



Climate Commission: A Year In Review

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

The Commission brings together internationally renowned climate scientists, policy and business leaders to inform the public about:

- The *science* of climate change,
- *International action* to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and
- The *economics* of a carbon price.

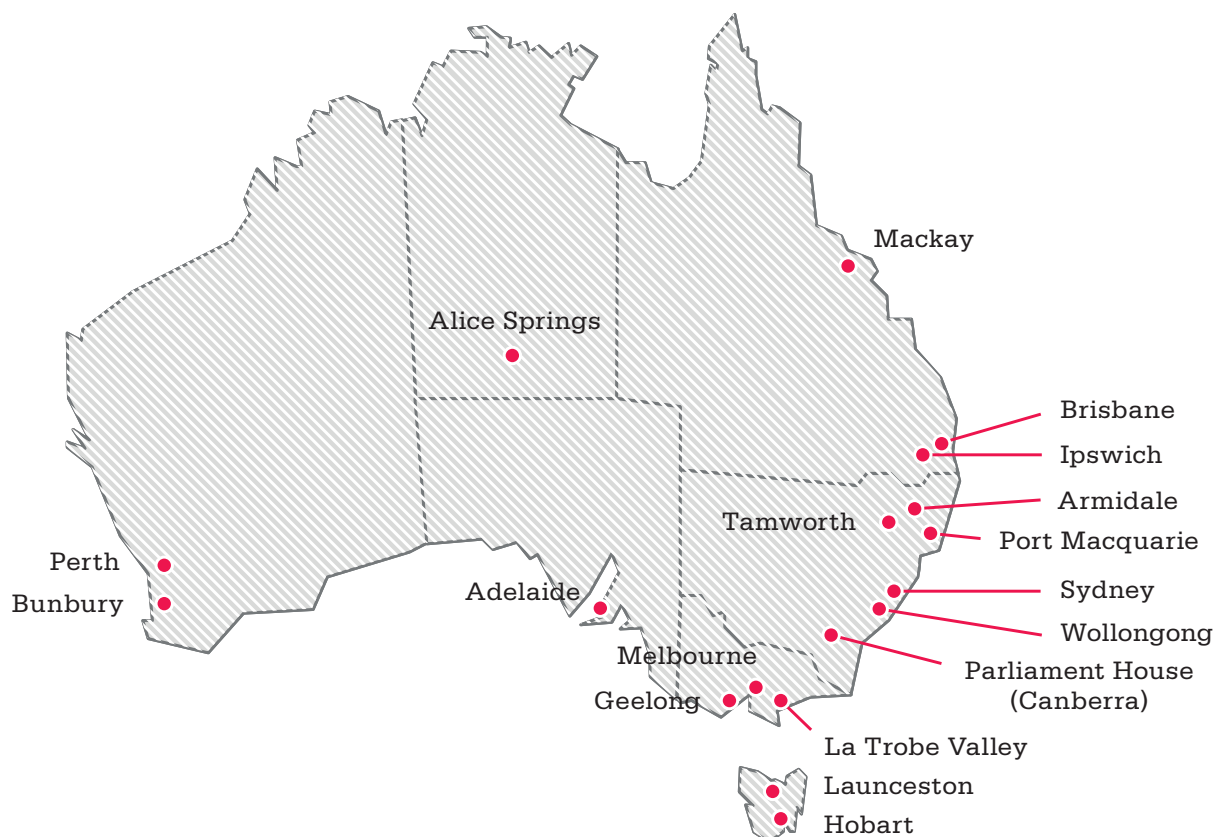
In its first year, the Commission has provided an authoritative source of information to government, the business community, and the public.

The Commissioners have met with business and industry leaders, local and state governments, and held community forums and public presentations for thousands of Australians. Through media coverage, social media interaction and the website, the Commission has connected with millions across the country.

Feedback data confirms the work of the Commission is necessary and will need to expand to include more practical advice and tips for communities and industry.

In its second year, the Commission looks forward to continuing the climate change conversation with many more Australians.

Climate Commission 2011 visits



What has the Climate Commission done over the last year?

Regional visits

The Climate Commission completed 11 regional visits as well as visits to most capital cities in the last year.

Places visited included: Mackay, Ipswich, Port Macquarie, Sydney, New England, Illawarra, Adelaide, Playford, Bunbury, Perth, Alice Springs, Melbourne, La Trobe Valley, Geelong, Launceston and Hobart.

Regional visits usually involved:

- a public forum for 200-500 people
- business breakfasts
- community leader forums
- school and youth forums
- private meetings with business, industry, community, local government and state government representatives and
- media interviews.

