

UTAS CLIMATE CHANGE GROUP SUBMISSION TO THE REVIEW OF THE CLIMATE CHANGE ACT

The University of Tasmania (UTAS) Climate Change Group is composed of academic and professional staff, alumni and students from the University of Tasmania who constitute a growing climate change and sustainability advocacy movement originating within the university. The content of this submission does not represent a formal UTAS submission to the review; it rather reflects the willingness of current and future leaders within a key institution to engage in the critical issues of our time. We are all passionate advocates for strong action on climate change and for linking this action to the seventeen (17) United Nations Sustainable Development Goals as we make the following responses to the questions framing the review.

Question 1: Do you support the proposed revised objects of the Act? If not, what other objects should be considered?

No, we do not support the proposed revised objects of the Act, which we consider to have the effect of weakening the existing Act at a time when strengthening such legislation is urgently required. We note that the proposed revised objects to the *Tasmanian Climate Change Act (2008)* were developed prior to the 8 October 2018 release of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C (SR15), and are now outdated and woefully inadequate in the light of the report's dire findings. Because policymakers at all levels of government – international, national, state, and local – have failed to act on more than two decades of robust science-informed warnings that greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions must be curtailed, everyone now faces a very stark choice. The choice now is between instituting policies that effectively minimise the damage of the anthropogenic global warming that is already locked in, or continuing with 'business as usual' that prioritises other concerns (such as 'economic growth' at all costs), which would likely overshoot the much more dangerous 2°C guardrail. As the SR15 (IPCC, 2018) clearly and irrefutably establishes, when compared with limiting warming to 1.5°C, a 2°C warming target will cause much more damage not only to humans and social systems but also to the complex interconnected natural ecosystems that all life forms (including humans) depend on for their survival.

In line with the findings of the SR15, any revised objects to the Act should reflect and communicate the **urgency** of the need to reduce GHG emissions **very rapidly**. According to the report findings, in order to limit average global warming to 1.5°C without (or with little) overshoot, global GHG emissions must decline by about 45% from 2010 levels by 2030. **This means that we have about 12 years to achieve the 45% GHG emission reduction target, which will require focused efforts at all levels of policy making, and this should be reflected in the revised objects of the Act.**

The UTAS Climate Change Group thus proposes that any revised objects to the Act should establish Tasmanian GHG emission targets that are much more ambitious

than national targets, as the latter would clearly set us on the wrong trajectory. This implies that the revised objects of the Act should, at the very least, **establish Tasmanian GHG emission reduction targets that align with scientific findings:** that the global community needs to cooperate and increase its ambition in order to achieve 'net zero' GHG emissions by 2050. In effect, the Act should establish:

- an ambitious overall target to reduce Tasmania's GHG emissions **in all sectors** (including targets to drastically reduce **fossil fuel** use in all sectors);
- **ambitious, explicit, legally binding, and enforceable interim targets for all individual sectors** that collectively constitute a realistic pathway to the global 2030 goal of a 45% reduction of GHG emissions below 2010 levels;
- instruments and institutions for going beyond merely monitoring, evaluating and reporting on progress made in relation to the interim targets: there should also be **meaningful and significant, enforceable penalties** for organisations, businesses and other entities that fail to achieve sectorally defined GHG emission reductions;
- meaningful and robust pathways for **community input and participation in making actionable decisions** that affect their lives, especially with regard to climate change mitigation and adaptation pathways but also in related areas such as pathways to sustainable economic activity that is equitable and just and that contributes positively to the general social well-being of Tasmanian communities;
- meaningful and enforceable requirements that all Tasmanian state departments prioritise **scientifically informed** climate change mitigation and adaptation considerations when making decisions rather than prioritising other interests (such as unsustainable and environmentally damaging economic growth); and, importantly,
- an **independent authority** (such as the now-disbanded Tasmanian Climate Action Council) to guide climate action over the next few decades, and specifically over the crucial 12-year period from now until 2030, since decisions made in this time period will, according to the SR15, largely determine our collective future as humans as well as the extent to which the current extinction of species will proceed.

