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Submission to the Climate Change (National Framework for Adaptation and Mitigation) Bill 2020 and Climate Change (National Framework for Adaptation and Mitigation) (Consequential and Transitional Provisions) Bill 2020

November 2020

www.anglicare.asn.au

About Anglicare Australia

Anglicare Australia is a network of independent local, state, national and international organisations that are linked to the Anglican Church and are joined by values of service, innovation, leadership and the Christian faith that every individual has intrinsic value. With a combined expenditure of \$1.82 billion, and a workforce of 20,500 staff and 9,000 volunteers, the Anglicare Australia Network contributes to more than 50 service areas in the Australian community. Our services are delivered to 450,000 people each year, reaching over 1.33 million Australians in total. Our services are delivered in partnership with people, the communities in which they live, and other like-minded organisations in those areas.

As part of its mission, Anglicare Australia “partners with people, families and communities to build resilience, inclusion and justice.” Our first strategic goal charges us with reaching this by influencing “social and economic policy across Australia with a strong prophetic voice; informed by research and the practical experience of the Network.”

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Introduction

This submission outlines the Anglicare Australia Network's experience as it relates to supporting our communities and organisations to deal with the impacts of climate change. We write, above all, to testify to the Parliament both the strength and hope in our communities that can be delivered by addressing climate change via these Bills; and our fears if it is not passed.

Anglicare Australia believes that these Bills presents us with the chance to protect Australia from further global warming and help our communities to adapt and grow stronger. We know we need to resist being mired in the now – instead we must sharpen our focus on our future. It's not too late. We are capable of doing better. These Bills would enable us to do better.

Our Network knows from working with resilient, recovering, and thriving communities that everyone has something to offer. People want to contribute, to volunteer, to create new jobs and new ways of living in the places they love, regardless of their circumstances. They can only succeed if climate change is addressed bravely and urgently, and they are resourced to be part of the solution.

The risks of Australia not acting to help stop global heating are well known to us. Working directly with the communities that regularly face fires, floods and droughts, our Network knows how extreme weather events are intensifying in frequency and impact. We have seen first-hand how these events cause the loss of essential services and infrastructure like housing, jobs, and, tragically, lives. We know that the people who are most vulnerable suffer the most and have the least resources to adapt or recover. We cannot yet imagine all the ways climate change will affect us, and nor do we want to. We know enough already. We want governments to act, and lead.

Our Network members do not just serve their communities, they are part of them. Increasing natural disasters deeply hurt our staff, our volunteers, and our ability to deliver services to the people in our communities who need them. We are shock absorbers for the vulnerable, but there is a limit to how many shocks we can cope with.

If we act now, we can build community recovery, capacity and resilience – and a bright new future. These Bills would enable Australia to maximise positive change and go beyond climate change risk mitigation. It provides a path to rapidly lowering emissions, and a framework that allows us to learn from recent terrible disasters. It will enable us all to act on the seeds of possibility that could create inclusive, resilient communities. It is a brave step that will go towards protecting our communities and put the needs of vulnerable people at the heart of the changes we need.

Recommendations

Anglicare Australia supports the Bills in the strongest possible terms. We call for it to be passed.

We further recommend the adoption of the amendments put forward by the Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS) in their submission. They strengthen the Bills to put people who are most vulnerable at the heart of how we view the need for action, and how we then act.

What our experiences have taught us

Anglicare Australia Network members have been on the ground throughout recent natural disasters, such as fires, floods and droughts in Queensland, and the Black Summer fires across NSW, ACT, Victoria and South Australia. We have seen and lived through the devastating impacts of climate change and we want to make sure these disasters do not become the new normal. We want to see our communities resourced and helped to adapt to be sustainable and able to thrive.

The impacts of extreme disasters on communities

We are approaching one year since the Black Summer fires devastated communities across the south east coast and beyond, and people are struggling to rebuild their lives. People are traumatised and struggling with their long-term physical and mental health. The most vulnerable people are the ones hardest hit. These are people who have lost their homes, did not have insurance, have no saved assets and lived on precarious incomes. Many are falling through the gaps.

Below is a snapshot of one Anglicare Bushfire Recovery Coordinator's working day on the ground taken on 11 November 2020, many months after the fires. It gives voice to the most vulnerable and highlights the lasting cost of climate change disasters on people's lives. Names have been changed to protect privacy.

Met 'Mary' at the Showground who is volunteering in a community group. Mary, an ex-teacher in her 60's lost her home and is struggling to get a shed built so that she can move out of her caravan. She has always been an active community member but had to leave the event as she could not cope emotionally. She has not had a shower in a week, relies on purchased bottled water for drinking and washes her clothes at the showground.

Met with 'Tom'. He and his (now ex) partner lost their home and market garden on NYE... Tom and his partner have separated since the fires, so he does not have any land and Tom now lives in his car. Tom has not received assistanceand parks his car anywhere he feels is safe.

Met with some of the community project leaders. One became very emotional when she was talking about the grant timelines that are required to be met. She has worked tirelessly for 9+ months, in addition to managing her own business and rebuilding. She was not sure how much longer she could endure the pressure.