Prior to each visit, the Chief Commissioner, Professor Tim Flannery, contacted Premiers, relevant State Government Ministers and Federal and State local members offering private briefings on the Commission's reports and other work. Several such briefings were provided.

The visits have proven very effective in communicating with a wide range of people across the country. For example, analysis of feedback from the community forums showed that 92% of attendees found them to be good or very good.

Major national reports

The Climate Commission released two major national reports in 2011.

The Critical Decade: Climate science, risks and responses, was accompanied by a climate change forum at Parliament House. The report received bipartisan endorsement.

The Critical Decade: Climate change and health, was endorsed by prominent health professionals such as Professor Fiona Stanley and Professor Peter Doherty, as well as a range of major health organisations including the Australian Medical Association and the Australian Nursing Federation.

All Commission reports are written in plain language and are designed for a broad public audience. All reports were reviewed by members of the Science Advisory Panel.

Regional reports

The Climate Commission has released reports highlighting the impacts of climate change for six regions/states of Australia: Gippsland (VIC), New England (NSW), South Australia, Western Australia, Tasmania and the Illawarra (NSW). Regional reports are created in consultation with key scientific bodies and provide useful information about the risks and opportunities climate change poses for communities.

Responsive reports

The Commission has also prepared two reports in response to community questions:

- *Carbon Pricing: A brief overview* provided a clear explanation of carbon pricing.
- *The science behind Southeast Australia's wet, cool summer*, clarified that the wet summer in 2011/2012 was consistent with what scientists expect from a changing climate.

International engagement

Part of the Commission's mandate is to report on the progress of international action in dealing with climate change.

The Commission hosted five prominent international guests in September:

- Dr Jiang Kejun, climate policy adviser to the Chinese Government
- Dr Daniel Kammen, World Bank Renewable Energy Specialist
- Ms Linda Adams, former Secretary of the Californian EPA
- Dr Kirit Parikh, Chair of the Expert Group on Low Carbon Strategy for India
- Professor Minik Rosing, internationally acclaimed scientist



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“THE HEALTH CONSEQUENCES OF CLIMATE CHANGE HAVE BEEN DESCRIBED AS “THE GREATEST THREAT TO HUMAN HEALTH IN THE 21ST CENTURY” IN THE PRESTIGIOUS LANCET MAGAZINE (2009). WHY THEN HAS THERE BEEN SO LITTLE ATTENTION AND DEBATE REGARDING THE DIRECT AND INDIRECT HEALTH IMPLICATIONS IN THE PUBLIC ARENA?” GEORGE, PERTH, WESTERN AUSTRALIA
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Each expert shared their knowledge and experience at a range of public and business forums in Melbourne, Sydney and Canberra.

Professor Flannery hosted a forum on green development opportunities between Danish and Australian business and industry representatives in November.



Chief Commissioner Tim Flannery welcomed Prince Frederick and Princess Mary to the Green Growth Forum.

The Commissioners met with other international figures when they were in Australia to ensure that the Commission has the most up-to-date knowledge about climate change action around the world. This information was then disseminated through public forums, speeches and reports. For example, in January Professor Flannery met with the Chairman of the Climate Commission for Wales.

Online engagement

The Climate Commission has developed a very recognisable web presence: www.climatecommission.gov.au. All of the Commission's forums are filmed and uploaded to the website. Answers to questions posed by members of the public and all of the Commission's publications can also be found on the website.

The Commission has identified a need to do more to harness the power of social media to distribute information and will focus on this in the coming months. Follow us on twitter: [@ClimateComm](https://twitter.com/ClimateComm).

Media

One of the best ways of reaching the Australian community is through the media. Professor Flannery and the other Commissioners have done hundreds of interviews with media across Australia.

Day to day activities

Between all of these events, reports, meetings and media interviews there is much work to be done by the Commissioners in planning, research, preparation for reports, regional visits and presentations; as well as reading and preparing correspondence and responses to enquiries and requests for information.

Correspondence is a big part of the role of the Commission. Questions come to the Commission from the public, business and media from around Australia. The Commissioners endeavour to answer them through correspondence, media interviews, public forums and through producing information sheets.

The Commissioners, particularly Professor Flannery, also regularly make presentations and speeches to people across the Australian community.

The story on the ground: what we've heard from around Australia.

In its first year, the Climate Commission engaged in an ongoing conversation with a broad cross-section of the public. We have heard from thousands of Australians, including steel workers, reef tour operators, sugar mill owners, car factory workers, local councillors, state government officials, business and industry leaders, school students and teachers, doctors, and farmers.

