



Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Treaties
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Submission on Paris Agreement Ratification

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed ratification of the December 2015 Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

Climate Change Balmain-Rozelle is a collective of parents and residents of Sydney's inner west who have come together out of mutual concern for Australia's excessive greenhouse gas emissions and the world our children will inherit. Our newsletters have a readership of 750. We have no affiliation with any political party.

We endorse early Australian ratification of the Paris Agreement and assert that it is clearly in Australia's national interest to do so.

This submission addresses four important points:

1. Australia's ratification is important for the agreement to reach the 55/55 threshold.
2. Australia's policies must be adequate to achieve the declared goals.
3. Australia's actions must be consistent with the terms of the agreement.
4. Other international agreements or domestic legislation must not override the agreement.

Background

There can be no doubt that global temperatures are increasing faster than at any time in the planet's history, and that human-induced emissions of carbon dioxide and other gases are the primary cause. The Paris agreement has recognised the need to reduce and eventually eliminate emissions so as to limit the temperature rise to well below 2 degrees Celsius, and furthermore it has recognised that this can only be achieved by concerted, ambitious and progressive action by all countries¹.

The National Interest Analysis provided by DFAT at the time of the agreement (Dec 2015) is quite clear about the extent of the threat posed by a changing climate:

“Collective global climate action under the Agreement is the most effective means of protecting Australia against the threats of climate change. Without effective global climate action, Australia will face risks to the health and resilience of our coasts and beaches including iconic natural systems such as the Great Barrier Reef, cities and the built environment, agriculture, forestry and fisheries, water resources and natural ecosystems, and the health and well-being of Australians, with consequent economic costs. Climate Change will have implications for disaster risk management and could affect the resilience and security of the Asia-Pacific region.”²

The DFAT analysis also supports the importance of joint action, saying:

“The scale of the climate change challenge is many times greater than Australia's annual emissions and any one country's capacity to act. The Agreement sets a common, multilateral platform for global action.”³

1) Australia's ratification is important for the agreement to reach the 55/55 threshold

Under Article 21, the agreement will enter into force once 55 parties to the Convention, accounting for at least 55 per cent of total global greenhouse gas emissions, have deposited instruments of ratification⁴.

At the date of this submission, 61 countries had ratified the agreement⁵, fulfilling the first condition. However, they represent only 47.81% of emissions. Of the remaining 129 countries, Australia's emissions (1.46% of the world's total) are ninth highest. Several countries with similar or higher emissions have signalled their intention to ratify the agreement by the end of 2016.

So while it seems likely that the threshold of 55% is within reach, Australia's contribution must be seen as a significant element in getting there, and as critical as that of any other country. Furthermore, Australia's high per-capita emissions invariably draw attention to our actions: failure to ratify at this stage would be inconsistent with our position up to this point, and would increase uncertainty and discourage international trade and investment in Australia.

2) Australia's policies must be adequate to achieve the declared goals

In preparing this submission, our greatest concern is the lack of any evidence that Australia has the right set of policies to achieve the targets that it undertook in Paris last December.

Modelling future trends

Australia's commitment in Paris is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 26-28% by 2030, with a review every five years.

Many expert bodies have analysed the data and almost universally have asserted that while there might be some modest reduction in emissions in the short term, Australia's targets for 2020 seem unlikely to be achieved. Lacking any clear policy framework or modelling by government agencies, the targets for 2030 do not seem credible.⁶

Independent advisory firm Reputex has just issued a White Paper *Framing Australia's 2030 Energy & Climate Policy Mix*⁷. Taking as a reference point the Department of the Environment's projections to 2020, the paper concludes that existing policies will only achieve about half of the emissions reductions required to meet the 2030 reduction target. It calculates that, in order to meet the commitment, funds allocated to the Emissions Reduction Fund would need to be tripled. Conversely, if industry was required to meet targets under the safeguard mechanism⁸, we would see a contraction in the economy of 5.4% pa. Vehicle fuel efficiency would also need to improve drastically, and it is overly optimistic to assume that level would be reached.

These conclusions are alarming. They suggest that if Australia is to ratify the Paris agreement **in good faith**, then it must implement much more robust actions to meet its committed targets.

States' policies and actions

The Reputex paper further notes that

"In parallel, state governments have begun to take strong policy action, led by ambitious emissions reduction, energy efficiency, and renewable energy targets in the ACT, Queensland, South Australia, and Victoria."

While those states have argued that they have set goals in the absence of any clear Federal policy framework, Reputex notes that

"this decentralised approach, whereby states develop their own trading mechanisms to meet unique emissions and renewable energy targets, is not favoured by industry."⁹

A decentralised approach is also against the outline of the Agreement, which calls for "economy-wide, absolute Emissions Reduction Targets".¹⁰

Climate Change Balmain-Rozelle calls on the Federal Government to lead, not follow, in setting effective policy on climate change.

3) Australia's actions must be consistent with the terms of the agreement

Climate Change Research

Climate change research is vital not only to our understanding of the mechanisms of climate change but also to our ability to predict those changes and to best prepare for them. Article 7.7 of the Treaty calls for “a strengthening of scientific knowledge on climate, including research and systematic observation of the climate and early warning systems”¹¹.

It is difficult to see how a net reduction of 20 climate scientist positions from CSIRO ¹² this year is consistent with the ambition of this part of the Treaty.

