

WINE NEWS

Top academics write to Morrison Government asking for 'deep cuts' to Australia's greenhouse gas emissions

By National science, technology and environment reporter Michael Slezak

Posted Wed 29 Jan 2020, 6:21am



PHOTO: The academics have called Australia "ground zero" for climate impacts and climate policy uncertainty. (ABC News: Michael Barnett)

Eighty of Australia's top academics have written an open letter declaring an "urgent need for deep cuts" to Australia's greenhouse gas emissions following the current unprecedented bushfire crisis.

The group of Australian Research Council (ARC) Laureate Fellows describe Australia as "ground zero for both climate impacts and climate policy uncertainty" and warn that without strong action on climate change, the world may not support human societies "in their current form and maintain human well-being".

They say research has identified what policies and technologies are needed to address the solution but "what is lacking is the courage to implement them at the required scale".

The letter calls on Australian governments to "acknowledge the gravity of the threat posed by climate change driven by human activities" and "reduce greenhouse gas emissions in time to safeguard against catastrophe".

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Key points:

- Australia's top academics say research has identified what technologies are needed to address the solution
 - Angus Taylor stands by the track record of the Federal Government on the issue
 - Researchers believe Australia can be a world leader on the issue if governments accept the need for action
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The letter, signed by 80 past and present ARC Laureate Fellows, notes that decades ago, scientists warned that the impacts we're seeing now, like the bushfire crisis, were coming.

It is only the second time the group of Australia's top academics have taken such action. The first was in December last year when 50 of them wrote in defence of whistleblowers who raised concerns about international students on ABC's Four Corners.

More than just fire management

The letter was coordinated by Professor Steven Sherwood, a climate scientist from the University of New South Wales, and includes top academics in fields including economics, healthcare, history and law, as well as many different scientific disciplines.

"We're a small group that has been selected by the Australian Research Council as the top researchers in our respective fields," Professor Sherwood said.

"It's a good group to think about all aspects of the problem — it's not just a science problem. It's a problem that spans all of those areas."

They call on governments to do more than just focus on adaptation to future fires.

Adaptation isn't enough, they say, since the world is still warming and is "only at the beginning of the climate change phenomenon."

"The current impacts are happening with just one [degree] Celsius of global temperature increase, but we are set for the best part of another degree even if very strong international action is taken to reduce emissions."

"If strong action is not taken, environmental degradation and social disruption will be much greater and in many cases adaptation will no longer be achievable.

"It would be naive to assume that such a world will still support human societies in their current form and maintain human well-being."

Opportunity for Australia

The researchers note that Australia cannot fix the problem on its own, but argue Australia's "visibility as ground zero for both climate impacts and climate policy uncertainty" means we could become a leader on the issue.

"Doing so will aid our economy, strengthen our standing in international affairs and relations with neighbours, and help secure Australia and the world from the impacts of climate change."



PHOTO: Professor Steven Sherwood has called for action on greenhouse gas emissions. (Supplied: UNSW)



PHOTO: Emissions Reduction Minister Angus Taylor has backed the Morrison Government's record on climate change. (ABC News: Marco Catalano)

Professor Sherwood noted the transition could be painful for some communities and they will require assistance.

"For example, we probably need to provide economic support to coal-mining regions," Professor Sherwood said.

"Many mining jobs are set to disappear no matter what our governments do, so this would be a concern even if we didn't care about the planet's future."

The letter concludes: "We call on all governments to acknowledge the gravity of the threat posed by climate change driven by human activities, and to support and implement evidence-based policy responses to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in time to safeguard against catastrophe."

"We owe this to younger generations and those who come after them, who will bear the brunt of our decisions."

"It's an urgent problem and a problem where the political sphere isn't moving fast enough," Professor Sherwood added.

In a statement, Emissions Reduction Minister Angus Taylor said the Federal Government has a track record of which "all Australians could be proud".

"We have beaten our first Kyoto target, we are on track to overachieve on our 2020 target by 411 Mt and the most recent projections published in December 2019 show we are on track to beat our 2030 target."