This report is a reflection of what the Commissioners have heard from this broad cross-section of Australians. It is a qualitative assessment of public attitudes.



The Climate Commission's community forum in Tamworth.

Australians are concerned about climate change

Most Australians we met were concerned about climate change and thought that Australia should take action to reduce our carbon emissions. While we also met some who do not agree that climate change is caused by human activity, the majority of the people appreciated that carbon pollution is the primary cause.



Learning about coastal erosion from Port Macquarie Council.

Feedback from the public forums shows that, overwhelmingly, Australians are concerned about the impact climate change is having on our economy, natural places, our health and our way of life.

- Coastal communities, like those in Mandurah, Western Australia, and Port Macquarie, New South Wales, expressed concerns about the impacts of rising sea levels on vulnerable coastlines.
- Changing rainfall patterns are of concern to people across Australia. For many areas of southeastern Australia scientists are concerned about the risk of intensifying droughts, fires and heat waves, as well as heavy rain events. These risks were highlighted in the Climate Commission's regional reports for Gippsland, New England and the Illawarra.
- People have raised concerns about water security for towns and cities, as well as for agriculture.
- Based on experiences with increasing food prices after extreme weather events, Australians are concerned about food security and the rising costs of fresh food as our climate changes.
- Commissioners have also received many questions about the impact of climate change on our unique biodiversity, particularly the Great Barrier Reef.



Chief Commission Tim Flannery talks to members of the audience in Perth.

Australians want action

Across the country we found that the Australians we met wanted action from the Government and business and wanted to know what action they could take themselves. We also found that most businesses, local governments and community members are eager to contribute to solutions to climate change.

Many businesses have already planned for a carbon price and this has motivated them to adopt more advanced business practices and reduce their carbon emissions. The Commissioners have been impressed by the number of Australian businesses that are embracing clean energy solutions that make sense for their business and the climate. Many businesses are looking to improve their energy efficiency as a way of saving on emissions and their bottom line.

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“A PRICE ON CARBON MEANS THAT COMPANIES NEED TO BECOME MORE EFFICIENT. BUT WHEN YOU DO THE MODELLING, THE LEVEL OF EFFICIENCY IMPROVEMENT NEEDED IS AROUND 1.4% PER YEAR, WHICH IN MOST ORGANISATIONS, SHOULD BE EASILY ACHIEVABLE.”
JIM BROSAN, VICE PRESIDENT OF SIMCOA, SIMCOA OPERATIONS PTY LTD, BUNBURY, WA
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The Commission has been impressed by the can-do attitude of many communities, where community groups, businesses and local government are working together. The Illawarra region is a great example of a community coming together across business, community groups, unions and local government to address the challenges of a changing climate. The Illawarra region faces risks of increasing fire danger, rising sea levels and floods as the climate continues to change. In addition, steel production, mining and manufacturing, which produce carbon emissions, are important to the region's economy. The Commission witnessed strong leadership in the community, a united response and the desire to find solutions that are good for the community in the long term. This included initiatives such as the Green Jobs Illawarra Project.



Commissioners Will Steffen and Lesley Hughes at Wollongong University.

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“THE WAY FORWARD IS NOT TO RUN AWAY FROM YOUR THREATS; IT’S TO FACE THEM HEAD ON AND TO ACTUALLY ORGANISE YOUR ECONOMY AND YOUR SOCIETY TO ADAPT TO THOSE CHANGES.

....PEOPLE ARE FOCUSED ON THE JOBS OF THE STEEL WORKERS AND MINERS, AND WE DON’T APOLOGISE FOR WANTING TO GET THE BEST DEAL FOR THEM, BUT SOMETHING WORRIES US EVEN MORE, AND THAT IS THE JOBS FOR THE SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF THE STEEL WORKERS AND MINERS THAT WE MAY LOSE IF WE DON’T ACT SOON.”ARTHUR RORRIS, SOUTH COAST LABOR COUNCIL, WOLLONGONG.

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Many local councils are thinking seriously about building cleaner regional economies, as well as how they can help their communities adapt to a changing climate. Clarence City Council in Tasmania, for example, is working with the community to develop ways to manage coastal areas that are vulnerable to erosion and flooding as the sea level rises.

Australians want to be involved

The most common question Australians have asked at community forums is “What can I do?”. The Commissioners have been encouraged by the appetite displayed all over Australia for people to come together to solve this national challenge. People are inspired and energised by real examples of how individuals are making a difference in their businesses, workplaces, schools, homes and communities. Many people said they were unsure about where to go to find information about the contribution they could make. The Commission will provide tangible examples of business and community action, as well as information for individuals about how to contribute.

