
Climate Change (Net Zero Future) Bill 2023

Climate and Health Alliance Submission

October 2023

Introduction

The Climate and Health Alliance (CAHA) welcomes the opportunity to contribute a submission to the New South Wales Inquiry into the Climate Change (Net Zero Future) Bill 2023 (the Bill).

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.

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. The recent Commonwealth commitment to a National Health and Climate Strategy, currently under development, is Australia's first attempted policy to address this major oversight.

As outlined in the 2022 AR6 WGII report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, climate change is already harming human health and wellbeing everywhere. In many regions including Australia, the limits of human tolerance to extreme heat are being reached.

If governments are serious about addressing these burdens, a whole of government approach is required. As such, we support the legislating of climate targets in New South Wales, and welcome the commitment from the NSW Government to establish a Net Zero Commission (the Commission) to monitor and report publicly on progress toward these targets.

Our submission provides evidence to the Inquiry related to how the Bill can be further strengthened to address climate and health needs in New South Wales.

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.

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Embedding health into climate action

With the exception of the [National Health and Climate Strategy](#) currently under development, Australia has a poor record on addressing the costly health impacts of climate change. This despite being one of the most climate vulnerable countries in the developed world.

Australia's failure to recognise health in its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) under the Paris Agreement 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.

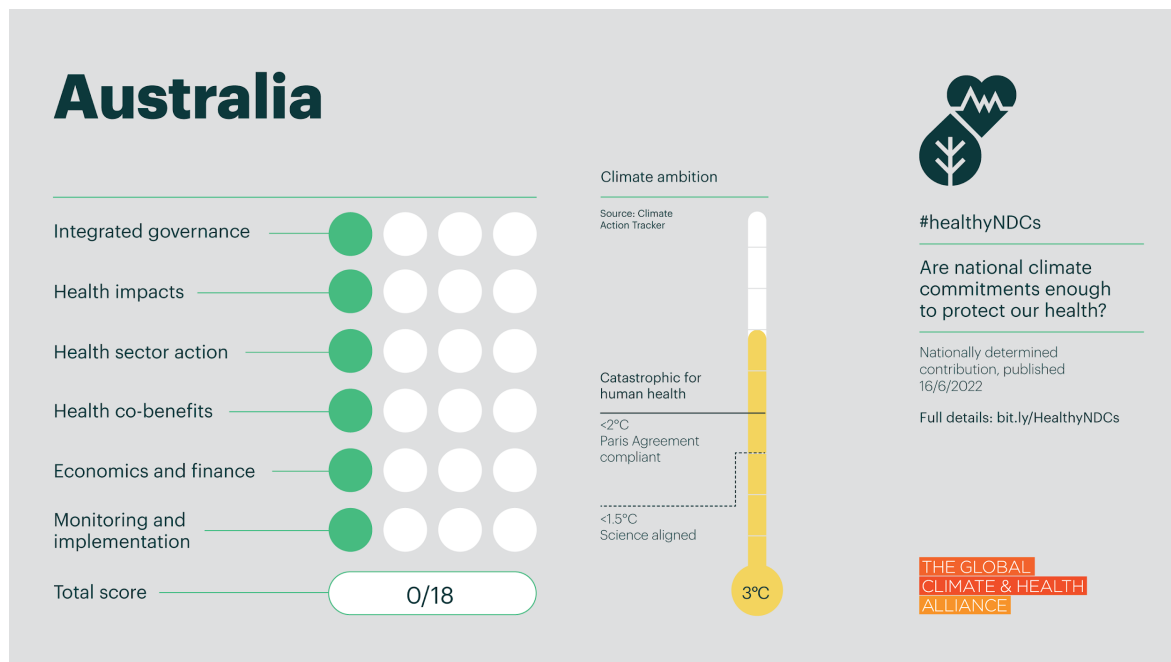


Figure 1: [Global Climate and Health Alliance NDC Scorecard](#)

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 and within all jurisdictions. 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.

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 in jurisdictional based decarbonisation targets that address the nexus of climate and health. As such, the Bill provides a crucial opportunity for the NSW Government to demonstrate leadership and proactively protect health in the face of the climate crisis.

