080 relative to 1971-2020. Total costs of heat-related impacts for the city of Melbourne for 2012-2051 have been projected to be A\$1.9 billion, of which A\$1.6 billion is human health/mortality costs ([original source](#) / [our report summarising original source](#)).

An economic analysis conducted for the Royal Australasian College of Physicians in 2021 calculated the losses associated with bushfires between 2021 and 2030 inclusive, based on estimates of bushfire risk relative to the severity of the 2019 summer bushfires over the coming decade. The modelled analysis predicted the loss of 1480 lives; healthcare costs of \$69 million; and a \$10 billion reduction in gross domestic product. This [modelling shows](#) that \$1 billion invested to reduce the impact of bushfires on health by 10% would be recouped in a decade.

Australia's failure to recognise health in its NDC has been noted in international analysis. The Global Climate and Health Alliance – of which CAHA is a member – publishes a scorecard on how nations are incorporating health into their NDC. The 2023 report reviewed NDC from 58 nations, and reported Australia as scoring 0 out of 18 for the second year in a row. This outcome reflects a serious misalignment between climate ambitions of the Paris Agreement, and the implementation of NDC in Australia.

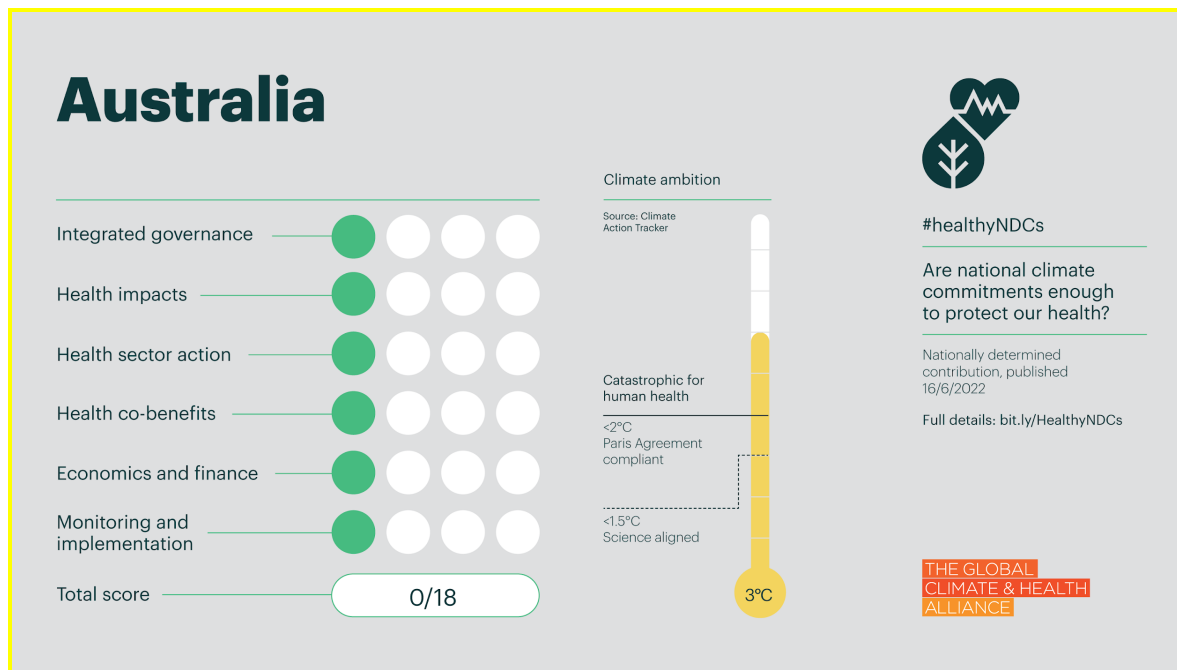


Figure 1: [Global Climate and Health Alliance NDC Scorecard](#)

The report acknowledges the imminent development of Australia's first [National Climate and Health Strategy](#), highlighting that action on the health impacts of climate change will be most effective when health is explicitly integrated into the NDC and embedded in national climate action across all sectors.

Good health is in everyone's interest regardless of personal values and political beliefs.

For too long Australian commitments to carbon reductions have been dogged by political partisanship, earning us the embarrassing international reputation of 'laggard'. An approach that places a primary and preventative focus on health and the related co-benefits, including health economics, is the best chance we have for setting and, more importantly, meeting emission reduction targets.

Frameworks

CAHA broadly supports the use of the Frameworks as a way of contextualising and directing thinking. However, it is important the Frameworks are outlined in order of work to be done. They should start with content and scientific evidence, followed by recommendations and how they are going to be met. CAHA recommends the CCA undertake targeted consultation with the community to set priorities within the Frameworks.

