



**Veterinarians for
Climate Action**
A Voice for all Animals

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Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
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Dear Chair and committee members

**Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Climate Trigger) Bill
2022**

Climate change is an animal health and welfare issue. Animals hold no responsibility for the causes of climate change, yet they feel the consequences most strongly. Approximately 3 billion animals were killed or displaced by the 2019-20 bushfires, hundreds of thousands more killed by floods, and domestic pets suffer from heat stress each summer. Veterinary professionals and animal carers are on the frontline experiencing the impacts first hand.

Vets for Climate Action support the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Climate Trigger) Bill 2022 and present our reasons below.

1. There is a climate crisis.

The rising global temperature is causing environmental degradation, natural disasters, weather extremes, food and water insecurity, economic disruption, conflict, and terrorism¹.

¹ The Climate Crisis – A Race We Can Win | United Nations

In Australia, rain events are more extreme, the Great Barrier Reef is dying, oceans are warming and acidifying and forests are burning.

The CSIRO State of the Climate 2020 report states that Australia's climate has warmed on average by 1.44°C since national records began in 1910². The Paris Agreement is attempting to limit the world temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels³. Australia is already about there.

2. Fossil fuels produce the most emissions

Scientists agree that global warming is caused mainly by human activity and that emissions from fossil fuels, coal, oil and gas, are the dominant cause of global warming.

In 2021, Fatih Birol, executive director of the International Energy Association and one of the world's foremost energy economists, has said: "If governments are serious about the climate crisis, there can be no new investments in oil, gas and coal, from now – from this year"⁴.

Also in 2021, the United Nations Secretary-General, António Guterres, urged all countries, companies and financial institutions to commit to net zero or carbon neutrality, with 'clear and credible' plans to achieve the target, starting immediately⁵.

Yet Australia remains a major producer of coal and the second largest exporter of coal in the world. An analysis by the Sunrise Project, a climate activist group, found 13 greenfield coalmines and 14 extensions of existing mines have been referred to this federal government for assessment under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act⁶.

In August 2022, the Federal Minister for Resources announced the release of a further 10 sites for exploration for new oil and gas projects off the coasts of Victoria, the Northern Territory and Western Australia, totalling 46,758 square kilometres of Commonwealth waters⁷.

There is no hope or possibility of Australia meeting its climate targets if new fossil fuel sites continue to be approved.

² [State of the Climate - CSIRO](#)

³ [The Paris Agreement | UNFCCC](#)

⁴ [No new oil, gas or coal development if world is to reach net zero by 2050, says world energy body | Fossil fuels | The Guardian](#)

⁵ [UN chief urges 'clear and credible' plans to achieve net zero | | 1UN News](#)

⁶ [Labor faces decisions on approval of up to 27 coal developments including greenfield mines | Climate crisis | The Guardian](#)

⁷ <https://www.minister.industry.gov.au/ministers/king/speeches/speech-nt-resources-week-conference>

3. The EPBC Amendment Bill supports government progress on climate change

A month ago, the Climate Change Bill 2022 officially passed parliament and will, in due course, be enshrined in law.

Most importantly, it outlines Australia's greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets of a 43% reduction from 2005 levels by 2030 and net zero by 2050. The Minister for Climate, Chris Bowen was reported at the time as saying "Legislating these targets gives certainty to investors and participants in the energy market and will help stabilise our energy system."

However, the Climate Change Bill 2022 includes no measures to control emissions from private business and developments, including fossil fuel industries. Currently, a new coal, gas or oil development can get environmental approval without any consideration of their potential emissions and contribution to climate pollution.

The Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Climate Trigger) Bill 2022 will ensure that any new development will be assessed on their contribution to emissions and climate change.

It will stop new projects that would emit more than 100,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide a year and require the government to assess the climate effect of developments that would produce more than 25,000 tonnes.

This legislation will focus the minds of all private developers on reducing of carbon emissions from their business and limiting their contribution to pollution of the globe.

4. The EPBC Amendment Bill supports environment and wildlife protection.

Australia has the worst mammal extinction rate in the world. We risk losing more of Australia's unique species, as well as the life-supporting benefits they provide by contributing to biodiversity.

An Australian rodent in the Torres Strait Islands, the Bramble Cay melomys is the first mammal to become extinct due to climate change. Rising sea levels and storm surges are thought to have resulted in loss of habitat for this animal.

Earlier this month, the Minister for the Environment, Tanya Plibersek, announced that the federal government has set a goal to prevent any new extinctions of Australian wildlife.

However, statements about environment and wildlife protections are meaningless unless climate change is effectively addressed.

It is widely acknowledged that the EPBC Act is urgently in need of reform. The Minister for the Environment has said the government will respond to Graeme Samuel's review of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act 1999 by the end of the year. A key failure of the existing EPBC Act is the failure to effectively address climate change.

A Climate Trigger is essential as it will allow the Environment Minister to review or reject a proposal on the grounds that its greenhouse gas emissions are excessive and an unacceptable risk to the environment or the community.

Conclusion

This Bill will provide the only legislation in Australia that begins to control greenhouse gas emissions from private industry, including fossil fuel developments. It has the potential to significantly reduce emissions thereby assisting the protection of the environment, the safety of our people and communities and all the animals we value including Australia's unique wildlife.

About Vets for Climate Action

Vets for Climate Action is a national, not-for-profit, registered charity that aims to advocate for and achieve climate action within and beyond our profession.

Our members include veterinarians, vet nurses and animal carers who campaign for climate action out of concern for all the animals that are being hurt or killed by climate change. Our patron is Professor Peter Doherty, veterinary surgeon, Nobel Laureate and Australian of the Year in 1997. Thirty-three former Chief Veterinary Officers also publicly work alongside us.

We mobilise the veterinary profession, the animal care community and animal lovers to advocate for and take climate action. We deliver non-partisan pressure on governments to implement climate action.

We are evidence-based and informed by published scientific findings. Limiting the global temperature increase to 1.5C will reduce the challenging impacts of climate change on ecosystems, human (and animal) health and welfare, and all aspects of society. For that reason, Veterinarians for Climate Action support a target of reducing emissions by 75% below 2005 levels by 2030 and reaching net zero emissions by 2035.