



**To: Committee Secretary**

**House Standing Committee on the Environment and Energy**

**Inquiry into the Climate Change (National Framework for Adaptation and Mitigation) Bill 2020 and Climate Change (National Framework for Adaptation and Mitigation) (Consequential and Transitional Provisions) Bill 2020**

**Submission from: Women's Climate Congress — a women's initiative for united action on climate change**

Submitted: 27 November 2020

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 stabilise the climate and to ensure intergenerational equity and custodianship of the planet are a priority in our public discourse.

#### **Why we want to see the Climate Change Act passed**

We believe that this legislation would provide firm grounding for collaborative, nonpartisan action – widely supported by the community – to reduce emissions and ensure that we avoid the worst consequences of climate change. We therefore think it serves the interests of the Australian community for this bill to be debated in parliament.

#### **The objectives and importance of long-term emissions reduction commitment**

Human activity is causing the planet to heat up and the climate to change. We are already seeing more extreme weather events: the catastrophic bushfires in Australia earlier this year and more recently in California, the increasing intensity of storms, droughts and floods in Australia and worldwide.

Scientists have been warning us about the danger of global warming for over 30 years. A special report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the peak body of the world's climate scientists, published in October 2018, warned that we only had 12 years to balance our carbon budget to avoid dangerous warming leading to major tipping points in the world's climate systems.

(IPCC (October 2018). Special report: Global warming of 1.5 °C, <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/>)

If we fail to take action to prevent those tipping points, the science tells us that we can look forward to rising sea levels, more wild fires, loss of biodiversity, desertification, water shortages, problems with food supplies, mass migrations, conflict and war as resources become scarcer.

Scientists advise that our best shot to avoid reaching those tipping points is to adopt net zero emissions by 2050. It is the internationally accepted target, consistent with the Paris Accord and the best available science from the IPCC.

## Why we need legislation to reach net zero by 2050

In Australia, as in many other parts of the world, there is an impasse between the need for rapid transition away from fossil fuels and a desire to maintain the industries that have allowed development of the world economy we currently enjoy and which support the livelihoods of many Australians.

Our party political system of government, with its tendency to polarising rhetoric and approach to policy development, has not been able to find a path to collaborative, nonpartisan action on this critical issue.

Meanwhile, the Australian Government would like to achieve a net zero emissions reduction “as quickly as possible, as quickly as it's able”.

(Reported Financial review - Nov 9<sup>th</sup>: <https://www.afr.com/politics/federal/net-zero-emissions-desirable-by-2050-pm-20201109-p56cpr>)

The Opposition also supports net zero by 2050. However, both parties are understandably sensitive to losing the support of members who represent the communities with the most to lose from the phasing out of fossil fuels.

WCC supports the Climate Change Act because, as the IPCC has warned, we cannot afford to lose any more time working out a pathway through these apparently competing interests. The Act presents an opportunity to help break the impasse by making net zero emissions by 2050 a statutory requirement. This would provide an opportunity to creatively solve the equally important issues of climate safety and economic security without loss of face on either side.

## Why we support an independent climate change commission

The Women’s Climate Congress supports the establishment of an independent body with diverse representation to guide policy based on the best scientific advice: to assess risks; to assess the best technologies going forward; and to recommend the best mitigation and adaptation plans, and the fairest and most equitable strategy for emissions reduction. A genuinely nonpartisan collaborative body will provide an opportunity to work through the different perspectives for the benefit of all.

## Summary

Climate change is a potentially catastrophic risk to the future wellbeing of today’s children, whose expected lifespan will take them to the end of this century. By establishing a statutory, ongoing, nonpartisan and collaborative process to radically reduce carbon and greenhouse gas emissions, the Climate Change Act offers us a collaborative way forward to safeguard that future.

## About the Women’s Climate Congress

In the short time since we were formed in January 2020, the Women’s Climate Congress has built a diverse network of women in electorates across the country, presented our ideas to decision makers, including the National Covid Coordination Advisory Board, established alliances with other women’s organisations as well as other organisations engaged in climate change issues, contacted all federal MPs and have either met or are meeting with a growing number of them.

Our key principles are:

ACCEPTANCE

We accept the scientific consensus expressed in the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports and call for effective action to decarbonise our economy to safeguard the future of our children and grandchildren.

We accept that radical transformation can cause economic harm, 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 MULTIPARTY 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. Indeed, the Climate Change Bill itself is an example of this. We are building a network of women in every electorate and promoting a national discussion with elected representatives to encourage collaborative, nonpartisan action that is firmly directed to secure a safe climate future.

#### BUILDING A UNIFIED NATIONAL AGREEMENT FOR AUSTRALIA'S CLIMATE RESPONSE

The WCC is firmly committed to bringing diverse perspectives together and we have developed a proposal for a carefully designed and independently mediated roundtable process. Such a process could complement and inform the work of the independent climate commission envisioned in the Climate Change Bill.

Further information about our Congress, including our principles, vision and values, and our proposal for a mediated roundtable process, are on our website: <https://womenscongress.weebly.com/>

To discuss these ideas further and how the Congress can help support united action on climate change, we would welcome a chance to speak to the committee in person at your hearings.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Janet Salisbury  
Founder, **Women's Climate Congress Ltd**  
Contact: Dr Janet Salisbury, M 0416 167 280  
[womensclimatecongress@gmail.com](mailto:womensclimatecongress@gmail.com)  
<https://womenscongress.weebly.com/>