



27 July 2020

## **Bringing diverse perspectives together to develop policies for a sustainable future**

**On 25 June 2020, the Women's Climate Congress (WCC) met with Mr Neville Power, the Chair of the National Covid-19 Coordination Commission (NCCC). At the meeting, we discussed the need for a collaborative process to bring together diverse voices on reducing carbon emissions to secure a safe climate future. In this paper, we offer some principles for developing a collaborative process to achieve this outcome. WCC would welcome the opportunity to discuss these ideas further and offer our expertise to continue the development of such a process.**

The majority of Australians want to see global warming limited to a safe level.<sup>1</sup> The NCCC has two key roles: to help minimise and mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 on jobs and businesses; and to facilitate the fastest possible recovery of lives and livelihoods. WCC sees the inclusion of a collaborative discourse towards effective and timely action on climate change as fundamental to achieving these outcomes.

Discussion on climate policy has become polarised around environmental protection on the one hand and economic viability on the other. WCC notes that the current process of the NCCC, which is in line with most other government commissions and inquiries, is to seek out individual submissions. This approach keeps different interest groups at arm's length from each other, promotes siloed thinking and reinforces stakeholders' focus solely on their own perspectives. This approach also misses significant opportunities for collaboration that could reduce polarisation, distrust and conflict. WCC believes there is an alternative way forward that would lead to greater investment certainty, all while reducing ongoing economic costs to manage disputes and at the same time delivering stronger economic and environmental outcomes. WCC see the need to invest in and develop a process, which brings representatives from different interest groups together to establish common ground in order to develop policy options and solutions that are creative, innovative and responsive to both economic and environmental needs.

WCC understand that the NCCC has planned roundtable discussions in northern Australia. Roundtables are useful to bring different interest groups together around specific issues. However, for an issue as complex as transition to a decarbonised economy, where there is existing conflict, a more rigorous and extensive process is needed. WCC proposes that a process be developed that satisfies three criteria:

- It must start from a shared recognition that maintaining economic viability, social wellbeing and equity is not at odds with robust environmental protection, including action to limit global warming, whilst also prioritising issues of intergenerational equity.
- Those participating must be drawn from the broadest range of stakeholder groups and must feel confident that the process will help them to arrive at sustainable and effective decisions that will be responsive to the range of issues under consideration.

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<sup>1</sup> The Lowy Poll for 2020 saw COVID-19 as overtaking climate change in people's minds. Still, 90% of people are calling for climate action, and 56% sees the need for significant expenditure:

<https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpretor/australia-s-shifting-mood-climate-change>

- The process must be managed by a team of impartial and independent facilitators who are accepted by those participating as not aligned with any particular stakeholder group or substantive issue and whose authority to manage the process is accepted by those involved.

Importantly, there needs to be commitment to the process by government, to ensure that the proposals developed are acted upon.

Such a process need not undermine the Westminster system where MPs and senators are elected to make the decisions. On the contrary, it provides:

- an opportunity to restore the confidence of citizens in political systems and enable a new course towards an equitable, more united and environmentally sustainable society
- an opportunity for government to find an honourable way forward in a complex and difficult situation without undermining their overall political views.

Based on these considerations, WCC propose that a process be designed to bring together experts and representatives with a range of perspectives, disciplines and community positions, for facilitated discussions to map a future pathway to COVID recovery that ensures climate balance, ongoing environmental sustainability, social equality and wellbeing. This could also be supported by wider community engagement. To ensure nonpartisan support for such a process, proposals could be presented to both sides of government for comment and revision until broad consensus is reached.

With thanks for this opportunity to contribute this proposal. We will also send these suggestions to members of the government and the national cabinet.

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