

## Safe climate

### Policy Position Statement

**Key messages:**

A safe environment and climate are core determinants of human health and wellbeing, along with the socioeconomic and political structure of society.

Increasing anthropogenic disruptions to these systems are threatening their capacity to provide necessary ecological services upon which humanity survives and thrives.

This statement seeks to outline a series of principle and tangible actions designed to achieve a safe climate.

**Key policy positions:**

1. Action to ensure a safe climate, and a just, equitable and ecologically sustainable society, is a critical and urgent public health priority requiring evidence, advocacy and policy guidance.
2. Response measures must rely fundamentally on mitigation to restore a habitable climate. However, the inevitable ongoing and intensifying warming necessitates societal transition to adapt and prepare for the coming storms, floods, fires, heat, droughts, and sea-level rise.
3. Government should facilitate adaptation and provide active assistance to those least able to adapt on their own, such as transitioning to renewable energy and a low carbon economy, promoting energy efficiency, reducing energy demand, and pricing carbon.
4. Australia's public health community will initiate new and traditional public health actions promoting well-being, increased uptake of physical activity (active transport), improved community amenity (greenspaces), and healthier diets.

**Audience:**

Federal, State and Territory Governments, policymakers and program managers, PHAA members, media.

**Responsibility:**

PHAA Ecology and Environment Special Interest Group

**Contacts:**

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**Date adopted:**

29 October 2020

# Safe Climate

## Policy position statement

This policy position statement should be read in conjunction with the Safe Climate Background paper, and the following policy position statements: global warming, food system and food security; health effects of fossil fuels; ecologically sustainable human society; nuclear industry; low emissions and active transport; health equity; climate refugees.

### PHAA affirms the following principles:

1. A healthy well-functioning set of ecosystems and environmental and natural processes are fundamental to a healthy human society and the public's health.
2. Climate change is a health emergency. Action to ensure a safe environment and climate is a critical and urgent public health priority.
3. The effects of global warming are novel, far-ranging and complex, and require public health action beyond traditional approaches.
4. Responses to global warming needs to focus on mitigation, and include adaptation to the inevitable disruptions.
5. Society-wide transition to low carbon economy is required for the greater good, and this it is the government's role to lead, inform, regulate, monitor and enforce, and to motivate behaviour change by individuals and corporations.
6. The cost of production of material goods should be encapsulate cradle-to-cradle processing, and carry full costs of environmental remediation. Costs must not be externalised to the environment and borne by the general population as poor air, soil or water quality, in taxes or health costs, but should be incurred by the producers.
7. Australia must ensure its national food and water security, making these basic human rights accessible to all.

### PHAA notes the following evidence:

8. Australia is a signatory to the *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development* (1992) which enshrined sustainable development in international law.<sup>1</sup>
9. A safe environment is one that provides a healthy and biodiverse habitat to support humans and an ecologically sustainable complex industrial society. It is a core determinant of human health, alongside the socioeconomic and political structures of society. A safe environment provides clean air, clean fresh water, healthy soil and forests and a diverse and healthy diet.<sup>1</sup> A safe climate is a core component of a safe environment.

