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**Submission Of: ClimActs**

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What is your submission based on? I am making this submission based on my professional knowledge, qualifications or experience or on behalf of a group or organisation

What is your area of professional expertise?

If you are lodging your submission on behalf of a group or organisation, what is the name of the group or organisation? ClimActs

### Your Submission

In your experience, what areas of the bushfire emergency response worked well?

In the face of unprecedented danger, the sheer courage, determination, skills, spirit of collaboration and selflessness of people on the front line was astonishing and deeply humbling.

In addition to the extraordinary bravery and compassion shown by ordinary people under extreme circumstances, it was encouraging to receive outpourings of care and generosity in all forms from around Australia and from around the whole world. It was very moving to see firefighters from New Zealand and Fiji perform ceremonies to farewell affected communities, and the deaths of three firefighters from the US will forever weigh heavily on our hearts.

In terms of relative damage, it was fascinating and exciting to see that properties that had been treated with cultural burning were saved, even in badly affected areas. On the grounds that cultural burns use small fires lit with matches (instead of drip torches) and burn in a circular pattern that is cooler and slower moving (usually no higher than knee height)—which leaves tree canopies untouched and allows animals to take refuge from the flames—it would be enormously beneficial to have traditional custodians playing key roles in directing all procedures relating to 'caring for country'. That it's informed by thousands of years of traditional knowledge aside, by taking into consideration critical factors such as the soil types, geology, trees, animals (including breeding times), and plants (including flowering times) of a given area, cultural burning is grounded in sophisticated science.

In your experience, what areas of the bushfire emergency response didn't work well?

Given that tens of millions of dollars had recently been cut from NSW fire and rescue services, it's reasonable to suggest that emergency responses were seriously, dangerously compromised. And it's important to note that these decisions were made during a period of crippling drought.

Further to this, fire and emergency responders' capacities were compromised because warnings of the looming crisis by experts were wilfully ignored. A group of 24 veteran fire chiefs who requested a meeting with the Prime Minister (April 2019) in order to communicate the urgency of the situation claim to have been locked out of discussions because they have made public statements about the role of anthropogenic climate change in making bushfire seasons longer and deadlier.

According to the The Ecocide Project's report 'Ecocide is the missing 5th Crime Against Peace'\* (see reference below): 'the idea of expanding the 1948 Convention on Genocide led to an extensive inquiry by the United Nations as to how it could be improved, including the possibility of criminalising ecocide alongside genocide', dates back to the early 1970s. In the following decades through to the 1990s: 'making ecocide an international crime was also considered by the United Nations International Law Commission for inclusion in the Code of Crimes Against the Peace and Security of Mankind, which later became the Rome Statute.' The key question debated was whether or not ecocide should be a crime in peacetime and wartime? In other words, 'are the consequences of extensive destruction of ecosystems severe enough to warrant ecocide being a crime of strict liability regardless of the offender's intent?' Expressed another way, ecocidal industries have no excuse for claiming ignorance about the consequences of their actions.

For decades mounting expert, peer-reviewed evidence from all independent science agencies all around the world has been showing that human activities that emit greenhouse gas in to the atmosphere is: 1) directly causing global warming, and 2) that if humans fail to transition global economies to zero emissions while drawing down excess greenhouse gas emissions fast enough then human civilizations will collapse. The speed and scale at which greenhouse gas emissions are rising is like nothing the Earth has experienced before. We are in unthinkable terrifying territory.

In fact, it's as a direct result of policies that put the profits of ecocidal industries ahead of the lives of ordinary people, and those whose job it is to protect them, that communities on the front line of the climate crisis and resource conflicts are now so vulnerable. Given the unprecedented scale and intensity of the fires - having ravaged around 18.6 million hectares of land, burnt more than 1.25 billion animals to death as well as the natural habitats of survivors, and destroyed an untold number of ancient, sacred Aboriginal sites – it's truly a miracle that more lives weren't lost. Without sheer luck from some chance wind changes, Black Summer would have been even more deadly and costly.

