Position paper #1
Version 2, May 2021

What do we mean by 'climate balance'?

Vision

Our vision statement says we aspire to '***restore climate balance by 2030***'.
This information paper clarifies what we mean by 'climate balance' and provides some criteria by which to judge our progress.

What is 'climate balance'?

The 'climate balance' we aspire to is one where we can rely on a stable (scientifically based) and safe (socially acceptable) climate that is not further impacted by humans (in addition to natural forces) in a way that creates unacceptably high risks of dangerous impacts and extreme events. The scientific basis for climate balance is related to the flow of incoming solar energy to the Earth compared with the flow of heat from the Earth to space. When these two are balanced (known as radiative equilibrium), the climate remains stable. If the amount of incoming or outgoing energy becomes unequal, global temperatures will rise or fall and the climate becomes unstable.[1]

Since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution in the 18th century, which introduced large-scale burning of coal, oil and gas by the Western world, huge amounts of greenhouse gases have been pumped into the atmosphere, trapping heat and causing temperatures to rise (radiative imbalance). The climate scientists warn that as the temperatures rise, self-reinforcing feedbacks could push the Earth towards a threshold that, if crossed, would cause continued warming ('Hothouse Earth') and prevent us from stabilising the climate even if human emissions are subsequently reduced. So when we talk about 'climate balance' we mean ensuring that carbon emissions are on a sufficiently downward trajectory to avoid crossing a threshold (or 'tipping point'[2]) from which there is no coming back to safety.[3]

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[1] Based on article entitled 'Climate and earth's energy budget' by Rebecca Lindsey, January 14, 2009. https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/features/EnergyBalance

[2] Such tipping points are not necessarily clearly defined by science yet; however, observations keep hitting or exceeding the higher end of projections that are generally already conservative. This means that we are in danger of hitting these tipping points without much warning. So good risk management dictates that we take action swiftly.

[3] Will Steffen, Johan Rockström, Katherine Richardson, et al (2018), Trajectories of the Earth System in the Anthropocene, *PNAS* 115 (33): 8252–59.

The Congress position

We are grateful for the material comforts brought by over 250 years of booming manufacturing times. As beneficiaries of the industrial age, we acknowledge our responsibility for the present climatic situation. However, we now feel trapped in a political system that does not seem able to make the necessary change and we lament that the world is in such a perilous situation.

Through listening deeply to the science, including the knowledge of First Peoples, we recognise the interconnections of Earth systems and human influences within those systems. With this in mind, we bring our collective imagination to uncover innovative, equitable and sustainable ways forward.

We are weary of the political conflict and polarisation around the issue of climate change and urge all to adopt a collaborative approach, without judgement or blame, to find a safe passage from climate chaos to climate survival.

We believe that women must come to the fore at this time to balance current paradigms of growth at all cost, and to replace the adversarial processes for deliberating policy with a more collaborative approach deeply imbued with care for each other, protection of our children and custodianship of all life on Earth.

The COVID-19 pandemic has taught us that no one is safe until everyone is safe. Climate change will impact everyone from the most well off to the most vulnerable. Action on climate change will also have widespread effects – from direct effects on jobs in mining communities through to retirees and superannuation investments. We need collaborative approaches to ensure an equitable and just transition.

We note that there are precedents where collaboration and scientifically informed policies and strategies have allowed us to manage global environmental crises; for example, the reversal of ozone depletion due to chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs).[4]

Watch out for our paper 'Why is women's leadership important (and why we think it is important for women to work together)?'[5]

What's our target?

Simply put, 'climate balance' will be restored when:

- carbon emissions are on a comfortable trajectory to be reduced to net zero[6] by at least 2050 (or earlier in line with scientific advice).

    The 2018 International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), Special Report says that to avoid catastrophic climate change, global carbon emissions must be reduced by about 45 per cent from 2010 levels by 2030, and reach net zero by 2050.[7,8] These predictions are expected to

[4] Andrew Klekociuk and Paul Krummel (2017). After 30 years of the Montreal Protocol, the ozone layer is gradually healing, *The Conversation*, Australian edn. https://theconversation.com/after-30-years-of-the-montreal-protocol-the-ozone-layer-is-gradually-healing-84051

[5] Coming soon

[6] 'Net zero emissions' refers to achieving an overall balance between greenhouse gas emissions produced and greenhouse gas emissions taken out of the atmosphere. Getting to net zero means we can still produce some emissions, as long as they are offset by processes that reduce greenhouse gases already in the atmosphere. For example, these could be things like planting new forests, or drawdown technologies like direct air capture. See https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/resources/what-does-net-zero-emissions-mean/

[7] *IPCC Special Report: Global warming of 1.5°C*, 2018. https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15

[8] Australian Meteorological and Oceanographic Society Council endorsed policy statement on the IPCC Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C.
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ruMs2I48recT8oWq5EtS6k0uXOcEV6W9/view

be further refined when the IPCC 6th Assessment Report is published (expected in August 2021[9] and some Australian scientists are already recommending an earlier target date for reaching net zero emissions.[10]

- global warming is limited to 1.5°C

  The Paris Accord was based on advice available in 2015 that to maintain a safe climate and avoid unpredictable tipping points leading to catastrophic climate outcomes, global warming must be limited to 1.5°C. Australia's target under the accord is for 26-28% reduction below 2005 levels by 2030 (including land use, land-use change, and forestry).

