

HOPE's response to the recent IPCC climate disruption report of early August 2021

By Andrew Nicholson, HOPE senior researcher Qld, 15 Sept 2021

The recent UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) [Physical Science Basis](#) report, published in early August 2021, has sounded a [code red](#) emergency warning on the urgent and vital actions required to tackle, effectively, the increasingly dangerous threats posed to human and other species health and wellbeing by human generated, global heating and climate disruption. The report is an amazing collaborative scientific effort and contains the most serious, scientifically validated assessment yet of the global climate predicament we now face. We have brought this [existential threat](#) upon ourselves through serial inaction and over [decades of lost opportunity](#).

At this momentous time of increasing concern for the future climate safety of humanity and the natural world, HOPE builds upon its past work in community climate change engagement, to add its voice to a growing call from Australian citizens, the business, not-for-profit and health sectors, and from those progressive and responsible governments here who understand the scale of the threats we face, and the intensity and urgency of the actions needed to address them, starting yesterday.

The IPCC report has helped further refine our understanding of the type of world we and future generations will experience as the century progresses, unless we [drastically reduce](#) all greenhouse gas emissions, [stop new fossil fuel developments](#), move rapidly away from [an increasingly unviable](#) carbon based economy to one [powered by renewable energy](#), provide [a just transition for those workers](#) displaced by such changes; and [develop climate change adaptation plans](#) to help protect our citizens from the worst effects of locked-in temperature increases we now know will be experienced [for decades to come](#).

The IPCC report reinforces the notion that we are now at the head of crossroad paths, to either an increasingly unliveable future, or one in which we achieve a more climate safe, ecologically healthier, socially fairer, and economically prosperous global culture. This latter path is a vision of a truly sustainable world which, surely, we must achieve. A wide ranging set of objectives for its achievement have been set out for a number of years now within the [Sustainable Development Goals](#).

There is much at stake, and over the last few years we have had a shocking foretaste of how climate disruption will play out if we do not undertake transformative action. Around the world, we have witnessed unprecedented levels of intensified weather events [made much more likely](#) by human caused global heating. These include extended droughts, intensified heatwaves, associated bushfires, and catastrophic flooding. In Australia.

To give one Australian example of these trends, the 2019 – 2020 bushfire season killed or impacted the physical and mental health of many people here. It also destroyed millions of hectares of natural areas, [billions of native animals](#) and total financial costs may be of the order of [\\$100 billion dollars](#), which will make this Australia's most devastating economic and ecological disaster to date..

Amidst the doom and gloom on climate disruption, however, we also know that an alternative, exciting, climate safer, [genuinely sustainable future is possible](#); and that we already have [the vision](#), the low and [net zero carbon technologies](#), and the strategies to achieve [millions of jobs](#) in new renewable energy and low emissions sectors of a transformed economy.

One of the key factors holding us back from a more rapid move towards this preferred future is absence of political will [at federal government](#) level to provide strong leadership toward such a low carbon transition. We believe that the federal government should be helping the country to embrace, rather than avoid, the inevitable move away from fossil fuels. It should be [collaborating strategically with all sectors](#) and citizens [who want to move decisively beyond](#) outmoded, business-as-usual development models, and fossil fuel driven economic practices which are no longer fit for purpose; given the novel, interactive and escalating sustainability problems we face in the 21st century, accompanied by the understandable public [anxiety and insecurity](#) this is producing.

Actively [engaging with a crisis](#), as opposed to [pretending it isn't there](#), can give us a sense of agency and hope, and can spur innovative solutions and strategies, whilst catalysing decisive and supportive leadership. These are some of the approaches we need now to deal, seriously, with climate disruption; to help guide us away from [the nightmare scenario](#) of ever-intensifying weather impacts, and onto the path headed towards a climate stable, alternative energy powered future.