Met with 'Mark and Bev', who are both in their 80's. Their home was damaged, and their sheds and gardens all destroyed. They were insured, but the building company handling the repairs is in dispute with the insurance company and Mark and Bev's house only has half a roof. Every time it rains, their interior is further damaged. They were both active member of the community and are now both suffering with new significant health issues.

These snapshots capture the ongoing hardship for the most vulnerable people directly affected by Black Summer fires. Even those with insurance face deep uncertainty and years of recovery.

The people our members work with are deeply invested in rebuilding their communities. However, there is a real sense from our workers on the ground that some communities are facing serious challenges. Maintaining good mental health and social connection is increasingly difficult in a landscape where most of a community is affected, and many live now surrounded by beloved landscapes and natural places that may never recover. People who did not lose property to fire and have been helping others are now also exhausted and withdrawing socially. Some communities are fracturing given the workload and associated stress.

The small snapshot of the lived experience in the wake of the Black Summer bushfires shows us that the consequences of inaction on climate change are long term and devastating. We need to pass these Bills so that all Australians can work together to better adapt to and mitigate future climate disasters.

Impacts on service provision

The extremity of the 2019-20 bushfire season placed immense pressure on Anglicare Australia members servicing affected areas. It took an extraordinary toll on staff, systems and volunteers alike, stretching resources beyond capacity. Anglicare Australia has assisted our members by evaluating the impact and lessons from the Black Summer fires on their volunteers in NSW & ACT; and separately the value of place-based recovery support for affected communities.

Volunteers play a special role when natural disasters hit. Anglicare Australia's members support volunteers who are trained to provide disaster relief in emergency and evacuation centres. The extraordinary events that played out over the Black Summer meant that many volunteers had to undertake tasks they were not trained for, driven by immediate need and the absence of anyone else to undertake them. Volunteers found themselves assisting frail people from nearby residential aged care homes with personal care, moving large quantities of heavy goods, helping people find lost loved ones and dealing with broken communication systems. So many staff and volunteers were themselves affected by the fires that other staff and volunteers without training came in to help.

Black Summer exposed how vital community services are in times of crisis, and the price of chronic underinvestment in our role. We need more recognition and investment in adaptation and mitigation to stop climate change from getting worse, including recognition of the role of community services.

The impacts of climate change are not limited to these terrible fires. Increasingly frequent and intense natural disasters have caused the price of organisational insurance to skyrocket. Recently one of our member agencies, not impacted by Black Summer fires, faced a staggering 700% increase in insurance costs for the community housing they provide. If not for assistance from the state government, this essential community asset would not have been insurable or viable. As disasters increase, insurance costs are a major risk to the community sector being able to provide vital services such as residential aged care, housing and homelessness services, community facilities and out of home care housing. Many areas where we operate are teetering on becoming outright uninsurable.

We need these Bills to fundamentally shift how Australia faces climate change and adapts to the warming that is already locked in.

Communities want change

The Anglicare Australia Network experience also shows the strength of the people we work with, their communities and our staff. People are desperate for government leadership and support to help each town and region plan and implement their path to recovery. Place-based recovery and adaptation work is showing the possibilities, but to make it happen across the country national leadership is required. The words from dedicated community members in Cobargo shows that there is will for change in affected communities:

...I am part of a small team driving the proposal to establish the Cobargo Showground Community Centre/Bushfire refuge/Evacuation Centre, which is a disaster refuge. Well, it's a \$2 million project to build a new building there that will be bushfire resilient, able to be isolated, yet still run power in the event of another disaster and will be able to be stood up quickly as an evacuation Centre.

...I'm involved with a community group which we set up here called the Cobargo and Regional Energy Transition Group. We're working on the development of a major project to transition this area in the northern part of the Shire into renewable energy for resilience and security. So, we want more renewables in this area, but actually I just read the NSW Government wants to put a gas pipeline in the ground. I've just seen their regional development plan have no mention of renewables.... That whole document really has been put together without any community consultation... It's throwing out some very interesting questions for bushfire affected communities, in terms of how you actually perceive strategic development, rather than this sort of ad hoc thing that seems to be the way the government is approaching bushfire recovery.

Local job creation and co-design must be the new normal for community recovery, adaptation and future flourishing. People are resourceful, but they need structures and investment to create transitions, including new jobs for areas dependent on fossil fuel industry and logging.

The Bills offers a path to establish those resources and commitments. It puts in place the critically missing national leadership and investment to both ensure Australia reduces its emissions and prepares its communities to transition to a better future. We cannot wait any longer.

Conclusion

Our submission highlights the experience of communities living through the impacts of climate change, exploring the impact on those most vulnerable, and our own organisations and staff.

We do so to emphasise how urgent it is that the parliament pass these Bills. Climate change is not an abstract, distant threat to the people we work with, our organisation, or our staff. It is our daily reality, and we demand political leadership to address it. That leadership, in passing these Bills, can lay the path to a more hopeful, inclusive and a sustainable future for us all.