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Submission to Climate Change Authority regarding ‘Updating the Authority’s previous advice on meeting the Paris agreement’ consultation paper

The Brotherhood of St Laurence welcomes this opportunity to comment on the consultation paper issued by the Climate Change Authority (CCA) regarding Australia’s pathway to meeting its Paris Agreement commitments.

Climate change is one of the greatest threats facing human life, with risks spanning health, jobs and the economy, the built environment, water and energy supplies, food security and agriculture, and our natural environment.

Many of the people with whom the Brotherhood works are already facing significant, and multiple forms of, disadvantage. Climate change poses an additional threat. The magnified impacts of climate change on low-income and already disadvantaged households have been well documented so we do detail them here. However, as an illustrative example, consider an older person living in an inefficient rental property whose primary income is the pension and who is struggling with health challenges and finding it difficult to make ends meet. Keeping cool during a summer heatwave may strain their finances, while failing to do so may threaten their health. Climate change will increase the frequency of heatwaves and other extreme events that exacerbate these challenges.

To address climate change credibly, the Australian Government needs to adopt a more ambitious emissions reduction target and implement policy to achieve the target. The Brotherhood supports a target and policy consistent with limiting global warming to 1.5 °C.

Australia’s emissions target is inadequate and we are not on track to meet it.

Australia has committed to limiting global warming to well below 2 °C, yet its 26–28% target is not consistent with this goal (The Climate Institute 2016).¹ To limit the impacts of global warming and honour our Paris commitment, Australia should increase its target. Further, Australia is not on track to meet its current target (OECD 2019; UNEP 2018; Department of the Environment and Energy 2019). Rather than falling, as they need to, Australia’s emissions have been rising for several years and are projected by the Department of the Environment and Energy (2019) to continue rising until at least 2030.

¹ Targets in this submission are expressed as 2030 targets relative to 2005 baselines.

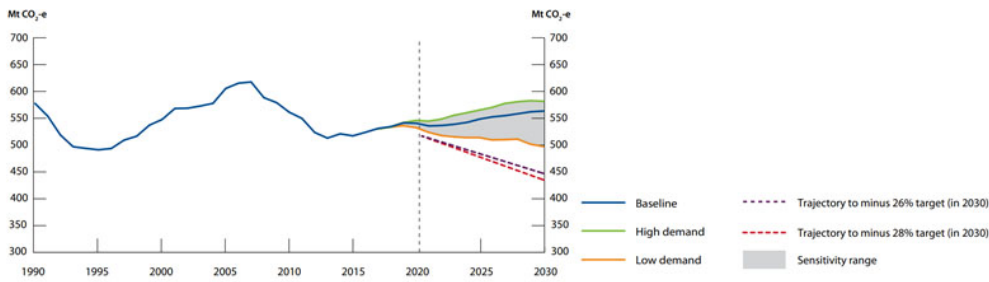


Figure 1: Australia’s past and projected emissions (modified from Department of the Environment and Energy 2018, p. 37). Baseline data from 2018 are DEE’s projections assuming medium economic and population growth, detailed on p. 34.

Better climate policy is necessary and compatible with a strong economy.

As illustrated by rising emissions, Australia’s federal climate change policy appears inadequate to meet our Paris commitment and is inconsistent with limiting global warming to 2 or 1.5 °C. There is an urgent need to implement stronger policy.

Climate change action is entirely compatible with a strong economy. In a review of 22 reports modelling ambitious targets, Swann and Merizan (2019, p. 3) found that all models showed the cost of climate action to be ‘very small compared to [the value of] ongoing economic growth’ and all targets led to ‘strong ongoing growth from 2020 to 2030’. Research commissioned by the Brotherhood and ACOSS (2019, p. 35) showed that 2030 residential electricity prices would be 16% lower than current levels under a 65% target.

Failure to act now, in line with the best available science, will necessitate dramatic action in the future.

Delaying action will require a sharper structural adjustment across the economy, which is likely to have a much greater impact on the individuals, households and communities we work with. We strongly support a planned, ambitious and timely response to emissions reduction now.

We recommend that the Commonwealth rapidly implement credible climate change policies. Significant opportunities in the following areas should be pursued:

- **carbon pricing**
- **decarbonising electricity generation.** Electricity generation is Australia’s single largest source of emissions and renewables are now the cheapest form of new-build generation (Department of the Environment and Energy 2019; Graham et al. 2018). Decarbonising the electricity sector is both vital and practical
- **stronger light vehicle emissions standards.** Strengthening Australia’s weak vehicle emissions standards to meet those of the EU and USA would not only substantially reduce emissions, but would also save the country an estimated \$48.70 per tonne of abatement (Ministerial Forum on Vehicle Emissions 2016, p. 6)
- **strong minimum energy efficiency standards for rental homes.** Many rental homes are energy-inefficient and therefore produce unnecessary emissions, but tenants face systemic barriers to improving them, and landlords generally lack an incentive to do so. Mandating minimum energy efficiency standards is the most realistic way to improve these homes and to realise the associated emissions reductions.
- **home energy efficiency retrofit programs, including specific programs for low-income households.**

The Commonwealth should engage with vulnerable communities.

Climate change will affect all areas of Australia, but some communities are particularly vulnerable to climate change itself (e.g. those dependent on the Great Barrier Reef or Murray Darling, those in bushfire-prone regions) or to the economic impacts of decarbonisation (e.g. the Latrobe Valley). Some near-term impacts of climate change are inevitable but, with government intervention, their social harm to vulnerable communities is not.

We encourage the Government to engage directly with communities vulnerable to the impact of climate change and households facing existing stressors to understand their needs and devise appropriate responses.

Please contact Damian Sullivan (e: [REDACTED] m: [REDACTED]) or David Bryant (e: [REDACTED] ph: [REDACTED]) for further information about this submission.

Yours sincerely,



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References

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