Interestingly, the still unfolding COVID-19 pandemic which, as with global heating, is another threat caused in part by human environmental disruption, has [given us a glimpse of how certain crisis intervention principles might help guide us toward a preferred sustainable future](#). We think some of these principles include:

- The use of robust climate science from the IPCC reports, and other sources of advice taken from reputable climate experts, to help guide political decision making which ensures that all sectors of society make their valid contributions to helping solve climate disruption, and in fair and proportionate ways,
- That governments at all levels in Australia, as key facilitators of human and financial resources, strategic planning, and legal direction, should show strong leadership in setting strong greenhouse gas reduction and renewable energy adoption targets, fully informed by the climate science advice contained in the recent IPCC report and other recent analyses.
- The need for governments to plan for the safe climate change adaptation of their citizens and communities, in the process educating and engaging with those communities on a collaborative basis. This should include direct, deliberative democratic involvement of citizens in decision making on climate disruption solutions, adaptation planning and other, associated sustainable living concerns that increasingly affect their communities.
- That governments use their extensive resources to actively support wider sustainable development innovation and entrepreneurship within their communities. This support should be aimed at tackling climate disruption impacts, restoring natural areas and wildlife, and ensuring a fairer distribution of economic resources to all citizens.

Linking to these principles, we close this statement by setting out some of the immediate actions we believe could and should be taken by various sectors of Australian society in the following months and years, particularly in the run up to the important [COP26 international meeting](#) on climate disruption to be held in Scotland in November 2021, and also given a predicted, Federal government election in 2022.

- At **national level**, we encourage all citizens to support the recent call by the Climate Council and a range of health sector organisations for the Federal government to adopt an interim [75% greenhouse gas reduction target by 2030](#) on the way to achieving net zero carbon emissions, well before 2050. We also support the longer established call for the Federal government to develop a [national strategy on climate and health](#).
- At **state and local government level** we want to see published, interim greenhouse gas reduction target ambition for 2030 increased for all administrations to [within a 50% - 75%](#) band, with [early adoption of 100% renewable energy](#) plans by governments; and effective and transparent community climate adaptation planning must rapidly become the norm over the next few years.
- At a **business, professional and service sector level**, we support any initiatives which can help minimise, rapidly, an organisation's environmental footprint, including significantly reducing its greenhouse gas emissions, [boosting its renewable energy use](#), and using sustainable processes which make it part of the exciting new, [circular economy](#). We also support re-thinking of business and service delivery models which can leverage a climate disruption control and adaptation focus with employees, customers, clients, members, and supply chains.
- At a **citizen level**, we can use [pragmatic optimism](#) to act in support of a climate safe sustainable future, but in the full understanding that to be truly effective, individual efforts are only one contribution to what must be a [whole of society response](#); and a response greatly augmented by fair

and effective complimentary efforts from all other sectors of society, particularly governments. Achieving far greater action on climate disruption whilst ensuring [collaborative fairness and social justice](#) outcomes across society, will also require significant, system level change in the way many of our [institutions operate currently](#).

In the interim, and as adults, we can [question our elected political representatives](#) over their response to the recent IPCC report, and the [need for urgent climate mitigation and adaptive action](#) at parliamentary level. If we are not satisfied with the answers given, we can consider voting for new, more responsible, elected representatives in the next political cycle, and make this clear to the incumbents.

- **At an individual lifestyle level**, we can adopt behavioural changes which are complimentary to greenhouse gas reduction efforts and climate change adaptation planning initiatives conducted by other sectors of society. There are many [free online guides](#) on what can be done at this level, but just a few actions include: reducing the amount red meat and dairy consumed, using low or net zero carbon forms of transport, such as [cycling, walking, public transport, and flying less](#). We can also plant trees or support efforts to do so or move our money and savings to financial organisations which do not invest in fossil fuels.
- **At a social or professional influence level**, we can use [psychological understanding of the best way to approach](#) taking action on climate disruption, decide on what our most effective role might be in helping to promote a climate safe, genuinely sustainable future, and plan action around that. We can start [diplomatic conversations](#) with friend's family and neighbours, or in our workplaces or professional life, about our own sustainable lifestyle choices and the reasons behind them, as well as our growing understanding of [the benefits for all to be achieved](#) by transitioning toward a sustainable, climate safe, low carbon future.

And we can join forces with likeminded community or [online groups](#) which support strong action on climate disruption, both to amplify our voice for change and to [help counter any mental health effects](#) of being overwhelmed by the scale of problems, or feeling like a lone voice in advocating for change.

The August 2021 IPCC report represents a call to action to all sectors of global and Australian society. This country is one of the [richest per capita in the world](#), but also has one of the [highest per capita greenhouse gas emission rates](#), and [one of the worst track records](#) for a developed economy in taking effective action on climate disruption. Australia is also [very vulnerable](#) to further global heating trends. We have to do much better on climate disruption in this decade and beyond, both for our own sakes and to make [our fair contribution](#) to international efforts to control this existential threat.