



IF YOU BREAK IT, FIX IT:

Australia's global obligations for a just climate transition



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This report is part of Oxfam Australia's 'Safe Climate, Equal Future' series, which focuses on solutions to the interconnected crises of climate change and inequality.

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IMAGE (ABOVE): Lilisiana village, Malaita province, Solomon Islands: The Lilisiana graveyard is being eroded by seas rising above their normal levels, as a result of climate change. Photo: Collin Leafasia/Oxfam. Oxfam acknowledges the support of the Australian Government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).

COVER IMAGE: Bena village, East Nusa Tenggara province, Indonesia: Guardians of their community, Marice, Marica, Marsalina and Febi (left to right) stand near the river that often floods their village. Their women's group is active in disaster management as part of Oxfam's Asia Community Disaster Preparedness and Transformation (ACT) program. This program aims to reduce disaster risks, enable partners and communities to prepare for disasters, and co-lead responses to small-scale emergencies and the recovery efforts that follow. It supports people to adapt their lives and livelihoods to the changing climate and ensures that women are included in local decision-making spaces around disaster management. The program includes an emergency response fund to address small-scale disasters. Photo: Elizabeth Stevens/Oxfam.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Australia is falling short of its obligations to assist developing countries to respond to climate change. Overwhelmingly, the negative impacts of climate change are affecting developing countries, yet they have contributed least to the causes of climate change.

This stark contrast between where the impacts of climate change will be felt and which countries produce the majority of greenhouse gases (GHGs) reminds us that both the causes and impacts of climate change are distributed very unequally. Addressing this asymmetry between countries is one of the most important features of a just response to climate change.

This report argues that Australia must address the unfair ratio of higher spending on domestic climate action versus limited spending on global climate action. Currently, Australia spends six times as much on domestic action as it does on assisting developing countries with climate change. Further, this international climate spending is not new and additional to general aid spending, but rather represents aid double-counted as climate finance for projects which have climate objectives. If Australia is to shoulder its fair share of global climate burdens and redeem itself in the eyes of the Pacific and developing countries as a climate leader, the ratio of climate spending has to change. Overseas climate funding must substantially increase and be dedicated and additional to aid budget expenditure on development.

A major reason why Australia should equalise this ratio is because its contributions to climate change are well above global averages and, crucially, often unrecognised. Not only is Australia a heavy domestic emitter of GHGs, it has a high level of historical emissions. For example, since 1990 Australia has emitted over 21 times as much climate pollution as Sri Lanka, with about the same population. These contributions must be counted in determining Australia's fair share of the climate burden. But it is what is not currently counted that is arguably just as important for working out Australia's climate debt. The emissions from Australia's fossil fuel exports are double domestic emissions but do not figure in accounts of Australia's climate obligations. The continued financial and political support for the fossil fuel export industry must also be counted as a contribution to climate change.

In the context of these significant contributions to climate change, this report argues that Australia needs to realign the proportion of funds between domestic and overseas assistance. While this will entail an increase in overall spending on climate action, it can be achieved by redirecting the AUD\$ 11.1 billion spent in 2022–2023 on subsidies to the fossil fuel industry and through greater taxation of fossil fuel industry profits.

Australia can also act in many ways apart from climate finance to achieve a globally just climate transition. It can implement legislative and policy changes at home that reduce its emissions and support climate justice abroad. It can provide research, knowledge and technology sharing support to developing countries. Importantly, it can play a significant role in positively influencing global agreements and bodies such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the G20, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and multilateral development banks to increase ambitions and drive forward appropriate and just climate action. All these measures need to be accompanied by a commitment not to undermine domestic and overseas climate action by continued support for the fossil fuel industry at home and abroad, especially in global forums such as the Conference of the Parties (COP) on climate change.

Underpinning all these actions must be a clear commitment to robust principles of justice. A just transition will recognise and address past and present injustices that exacerbate climate harms. This would involve appropriate procedures that give those affected a genuine say in designing and implementing solutions. Not doing so would leave developing countries without the resources they need, and risk locking in any transition benefits to wealthy countries. A successful just transition will not simply mitigate or adapt, but make societies more equal, ensuring the genuine sharing of the benefits of climate action within and between societies.

