

29 November 2013

This submission requests that Australia's climate targets be raised much higher, to match those outlined by highly respected global analysts Ecofys in their report released in the last week of October 2013.

Our climate and oceans are in such a perilous state that we must set ourselves these targets if we are to give our children a real chance for the future.

### **The various proposed targets**

Australia currently has a target of reducing its domestic emissions by 5% below 2000 levels by 2020. The Climate Change Authority (CCA) has, rightfully so, recently called this 5% target "not credible".

The CCA has itself recently presented two "options" for emissions trajectories.

- Option 1: 15% below 2000 levels by 2020 matched with 35-50% by 2030 or
- Option 2: 25% below 2000 levels by 2020 with 40%-50% cuts by 2030.

However, the report by Ecofys (commissioned by the WWF and released in the last week of October 2013) concluded that, for Australia to contribute our fair share to the kind of global emissions cuts necessary to give us a decent chance of staying below 2°C warming, we need to deliver 27-34% cuts by 2020, 82-101% by 2030 and 98-106% by 2050.

In other words, far from being the outlier, 25% cuts by 2020 are below the minimum requirement. Beyond that, we essentially need to be net carbon neutral as a nation in two decades. This is not the first report to come to this conclusion.

The CCA's 15% and 25% targets unfortunately both fail their own test of consistency "with action toward the 2°C goal". In addition, the CCA's 2020-2030 trajectories fail their own articulation of the need to cut faster sooner in order to reduce costs. Ecofys makes the mathematically obvious point that, since it is total carbon budgets which are the critical factor, the less we cut pollution now, the steeper we need to cut in the longer term. The CCA agrees, but then suggests matching weaker 2020 targets with weaker 2030 targets.

### **Our small window of opportunity**

The reality is that we must take real action on our climate targets, and we must do it very quickly.

At the end of September, the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) published the most comprehensive assessment of the science of climate change ever undertaken: the IPCC Fifth Assessment Report.

One of the key take-outs of this report was that we only have a very brief period of time in which to deal with climate change.

The report predicts that the average temperature between 2080 and 2100 will be 2.6-4.8C higher than today if emissions are unchecked.

It must be noted that the last ice age was just 4C cooler.

In addition, according to some commentators, within 15 to 30 years we will exhaust the total emissions budget that would provide us with reasonable odds of staying beneath 2C.

Scientists regard a warming of 2C as the threshold of safety. But even 2C risks severe drought and storms that could challenge civilized society, leading to conflict and mass migrations.

In addition, a recent report by the International Programme on the State of the Ocean (IPSO) has shown that burning fossil fuels is having such an impact on our oceans that a mass extinction may already be underway.

### **We are already seeing the effects of climate change**

Australia is already starting to see the effects of climate change. Our last summer broke 123 extreme weather records in 90 days. September was Australia's hottest ever on record. Barring a cool end to the year, 2013 is likely to be Sydney's warmest in 154 years of record.

There's no time to waste: we must set ourselves urgent, substantial targets.

### **Getting real international commitment**

We need a circuit breaker in international talks in order to get deeper and faster cuts on the table.

China and India are already offering proportionally and historically more than they quite reasonably believe rich nations like Australia are offering. The only way Australia can contribute to global agreement is to ditch not just our 5% target, but also our 15 and 25% targets, and agree to move rapidly to net carbon neutrality as part of serious global emergency action.

### **Significantly higher targets are achievable**

Higher targets are achievable and in fact we are already starting to see them being implemented in Australia.

Earlier this week the Tasmanian Government launched a new climate action plan that will commit the state to 100 per cent renewables by 2020 as well as a 35% reduction in emissions.

It is now up to the rest of Australia to follow their lead.

## **The long-term costs of low targets**

The less climate change action we take now, the much greater the costs will be in the future. This is especially the case for Australia, which is particularly exposed to the extreme weather events associated with climate change.

The costs to taxpayers of extreme weather events will far outweigh any short-term financial gains through weaker climate targets.

## **Per person, Australia is one of the world's biggest carbon emitters**

Australia is one of the world's biggest carbon emitters on a per capita basis.

In fact, a recent study by the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency and the European Commission's Joint Research Centre found that in 2012 Australia had the highest per capita emissions in the world.

We've helped create the problem. We now need to become part of the solution.

## **Weak targets a crime against our children**

We need to be very honest about the gravity of this situation. Weak climate targets put the future of our very own children at risk.

Now is the time to take real, urgent action. Anything less is unconscionable and, quite frankly, a crime against our children.