



## Climate Commission: The year in review 2012

The Climate Commission was established in 2011 to provide Australians with an independent and reliable source of information about climate change.

Over the last two years, the Commission has communicated with a wide range of community members in different ways and provided information on many aspects of climate change including:

- the science of climate change
- international action
- solutions to addressing climate change.

The Commissioners have held community forums and public presentations and met with thousands of people across Australia, continuing the conversation about climate change. The Commissioners spoke with business and industry leaders; community groups; and local and state government representatives.

Through its events and reports - as well as through media coverage, social media and its website - the Commission has connected with many thousands of people across the country.

## What did we do?

### Community forums

The Climate Commission held six community forums during the year, travelling to five states and speaking with around 1600 people. After a particular focus on regional areas in 2011, a greater emphasis was given to the larger cities in 2012. Community forums were held in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Adelaide, Launceston and Hobart.

Each forum commenced with a brief presentation on climate change science, impacts and opportunities, with the majority of time devoted to audience questions. The forums have been a very effective way of communicating with people across the country from a range of backgrounds. Feedback from audience members showed an overwhelmingly positive response to the community forums. In feedback surveys participants made clear that they appreciated the knowledge and expertise of the Commissioners and the opportunity to ask questions.



As part of each visit to hold a community forum the Climate Commission also met with a number of groups to discuss climate change challenges and opportunities. During these visits the Commissioners were impressed by the great examples of action being taken around Australia to tackle climate change.

Other activities during the Commission's visits included:

- meetings with local councils
- meetings with community organisations and leaders
- school and youth forums
- meetings with health organisations and business, industry, and state government representatives
- media interviews.

## Publications

The Climate Commission released eleven reports and information papers on climate change in 2012. The reports are written by the Climate Commissioners in plain English and are aimed at a broad public audience. They draw on the latest research and are written in consultation with relevant experts and the Climate Commission's Science Advisory Panel.



The Commission's reports are available on the Climate Commission's website:

[www.climatecommission.gov.au](http://www.climatecommission.gov.au).

### Major reports

The Commission's third major report, **The critical decade: International action on climate change**, was released in August 2012. The report explores the action being taken on climate change around the world and Australia's contribution to global action. It demonstrates that the world is clearly moving to take action on climate change but that more needs to be done. For example, every developed country has pledged to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and Australia was the 33rd country to introduce a carbon price. The report also shows that Australia plays an important role in shaping

—  
**'The longer we wait to act the more it will cost when we do. The report provides an extremely helpful catalogue of ideas for action.'**

**Connie Hedegaard, European Commissioner for Climate Action**

—  
**'The great transformation towards a low-carbon future has begun.'**

**Christiana Figueres, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Executive Secretary**

the global response. It also demonstrates that it is in Australia's own interests to act to tackle climate change.

This report was endorsed by a number of leading international spokespeople and specialists on climate change.

A report on renewable energy, **The critical decade: Generating a renewable Australia**, was released in November 2012. This report summarises the state of renewable energy in Australia and across the world, the potential for growth and some of the challenges.

The renewable energy report states the clear and critical need to rapidly expand the uptake of clean and renewable energy to reduce our reliance on fossil fuels. Australia has enormous potential for renewable energy, and although momentum is building in Australia, renewable energy resources such as wind and sun are currently under-utilised.

The renewable energy report was supplemented by an outline of South Australia's current and future renewable energy capacity to coincide with the Commission's visit to Adelaide - **The critical decade: Generating a renewable Australia - South Australia**.

### Regional reports

The Climate Commission released four regional reports highlighting climate change impacts and opportunities in four states: **Tasmania, New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria**. These follow reports released in 2011 for Gippsland (VIC), New England (NSW), South Australia, Western Australia and the Illawarra (NSW).

The reports communicated information about climate science and the impacts that a changing climate will have on particular areas of our country and our way of life. The reports demonstrated that the climate is already changing and is likely to change further, posing significant risks across Australia.

The regional reports were released to coincide with community visits and were covered widely in regional and national media.

## Short reports

The Climate Commission also produced three short reports focusing on specific aspects of climate change science that were particularly relevant during 2012. Climate-related extreme events experienced in Australia and the rest of the world are providing a glimpse of what a future world with a changing climate may look like.