If Australia is to lead a just climate transition, it must acknowledge the full extent of its climate change contributions, including its historical and current domestic emissions and its emissions from fossil fuel exports. It must also commit to allocating greater resources to assisting developing countries to mitigate and adapt to climate change, and compensate them for their climate losses. In short, it's time that Australia recognise that if you break it, you must fix it.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

To achieve a global just transition in response to climate change, Australia must:

- 1. Address the unfair ratio of higher spending on domestic versus limited spending on global climate action:**
 - Increase its climate finance commitment to developing countries in accordance with need, its high capacity to pay, and its large contribution to climate change.
 - Ensure that future global commitments are new and in addition to the aid budget.
- 2. Recognise the full range of its contributions to climate change:**
 - Include historical emissions and a percentage of emissions from fossil fuel exports, in addition to its capacity to pay, when calculating its fair share of climate burdens.
- 3. Ensure that the allocation of resources to its regional neighbours for climate action is not undermined by domestic actions. To do so, Australia must:**
 - Redirect subsidies away from the fossil fuel industry towards global climate action.
 - Increase domestic GHG emissions reductions in line with Australia's fair share of the science-based target of limiting warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius.
 - Not undermine global climate action through support for the fossil fuel industry and allowing new and expanded fossil fuel projects.
- 4. Adopt robust principles of justice in allocating resources for the response to climate change by recognising and embedding in government decision-making that:**
 - The causes and impacts of climate change are distributed very unequally.
 - Wealthy countries that have contributed to climate change bear a responsibility to assist those countries that have not contributed substantially to climate change, and which have few resources to respond.
 - Transition must be timely, reflecting the urgency needed, be broad, encompassing all those affected, and be accompanied by a re-allocation of resources towards global efforts based on need.
- 5. Act comprehensively to fast-track a globally just transition to climate change:**
 - Undertake influencing, legislation, policy, technical support and financing measures to act on mitigation, adaptation and loss and damage domestically and overseas.
 - Take a whole-of-government approach to a just transition to climate change by embedding climate justice considerations across government department decision-making.



East Are'are, Solomon Islands: Shirley lives with her parents in East Are'are. She uses her dug-out canoe to travel to school, because the path she used to take has been inundated by water due to rising sea levels. Photo: Ivan Utahenua/Oxfam.

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INTRODUCTION

As countries accelerate their climate transitions, the importance of a just response to climate change has never been clearer. While all countries will be affected by climate change, Australia cannot ignore that climate harms will – and are – overwhelmingly falling on developing countries. As the 2022 United Nations Least Developed Countries report notes, while developing countries bear the least historical responsibility for climate harms, they are now bearing more of the burdens.¹ During the last 50 years, 69% of worldwide deaths from climate disasters have occurred in these countries.²

This stark contrast between where the impacts of climate change will be felt and which countries produce the majority of greenhouse gases (GHGs), reminds us that both the causes and impacts of climate change are distributed very unequally. Addressing this asymmetry between countries is one of the most important features of a just response to climate change and one that must be incorporated into the transition plans of wealthy countries from the beginning.

Yet, as countries such as Australia plan their responses to climate change, their transition plans are predominately focused on their own domestic emissions reductions and adaptation needs. While this is crucial, this paper asks whether a climate transition that is predominantly focused on domestic measures does enough to support those countries which are hardest hit, least responsible, and least well-resourced to respond to climate change impacts. What is lacking is a recognition of how this asymmetry should alter the transition plans of wealthier countries.

This report argues that Australia, and similar countries, need to allocate resources more fairly and incorporate robust principles of justice. If Australia is to lead a just climate transition, it must acknowledge the full extent of its climate change contributions, including its historical and current domestic emissions and its emissions from fossil fuel exports, and it must commit to allocating greater resources to assisting developing countries to mitigate and adapt to climate change, and compensate them for their climate losses.

This report first establishes what Australia's climate contributions and responsibilities are. This is crucial for the claim that Australia needs a different

approach to allocating resources for mitigation and adaptation that recognises the unequal distribution of climate change causes and impacts (Section II). Not only should the amount of Australia's climate commitment be increased (Section III), but it must realign its focus from acting mainly domestically to shouldering its share of the global climate burden, made significantly worse by its continued high level of support for fossil fuel exports. A considerably higher percentage of current and future climate resources should be devoted to the three pillars of climate action – mitigation, adaptation and loss and damage in developing countries (Section IV). This need not delay wealthy countries' emissions reduction efforts. Such a transition must also be timely, reflecting the urgency needed, and be broad, encompassing all those affected. Without this new model, there is a risk of increasing unfairness.