The above recommendations are outlined in broad terms and are intended to provide a foundation for drafting instructions for the revised Act. In this context the *Independent Review of the Climate Change (State Action) Act 2008* (Jacobs et al., 2016), although it was published before the SR15, provides many specific recommendations that policymakers may find useful to revisit and reconsider. As reflected in our feedback about the proposed objects, one such recommendation from the independent review is that "Tasmania should not rely on forest management alone to achieve its emissions reduction target, action should be undertaken to reduce fossil fuel use and drive emissions reductions across other sectors of the economy" (ibid., p. 6).

Question 2: Do you support the proposed principles to guide decision making? Are there other principles that should be included? If so, why?

The independent review report (Jacobs et al., 2016, p. 38) distinguishes between two types of principles: conceptual principles and outcome-focused principles. The report lists conceptual principles as including ‘...the precautionary principle, a principal [sic] around inclusive and integrated decision-making, transparency, selecting solutions that are cost-neutral or positive, [and] intergenerational equity’ (*ibid.*, emphases added). Most of these principles are ignored in the currently proposed principles and, given the review report’s recommendation that ‘...a set of principles is required that neatly summarises “**what really matters most**” in decisions on allocation of scarce resources to abatement and adaptation...’ (*ibid.*, emphasis added), this is a serious shortcoming. Taking decisive action to limit the average rise in global temperature to 1.5°C addresses **the precautionary principle** and is, as argued previously, an imperative that cannot and must not be ignored. Because of the limited time-frame policymakers now have to seriously adopt this principle, neglecting to include other conceptual principles (such as those regarding inclusive and integrated decision-making, transparency, and intergenerational equity) is unacceptable. We therefore consider the proposed principles to guide decision-making by the Tasmanian Government as weak and inadequate.

More specifically, many of the proposed principles are too weak to guide action on reducing GHG emissions to the extent required over the next 12 years because they are expressed in vague language that is open to interpretation. Some of the weaknesses of each of the principles are identified and briefly outlined below:

- The first proposed principle that the Tasmanian government ‘take into account’ the ‘possible contribution to Tasmania’s greenhouse gas emissions reduction target’ of the decisions they make is too vague. Taking ‘possible contributions’ ‘into account’ does not prioritise meeting ambitious GHG emission targets and can also be interpreted in ways that counter this imperative.
- The second proposed principle stipulates that Tasmanian Government policies ‘complement’ national policies and initiatives, an approach that is unacceptable given the urgency of the situation and the lack of ambition defining national climate change action policies and initiatives. We urge the Tasmanian Government to take the initiative and ensure that our state is a leader in action on climate change, thereby providing a model that the national government may be inspired to emulate and extend.
- The third proposed principle is also too weak as it suggests that the Tasmanian Government ‘take into account the best available science and information about climate change’ when making decisions and developing policy. Given the urgency of the situation, **it is not enough to take scientific advice ‘into account’: the science should be given priority.**
- The fourth proposed principle advises policymakers to ‘assess the risks’ associated with their decisions and policies. Again, this is inadequate as risks are difficult to predict with any accuracy and this is often used to justify delaying

decisive action despite the evidence that, to date, the outcomes of an approximately 1°C rise in average global temperature has resulted in much worse than predicted environmental outcomes. Adopting the precautionary principle regarding risks is more than warranted at this stage, which means that the fourth proposed principle should be amended to reflect this urgency and to also advocate that potentially damaging decisions and policies be actively avoided (rather than just assessed).

- The fifth (and final) proposed principle suggests an ‘adaptive management’ approach, which is problematic in a variety of ways, including that it does not explicitly allow for community input and that it assumes that we have unlimited time to make the required changes to our socio-economic systems. Given policymakers’ failure to take timely action, which should have begun more than two decades ago when scientific evidence that anthropogenic global warming is occurring and is dangerous was already firmly established, we now have only 12 years to drastically change our economy, our society, and our values. This means that we have very little time to experiment with different approaches and adopt an ‘adaptive management approach’: action has to be decisive and must begin now. As discussed in more detail in our response to Question 3, the knowledge and technology for mitigating further anthropogenic global warming already exists. The available solutions must, of course, only be implemented after widespread and meaningful community consultation. For this reason, there is an additional **urgent need to educate the community** about these issues so that the consultation is adequately informed, and so that suitable policies and actions in response to current and future challenges of climate change draw on widespread support.