Short reports included:

- **The science behind southeast Australia's cool, wet summer:** an explanation of the scientific understanding on links between the wet, cool summer of 2011 and climate change
- **Was Hurricane Sandy influenced by climate change?:** an explanation of the links between climate change and Hurricane Sandy and tropical cyclones more generally
- **Loss of Arctic sea ice indicates global risks from climate change:** an explanation of the links between climate change and melting of Arctic sea ice, permafrost and the Greenland ice sheet.



## Presentations and speeches

During 2012 the Climate Commissioners made a number of speeches and presentations at conferences and functions around Australia, allowing them to reach thousands of people in different settings. The Commissioners receive a large number of requests to attend events organised by various organisations ranging from small neighbourhood groups to large national organisations.

Commissioners spoke at events including:

- public forums on climate change in Sydney, Canberra, Bathurst (NSW) and Logan (Qld)
- public events at universities in Melbourne, Sydney and Canberra
- the Australian Medical Association annual conference
- keynote address for the Committee for Economic Development of Australia
- local government climate change events in Sydney and Melbourne.

## Online communications

During 2012 the Climate Commission improved and expanded its online communications, including its website. The website ([www.climatecommission.gov.au](http://www.climatecommission.gov.au)) houses

information about climate change science, reputable sources for further information, Commission reports and publications, and videos of the Commission's forums. News is regularly updated through the blog feature.

A monthly electronic newsletter was established in 2012 with content drawn from recent blog entries and the number of subscribers is consistently growing. Members of the public can subscribe to keep updated on the Commission's **website** and can follow us on twitter **@ClimateComm**

## Day-to-day activities

The Climate Commission endeavours to respond to public enquires by providing reports, fact sheets, public forums, and information on the website. The Commissioners also respond to media enquiries and hold a large number of interviews for newspapers, television and radio.

Between publishing reports and holding public meetings and events, the Climate Commission carries on a range of other activities including planning, researching, writing and editing.

## What did we see?

Wherever the Commissioners went around Australia, they witnessed examples of actions taking place to reduce emissions and to move towards cleaner and more efficient energy solutions. Schools and universities, community groups, businesses – small and large, state and local governments, health professionals, and many more, are thinking about new ways of doing things to minimise the risk of climate change for the future.

Some actions were small, some were just beginning, and some were extraordinary in their scale and innovation. Together they form a picture of a country of people wanting to take action and wanting to do more.



**Year of action** - Commissioners saw sustainable transport in action with bike paths in Sydney and Launceston and a solar-powered bus in Adelaide; viewed energy-saving activities at Melbourne Girls' College, Richmond; toured technology advances in practice at a manufacturing site in Melbourne; and heard about uptake of solar energy in communities throughout Australia.

## How did we work with the media?

In order to reach the Australian community, the Climate Commission keeps the media throughout Australia informed of its reports and activities. In 2012 the Commissioners put out media releases and factsheets; conducted interviews for print media, television and radio; and wrote opinion pieces for newspapers and other publications.

## Who is the Climate Commission?

The Climate Commission consists of six internationally-renowned climate scientists, researchers, and policy and business leaders. The Commissioners bring together a wealth of knowledge and expertise in a number of areas relevant to climate change.

The Climate Commissioners are:

**Professor Tim Flannery, Chief Commissioner**

**Professor Lesley Hughes**

**Professor Will Steffen**

**Professor Veena Sahajwalla**

**Mr Roger Beale AO**

**Mr Gerry Hueston.**

In May 2012 the Climate Commission welcomed a new commissioner to its team. Professor Veena Sahajwalla replaced former Climate Commissioner, Dr Susannah Elliott.

The Commission is supported by a Science Advisory Panel which provides information and expert advice on the science of atmospheric dynamics and the impacts on Australia. The panel consists of scientists with wide-ranging expertise in areas such as climate change, ocean circulation, extreme weather events, and climate modelling.

## What are we planning next?

As the Climate Commission heads into its third year it is planning new and improved ways of communicating accurate information about climate change to the Australian community. It constantly monitors what it hears from the community and endeavours to answer the questions that are raised.

Plans for 2013 include:

- further reports on climate change topics, including the latest on the science and opportunities for the future
- information about how Australians are already taking action to tackle climate change
- providing accurate information through the media.

You can keep informed of current activities through the website ([www.climatecommission.gov.au](http://www.climatecommission.gov.au)) or by subscribing to the Commission's email newsletter.