Technology Development

Article 10 of the Paris Agreement¹³ deals with technology development. It mentions a vision of

“fully realizing technology development and transfer in order to improve resilience to climate change and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.”

Furthermore it states that

“accelerating, encouraging and enabling innovation is critical for a long-term effective global response to climate change”.

The Australian Renewable Energy Agency (ARENA) helps drive investment in the renewable energy sector by reducing investment risk and accelerating innovation to make the transition to renewable energy faster, cheaper and easier. This seems to be wholly consistent with the aims of the Paris agreement. Again, it is hard to see how the government's recent action in cutting ARENA's funding by \$500 million over 5 years¹⁴ demonstrates good faith with the Paris agreement.

Continued fossil fuel support

Additionally, earlier this year, a number of new “Growth Centres” were announced by then Science Minister Christopher Pyne¹⁵. Centres would focus on areas of competitive strength and strategic priority. One centre would deal with growth and development of oil, gas and energy resources, and was to be known as National Energy Resources Australia.

The Growth Centre will work with the oil, gas, coal and uranium sectors to unlock commercial opportunities and drive innovation by building links between businesses and industry organisations and the science and research sector¹⁶.

Renewable Energy is not included in the remit of this centre, nor is any aspect of Australia's response to climate change included in any of the six centres. This does not seem to demonstrate any enthusiasm by the Australian government to work in the spirit of the Paris agreement.

4) The agreement must not be overridden by other international agreements or by domestic legislation

While this submission refers specifically to the Paris Climate Change Agreement, we are bound to note that there are many other international agreements in place or currently being finalised, covering issues such as trade and defence.

Trans Pacific Partnership

Climate change features in any and every area of our activities, whether changes are a result of what we do, or what we do presents opportunities to mitigate or adapt. It is therefore important that agreements such as the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) must be in harmony with international actions on climate change. And yet that agreement is virtually silent on climate change, ambiguous at best on the place of environmental legislation, and clearly prioritises financial considerations over those of the environment¹⁷. “

On the words ‘climate change’ being absent from the TPP, (former) trade minister Andrew Robb said: “It’s not an agreement on climate change, it’s a trade agreement”.¹⁸ We assert that it is no longer acceptable to exclude considerations of climate change from any area of activity.

Trade in Services Agreement

The Trade in Services Agreement (TiSA) appears to be a greater threat still to the Paris agreement. Under drafts recently seen, TiSA would proscribe any state support that favoured one form of energy over another.

“The Paris climate agreement called for “making finance flows consistent with a pathway to low greenhouse gas emissions” but the deregulatory thrust of the negotiating text, which was obtained by Greenpeace Netherlands, seems to run counter to this. Its energy annex says that the trade rules will apply to all legislative measures covering power generation services, “whether the energy source is renewable or non-renewable”. It also contains a “standstill” clause freezing in perpetuity the high watermark of liberalisation in certain sectors, and a “ratchet” clause to stop countries reintroducing trade barriers that had been previously removed. *Both mechanisms have been proposed by Australia*¹⁹.

It is vitally important to the success of climate change actions that agreements on climate change action take precedence over any contrary agreement. Actions stemming from trade agreements may have effects that will last a few years. Actions that fail to address climate change will have effects that last for hundreds of years. There is no greater challenge facing humanity at present.

Climate Change Balmain-Rozelle

4th October 2016

¹ [Paris Agreement](#) article 3 sourced 01/10/2016

² [National Interest Analysis](#) par 10 sourced 01/10/2016

³ [National Interest Analysis](#) par 6 (DFAT) Dec 2015 sourced 01/10/2016

⁴ [Paris Agreement](#) article 21

⁵ <http://climateanalytics.org/hot-topics/ratification-tracker.html> sourced 01/10/2016

⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/sep/29/officials-admit-no-modelling-shows-how-australia-will-meet-paris-climate-pledge> sourced 01/10/2016

⁷ [RepuTex report: “Framing Australia’s Energy and Climate Policy to 2030”](#) sourced 01/10/2016

⁸ <https://www.environment.gov.au/climate-change/emissions-reduction-fund/publications/factsheet-erf-safeguard-mechanism> sourced 4/10/2016

⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰ [Paris Agreement](#) article 4.4

¹¹ [Paris Agreement](#) article 7.7

¹² <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/aug/04/csiro-cuts-turnbull-government-orders-u-turn-on-climate-science-research> sourced 01/10/2016

¹³ [Paris Agreement](#) article 10

¹⁴ [Budget Savings \(Omnibus Bill\) 2016](#) sourced 01/10/2016

¹⁵ <http://www.industry.gov.au/industry/Industry-Growth-Centres/Pages/default.aspx> sourced 01/10/2016

¹⁶ <http://www.industry.gov.au/industry/Industry-Growth-Centres/Documents/Industry-growth-centres-oil-gas-energy-resources-fact-sheet.docx> sourced 3/10/2016

¹⁷ <http://www.foe.org/projects/economics-for-the-earth/trade/trans-pacific-partnership> sourced 01/10/2016

¹⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2015/nov/06/trans-pacific-partnership-four-key-issues-to-watch-out-for> sourced 01/10/2016

¹⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/sep/20/global-trade-deal-threatens-paris-climate-goals-leaked-documents-show> sourced 01/10/2016