



Brotherhood  
of St Laurence

Working for an Australia free of poverty

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Standing Committee on the Environment and Energy  
House of Representatives, Australian Parliament

### **Submission regarding inquiry into Climate Change (National Framework for Adaptation and Mitigation) Bills 2020**

#### **Summary**

The Brotherhood of St. Laurence supports the two Climate Change Act bills proposed by Zali Steggall, and believes they should be strengthened to protect people facing disadvantage, and to ensure that emissions budgets set through the Bills' framework are consistent with limiting warming to 2 °C, while pursuing efforts to limit it to 1.5 °C.

The Brotherhood of St. Laurence (BSL) welcomes this opportunity to comment on the Standing Committee on the Environment and Energy's inquiry into the two Climate Change (National Framework for Adaptation and Mitigation) Bills set to be introduced by Zali Steggall MP (henceforth 'the Bills').

Australia must lower our emissions in line with global efforts to limit warming to 2 °C, and pursue efforts to limit it to 1.5 °C by 2050. To achieve this, Australia must reach net zero emissions by 2050 at the latest. It is essential that the transition to net zero is fair for all, particularly people facing pre-existing disadvantage.

Australia must also act to increase our resilience against climate change, as climate change is already here and will get worse until we achieve a sustained reduction in global greenhouse gas emissions. Australia is particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change: much of the nation faces nearly an extra month of dangerous fire days every year (CSIRO & Bureau of Meteorology 2020), and the 2019/20 bushfires showed that we are unprepared for the risk we face. Beyond fire, Australia can expect longer and more severe droughts but more intense rain events, increased illness and death from heatwaves, rising sea levels, more frequent and intense floods, and over \$4 trillion of losses to labour and agricultural productivity in Australia by 2100 (CSIRO & Bureau of Meteorology 2015; IPCC 2018, 2014; Climate Council 2019). The last decade was hotter than any other in the last century, but is likely to be the coolest that anyone currently living will experience (CSIRO & Bureau of Meteorology 2020).

People who are already facing disadvantage are likely to be particularly badly affected by climate change, because they lack the resources to adapt to – or recover from – extreme weather, disasters or societal changes, including those necessary to avoid climate change. Others may be pushed into disadvantage as a result of the direct impacts of climate change or a failure to adequately plan and resource a transition to a

zero-carbon economy. This may mean living in a bushfire-prone area without home insurance, being an older person who is susceptible to heat but unable to afford cooling, being employed as an agricultural worker in a region impacted by climate-change-induced water stress, or working in a field like coalmining that must change or cease existing to lower emissions.

Importantly, if we step up to the challenge of reducing emissions, there are huge employment and industrial opportunities in the transition, as identified by Ross Garnaut and others. Harnessing these opportunities and combining them with a well-resourced and planned approach to adaptation and building resilience has the potential to spur a new era of prosperity and reduce disadvantage in Australia. However, it won't happen without appropriate support from government.

### **The BSL supports the Climate Change (National Framework for Adaptation and Mitigation) Bills**

The BSL supports the Bills because they provide a strong, non-partisan framework through which Australia can take meaningful action on climate change, and because the people we work with will be negatively impacted and unable to thrive without such action.

Australia will need such a framework when we commit to lower our emissions to net zero by 2050, and the time to for the Commonwealth to commit is now: all Australian states have already committed, as have the European Union, the United Kingdom, the United States under Biden, and Japan. Aside from the moral necessity of avoiding climate change outlined above, failing to act will tie Australia's economy to yesterday's jobs instead of tomorrow's, which will reduce our prosperity, especially for vulnerable people.

The bills are similar to legislation that has worked effectively in the UK and Victoria, and would not dictate the government of the day's policy choices. Rather, they would enable successive governments to work within a shared framework while acting upon independent, expert advice, much as governments work on the advice of the Reserve Bank.

While the BSL supports the Bills, we believe they should nonetheless be strengthened as outlined below.

### **The Bills should be strengthened to protect people facing disadvantage**

It is not enough for Australia's climate transition to be ambitious and timely – it must also be fair to people facing disadvantage and poverty. While we are heartened to see that the Bills' guiding principles include equitable action and a fair employment transition, we believe the Bills should go further by requiring the Climate Change Commission to ensure the voices of people experiencing disadvantage are included in the debate.

### **Emissions budgets should be in line with limiting climate change to 2° or 1.5° C**

Although the main Bill references limiting climate change to 2 ° and 1.5 °C in its objectives, we recommend that it explicitly requires decisionmakers to set emissions budgets with reference to those temperature limits. This will avoid any doubt in interpretation of the bill.

For further information about this submission, please contact: Damian Sullivan (e: [dsullivan@bsl.org.au](mailto:dsullivan@bsl.org.au) m: 0405 141 735) or David Bryant (e: [dbryant@bsl.org.au](mailto:dbryant@bsl.org.au) ph: 03 9483 2470).

Yours sincerely,

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