  However, the more recent 2018 IPCC Special Report cautions that, to be confident that this global limit will be achieved, faster reductions are now needed by 2030 and zero emissions must be reached by 2050. Because the world has wasted decades getting going on emissions reduction, there is now no wriggle room in the climate predictions. We must reach net zero by 2050 or face the consequences of runaway warming and a destabilised climate.[11] All countries, including Australia, have been invited to present increased ambitions above the targets agreed in Paris, to meet this greater urgency.

What needs to change?

To achieve 'climate balance' governments need to work collaboratively with climate scientists and the business community to address risks and make appropriate technological and economic changes to ensure we stay within safe limits for carbon emissions and global warming. There is simply no room for polarising debate to continue to slow things down – anymore than there was for action on COVID19. We must set aside party political posturing and work out a national (indeed global) plan supported by science. The scientific community, in turn, should espouse the values of integrity, transparency, collaboration, kindness and open source so that everyone can access scientific information and evidence.

To achieve and maintain a safe climate for ourselves and future generations, all of us – individuals, communities, business, media and government – need to take on responsibility for bringing back this balance through practical, economic and social behaviours. This must include deep listening to First Nations peoples whose knowledge and connection to the land has been marginalised since settlement and can teach us so much about what it means to be custodians of the Earth for future generations.

Furthermore, Earth System science has identified social equity as a factor influencing the Earth System alongside other biophysical factors.[12] This means that when we continue to ignore gross inequities among peoples – whether in our own country or globally — then we are 'baking in' ongoing environmental damage. Working together we can adopt new cultural practices that nurture human health and safety, and care for the Earth; and also ensure financial security, dignity, equity and justice for all peoples.

This means that we must transition away from the energy production and consumption patterns that have served us well for generations. But our current economic paradigm reinforces these

[9] The IPCC is currently (May 2021) finalising its 6thAssement Report (AR6). See https://www.ipcc.ch/assessment-report/ar6/

[10] Climate Council (2021). *Aim high, go fast: why emissions need to plummet this decade.* https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/aim-high-go-fast-why-emissions-must-plummet-climate-council-report.pdf

[11] See for example: *Joint International Climate Communique*, March 2021. https://www.amos.org.au/joint-international-climate-communique/

[12] Will Steffen, Katherine Richardson, Johan Rockström, et al (2020), The emergence and evolution of Earth System Science, *Nature Reviews Earth & Environment* 1: 54–63.

patterns and does not value environmental processes (or a range of other social services), so we need to find new economic models that favour the required transition. This does not rule out political differences or robust discourse but we must put concern for the safety of future generations and for all of life on Earth at the forefront of policy making.

There needs to be trust in the scientific process and respect for the advice of scientists. This does not rule out being alert to new information and interpretation but unless robust new evidence emerges, the best current assessment should guide our behaviour, business models and policies.

We must rapidly transition away from fossil fuels

Scientists have assessed that to meet the carbon emissions and global warming targets mentioned above, we must stay within a finite 'carbon budget' (ie the amount of carbon that can be released to the atmosphere to stay within a safe limit). To achieve this, the IPCC has reported that we need to leave the Earth's remaining fossil fuels in the ground, and phase out the use of supplies from existing sources as fast as possible. Because of the slow global response to date, we now have less time to make the necessary changes and so we cannot continue a slow transition that involves further extraction of fossil fuels. Every tonne of fossil fuel extracted and burnt anywhere in the world contributes to the finite carbon budget and even with current sources we are already on a trajectory to overspend that budget.[13]

In relation to energy production in Australia, this means creating a policy environment to transition as fast as possible to renewable energy. It also means showing our gratitude for workers made redundant by the ongoing closure of fossil fuel industries, and providing them with generous income support, retraining and community reorientation while they transition to new jobs and lifestyles.

We must also reduce other sources of emissions

Energy consumption is only one part of the carbon emissions picture. Transport, agriculture and manufacturing are also all contributors. Changes are needed in each of these sectors to reduce overall carbon emissions to zero and achieve climate balance.

