

Women's Climate Congress

Meeting with Neville Power,
Chair, National COVID-19 Coordination Commission
Thursday 25 June, 4.00 pm

WCC attendees: Janet Salisbury, Kirsten Anker, Barbara Baikie

We appreciate that you are taking the time to speak with us at this critical time in Australian and global history when the recommendations you make to our government about the current stimulus package will determine our future.

In the following pages we have provided some background information about the Women's Climate Congress followed by three key points of discussion

Introducing the Women's Climate Congress

WCC was founded in January 2020 in response to 'Black Summer' 2019-20 bushfires and escalating climate change.

We resolved to develop a national network of women from all political perspectives to promote the urgent need for nonpartisan collaboration to restore climate balance and to promote lasting cultural change in our public discourse towards compassion, nurture of life and custodianship of the planet.

Our key principles are:

ACCEPTANCE

We accept the scientific consensus expressed in the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports.

We also recognise that radical transformation can cause economic harm (as is happening with COVID-19), and acknowledge that the burden of change should not fall only on groups immediately affected but should be shared justly amongst all of society.

NO BLAME

As beneficiaries of the industrial age, we suspend judgment on the leadership decisions that have brought us here (taking joint responsibility for where we are). Our vision is future-focused, to be a catalyst for united and creative change to restore climate balance and to make a renewed commitment to care for life on Earth through compassionate and restorative action.

ROLE OF WOMEN TO BRING ABOUT A CULTURAL SHIFT TO BUILD MULTI-PARTY CONSENSUS

We believe that women cannot continue to be marginalised in these discussions and that women's leadership can help clear the way to more collaborative approaches. We have set up the Women's Climate Congress as a national organisation and we are working on plans to promote a national discussion with elected representatives in each electorate to promote collaborative, nonpartisan action that is firmly directed to secure a safe climate future.

Key issues for discussion

There are three key issues which we hope become clear during our conversation. These are:

1. Nurture of life and the Earth

We are asking that all programs that you recommend have at least two functions: to stimulate the economy AND to work to create a society focused a safe and secure future for all. This includes ensuring a swift transition to renewable energy and a sustainable and inclusive economy.

We are dependent on the healthy life of the planet for our continued existence. This year's bushfires and the appearance of the novel coronavirus are reminders of what happens as the strains on natural systems reach breaking point. Nurture of life and the Earth must lie at the heart of our important long-term decisions.

In a recent presentation, Christiana Figueres (whose work to rebuild the global climate change negotiating process based on fairness, transparency and collaboration, led to the Paris Agreement) observed that, in the unprecedented economic downturn brought about by COVID-19, there are unprecedented amounts of money being made available by governments all over the world. The expenditure of these funds will set the path for the planet for the next 20 years or more and will be critical for whether we achieve the Paris target we have committed to, of limiting global warming to 1.5°C. There will be no other opportunities for large-scale expenditure for many decades.

We have 10 years in which to decarbonise our economy so that the planet remains a beautiful place to live for our children and future generations. The decisions about our direction over the next 10 years will be taken in the next 18 months. The recommendations you make to our government about the current stimulus package will determine our future.

The two ambitions of stimulating the economy and ensuring a swift transition to renewables are clearly compatible. A number of organisations including Beyond Zero Emissions and other NGOs, University research centres such as the Climate Institute and the Centre for Climate and Energy Policy at the ANU have advanced detailed plans for jobs-focused economic stimulus and simultaneous emissions reduction involving mature as well as developing industries, proven pathways as well as innovative approaches.

By once again following the advice of scientists, as the government did in response to the COVID pandemic, Australia can fairly advance into an economically sound and environmentally sustainable future, to the benefit of the planet and the great joy of current and rising generations.

2. The value of diversity

We are asking that you approach the Prime Minister to increase the number of women members of the NCCC to at least the government's own recommended level of 40%. Although some time has elapsed since the Commission was formed, your work on economic reform is now at a critical stage and it is timely to review who is at the table.

