

DEA Position Statement: Australian Federal Election 2018/19

Climate change is the most imminent and serious threat to human health this century. Increases in extreme weather events, increased temperatures, and environmental degradation have profound effects on human health and wellbeing. The economic, social and cultural costs of climate change over coming decades may surpass any previous human catastrophe. DEA calls upon our Australian politicians to act now to protect the health of present and future generations by developing and implementing policies and practices that mitigate climate change and aid our adaptation to the already unavoidable rise in global temperature.

DEA calls for:

- **The inclusion of respected climate science in policy development across all governmental agencies, and for all government policies and decisions to be consistent with and well informed by this expert advice.**
- **Effective, prompt, whole of government action to reduce national emissions, aiming for net zero carbon emissions at least by 2050, in line with the IPCC.**

Specifically including:

- **Effective, prompt, action to transition from fossil-fuel (coal and gas mining and combustion) to a mix of renewable energy sources; DEA does not support any new coal or gas mining.**
- **Adaptation strategies that have the joint benefits of reducing carbon pollution and encouraging improvements in physical activity and diet to aid human health.**
- **Effective, prompt action to ensure that air pollution from coal fired power and vehicles, which causes 3,000 deaths per year and extensive illness, is alleviated by development and implementation of revised air quality standards, in keeping with best practice international scientific opinion.**
- **The prompt adoption and implementation of an effective New Generation of Environmental Laws which will secure action to protect the environment and biodiversity; and ensure national action on climate change mitigation and adaptation has a sound scientific basis.**
- **Effective, prompt action to stop all land clearing and logging of old growth forests, and reform of the agricultural sector to ensure financing and sustainability of this important industry.**
- **Develop and implement national measures to reduce greenhouse emissions from our health care services.**

November 2018

DEA Scientific Committee

Prof Peter Doherty AC
Prof Stephen Leeder AO
Prof Lidia Morawska
Prof Hugh Possingham
Dr Rosemary Stanton OAM

Prof Stephen Boyden AM
Prof Michael Kidd AM
Prof Ian Lowe AO
Prof Peter Newman AO
Prof Lawrie Powell AC
Dr Norman Swan

Prof Emeritus Chris Burrell AO
Prof David de Kretser AC
Prof Robyn McDermott
Prof Emeritus Sir Gustav Nossal AC
Prof Fiona Stanley AC

BACKGROUND

Doctors have a direct and legitimate interest in advocating for government action to reduce the severity of climate change now and in the future. Every day, doctors are confronted with the health impacts of climate change, such as increased mortality and morbidity from heat waves, respiratory impacts from increasing bushfire frequency and severity, and increased risks to patients from vector-borne and other infectious diseases. In the interests of our patients for whom we have a deep moral and professional obligation to advocate, Doctors for the Environment Australia (DEA) calls for urgent, effective and well-delivered public policy and practice to address the mounting social, health and environmental effects of climate change.

Dr Maria Neira, World Health Organization (WHO) Director wrote in 2014 "*We know that climate change mitigation can yield substantial and immediate health benefits. It is time now to translate knowledge into action.*" Climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies are required across all federal government departments.

A recent poll conducted by The Lowy Institute found that the majority of Australians say, 'global warming is a serious and pressing problem' about which 'we should begin taking steps now even if this involves significant costs'. Almost all Australians (84%) say 'the government should focus on renewables, even if this means we may need to invest more in infrastructure to make the system more reliable' (The Lowy Institute Poll, 20 June 2018).

Australians and Australian communities are striving, but at times struggling, to adapt to the increasing risk of extreme weather events. There is often mutual advantage in approaches to address both climate change and ill health. For example, increased physical activity and carbon pollution reduction occurs with more walking, cycling and public transport use. Similarly, population dietary and agricultural strategies can meet the mutual challenges of climate change, and obesity and other chronic diseases. Urban greening to counter heat island effects and careful urban planning can help adapt against weather events as well as improve walkability and community wellbeing.

Similarly, doctors have a legitimate interest in the protection of biodiversity. Not only has biodiversity been shown to be important to human mental health, but recent research shows links between reduced biodiversity and increased frequency of allergies and auto-immune disease. Therefore, strong protection of Australia's biodiversity through legislation and well-resourced monitoring and compliance is critical to the health and welfare of current and future Australians. DEA partners with Places You Love, to advocate for environmental law reform to protect Australia's natural beauty and diversity.

DEA is an independent, self-funded, non-governmental organisation of medical doctors and students in all Australian States and Territories. Our members work across all specialties in community, hospital and private practice. We work to prevent and address the diseases – local, national and global – caused by damage to our natural environment. We are a public health voice in the sphere of environmental health with a primary focus on the health harms from pollution and climate change.

Primary References

1. The Lancet Countdown: Tracking Progress 17 on Health and Climate Change. 2017 Report.
2. Climate change: An opportunity for public health. Dr Maria Neira, WHO Director, Department of Public Health, Environmental and Social Determinants of Health (PHE) Commentary. 14 September 2014
3. Why Connecting With Nature Elevates Your Mental Health. Douglas LaBier Ph.D. Psychology Today Jan 8 2018
4. Lloyd's of London to divest from coal over climate change. The Guardian. Julia Kollewe. Mon 22 Jan 2018
5. Do economists all favour a carbon tax? The Economist. Sep 19th 2011 by R.A. WASHINGTON
6. Srinivas, Girish; Möller, Steffen; Wang, Jun; Künzel, Sven; Zillikens, Detlef; et al. Genome-wide mapping of gene-microbiota interactions in susceptibility to autoimmune skin blistering. Nature Communications; London Vol. 4, (Sep 2013): 2462. DOI:10.1038/ncomms3462
7. Independent Review into the Future Security of the National Electricity Market 2018 Lowy Institute Poll 20 June 2018 (<https://www.loyyinstitute.org/publications/2018-lowy-institute-poll#sec35286>)

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