Submission: EPA's draft Climate Policy and Action Plan from Patsy Asch & Barbara Finch

1 November 2022

Thank you for making time for community members to respond to your draft EPA Climate Policy and Action Plan. I also want to commend you for acknowledging that you have a statutory duty to address climate change and regulate greenhouse gas emissions.

It is particularly important to me that you will now be regulating greenhouse gases as a form of pollution, as well as protecting the quality of the environment. It is fine for governments to set emission targets but without proper regulation and monitoring, it is an empty action. In making decisions you must look at the impacts for both mitigation and adaptation.

While my community so far has been spared from serious bushfires and floods, we have experienced severe drought and several tornadoes that destroyed houses and put people's lives at risk. However, it is changes like yours to Action Plans and implementation that lessen my despair and fear over the future of life on earth. The destruction of wild life habitat and the increasing rate of extinction, as well as the threat to human existence, should motivate us all to take stronger immediate action.

One significant way to rebuild trust and develop strong programmes is to consult widely among the communities significantly impacted in the last few years and to learn from them, rather than assuming a top down approach to policy. In serious emergencies, it is the people on the ground who respond, and who consequently have much to offer about what might better be done to protect people and the environment.

Your intention to partner with other organisations like DPE, is a great initiative. Similar partnerships with agencies responsible for Agriculture, should be encouraged to work collaboratively in developing responsible policies and implementation in the face of climate change. We need to embed mandatory climate change considerations into planning laws. Consultation and listening is important but we clarity on priorities and a committed time frame for actions within the next three years.

One of the first actions we need to take is to prohibit new gas or coal projects and to regulate existing projects to minimise emissions. This should be a consequence of your new obligations. All new projects must be evaluated on the basis of their potential climate impact, and existing projects need to

adhere to regulations. The time for you to act is now, not in the future. And the EPA must set strong scientifically based targets for emission reductions by key industries. But targets are not enough, there must be action and action that is regulated and rigorously monitored. To date, your draft proposal needs clearer, more ambitious strategies on how polluting industries will be regulated. Without clarity, it is difficult to imagine how best to rebuild after natural disasters, or how to imagine a more positive future. Climate change must be embedded in all regulatory activities and it must be mandatory.

It is significant, too, to provide clear pathways for assessing the ecological impacts of renewable energy projects, with particular emphasis on new transmission lines—impacts both on the environment through which they pass and their place in the transmission to a renewable energy economy.

The expansion of your statutory duties, if acted upon, will place the NSW EPA at the forefront of international environmental protection. We have almost run out of time to respond, so action is urgent. Without it communities that have been devastated by fires, floods and drought will lose all hope of re–establishing safe places to live and work. And Australia's actions on the global scene to minimise the impacts of greenhouse gas emissions will be a farce.

Patsy Asch & Barbara Finch
While this is a personal submission, We are members of Sustainable Living Armidale