The government's Workplace Gender Equality Agency has [released new research](#) demonstrating the increase in profitability and productivity to businesses with women in leadership positions. This isn't new information: [Forbes](#) reported on this insight in 2015, and on research from [Boston Consulting Group](#) in 2018, [the Brisbane Times](#) reported in 2016 on similar conclusions from a report by Deloitte's, and you may have seen the Landline report on the [Queensland carrot farmers](#) who enlisted the support of their wives.

In ABC's [The Drum](#)'s coverage of the WGEA report, Professor Emma Johnston, Dean of Science at UNSW, spoke about the diversity of opinion that comes with having people from different backgrounds and experience in senior positions. Absence is expensive: businesses who limit the pool from which they draw their talent suffer the consequence of having fewer people to choose from. These arguments apply of course, not only to women but to other groups of people who are typically by-passed in the belief that they have little to offer.

We also ask that in your policy recommendations to government, you include specific recommendations about diversity. These recommendations should be developed in collaboration with a wide diversity of people whose representation is vital for an inclusive society.

3. The value of early engagement with people affected by decisions

We are asking that your process for developing policy recommendations for government involves, as well as consulting individually with peak bodies, a process that enables key stakeholders to come together in a collaborative way to find common ground and work together to balance economic, human and planetary considerations. Further, we ask that you recommend to the government that such processes continue into the implementation stage of policies.

We have expertise in this area among our members and would very much like the opportunity to continue the conversation with you about the design of such a process for the Australian context.

Public policy research identifies different processes by which policy is made, each allowing different levels of participation by affected citizens.

Of these processes, those with more meaningful citizen engagement take more time but produce policy that is better targeted, more widely accepted and more durable. Acceptance is key, as challenges by disappointed stakeholders cause delays, involve expensive legal proceedings and lead to unresolved polarisation in the community.

Citizen engagement processes have been established in the UK, where a [Climate Assembly](#) has finished work on a report that will go to parliament in July, and in France, where the members of the citizen's convention have just handed their recommendations to President Macron. An example of a diverse community engagement process in Australia, was the Ecologically Sustainable Development Working Groups of the early 1990s, which combined roundtable working groups and larger-scale community meetings to review each industry sector.

With the assistance of professionals well acquainted with processes for bringing people with diverse views together, a community engagement process could be designed specifically for the Australian context at this time.

On behalf of

Women's Climate Congress

Contact: Dr Janet Salisbury, M 0416 167 280

womensclimatecongress@gmail.com

Further information about WCC is on our website: <https://womenscongress.weebly.com/>

See over for bios of the WCC members attending the meeting

WCC members attending:

WCC Founder, Dr Janet Salisbury, is a Canberra business woman, and was the founder of the prominent science information company Biotext Pty Ltd. She developed a strong interest in dialogue around contentious public policy issues through her work in science communication. Janet was the initiator and facilitator of a series of 14 Canberra Conversations hosted by A Chorus of Women from 2009-2014. These conversations brought together citizens from across different professional and political perspectives for conversations about environmental and development issues, the arts, peace and human rights. Many were hosted in collaboration with the ANU Climate Institute. She is a member of the international collaboration of practitioners in the Art of Hosting Conversations that Matter and has been active in bringing this practice to Australia and Canberra.

Kirsten Anker trained in law, both in Australia and the US. After working for some time with Legal Aid, she has mainly focused on family as they lived in different places around the world. She has developed an interest in conflict resolution and mediation, especially in the community context, and believes that communication amongst decision-makers that is honest, open and empathetic would improve the quality of government and put us in a place from which we could move forward on the important challenges that will shape our future.

Barbara Baikie has been an advocate for women's issues for many years, Barbara is concerned about domestic violence, gender equality in positions of leadership, and the growing problem of homelessness of older women. In 2017, she founded the National Council of Young Women of Australia. As president of the National Council of Women of Australia, in 2018 Barbara was invited to speak at the 70th meeting of the United Nations Committee for ending all forms of Discrimination Against Women. Barbara has also served as a member and past president of Hall Rotary Club, and is a past president of the Canberra Chamber of Women in Business. Barbara is currently undertaking her PhD on the long-term effects of child sexual abuse.