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Australian Government  
Department of Industry, Science, Energy and the Environment

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Dear Sir or Madam

### **Consultation Process for The Gas Fired Recovery Plan**

We thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Gas Fired Recovery Plan announced by the Prime Minister, Scott Morrison to help re-establish a strong economy in the recovery from COVID-19.

Veterinarians for Climate Action [1] is a national, not-for-profit, registered charity that aims to advocate for and achieve climate action within and beyond our profession. Veterinarians care for animals and deliver knowledge and practical support to those who own and look after animals, whether pets, livestock or wildlife.

Our view is that the Gas Fired Recovery Plan should be scrapped without delay and we present our arguments below:

#### **Climate change is a scientific fact**

Veterinarians are scientists. Our work is evidence-based and relies on published scientific findings.

As a community we rely on science. It is the knowledge base on which all plans and strategies should be formulated. It should never be ignored, or made to magically vanish with the sleight of a political hand.

Scientific data on global warming and consequential climate change has accumulated over decades, is constantly updated and readily available. Nevertheless, it seems necessary to summarise the most important facts here.

The CSIRO State of the Climate 2020 report [2] states that Australia's climate has warmed on average by 1.44°C since national records began in 1910. The Paris Agreement [3] is attempting to limit the world temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.

Australia is already about there! And is already experiencing the severe weather events associated with climate change.

The Cape Grim Baseline Air Pollution Station (a joint responsibility of the Bureau of Meteorology and CSIRO), located at the northwest tip of Tasmania, is a **key world site** for measuring greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. They report that the levels of carbon-dioxide, nitrous oxide and methane in air samples at Cape Grim are steadily increasing [4].

Rising sea-levels, a response to increasing concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, contribute to coastal erosion and inundation of low-lying coastal regions and islands, with a particular impact on the people living in those areas. Sea levels are predicted to continue rising [5].

Veterinarians for Climate Action believe that everything we do from now on, whether as individuals or as governments, including economic recovery following COVID-19, must take climate change into account.

### **Gas is a fossil fuel**

Natural gas is a fossil fuel alongside coal and oil. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has found that emissions from fossil fuels are the dominant cause of global warming. In 2018, 89% of global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions came from fossil fuels and industry [6].

Natural gas as a fuel is mostly made up of methane. Methane is the second-most important greenhouse gas after carbon dioxide and a key driver of climate change. Greenhouse gases are released into the atmosphere at all stages of the natural gas industry, during the production of gas, as fugitive emissions and during the energy intensive process of liquefying gas for export [7].

When the world is attempting to reach zero net gas emissions as fast as possible, Australia should not be investing millions in a Gas Fired Recovery Plan that will have the effect of increasing greenhouse gas emissions and will inevitably become obsolete as the country moves to renewable energy.

### **How good is renewable energy!**

State and Territory governments are leading the transition to renewable energy. Tasmania has become one hundred per cent self-sufficient in electricity generated from renewable sources, largely wind and hydro. South Australia and the ACT are close behind that achievement and every State and Territory has committed to a net zero emissions target [8].

The Australian continent has the highest solar radiation per square metre of any continent and consequently some of the best solar energy resource in the world [9]. Household and business owners have been investing in solar energy for decades, fixing solar panels to their roofs to contribute renewable energy to the grid. In the last couple of years there has been a surge in roof and ground mounted photo voltaics and Australia now leads the world in solar per capita, at 600W/person with Germany a close second at 580W/person [10].

There are over 100 operating hydroelectric power stations in Australia [11]. And now the power of the sea is being explored as an energy source. CSIRO reports their research shows

wave energy could contribute up to 11 per cent of Australia's energy (enough to power a city the size of Melbourne) by 2050, making it a strong contender in Australia's renewable energy mix [12].

Wind power is currently the cheapest form of large-scale renewable energy. For the first time, wind overtook hydro as Australia's leading source of clean energy in 2019 supplying 35.4 per cent of the country's clean energy and 9.5 per cent of Australia's overall electricity [13].