Communication from the Federal government during the crisis was nothing short of appalling. As the sheer scale of the tragedy was becoming clear, it was shocking to discover that Australia's Prime Minister (the world's 5th highest paid leader, earning about seven times what an average Australian worker does) was on a holiday in Hawaii. As this was during a period when two volunteer firefighters, both with young families, lost their lives trying to protect the lives and properties of others, many Australians justifiably felt betrayed. This sense was heightened by what appeared to be considerable efforts made to keep this information a secret from the public, as well as by the fact that the

PM was clearly not rushing back to help lead the nation during this time of crisis.

The extent of disinformation during the Black Summer was the subject of widespread domestic and global condemnation, prompting numerous local and international 'fact checks'. In what can only be viewed as craven attempts to distract from the role of the climate crisis, prominent News Corp commentators aggressively denied scientific facts while spreading misinformation about land clearing and so-called 'politically motivated arsonists' which (using the hashtag #ArsonEmergency) were suspiciously quickly fuelled by armies of bots and trolls on social media. News Corp's coverage of Australia's fire crisis was so blatant that James Murdoch and his wife Kathryn were prompted to publicly call out Fox News and News Corp on the international stage for 'ongoing' climate denial. And yet, as far as we heard, this dangerous misinformation was ignored by Federal leaders, presumably for political purposes.

We are just beginning to come to terms with the loss of wildlife as a result of Black Summer. The list of seriously threatened and possibly extinct species is exhaustive and growing. Meanwhile, under cover of Covid-19, our Federal leaders are currently using their power to fast track more ecocidal coal and gas projects with a scheme to underwrite more fossil fuel power with \$1bn of Australian taxpayers' money. Just imagine how many renewable power, energy efficiency solutions and regenerative land projects that money could fund instead.

Logically, there is no room for socially exploitative and extractive industries in a 21st century economy. "Political donations" and "consultancies", and the revolving door of lucrative industry appointments for government decision makers are entirely incompatible with a healthy democracy and must be banned. Transitioning to a clean and fair economy capable of 'delivering for All Australians' requires electoral funding reform and measures to stamp out the covert and highly corrosive influence from mining and other heavily polluting industries (as well as from banks, weapons manufacturers, gambling, junk food, chemical and pharmaceutical companies, and developers). Game of Mates by Dr Cameron Murray and Paul Frijters provides a highly useful guide to cleaning up Australia's woefully failing socio-political-economic system.

\*'The Ecocide Project: Ecocide is the missing 5th Crime Against Peace' by Anja Gauger, Mai Pouye Rabatel-Fernel, Louise Kulbicki, Damien Short and Polly Higgins, published by The Human Rights Consortium in 2012

[In your experience, what needs to change to improve arrangements for preparation, mitigation, response and recovery coordination for national natural disaster arrangements in Australia?](#)

We must urgently address the factors causing the increasingly deadly natural disasters our nation is facing. Just as they are currently, in the face of the deadly Covid-19 pandemic, we need our leaders to listen to experts.

Australia is among the most polluting nations in the world on a per capita basis. If Scope 3 emissions from pollution generated by Australia's massive fossil fuel export industry (largely foreign owned) are counted then our contribution to global greenhouse gas levels increases by around three hundred per cent, at least.

By any measure this makes Australia's contribution to global warming appalling. Coming as it does from one of the richest, developed nations it's beyond obscene and deeply shameful. Australians deserve better than this. The global community deserves better than this. And it's not difficult to imagine that in the not too distant future Australia will face significant reparation payments for its role in hosting and championing ecocidal companies. It's also worth noting that, in addition to being largely foreign owned, mining companies operating in Australia are notorious tax dodgers.

More than ever, Australia's unique and precious wild places desperately need protecting and nurturing. For instance, Australia hosts 'the world's most carbon dense forests', which are also gravely endangered wildlife habitat and absolutely fundamental for water security, becoming even more precarious by the climate emergency. The exploitation and destruction of our forests for a quick buck — typically in the form of wood chips, building products or paper — is insane and must end. Now is the time to implement collaborative science-based programs guided by traditional custodians to actively rewild degraded ecosystems and restore them to health as quickly as possible.