This report also outlines how a greatly increased focus on overseas assistance can be achieved in a way that incorporates robust principles of justice (Section V), which is crucial to achieving a just climate transition. A just transition will recognise and address past and present injustices that exacerbate climate harms. This will involve appropriate procedures that give those affected a genuine say in designing and implementing solutions. Not doing so would leave developing countries without the resources they need, and risk locking in any transition benefits to wealthy countries. A successful just transition will not simply mitigate or adapt, but make societies more equal, ensuring the genuine sharing of the benefits of climate action within and between societies.



Lilisiana, Malaita province, Solomon Islands: Grace, a student at the local high school, walks through water left in the town square after a high tide. Grace worries about the future of her town, having experienced the impacts of a changing climate. Photo: Collin Leafasia/Oxfam. Oxfam acknowledges the support of the Australian Government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).

I. AUSTRALIA'S COMMITMENTS AND FUNDING

Before it is possible to determine how countries like Australia should allocate their resources domestically and overseas, it is important to establish the degree to which they are contributing to climate change.

Australia's federal and state governments have net zero emissions goals that are intended to reflect the country's international climate change commitments. Nationally, Australia has goals of a 43% reduction of GHG emissions by 2030 against 2005 levels, and net zero by 2050.³ This is a comparatively low target compared to many other high-income countries.

For example, the European Union and the United States have emissions reduction targets of 55% below 1990 levels and 50% below 2005 levels, respectively, by 2030.⁴ Most Australian states have more ambitious emissions reduction targets than the federal target, as well as additional programs and policies.⁵

The federal government’s budget review from October 2022–2023 outlines AUD \$24.9 billion in spending on domestic climate action to June 2030, including balance sheet measures such as concessional finance and equity injections, but excludes standing disaster relief funding and tax subsidies for electric vehicles.⁶ Domestic funding is split over four policy areas:

- AUD \$23.478 billion towards supporting the transformation to net zero;
- AUD \$948.3 million towards adapting to climate change and improving climate resilience;
- AUD \$295.8 million towards re-establishing Australia’s international climate leadership;
- AUD \$194.6 million towards building Australian government climate capability.

The majority of this spending implements the *Powering Australia Plan*, which aims to ‘create jobs, cut power bills and reduce emissions by boosting renewable energy’.⁷ Most states have more ambitious targets than the federal target as well as additional programs and policies.⁸

In contrast to its planned spending on domestic climate measures, the federal government has a much smaller commitment to funding climate measures in other countries.

In November 2021, ahead of the Conference of the Parties 26 (COP26) in Glasgow, Australia announced a AUD \$500 million increase in its climate finance commitment, bringing its total commitment to AUD \$2 billion over 2020–2025.⁹ According to a March 2023 report from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia met almost half of this commitment by mid-2022.¹⁰ In October 2023, the government announced it was on track to spend AUD \$3 billion on climate finance over 2020–2025.¹¹ However, these funds are not new and additional, but drawn from the Official Development Assistance budget, which has been reduced to its lowest point in 10 years in real terms and is well below the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee average.¹² Double counting the aid budget towards climate finance without increasing aid spending to an equivalent amount is not in the spirit of international climate agreements for new and additional funding. It poses a serious global reputational risk to Australia if it continues to undermine global cooperative efforts in this way. The AUD \$3 billion pledge for 2020–2025 also remains well below Australia’s international fair share of the USD \$100 billion global finance goal made by wealthy countries in 2009. Added to all this is the fact that the

AUD \$100 billion goal was not a needs-based figure, but simply a political goal.¹³ Recent analysis by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) of financing needs found developing countries require at least USD \$6 trillion by 2030 to meet less than half of their existing need.¹⁴

The federal government has taken some positive steps with its new International Development Policy. It aims to mainstream climate change action across spending, recognising that this is a key driver of poverty and instability in the Asia Pacific region. It has committed to ensuring that, from 2024–2025, at least half of all new bilateral and regional investments valued at more than AUD \$3 million have a climate change objective, with a goal of reaching 80% in 2028–2029.¹⁵ However, with increased climate finance commitments not being met by concurrent increases in development financial assistance, it appears that Australia will double-count a growing proportion of the aid budget as climate finance without committing any new funds. It is expected that this will not be well received globally.