10. Collectively, human actions have disrupted Earth's geophysical and climatic systems and the ecological services which comprise our core environmental health determinants. This is unprecedented for Homo Sapiens.
11. Average global land and sea temperatures have risen 1.1° since the pre-industrial era, and is accelerating with climate disasters on every continent.<sup>2,3</sup>
12. This complex novel problem presents an existential threat to human survival, making it different to, and more urgent than, previous public health issues. Insufficient mitigation action, nationally and globally, now render global warming and climate disruption a Public Health Emergency.
13. Global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from fossil fuels, industry and land-use change continue to rise, by 1.3% in 2019, meaning that we are not on course to achieve the 2015 Paris Agreement which aims to limit the increase in global average (land and ocean) temperatures to below 2°C, and ideally under 1.5°C.<sup>4</sup>
14. Australia's total emissions are 14<sup>th</sup> globally, and per capita are the highest in the OECD.<sup>5</sup>
15. Australia is ranked 174<sup>th</sup> out of 180 countries on the Sustainability Index, primarily on lack of securing a safe climate for the world's children.<sup>6</sup>
16. The impacts of global warming are already visible on all continents. Australia is enduring increasing catastrophic climate related events of heat waves, droughts, floods and the most recent 2019-2020 unprecedented bushfires.<sup>7</sup> Australia's rainfall variability will increase (longer dry spells and heavier rain events), threatening water supplies and agriculture.<sup>8</sup>
17. Low carbon technologies, offer cheaper and healthier alternatives. Geoengineering techniques cover a broad set of technological interventions, all of which are theoretical or experimental, hence significant doubts exist as to their capacity to safely offset emissions without creating damaging consequences. They may also distract from efforts to reduce emissions.
18. Implementing this policy would contribute towards the achievement of [UN Sustainable Development Goals 3 – Good Health and Wellbeing](#) and [13 - Climate Action](#).

### PHAA seeks the following actions:

1. Australia needs to develop an integrated and comprehensive suite of policies to promote development of renewable energy, energy efficiency and energy demand reductions to drive the transition from a fossil fuel based economy, and to initiate policies to promote their uptake.
2. Progressively redirect subsidies currently going to fossil fuel energy and fossil fuel dependent transport sectors, towards low/zero emissions transport options across the private, public and commercial fleets, and actively promote active and public transport.
3. Funding for research in renewable energy and energy storage modalities should be maintained or increased.
4. Australia's international climate policies should be strengthened and extended to ensure that actions undertaken in Australia do not increase emissions internationally.
5. Disallow construction of any new coal-fired power stations or coal mines.

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6. Regulate for emissions limitations on all emission sources including transport, housing, agriculture, and industries.
7. Support and assist employees to transition from fossil-fuel economy jobs into alternative employment, with focus on communities simultaneously affected, such as by mine closures.
8. Support and fund campaigns for decreased consumption of meats and products of animal agriculture.
9. Raise public awareness of the health and climate harms of policies that promote fossil fuel extraction, burning, usage and exports.
10. Protect, preserve and restore forests, productive agricultural land and native vegetation and promote agricultural stewardship of land that includes carbon biosequestration and ecosystem restoration.
11. Fund social marketing campaigns that explain the action being taken to reduce global warming and climate change risks, and to elicit community support for the necessary behavioural changes to achieve this.
12. Promote urban housing and urban landscape design to ensure thermal comfort and reduce energy demand.
13. Develop and implement a humane and compassionate policy for refugees dislocated by climate change impacts, particularly from the Pacific Small Island Developing States.

### **PHAA resolves to:**

14. Advocate for the above steps to be taken based on the principles in this position statement.
15. Provide leadership to promote a positive vision of a viable, healthier and ecologically sustainable society with an economic system that prioritises health and wellbeing.
16. Inform the public, health professional and policy makers of the adverse health and social impacts of fossil fuel developments, including unconventional gas extraction and coal mining, combustion and export.
17. Actively encourage PHAA, its members, and others to reduce fossil fuel and animal product consumption.
18. Work collaboratively with other organisations.

**First ADOPTED 2010, revised 2013, 2014, 2017 and 2020**

## References

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2. IPCC. Summary for Policymakers. In: Climate change 2013: The physical science basis. Contribution of Working Group 1 to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [Stocker, T.F., D. Qin, G.-K. Plattner, M. Tignor, S.K. Allen, J. Boschung, A. Nauels, Y. Xia, V. Bex and P.M. Midgley (eds.)]. Cambridge, United Kingdom and New York ,NY, USA: Cambridge University Press; 2013.
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8. Dey R, Lewis SC, Arblaster JM, Abram NJ. A review of past and projected changes in Australia's rainfall. *WIREs Climate Change*. 2019;10(3):e577.