The Hon. Mark Butler MP
Shadow Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Email: Mark.Butler.MP@aph.gov.au

6 November 2014

Dear Mr Butler

As you are aware, the Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) is recognised as the principal non-government organisation for public health in Australia and works to promote the health and well-being of all Australians. The Association seeks better health for all based on prevention, recognising the role of the environmental and social determinants of equity and health. Further the Association believes that a well-functioning ecosystem is fundamental to human health and prosperity.

We welcome the leadership that you continue to show on the issue of climate change, and most recently your response to the Fifth Assessment Report from the International Panel on Climate Change.

PHAA believes that a better outcome for health in relation to climate and energy policy will come from the ALP continuing to challenge the framing imposed by the government, and continuing to advise and educate the Australian public on the long term better options for the Australian economy - and for health - of transitioning our economy away from fossil fuels to renewable energy.

The CSIRO Fourth Annual Survey on Climate Change shows there is still strong public opinion that the Federal Government needs to act on climate change, some understanding about the need to act, and reasonable understanding about the possible effects of climate change. However people still rank climate change as a low order problem. This suggests that a strong leadership position on action on mitigation may lead to even greater support for government action.

Another important factor is the timing of heat related events this summer. If such extreme events occur, then people will be open to a clear, measured, reasonable-sounding call for direct government action, including maintaining the existing Renewable Energy Target (RET).

We welcome your ongoing efforts to dispel the myths being put forward by vested interests - and echoed by the Government – with clear, straight-forward messages to the public that in the medium or even short term renewable energy can help reduce energy costs. We recognise that the arguments about energy prices need to be placed within the broader context of mitigating climate change and maintaining the economy by protecting agriculture and other climate sensitive industries such as tourism.

PHAA is also concerned that the impact of further disruption to the renewable energy industry will be felt by the Australian economy for the next 20 years. We concur that it is also important to highlight these longer term secondary impacts so that Australians have a broader context in which to assess energy policy.
PHAA welcomes your efforts to reframe the current public discourse in a manner that reflects the fact that a sensible government looks after and leads on the environment as well as the economy, and develops a 21st century energy policy for Australia that builds renewable capacity. Leadership in advocacy is vital in building community understanding that our economic prosperity and our capacity to provide a fair and equitable society ultimately depends on the preservation of a healthy ecosystem.

We would welcome an opportunity to meet with you and/or your staff to discuss these matters further at your convenience.

Yours sincerely

Michael Moore
Chief Executive Officer
Public Health Association of Australia

Dr Peter Tait
Convenor
Ecology and Environment Special Interest Group
Public Health Association of Australia