When comparing average per annum spending on domestic mitigation and overseas climate finance measures, it is clear that, between 2022 and 2025 the federal government is spending around AUD \$3.56 billion each year on domestic mitigation action and around AUD \$600 million on average on overseas action – about six times less.

Figure 1: Australian Government budget spend for climate action domestically and internationally 2022–2025 (AUD\$) average per annum



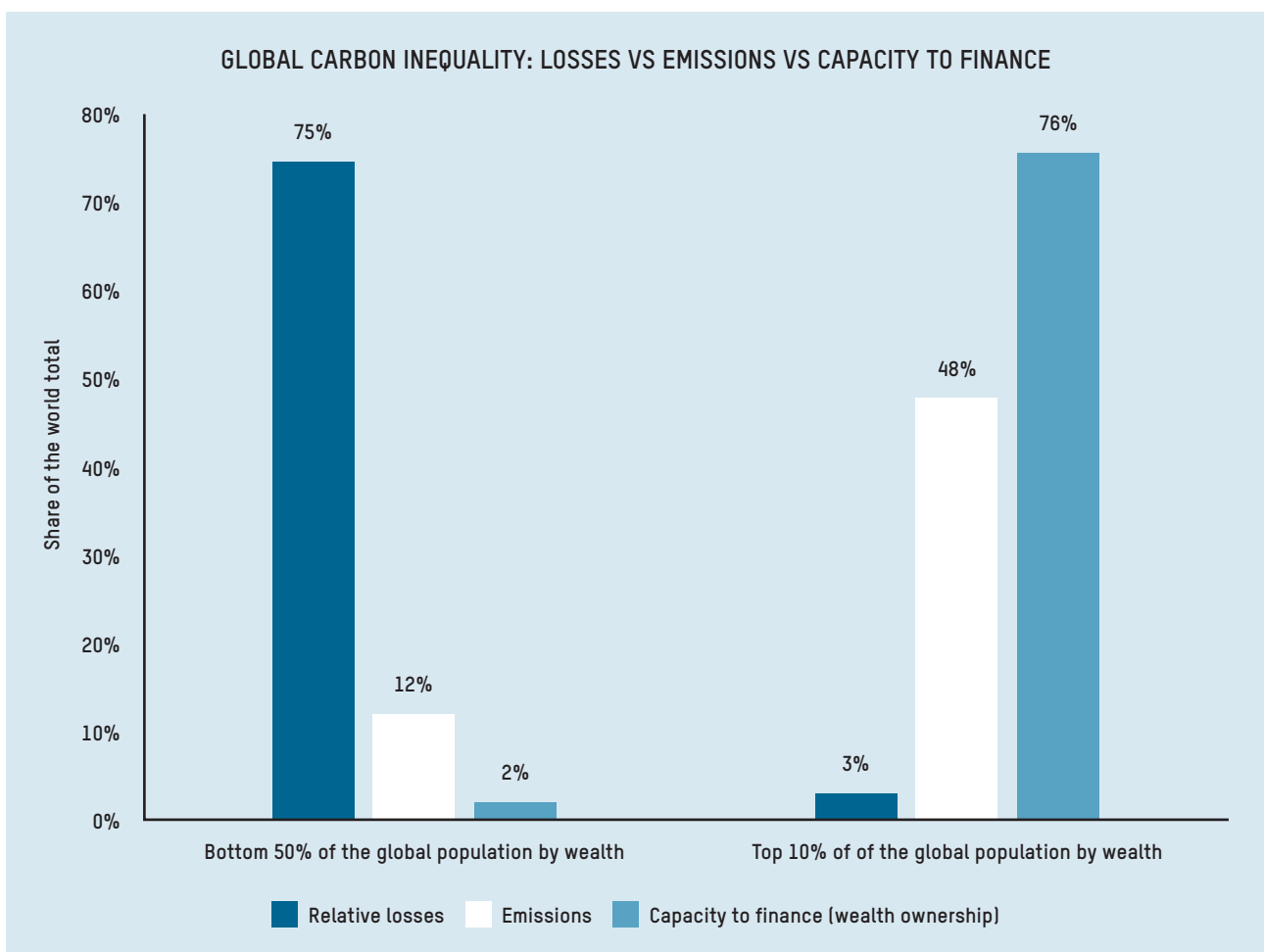
II. CLIMATE IMPACTS

Funding from Australia to other countries must address a worsening set of climate risks and impacts. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) made clear in its most recent synthesis report that climate risks and impacts will increase with further warming.¹⁶ Likely impacts include increased incidence of heat-related mortality, flooding and inundation in low-lying areas, decreased food production, and bio-diversity loss. These impacts will be compounded by a range of other vulnerabilities such as increasing inequality, poverty, gender inequality and forced migration.

