

CLEAN SA Submission: Climate Change Strategy for South Australia

CLEAN SA (Climate Emergency Action Network of South Australia) is a grassroots, Adelaide-based community climate action group that was established in 2008 as a response to the climate emergency. We aim to inform, educate, lobby and organise around issues relating to climate change, and to inspire the community to take collective action. CLEAN was instrumental in initiating the campaign in South Australia to replace the ageing coal fired power stations in Port Augusta with solar thermal energy.

We want to see a fair and just transition to a zero carbon economy in South Australia that creates jobs, reduces pollution and contributes to creating a safer climate for current and future generations.

We welcome this opportunity to contribute to the development of a climate change strategy for South Australia. We commend the South Australian government for initiating this process and for its overall support for wind and solar PV technology.

But while some progress has been made, much more must be done if South Australia is to show real leadership on climate action, and if the actions of our state are to meet the demands of climate science. In particular, CLEAN SA wishes to express concern at the support the state government provides to the fossil fuel industry, and at the enthusiasm the government has shown for expanding the unconventional gas industry.

Humanity faces a climate emergency, and urgent government action is needed. Global temperatures are rising at an unprecedented rate. In all, 14 of the 15 hottest years on record have occurred in the 21st century, and 2014 was the hottest of all.¹ Here in Australia, the 'Angry Summer' of 2013/2014 broke more than 150 weather records, a result which a Climate Council report found could be clearly attributed to climate change.²

Recent research published in the journal *Nature* revealed that globally, a third of oil reserves, half of gas reserves and over 80 per cent of current coal reserves will need to remain in the ground if we are to have any chance of meeting the widely agreed target of 2°C warming (a target that is problematic in itself given we are already seeing the impacts of climate change)³.

¹ World Meteorological Organisation, 'Warming Trend Continues in 2014', 2 February 2015, <https://www.wmo.int/media/?q=content/warming-trend-continues-2014>

² Climate Council of Australia, 'Angry Summer 2013/14', <http://www.climatecouncil.org.au/uploads/ff37af7492b4b698420c1aebdaed54a0.pdf>

³ McGlade, C & Ekins, P, 'The geographical distribution of fossil fuels unused when limiting global warming to 2°C', *Nature* **517**, 187-90, 8 January 2015, <http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v517/n7533/full/nature14016.html>

The Nature report called for 90% of Australia's coal reserves to remain unburned, and specifically warned against the exploration and extraction of new unconventional oil and gas reserves.

In these circumstances, allowing fossil fuel companies to continue exploration with a view to extracting oil, gas and coal in our state is irresponsible and reckless, and incompatible with the stated vision for our state to be a leader on climate action.

CLEAN SA recommends that as priorities for its climate change strategy, the South Australian Government adopt the three commitments detailed below:

1. Make solar thermal with storage at Port Augusta happen

As well as being a practical measure to address climate change, building solar thermal with storage at Port Augusta would create new jobs, alleviate health problems for the local community and situate Port Augusta as a global hub for this innovative and proven technology. It would also help South Australia re-establish a strong local manufacturing base, as Heliostat SA are demonstrating in their conversion of car manufacturing equipment to build heliostats for solar thermal plants.

The recent announcement that the remaining coal-fired power station in Port Augusta will shut down early in 2016 makes it especially urgent that an alternative, renewable energy industry should be developed in this region. The power station workers, who have provided power to South Australia for decades, deserve better than to be left stranded as a result of poor transition planning.

There is broad community support for this proposal, both from the Port Augusta community, who for years have been advocating for this transition, and also from the wider South Australian population. This was demonstrated by the Community Vote that was held in Port Augusta in 2012, and that saw an overwhelming majority favour solar thermal. The same year, the Rally for Solar gathered 2000 people in Adelaide to support the proposal. More recently, support has been demonstrated by the strong turnout at the 'Making Solar Thermal Happen' forum, hosted by the Repower Port Augusta Alliance, and by the attached photo collage (**appendix 1**) of community members calling on Premier Jay Weatherill and the SA state government to make solar thermal happen.

2. Commit to a moratorium and phase-out of fossil fuel exploration and extraction in South Australia

Any serious climate change strategy must address the main source of carbon emissions: the extraction and burning of fossil fuels. For South Australia to be among the world leaders in renewable energy is close to meaningless if our state simultaneously seeks out new unconventional gas sources and drills for oil in precious marine environments.

We call on the state government to put a stop immediately to shale gas exploration in the South East and oil exploration in the Great Australian Bight. Both these activities, if successful, will make unacceptably large contributions to global warming, while also destroying prime agricultural land and destabilising marine ecosystems respectively.

3. Plan for an urgent and just transition to 100% renewable energy and a zero carbon economy

The planned phase-out of fossil fuels must be accompanied by a just transition to 100% renewable energy generation. There are currently no technological barriers to achieving this, only political ones – and it is here that strong leadership and vision is required.

A range of reports now show that a renewables-only grid is entirely workable. Especially notable is a recent report by Associate Professor Mark Diesendorf, who has modelled a transition to 100% renewable energy specifically for South Australia⁴.

We call on the state government to set the target of 100% renewable energy, and to develop an urgent strategy to achieve this goal. It is shameful that our state currently has a Roadmap for Unconventional Gas Projects in SA, which will pose significant dangers to the climate, but does not have a comprehensive roadmap for moving towards renewable energy.

Planning for a zero carbon economy will require not only developing renewable energy technology and capacity, but also investing in public transport, energy efficiency and the transformation of our agricultural systems.

Fairness and justice must be at the forefront of this transition, with significant government investment provided for retraining and assisting workers in polluting industries, along with a strong social safety net for the people and communities most affected by this transition and by the impacts of climate change.

CLEAN SA also endorses the submissions made by the Australian Youth Climate Coalition, and the Repower Port Augusta Alliance, of which we are a member.

We welcome the opportunity to make this submission and would be happy to discuss these matters further.

⁴ Mark Diesendorf for Conservation SA, *100% Renewable Electricity for South Australia*, June 2015.