

Chair
Portfolio Committee No 7 – Planning and Environment
Legislative Council
Parliament House
Macquarie St Sydney NSW 2000

24 October 2023

Submission to Inquiry into the Climate Change (Net Zero Future) Bill 2023

Thank you for providing this opportunity to make a submission to the above inquiry. I am doing so on behalf of the Central West Environment Council (CWEC). The organisation which I represent is a combination of environmental groups from centres throughout the Central West of New South Wales. All groups are active in their support for policies and initiatives designed to reduce our carbon footprint and to work towards achieving zero emissions for New South Wales.

Several CWEC member groups have had a long association with the environmental impacts of coal mining. The current Bill does little to alleviate their concern about continued emissions from the mining of fossil fuels in their areas or in the rest of the state. At present there are 13 proposed coal mine expansions for New South Wales. If approved, they will be responsible for more than 2 billion tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions. An example of such coal mine expansion is that of the Hunter Valley Operations. It is essential that such projects be halted if the New South Wales government is to seriously take action to address the issue of carbon emissions in New South Wales.

In the Western Coalfields area there are current proposals to expand the Angus Place West Coal Mine at Lithgow and the Ulan, Moolarben and Ulan Coal Mines in the Mudgee Region. The methane emissions from these mines are substantive and not being managed. The Mudgee mines have approvals to produce up to 58 million tonnes of coal per year until 2038. There should be no more coal produced in the region beyond that date.

The Independent Energy Agency has recommended no more extraction of fossil fuels if the agreement to keep global warming to 1.5 degrees is to be met. Global temperatures are already at or above that target with the demonstrable social, environmental and economic disruptions occurring at an ever increasing rate. We strongly urge the NSW Government to scrap the Barilaro ‘Strategic Statement on Coal’ and to enter into effective just transition programs in the state’s coal regions.

The Central West has experienced significant impacts from extreme weather events over the past 5 years from the most intense drought on record to the largest floods on record with major bushfires in between. Our communities have suffered greatly from these life threatening events and we are now entering the next severe drought conditions. The royalties from the coal industry do not cover the economic, social and environmental impacts of current extreme weather events, let alone from future worsening events due to the rapidly changing climate conditions.

We support the establishment of a Net Zero Commission. If the NSW government efforts to achieve its emissions reduction targets are to be successful, it is essential that there is established such a regulatory body that can monitor and report progress. Additionally, it should have the power and capacity to provide advice on all new emissions intensive developments such as the above fossil fuel projects. The Net Zero Commission needs to be backed up by a strengthened Climate Change Bill and a more appropriate emissions target set to achieve the existing target of 70% emissions reduction by 2035. This target is supported by science and has received strong support by the NSW Parliament. To meet our commitment to the Paris Agreement to limit global warming to below 1.5 degrees we must start with appropriate targets based on science and supported by genuine political will.

CWEC is concerned that the Climate Change (Net Zero Future) Bill 2023 has removed this important target and downgraded the state aspirations to 50% reduction by 2030. The agreed 70% reduction target by 2035 should be included as a next step.

Another important role for the commission is that of reviewing and ratchetting up of emissions targets at regular intervals between now and 2050. There should be a regular inventory of progress accompanied by specific strategies for maintaining momentum for the reduction of fossil fuel production and consumption based on current scientific data.

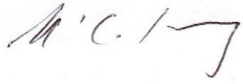
The Bill should not be considered as legislation unconnected to other laws. There should be a legislated requirement for action on climate change to be a core feature of all Government decision making. Requirements for the inclusion of climate action and policy should be mandatory for all future government policy and action.

Another function of the Commission should be to audit government agencies and departments to identify opportunities to reduce their emissions. Associated with this approach should be the scrapping of government policies and initiatives that are in direct contravention of any emissions reduction policies. Examples of this are the approval of new coal mining projects, and the continuation of native forest logging.

In summary, CWEC supports the principle of legislating climate targets and establishing a commission. However, if the establishment of legislated carbon targets and the function of a Net Zero Commission is to be successful, it must initiate action consistent with science based targets and have the capacity to legislate against any current or future policies and practices that directly or inadvertently impact on carbon reduction.

The window of opportunity for real action on carbon is rapidly closing. The Climate Change Bill and a Net Zero Commission represents a chance for NSW to make a significant contribution to the Paris Agreement. We must not waste it.

Your sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'N. King', written over a faint circular stamp.

Nick King
President, Central West Environment Council