

Policy Priorities for the Australian Government to protect animals from climate change

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Climate change is hurting the animals we love and care for

Unnatural weather events harm our wildlife (such as the inconsolable loss of 3 billion animals in the bushfires of 2019/20); expanding diseases threaten our multi-billion dollar livestock industry and food security; while heat stress increasingly impacts our companion animals.

The next five years are pivotal, requiring decisive government action to hold the increase in global average temperatures to well below 2°C of warming and pursuing efforts to keep warming to less than 1.5°C

The consequences of exceeding 1.5°C will be stark: heatwaves, droughts, bushfires and intense rain events will become even more severe and frequent. Sea levels will rise, species will become extinct and crop yields and livestock production will fall. This will cause further food and water insecurity, economic disruption, conflict, and terrorism.

There is no safe level of global warming.

Veterinary professionals are expert advisors to governments, corporates, farmers and families. We care deeply about animals, humanity and the environment, recognising that the three are inextricably linked - One Health. We also understand that animal health and welfare have a critical position in our future. Climate change threatens both, along with biodiversity, biosecurity, livelihoods, mental health and global food supply.

Vets for Climate Action sets out the below policy priorities the Australian Government must adopt to ensure a world where animals and people thrive in a healthy climate.



About Vets for Climate Action

Veterinary professionals advise governments, businesses, farmers, and families. We know that animal health and welfare are vital to our future, yet climate change threatens both—along with biodiversity, biosecurity, livelihoods, and mental well-being.

Vets for Climate Action represents veterinarians, vet nurses, practices, and industry partners across Australia, who want immediate action on climate. We educate our profession and communities, reduce our sector's emissions, and advocate for sustainable veterinary care at every level.

Guiding principles

We are evidence-based:

Our recommended actions are based on peer-reviewed scientific research on the contributing causes and impacts of climate change, in conjunction with robust practitioner knowledge. This enables us to develop and implement feasible and effective strategies for greenhouse gas emission reduction and climate change adaptation.

We are proudly non-partisan:

We support climate-positive policies and call out climate-damaging policies regardless of the party.

We have a deep respect for the science and knowledge of our First Nations Peoples:

Our First Nations Peoples have cared for this country, its land, oceans and rivers, its trees and wildlife, for over 60 000 years. Government must consult with, and listen to, First Nations people as the original custodians of this land.

We support an equitable transition:

We acknowledge that moving away from established industries is difficult, but necessary. We urge the Government to develop and fund plans to give workers moving from the fossil fuel and forestry industries 'a fair go' and to secure alternative employment opportunities.



1. End Fossil Fuel Projects

The most recent IPCC report, the AR6 Synthesis Report, states that human activities, principally through emissions of greenhouse gases (GHG), have unequivocally caused global warming. The largest share and growth in gross GHG emissions occurs due to the mining and combustion of fossil fuels.

A discernible slowdown in global warming within around two decades can be achieved by deep, rapid, and sustained reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

Key Actions:



No new fossil fuel projects:

Cease approval or extension of applications for fossil fuel projects including gas production and coal mine expansions



No taxpayer subsidies for fossil fuels:

End fossil fuel subsidies and incentives and redirect public funds towards renewable energy projects.



Ban offshore oil and gas projects:

Cease approval for fossil fuel projects or exploration licences in Australia's waters and in international territories



2. Accelerate the Transition to Renewable Energy

Replacing fossil fuel-based energy with renewable energy (and storage solutions), like wind and solar, will help reduce greenhouse gas emissions, which have unequivocally caused climate change and is threatening our much loved animals.

Australia is successfully adopting clean energy with 46% of the electricity in the main national grid now coming from renewable sources. This is delivering cheaper, cleaner and more reliable energy.

Achieving the Government's renewable energy target: to generate 82% of electricity from renewable sources by 2030 will require greater investment and support.

Key actions:



Fund key energy efficiency upgrades, and battery storage solutions: Provide funding and support to electrify homes, schools, small businesses, and community facilities (such as animal shelters and wildlife hospitals)



Support renewable energy infrastructure: Expand investment in solar and wind power to reach a 100% renewable energy target by 2030.