In all these areas, new approaches are needed to realign economic models with the true value of environmental and human services and to promote a fair distribution of resources among citizens.

Watch out for our paper on 'What do we mean by an equitable and sustainable way forward?'[14]

Who needs to make the change?

Political/government level

Electors want honesty and transparency in all spheres of government activity and especially in policies and practices that affect their future and that of their children. It is governments' responsibility to create and foster an economic and social environment in which people, business and industry can work together to create a safe and stable society.

All governments (federal, state and local) must emphatically affirm the urgency to restore climate balance and ongoing climate stability. This means listening to and acting on scientific advice on climate change, as has been the case with the scientific advice on COVID 19, and assessing policies through the lens of 'is it good for the health and wellbeing of our Earth?'

[13] For example, see the article 'Our carbon budget is all but spent but who is counting' by Penny Sackett, May 2019: https://www.anu.edu.au/news/all-news/our-carbon-budget-is-all-but-spent-but-who-is-counting

[14] Coming soon

Rather than being ideological in a party political way, these issues reflect human principles that we all share such as care for our children and for the places we know and love. Collaborative action is needed given the current predictions of science in relation to climate change.

Watch out for our paper on 'What do we mean by nonpartisan collaboration?'[15]

Business and industry level

In recent times, the corporate world has ramped up environmental and social responsibility in its business models. Further work is needed, particularly to reduce unnecessary consumerism. Media can also play an important role in influencing social opinion and behaviour.

Heavy industry has started to work towards a cleaner environment and can continue to improve technology and practices without waiting for government to compel it to do so. Working collaboratively with climate scientists to categorise risks and make appropriate technological and economic changes will ensure we stay within safe limits.

As with fossil fuel industries described above, careful and timely exit planning is needed, including retraining of workers and mitigation of negative economic impact on communities.

Community and individual level

In line with the principles of sustainable development and the UN Sustainable Development Goals,[16] communities and individuals must all play a part to embrace renewable energy sources, reduce wasteful consumption (eg clothing, plastic, fuel, energy, food, water etc) so that less fortunate societies can survive and thrive.

Communities all around the country are already creating their own zero waste, sustainable futures through local activities to reduce emissions and other waste, generate renewable power locally and many other projects. A representative government would foster and support these activities.

What is the Women's Climate Congress doing?

The Congress is inclusive of women from all political parties, ages and social and cultural backgrounds. We are engaging with all political parties and representatives, looking for common ground, identifying roadblocks and seeking deeper conversations about the issues and potential solutions. We are seeking out and developing relationships with First Nations women.

We have proposed an approach for a mediated whole-of-community engagement to overcome current polarisation[17]. We will continue to seek support for this approach.

We are encouraging women leaders of all political parties to support each other to be fully included in decision-making at all levels. We have proposed that this could be achieved through a multiparty parliamentary women's group similar to the Women's Caucus in the US Congress.[18]

As women leaders in our communities, we assert our right to protect future generations. We firmly and respectfully reinforce the science in discussions with decision makers and we will focus on what must happen: 'Will this action reduce emissions?' 'How will this approach ensure a safe future for

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[15] Coming soon

[16] The *17 Goals*, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Sustainable Development: https://sdgs.un.org/goals

[17] *Building a unified national agreement for Australia's climate response: proposal for an inclusive process to address climate risks*, Women's Climate Congress position paper, November 2020. https://womenscongress.weebly.com/uploads/3/0/2/0/30206683/wcc_mediation_proposal-01_23nov2020_.pdf

[18] Women's Caucus: https://www.wcpinst.org/our-work/the-womens-caucus/

the children with no more than 1.5°C warming?' 'How will this approach allow equitable adaptation to climate change already locked in?'

We will reinforce and affirm government actions that move the political culture towards more collaboration, respect for the science and actions to unify the nation to restore climate balance. We support the Parliamentary Friends of Climate Action group and encourage parliamentarians of all parties to join and participate.[19] We also support measures that are in line with the Congress vision, such as debate in Parliament of the private member's Climate Change Bill tabled by Independent MP Zali Steggall.

Nationally and locally, we encourage our members to convene bold conversations that deepen relationships with those not currently engaged with climate change, focusing on common issues – care for families, children, community.

In 2021, these activities will culminate in a National Congress of Women in Canberra and online, 29 November –1 December with the theme 'How can women rising transform our response to climate action?'[20]

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Contacts and further information

Janet Salisbury
womensclimatecongress@gmail.com
https://womenscongress.weebly.com/

[19] Parliamentary Friends of Climate Action: https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Friendship
[20] http://womenscongress.weebly.com/national-congress-of-women-2021.html
[21] See http://womenscongress.weebly.com/who.html