2.1. Strategic Framework

1. What actions and enablers beyond those identified in the Strategic Framework could help Australia progress towards a prosperous and resilient net zero future? What are your highest priorities?

As the peak body for climate and health, CAHA's highest priority is that health benefits of climate action are realised. We recommend the CCA adopt policy priorities outlined in CAHA's 2021 report [‘Healthy, Regenerative and Just’](#) within the Strategic Framework:



Figure 2: Climate and Health Alliance - [Healthy, Regenerative and Just Framework](#)

CAHA broadly supports the actions and enablers that have been identified in the Strategic Framework, with some recommendations to strengthen it.

- The Strategic framework should specify that the Commonwealth Government has a role in enabling positive actions by corporate and industry actors, including domestic and foreign entities.
- Enablers and actions in the Strategic Framework should be closely anchored to what must be done to avoid the worst impacts of climate change as quickly as possible.
- Enablers should include community engagement, especially with those who are most impacted by climate change. Enablers should also include leadership from the First Nations Elders and communities.
- Actions should include maximising co-benefits of climate action.

Additional priorities of the environment and health sectors include:

- Develop a National Renewable Exports Strategy to seize new economic opportunities and strengthen Australia's international competitiveness in clean energy technologies.
- Partner with local governments to align their climate commitments with the NDC.
- Develop and implement a Zero Emission Transport Strategy for broader transport sector decarbonisation.
- Implement a National Health and Climate Strategy (NHCS).

2.2. Progress Framework

2. How are you and the people around you impacted by or preparing for the net zero transition and Australia's climate future? How can governments better support you to prepare for or respond to the impacts?

CAHA has been supporting the development and implementation of the NHCS (due for delivery Q4 2023). This Strategy will be a crucial tool in supporting better health outcomes in a changing climate. However, the NHCS lacks a commitment of funding or accompanying action plan to execute implementation. CAHA recommends the Commonwealth Government commit to funding and urgently developing an action plan for the Strategy to better support the health sector response to climate impacts. The NHCS should seek to engage and support all government departments across Commonwealth, State and Territory and local governments in transitioning to net zero.

3. What should the Authority measure or assess to determine progress towards a just transition and improved wellbeing?

CAHA welcomes the inclusion of wellbeing in the consultation paper. It is crucial that action on climate is recognised as having impacts on the health and wellbeing of all people living in Australia.

CAHA supports the development of the Measuring What Matters Statement as a mechanism whereby holistic wellbeing can be core to assessing the success of government policy and practice, particularly concerning climate and health. Indicators included in the Statement should be utilised by the CCA to determine progress towards a just transition and improved wellbeing. This should include contextualising the [OECD wellbeing indicators](#) to be relevant for people living in Australia. CAHA has outlined a series of recommendations to Treasury in their recent consultation on the [Measuring What Matters Framework](#), and includes them below for consideration by the CCA.

- **Conduct a national conversation.** It is crucial that action on climate consider those most impacted. Indicators of success should be determined by best scientific evidence, as well as the lived experience of people living in Australia. CAHA recommends that the next stage of development for the Statement be a national conversation, and the CCA should seek to engage and replicate outcomes from that process.
- **Embrace First Nations wisdom.** Australia's First Nations people are the longest continuing culture in the world, dating back over 60,000 years. Sovereignty over the land we call Australia has never been ceded. The rich and diverse Traditional Knowledge held by First Nations peoples can contribute to the development of the Statement so that it supports the strength and resilience of First Nations peoples, as well as Australian society at large. CAHA recommends the CCA undertake genuine engagement with Australia's First Nations peoples, and work to co-create the NDC with Elders and communities in a way that recognises the rich and enduring Traditional Knowledge of First Nations peoples.
- **Develop a holistic approach to wellbeing.** When considering actions that measure wellbeing and the just transition, it is crucial the CCA consider wellbeing in a holistic frame that encompasses physical factors, such as the absence of disease, and a wide range of spiritual, cultural and social influences on wellbeing. This includes environmental and social fundamentals such as clean air and water, healthy food, access to education, community participation, inclusion and personal agency as elements of climate action. CAHA recommends CCA adopt the [World Health Organization definition of health and wellbeing](#) and undertake engagement cross-sectorally with consumers and experts, to understand how holistic wellbeing can be measured and incorporated into the work of the CCA before embarking on establishing indicators.

4. What more could the Government do to help you reduce your carbon footprint?

CAHA supports whole-of-society government interventions that will reduce carbon emissions as ambitiously and rapidly as possible. The Commonwealth Government must ensure it provides support for sectors and business to develop credible baseline assessments of their carbon footprint and track emissions. This should be done with a bipartisan approach to reducing carbon emissions through consistent policy and funding across all levels of government.