One of the biggest criticisms of renewable energy has been that the output of wind and solar farms is variable depending on the weather and time of day. But technology has already resolved that through storage solutions. The Hornsdale Power Reserve in South Australia is the largest lithium-ion battery in the world, and is providing essential grid-support services [14]. Pumped hydro energy storage can utilise surplus energy to pump water from a lower dam to a higher one, essentially converting the upper reservoir into a giant battery.

Another argument raised against renewable energy has been that it is more expensive. However, a report last year from the International Energy Agency stated that renewable energy costs have dropped and are increasingly below the costs of conventional fossil fuel generation [15].

There is genuine concern that, in moving from traditional fossil fuels to renewable energy, people employed in the coal and gas industries will lose their jobs. That will happen. But it is also a fact that new jobs will result from the green economy in all areas of employment, from building and maintaining wind or solar farms to sustainable construction designers, energy efficiency consultants and other specialised professionals. The United Kingdom has a Climate Change Act and a net zero emissions target. With that has come a surge of "green jobs" with London ranking 6th globally for its concentration of sustainability professionals, according to new data from LinkedIn, the world's largest professional network [16].

There are significant rewards for Australia in transitioning to renewable energy. Once the Federal Government matches the leadership shown by State and Territory governments, climate technology and industry will really take off. Innovative technology will be exportable to other countries, increasing the gross domestic profit. Carbon taxes currently threatened by other greener countries to which Australia sends exports, will no longer be a threat. And last but by no means least, Australia as a whole will be seen by the world as contributing to climate action instead of dragging its feet. There will be respect for this country instead of the current disrespect.

## **Conclusion**

Veterinarians for Climate Action see a bright climate future for this country built on the hopes and expectations of its people, the research delivered by scientists and the technological creativity of industrialists.

In this post-Covid recovery period, we recommend the Australian Government does the right thing, that it scraps its gas fired recovery plan and replaces it with a strategy for a green economy increasingly powered by renewable energy.

## More Information

- 1 Veterinarians for Climate Action, <https://www.vfca.org.au/>
- 2 Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation, *State of the Climate* <https://www.csiro.au/en/research/environmental-impacts/climate-change/state-of-the-climate>
- 3 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, *The Paris Agreement* <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement>
- 4 Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation, *Latest Cape Grim Greenhouse Gas Data* <https://www.csiro.au/greenhouse-gases/>
- 5 Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation, *Future Sea Levels* <https://research.csiro.au/slrwavescoast/sea-level/future-sea-level-changes/>
- 6 Client Earth, *Fossil fuels and climate change: the facts* <https://www.clientearth.org/latest/latest-updates/stories/fossil-fuels-and-climate-change-the-facts/>
- 7 Climate Council, *Why is gas bad for climate change and energy prices?* <https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/resources/why-is-gas-bad-for-climate-change-and-energy-prices/>
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- 9 Australian Government – Geoscience Australia, *Solar energy* <https://www.ga.gov.au/scientific-topics/energy/resources/other-renewable-energy-resources/solar-energy#heading-2>
- 10 Australian Energy Market Operator, *Standards evolve to support a secure and reliable electricity grid as solar PV continues to grow* <https://aemo.com.au/newsroom/news-updates/aemo-welcomes-revised-inverter-standard>
- 11 Australian Government – Geoscience Australia, *Hydro energy* <https://www.ga.gov.au/scientific-topics/energy/resources/other-renewable-energy-resources/hydro-energy>
- 12 Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation, *Wave Power in Australia* <https://www.csiro.au/en/research/natural-environment/oceans/Wave-energy>
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- 14 Hornsdale Power Reserve, <https://hornsdalepowerreserve.com.au/>
- 15 International Energy Agency, *Projected Costs of Generating Electricity 2020* <https://www.iea.org/reports/projected-costs-of-generating-electricity-2020>
- 16 Onrec, *LinkedIn: Data reveals the UK is hotspot for green jobs* <https://www.onrec.com/news/statistics/linkedin-data-reveals-the-uk-is-hotspot-for-green-jobs>