Given that we have clean industry alternatives, there is no justification for business practices that poison everything. Fossil fuel companies (again, note, largely foreign owned) currently receive about US\$29bn of Australian taxpayers' money every year. That's a lot of public money going towards destroying our country. Meanwhile, reports show that just a fraction of that funding would generate a green energy revolution with enormous benefits to local communities and their natural environments. It goes without saying that in the interests of all Australians (and global citizens) it's the government's job to lead the critical transition away from ecocidal and antisocial industry practices towards socially and ecologically sustainable ones that underpin cleaner and fairer economies.

Many of the fire-affected areas already host socially and ecologically pro-active communities that could be more actively supported to become inspiring case studies to demonstrate how to rapidly transition local economies to be fairer and more sustainable. For instance, supporting the uptake of Regenerative Farming systems to heal nutrient depleted and degraded soils by building organic soil carbon. As a result, the water holding capacity, nutrient density and overall resilience of soils improves along with its capacity to draw carbon down from the atmosphere. And naturally the food grown in healthy soils is healthier and tastier. By seed-funding collaborative, community driven projects, governments could also play a key role in enabling urban communities that are seeking to reduce their ecological footprint to more directly support rural communities to draw down carbon, enrich soils and hence significantly improve the quality of food generally.

[Is there anything else you would like to tell the Royal Commission?](#)

For a short time, not so long ago, Australia led the world with effective policies to protect people and the natural world all lives depend on. Operating from mid 2012 to mid 2014— as a complementary suite of 18 bills informed by experts—Australia's Clean Energy Act was arguably the world's most effective climate and environment protection law at the time. Not only did Australia's emissions come down significantly and quickly but tens of thousands of new more sustainable jobs were created, and local economies benefited from hundreds of millions of dollars in new investment in the clean energy sector.

Unequivocal evidence of the fast and phenomenal success of the Clean Energy Act is arguably the reason why Australia's political discourse is now fever-pitch-reactionary-crazy. For, denying the climate emergency in the 21st century is one thing. Denying the mountain of evidence that the solutions to address the climate crisis doesn't create sustainable new jobs, better health and prosperity for local economies in ways that benefit all people and nature has demanded another ratcheting up of polluter propaganda.

So, the good news is that Australia already has proven legal infrastructure to address its critical vulnerabilities to natural disasters. What made the Clean Energy Act so effective was the willingness of the Gillard Government to establish the Multiparty Climate Change Committee (which was a Greens Party condition of support for Gillard) to be advised by experts. Currently, in response to Covid-19, we're witnessing effective collaboration and decisive decision making based on best available science. What is stopping this same approach from being taken with the

climate and extinction crisis? Perhaps a new precedent has been set and we will see progress that puts people and the environment ahead of profits for extractive and exploitative industries.

It's a fact that major advances in ecological science and sustainable technologies are enabling us to create everything we need to meet basic food, water, power, shelter, health and education needs necessary for healthy and happy lives in fair and sustainable economies at the local level on a global scale. Esteemed economics Professor Ross Garnaut, among many other globally recognised sustainable technology experts, argues that our nation has the capacity to become 'the superpower of the post-carbon world'.

For the sake of current and future generations it is vital that Australia join the world's nations to halt the rise of global greenhouse gas emissions and sequester legacy emissions as quickly as humanly possible. With its so-called 'advanced' status and enviable renewable energy resources (aka solar radiation and strong 'Roaring Forties' winds), Australia has no excuse for remaining one of the world's largest per capita polluters.

The unprecedented scale and intensity of the Black Summer gives us just a snapshot of our future if we don't take radical action to protect our communities by repairing the environment that all lives depend on. Guided by independent science, we must bring back policies designed to 1) drastically reduce greenhouse gas emissions; 2) transition our economy to clean, renewable energy sources supported by efficient distribution and storage systems, and 3) repair and regenerate damaged ecosystems using natural climate solutions that will create secure jobs and purpose in local communities.

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