



Lawyers for Climate Justice Australia

13 August 2021

Statement on Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Working Group I Report

On Tuesday the IPCC released the first of four reports under its sixth assessment cycle with a drastic message: The window for action is closing fast. We must make deep, drastic and sustained cuts to our emissions now. It is likely that global temperatures will exceed 1.5 degrees within the next decade. 1.5 degrees is a tipping point for irreversible harm.

A surge in catastrophic fires, floods and droughts awaits us, and these will continue to worsen if we fail to act.

But the worst is not “baked in”. In a very-low emissions scenario, the temperature would likely rise over 1.5 degrees (of warming) for a few decades, then start reducing. However, even in the best scenario there will be catastrophic weather events that will disproportionately affect already disadvantaged people.

To quote Lesley Hughes from the Climate Council, “Every fraction of a degree matters because every fraction of a degree is doing us harm.”

Australia must reduce emissions 75 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030, and reach net zero five years later *by 2035 and before 2050, as originally understood. 2050 will be too late.*

The IPCC produces highly reliable, comprehensive reports that use the latest scientific modelling from the world’s foremost climate scientists.

This report arrives in the midst of the northern hemisphere experiencing devastating bushfires, floods and heatwaves. It comes three months before world leaders convene in Glasgow, Scotland to plan for the worst effects of climate change and to reaffirm their commitments to reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

The implications are clear: There must be zero tolerance for new fossil fuels. No new coal, oil and gas. Fossil fuels must be urgently reduced, not expanded.

In Australia, the government has again refused to commit even to the inadequate target of net zero by 2050 and turned the focus to the emissions of “developing countries”. Australia remains a very high per capita emitter, as well as major exporter of fossil fuels. Australia should use its wealth and position to become a climate leader, not a burden.

In an absence of leadership by lawmakers, Lawyers for Climate Justice Australia encourages lawyers, law students and the wider profession to consider what they can do personally and professionally to work towards a world where the most catastrophic outcomes are avoided.

This includes Australian lawyers whose work facilitates the creation of new coal mines, oil and gas fields that will contribute to the very worst climate outcomes. These projects remain legal under Australian law but it is increasingly obvious that they are morally untenable and are losing their social licence. Many more in the legal profession are still prohibited from discussing climate publicly by the restrictive policies of their employers. A more “climate-conscious” approach will be needed at all levels of the law if Australia is to play its part.

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#### SOME LINKS

<https://www.afr.com/policy/energy-and-climate/world-to-hit-temperature-tipping-point-10-years-faster-than-forecast-20210805-p58g7u>

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/aug/08/worlds-climate-scientists-to-issue-stark-warning-over-global-heating-threat>

<https://thewest.com.au/news/environment/un-to-release-latest-climate-report-card-c-3631363>

<https://theconversation.com/ipcc-says-earth-will-reach-temperature-rise-of-about-1-5-in-around-a-decade-but-limiting-any-global-warming-is-what-matters-most-165397>

Climate-conscious lawyering: [https://lec.nsw.gov.au/documents/speeches-and-papers/Preston\\_CJ -  
\\_Implementing a climate conscious approach in daily legal practice presented at UCL February 2020.pdf](https://lec.nsw.gov.au/documents/speeches-and-papers/Preston_CJ_-_Implementing_a_climate_conscious_approach_in_daily_legal_practice_presented_at_UCL_February_2020.pdf)