

15 September 2023

The Honourable Chris Bowen MP
Minister for Energy and Climate Change

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Cc: Ged.Kearney.MP@aph.gov.au, Josh.Burns.MP@aph.gov.au, MarkButler.MP@aph.gov.au

PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister,

It's time for Australia to declare a climate emergency.

As you may recall, in October 2019 the Hon Mark Butler MP, in his role as Shadow Minister for Climate Change and Energy, lodged a climate emergency motion on behalf of Labor. Unsurprisingly, members of the Morrison Government and some crossbenchers voted against the motion and it did not pass.

When the Labor Government was elected in 2022, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said:

"We have an opportunity now to end the climate wars in Australia. Australian businesses know that good action on climate change is good for jobs and good for our economy, and I want to join the global effort."

In July 2022 at the Pacific Islands Forum, our Prime Minister was one of 16 leaders who signed a climate emergency declaration, and commented that:

"The world's climate emergency is the Australian opportunity... We could be a renewable energy superpower for the world if we just seize that opportunity."

Recently, your colleague Josh Burns MP acknowledged both the leadership role that local government has played in Australia by recognising the climate emergency, as well as "the urgency required for us to act."

Australia is the home of the climate emergency movement. The Hon Ged Kearney MP recently lauded Darebin City Council in her own electorate, which was the first council in the world to declare a climate emergency. Ms Kearney highlighted the role that Darebin's declaration played in "instigating that movement, where hundreds of local governments now have declared a climate emergency."

Climate Emergency Australia (CEA) represents councils around Australia that have declared a climate emergency. We facilitate a network of over 350 local government officers who communicate daily about getting on with the task of responding to the climate emergency. Across Australia 115 councils have declared a climate emergency, as have the South Australian Government and the ACT Government.

CEA was heartened by the commitment to and understanding of the challenge outlined in your Annual Climate Change Statement to Parliament in December last year, when you said:

"It is too late to avoid the climate emergency. It is our job to act with urgency to avoid the worst of the emergency. But I am also hugely optimistic about our future. Because the world's climate emergency really is Australia's jobs opportunity."

In March this year, you said:

"Nowhere is it more important to get things done than in the area of climate policy after 10 years of denial and delay."

Last month, Treasurer the Hon Dr Jim Chalmers MP, said upon the release of the Intergenerational Report:

"We can't be complacent about the future and where that complacency could be the most damaging is when it comes to climate change."

We welcome the positive steps already made by the Albanese Government in the past year. We also know that we still have a long way to go and that councils are ready to play our part in the solution. CEA is keen to work with you to engage, educate and empower the local government sector.

As you know, July 2023 was the hottest month on record and Australia has just recorded its warmest winter.

Every year, with alarming and increasing frequency, councils and communities are grappling with fires, floods, droughts, storms, heatwaves and other disasters. Around the world, more than 2,300 jurisdictions have declared a climate emergency. Climate action in Australia has been held back by the lack of coordination at state and federal levels, and by the resulting fragmentation of policy, funding and resourcing.

We are in a climate emergency, as you have acknowledged. It's time for all levels of government to recognise this emergency, and to respond with the necessary scale, speed and coordination.

As the Executive of CEA, we are writing to ask you now, as the Minister for Energy and Climate Change, to take the next step and declare a climate emergency in the Parliament of Australia. In so doing, we request that you acknowledge explicitly the role of, and reinforce the need for, all levels of government to work together to solve this crisis.

A governance framework that empowers all levels of government through effective coordination and collaboration is essential if we are to meet our shared aspirations for an Australia that is sustainable and liveable for both current and future generations.

If Australia truly wants to "join the global effort," declaring a climate emergency will define a new era of climate policy and action in Australia and let our councils know they have the backing of their federal government.

Will you join us?

Climate Emergency Australia Executive:

Councillor Trent McCarthy, Darebin City Council, VIC
Councillor Brian Stockwell, Noosa Shire Council, QLD
Councillor HY William Chan, City of Sydney, NSW

Mayor Karen Redman, Town of Gawler, SA
Councillor Jason Modica, Mildura Rural City Council, VIC
Councillor Alida McKern, Banyule City Council, VIC