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“IS THERE ONE CHANGE OR CONTRIBUTION THAT CAN BE MADE AT AN INDIVIDUAL LEVEL THAT WILL BE SIGNIFICANT IN THE BATTLE OF CLIMATE CHANGE?” CARLENE, ALICE SPRINGS COMMUNITY FORUM, NT

**“HOW CAN AN INDIVIDUAL FAMILY MAKE A DIFFERENCE?”
JOHN, TAMWORTH COMMUNITY FORUM, NSW**

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Australians want accurate and relevant information

Overall, the Commission has found that Australians are hungry for information on climate change.

Commonly the Commission receives a majority of questions about:

- climate change science
- local and national impacts
- carbon pricing and
- what is happening around the world.

There is considerable confusion in the community about the Australian Government’s carbon price and the progressive move to emissions trading, and also about the Opposition’s plans for direct action on climate change. Many businesses indicated that regulatory certainty is particularly important to their decisions on investing in the future.



Community forum in Hobart.

Although the Commission does not advocate any particular policy position, it has sought to explain how carbon pricing encourages reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and drives investment in cleaner energy and energy efficiency.



Participant asks a question at the Wollongong community forum.

Action on climate change is in our national interest

The Commission has received a lot of questions about Australia's global role. The Commission will release a report on international action in the coming months, which will explain what other countries are doing and place Australia's bipartisan commitment on emission reductions in its global context.

Feedback shows most Australians feel it's in our national interest to take action on climate change. People appreciate that climate change is a global problem but think we have a responsibility to do our fair share.

Many Australians have expressed to the Commission that they do not want Australia to lag behind the rest of the world or miss out on opportunities in clean energy. There is concern about the severity of the impacts climate change could have on Australia, on our vulnerable people and on our Pacific neighbours, if there is not sufficient global action.

On the other hand, many others have incorrectly assumed that Australia is ahead of other countries in acting to reduce emissions.

In response to community questions about Australia's actions in an international context, the Commission hosted a range of prominent international experts in 2011, as noted above. The consistent story that we've heard from international leaders is that the world is moving. Our trading partners are moving to address climate change and capitalise on clean energy opportunities.

"WE KNOW THAT ALL OF THE MEMBERS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION HAVE BEEN TAKING VERY STRONG DOMESTIC ACTION FOR A LONG TIME, SO THERE'S NO QUESTION ABOUT AUSTRALIA LEADING, THE EU HAS BEEN AT IT FOR YEARS."
HOWARD BAMSEY, FORMER CLIMATE CHANGE NEGOTIATOR FOR AUSTRALIA AT THE PARLIAMENT HOUSE COMMUNITY FORUM.

Linda Adams, former Secretary of the California Environmental Protection Agency, in an address to the National Press Club in Canberra stated that "California's leadership as the eighth largest economy in the world can clearly demonstrate that environmental protection and economic growth can go hand in hand. We've done economic analyses that make it very clear that the costs of inaction will greatly outweigh the costs of taking action."



Linda Adams, former Secretary of the Californian Environmental Protection Authority.



Dr Jiang Kejun, climate policy adviser to the Chinese Government.

Dr Jiang Kejun, head of the Chinese Government's energy and environmental policy agency, told a business forum in Melbourne that China is in the midst of a clean energy boom. China is introducing pilot carbon pricing schemes from 2013, covering provinces and cities with a total population of around 250 million people.

Dr Daniel Kammen, the World Bank Group's Chief Technical Specialist for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency, told a community forum in Sydney that smart countries have identified clean energy as the way of the future and are strategically positioning themselves to capitalise on the growing global market. He told one newspaper: "promoting renewable energy...would increase energy security, business profitability and promote job growth".



The Climate Commission: Professor Will Steffen, Roger Beale, Professor Lesley Hughes, Professor Tim Flannery, Dr Susannah Elliot and Gerry Hueston.

What is up next for the Climate Commission?

The Commission found its first year enlightening and will use the feedback from the public to move ahead with the mission of providing accurate information and advice on climate change.

In response to the questions and comments we have received from the public, the Commission will produce further resources in 2012 including:

- the most up to date science, including local and regional information

- information about what people can do in a business, home, school or local community
- how carbon pricing works
- what is happening around the world.

The Climate Commission's program for 2012 will include a number of regional visits and new reports.

Further details will be provided on the Commission's website as they become available:

www.climatecommission.gov.au