Increase community engagement: Ensure proper consultation with local communities on energy transition projects.

3. End Deforestation and Native Forest Logging

Native forests generate the oxygen we breathe, are a sink atmospheric carbon, and house a wealth of biodiversity: animals, insects, plants, and fungi.

Logging of native forests threatens our unique native animals by removing the habitat, shelter and resources they need, particularly older trees which have developed hollows used by multiple species.

Since colonisation, 50% of Australia's forest and bushland has been destroyed. Additionally, Australia has the unenviable record of the worst mammal extinction rate in the world, with 38 native mammal species driven to extinction including the first due to climate change: the Bramble Cays Melomys.

Native forest logging is neither financially sustainable, nor environmentally sustainable.

Key actions:

- ✓ **Implement an immediate ban on native forest logging and remove government subsidies:** Protect native forests and our unique biodiversity, flora and fauna
- ✓ **Increase afforestation and reforestation efforts:** Enhance carbon sequestration through native tree planting.
- ✓ **Recognise the inherent value of biodiversity:** invest in and support biodiversity projects, irrespective of their perceived market value



4. Strengthen our Environmental Laws

The 2020 Independent Review of the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999, led by Professor Graeme Samuel found that Australia's environmental laws are "not fit to address current or future environmental challenges" and have failed to protect biodiversity and critical habitats.

Current environmental laws have failed to prevent deforestation, species extinction, and the approval of high-emission projects. Nor do they directly target (or reference) climate change.

Key actions:

- ✓ **Reform the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act:** Integrate climate change into the Act and include a 'climate trigger' ie. including climate change as a stand alone Matter of National Environmental Significance.
- ✓ **Ensure strong enforcement powers for environmental compliance:** Establish an independent Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and a national data agency Environment Information Australia (EIA)
- ✓ **Require disclosure of all emissions:** In projects required to be assessed under EPBC Act include all emissions across the entire project lifecycle, such direct, indirect and supply chain emissions (Scope 1, 2 and 3)
- ✓ **Remove the Regional Forest Agreement (RFA) exemptions from the EPBC Act:** Ensure native forest logging in any manner is protected by our national nature laws



5. Support the Veterinary Profession

Veterinarians are vital to Australia's biosecurity, food production, and public health. With livestock contributing \$20.4 billion to the economy, the One Health approach—linking human and animal health—is more important than ever. Climate change is accelerating zoonotic diseases like Japanese Encephalitis, increasing the need for veterinary expertise.

Embedded in rural, regional, and urban communities, veterinarians are often first responders to climate emergencies, witnessing firsthand the impact on livestock, wildlife, and companion animals. Strengthening the profession safeguards both animals and the people who rely on them, building resilience against climate challenges.

Key actions:

- ✓ **Establish a National Animal Disaster Fund:** Compensate private veterinarians providing emergency care during natural disasters.
- ✓ **Continue renewing the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy:** Ensure best practices in animal care and protection.
- ✓ **Integrate the veterinary sector into rural subsidy programs** to enhance veterinary services in remote and underserved areas.
- ✓ **Invest in a National Veterinary Workforce Strategy:** address workforce shortages and support the long-term sustainability of the profession.



6. Commit to Low Emissions Agriculture

According to recent data, Australian agriculture contributes around 16.8% of the country's total greenhouse gas emissions. The majority of these emissions come from livestock, particularly cattle and sheep, which produce methane as a significant contributor to the total agricultural carbon footprint.

Australian agriculture is also highly vulnerable to climate change, including droughts, bushfires, and extreme weather.

Key actions:



Position Australia as a world leader in sustainable agriculture and land management: Implement policies to reduce agricultural emissions, deliver low emissions agriculture, and improve animal welfare and productivity.



Develop a National Ruminant Emissions Reduction Program: Incentivise methane reduction strategies, such as feed additives and improved livestock genetics and management.



Enhance carbon farming and soil sequestration: Provide financial incentives for farmers to adopt sustainable practices.



Vets for Climate Action mobilises
the veterinary profession and
broader animal care community
to tackle the climate crisis
within and beyond our sector.



www.vfca.org.au

This has been approved by Steff Goldring, CEO of Vets for Climate Action.
References are available.