In sum, all of these principles should be revisited and reformulated (and perhaps additional principles should also be added) so that the Act rises to the challenge of doing our best to contribute towards the 45% global target to reduce GHG emissions below 2010 levels by 2030.

Question 3: Do you have any other comments or suggestions relating to the proposed amendments to the Act?

Tasmania is uniquely positioned to do better than adopt a 45% GHG emissions reduction target by 2030, and it is incumbent on us to be a leader, a ‘first mover’, on this challenge. This will involve longer-term thinking and planning than is currently the norm. It will involve a reorientation of the way we appraise competing values away from the current short-term considerations of unsustainable and inequitable economic growth that is narrowly defined by increases in Gross Domestic Product and that values business enterprise profit maximisation rather than sustaining healthy ecosystems and a habitable planet. In contrast, adopting a different approach to brokering values can transform the challenges that anthropogenic global warming presents into opportunities for building a sustainable society that works cooperatively to secure equitable outcomes for all Tasmanians. The required change in the way values are deliberated over would importantly include respecting, and

giving priority to, scientists' research findings and advice. The UTAS Climate Change Group thus emphasises the need to re-establish an independent body of scientists, such as the now disbanded Tasmanian Climate Action Council, to guide climate action over the next decade (as discussed in more detail in Question 1).

In addition to scientific research outlining the challenges we face, another large body of research clearly demonstrates that it is technically and socially feasible to attain the global 45% reduction of GHG emissions below 2010 levels by 2030, even in the short timeframe available to us. *Drawdown* (Hawken, 2017) is just one of many resources that outline a plethora of solutions that are already being implemented in various communities around the world; the challenge is to adopt the most appropriate local solutions and to scale up their implementation. The obstacles to adopting more sustainable ways of leading our lives and running our communities are therefore not technical, they are political and economic and require political and economic innovations to address them as set out, for example, in *The Political Economy of Sustainability* (Gale, 2018). When policymakers prioritise economic growth without seriously taking the environmental effects of this growth into account, this frequently results in the severe degradation of ecosystems (through, for example, deforestation, contamination of waterways, depletion of fish stocks, etcetera), which are damaged irreversibly. Some initiatives aimed at increasing the growth of specific economic sectors, such as tourism in Tasmania, also fail to account for the indirect environmental damage this causes: tourists flying to Tasmania are responsible for increasing global GHG emissions. This example illustrates just how much thought needs to be devoted to considering the environmental implications of specific policies and initiatives that promote economic growth: there is clearly an urgent need to reconsider and change the way values are brokered in Tasmania and employ new, alternative, cross-value deliberative systems to craft genuinely sustainable policies, including a Sustainable Industrial Policy, for the State.

Community building is also crucially important if we are to face current and future challenges equitably and sustainably, and some policy choices are more effective at achieving this aim than others. For example, while Tasmanian policymakers continue to invest taxpayer money in building new roads and increasingly pay attention to establishing a network to recharge electric vehicle (EV) batteries, this strategy for reducing fossil fuel emissions, if it is the main policy tool, is not equitable because EVs are expensive and not a viable option for many Tasmanians. Promoting EV use by all is also not sustainable in many other ways, as the widespread global adoption of EVs will continue the trend of increasing consumption in general, and thereby increasing material and energy throughput and environmental damage. Thus, a more appropriate and equitable long-term solution would see the Tasmanian Government simultaneously invest in building affordable public transport networks (for example, electric powered railways and trams). This example again illustrates the complexity of the decisions that policymakers need to make: it will not be easy to implement sustainable and equitable solutions to the challenges we face, but it must be done.

References

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