Why we must act

The current health impacts of climate change in Australia

Extreme weather events

Heatwaves, storms, floods and fires are increasing in Australia and will worsen leading to illness, loss of life and livelihoods, and increasing pressure on our health services.

These events are increasing the risk and incidence of climate-related mental illness and stress

Infectious diseases

Through biodiversity loss and a warmer climate, the range and prevalence of vector-borne and zoonotic diseases is increasing, threatening a larger proportion of the Australian population.

Sea level rise

Coastal inundation from sea level rise threatens food production, health, homes, livelihoods, and culture. Sea level rise also compounds other threats to the availability and quality of fresh water.

Food and water security

Changing weather patterns associated with climate change are impacting agriculture, fisheries, and water supply, jeopardising rural livelihoods and endangering Australia's food and water security.

Pollution and aeroallergens

Burning coal, oil and gas creates harmful local air pollution, estimated to cost Australia \$5.3 billion pa.

Droughts and heatwaves contribute to dust storms and bushfires, both additional sources of harmful air pollution.

Rising temperatures increase ground level ozone and aeroallergens, aggravating allergic and respiratory conditions, and amplifying the toxic effect of other air pollutants.

Pollution of our waterways, soil and water is also a major health risk. This is occurring from the overuse of toxic chemicals & plastics and other pollutants.

Populations at greater risk

Vulnerable populations suffer disproportionately from the adverse health impacts of climate change, with people with pre-existing medical conditions, older people, young, disabled, socioeconomically disadvantaged and Indigenous Australians particularly vulnerable.

Women in particular are disproportionately impacted by climate change, as long-standing social, cultural and economic gender inequalities are exacerbated by climate-related hazards.

Hotter temperatures are also putting outdoor and manual labourers at increased risk of heat-related illnesses, work accidents and death, while the extreme weather events are increasing occupational risks and demands on emergency services.

Figure 2: *'Why we must act'* - submission to the Department of Health and Aged Care on the National Health and Climate Strategy, Climate and Health Alliance

Recommendations

The Climate and Health Alliance support the legislating of climate targets in New South Wales, and welcome the commitment from the NSW Government to establish a Net Zero Commission to monitor and report publicly on progress toward these targets. We provide the following recommendations to strengthen the Bill, and improve climate and health outcomes.

1. **Adopt a 'Health in All Policies' approach to climate action in NSW.** All dimensions of climate change are interlinked with human health. Health should be understood in the holistic sense, as "... [a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity](#)". Therefore action to reduce the health risks from climate change requires working across all sectors and all levels of government. CAHA recommends the NSW Government take an ambitious approach to its climate policy by adopting a Health in All Policies approach.
2. **Set science-based targets.** To address the [growing burden and urgency of climate change](#), CAHA recommends the Bill be strengthened to a 75% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions below 2005 levels by 2030 and net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2035.
3. **Prioritise emissions target reviews in the Net Zero Commission.** CAHA recommends NSW adopt a model similar to the [Victorian Climate Change Act](#), whereby the targets are set for each five-year period and regularly reviewed and ratcheted up in ambition by the Net Zero Commission.
4. **Demonstrate leadership through ambitious action.** CAHA recommends 'carbon budgets' proposed are based on NSW priorities and in alignment with climate science, not only those adopted by the Commonwealth Government.
5. **Empower the Net Zero Commission.** CAHA recommends the functions of the Net Zero Commission be amended to empower the Commission to provide advice on all new emissions intensive developments such as fossil fuel projects. The Bill as currently drafted has little impact on 13 proposed new and expanded coal mines in NSW which, if approved, would emit more than two billion tonnes of lifecycle greenhouse gas emissions. One of those projects is the biggest proposed in NSW since the Paris Agreement – the Hunter Valley Operations Coal expansion. A moratorium on proposed fossil fuel expansions should be in place until the Commission is established. CAHA also recommends the Commission be empowered to audit agencies and departments to identify emissions reduction opportunities.

Appendix: Climate and Health Alliance Members

CAHA membership as of June 2023.