5. What are the other challenges and opportunities the global context presents Australia with in responding to climate change?

There is immense talent and expertise in Australia to respond to the needs of the climate crisis. Considering the global impact of carbon emissions, it is crucial that Australia collaborates effectively with regional and international stakeholders on decarbonisation strategies. This means leveraging engagement to better understand challenges and opportunities for decarbonisation and building capacity. Australia can also benefit from best practice in other jurisdictions and should, where possible, seek to emulate successful actions.

Australia has the opportunity to lead the world in realising the co-benefits for climate and health action. Our NDCs should reflect best scientific evidence and our commitment to the Paris agreement.

Australia has the opportunity to demonstrate to the world that action on climate does not equal a stagnant economy. The costs of doing nothing far outweigh the cost-burden of transitioning to a net zero carbon economy.

6. What role is there for corporate action to 2030 and beyond?

Corporate actors play a critical role in the implementation of emissions reductions policies. However, there should be caution when engaging with stakeholders on policy when there is a profit motive involved. CAHA recommends establishing clear conflicts of interest guidelines within the CCA consultation processes. CAHA also recommends, where necessary, audits are conducted to ensure transparency on claims and ensure stated corporate objectives are reflected in action.

7. When is it appropriate for the Government to regulate something?

The climate crisis is an existential threat to all of humanity. Global evidence is clear: without immediate, ambitious action, the future of humankind is in jeopardy. The impacts of climate change are already being felt and as such it is the duty and moral imperative of all governments everywhere to regulate activity that compromises climate and health outcomes.

2.3. Target-setting Framework

8. How could the Authority best strike a balance between ambition, domestic considerations and the international context in its 2023 NDC advice?

Australia's NDC should be based on the best scientific evidence available. CAHA recommends the CCA adopt science-based targets aligned with the Paris Agreement, of which Australia is a signatory. CAHA broadly supports the Target-setting Framework, with some recommendations to strengthen it:

- We recommend that the Framework explicitly include the need for Australia's current NDC to be increased so as to pursue efforts that will limit warming to 1.5°C.
- Many organisations in the climate and health movement have adopted a shared goal that Australia should reduce its emissions to 75% below 2005 levels in 2030. CAHA supports this ambitious goal.
- Australia is one of the world's largest fossil fuel exporters. When reviewing our national targets, fossil fuel exports should be considered in target setting. Australia should also aim for the phase out of fossil fuel exports as part of its NDC.

9. What do you think Australia's 2035 target should be and why?

The target should be as ambitious as possible and aligned with best scientific evidence available. The Commonwealth Government should be seeking to catch up to other major developed countries in its climate ambitions.

Cross-cutting issues

3.1. Leading Indicators

10. What are some leading indicators of progress towards net zero emissions?

CAHA broadly supports the leading indicators outlined in the consultation paper. To strengthen these, we recommend:

- CCA includes the health co-benefits for action on climate (for example, disease prevention) as a leading indicator.
- Indicators are developed in consort with the community, and reflect findings in the processes of the Measuring What Matters Statement.
- Indicators should include an increase in renewable capacity and generation, improved energy efficiency in industry and buildings, growth in electric vehicle uptake, decline in emissions from deforestation, and results from national pollutant inventory reports.

3.2. Sectoral pathways

12. What factors should the Authority consider when developing sectoral decarbonisation pathways?

a. What are the risks and opportunities for households, business, workers and communities affected by the transition?

There is a risk (contingent on approach used) of entrenching disadvantage in certain communities. As an example, incentivising electric vehicle use will aid reductions in the transport sector, but may increase the disparity between homeowners and renters, or people in residences without access to car parks and external power supply. We recommend CCA works to ensure a just and rapid transition. In transport, for example, this implies looking at the broad range of [pathways to decarbonise](#) in ways that promote health and equity (rather than focussing on the uptake of private electric vehicles by default)

3.3. Contributing beyond Australia's borders

14. What are the most important things to consider when assessing the adequacy of a country's NDC?

It is crucial that Australia's NDC takes into account the science-based evidence on the climate crisis. This means establishing an ambitious target that can achieve carbon emissions reductions in line with the Paris Agreement. Without an ambitious target, the growing climate and health crisis will continue to worsen.

Alongside development of the Net Zero Authority, there needs to be a long term strategy that puts health, wellbeing and Australia's most vulnerable at the centre. A fair and inclusive

transition to zero emissions, which supports workers and communities affected by the transition is paramount.

For more information, please contact:

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Appendix 1: Climate and Health Alliance Members

CAHA membership as of June 2023.