The distribution of these worsening impacts is unequal, with poorer countries likely to suffer a disproportionate amount of climate harms. Almost half of all GHGs can be attributed to 10% of the global population.¹⁷ Yet, this 10% only experience 3% of all relative losses (measured by country-level gross

domestic product (GDP)), while owning 76% of all wealth. This enables them to finance their safety and resilience against impacts.¹⁸ Meanwhile, half of the global population have generated 12% of all global emissions, but experience 75% of all relative losses and own only 2% of all wealth (Figure 2).¹⁹

Figure 2: Global carbon inequality²⁰



The IPCC's Sixth Assessment Report finds that countries in the Asia region, which is home to 60% of the world's population, are already experiencing high rates of economic loss and damage, climate-induced displacement, supply chain shocks, and increased heatwaves and extreme weather events.²¹ Left unaddressed, climate change will exacerbate the frequency and intensity of these impacts for billions of people.²²

Small island developing states (SIDS) are also particularly exposed and vulnerable to climate change due to their geographic locations, governance arrangements, financial resources, low levels of economic diversification and technology development, and capacity limitations in institutional and legal systems.²³ Pacific SIDS in particular are highly vulnerable to climate change, in part because

their locations make them vulnerable to cyclones, drought and sea level rise, and losses to coral reefs and fish stocks.²⁴

The lack of financial resources to avert, adapt to, and recover from climate impacts, combined with increased exposure to climate impacts creates significant disadvantage for developing countries. To measure this disadvantage, the Notre Dame Global Adaption Index (ND-GAIN) ranks 182 countries by their vulnerability to climate change impacts (across exposure, sensitivity and adaptive capacity) and their readiness to respond to its impacts (across economic, governance and social readiness).²⁵ Table 1 lists countries in the Asia Pacific, their income grouping, per capita emissions in 2021, and ranking on ND-GAIN.

Table 1: Income group, 2021 per capita emissions, and ND-GAIN ranking on climate vulnerability and readiness to respond, of countries in the Asia Pacific, arranged by ranking.

Country	Income group	2021 per-capita GHG emissions in CO ₂ -e (tonnes) ²⁶	ND-GAIN rank ²⁷
New Zealand	Upper	10.16	9
Australia	Upper	23.24	13
Japan	Upper	8.86	62
Korea	Upper	12.72	51
China	Upper middle	9.62	74
Bhutan	Lower middle	4.64	94
Viet Nam	Lower middle	5.85	97
Samoa	Lower middle	2.30	97
Indonesia	Lower middle	7.50	100
Sri Lanka	Upper middle	1.93	104
Maldives	Upper middle	4.55	106
India	Lower middle	2.77	111
Philippines	Lower middle	2.37	113
Dem. People's Rep. of Korea	N/A	3.27	116
Timor-Leste	Low	7.10	117
Solomon Islands	Low	5.43	123
Nepal	Low	1.90	126
Vanuatu	Low	1.19	135
Laos	Lower middle	9.15	137
Pakistan	Lower middle	2.30	146
Cambodia	Low	4.84	149
Micronesia	Low	1.10	151
Myanmar	Lower middle	4.99	156
Papua New Guinea	Low	5.29	160
Bangladesh	Lower middle	1.54	164
Afghanistan	Low	0.96	175



Molpoe village, Vanuatu: Roy fishes off the coast of his home, however the fish aren't biting. In 2022, Molpoe was hit by a devastating landslide caused by torrential rain, which has become more frequent due to extreme storms. The landslide destroyed many homes and plantations that people relied on for their livelihoods. It also destroyed the underwater reef, so the fish have moved on. Photo: Ivan Utahenua/Oxfam. Oxfam acknowledges the support of the Australian Government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).

As seen in the table, countries like Australia and New Zealand have high income and high per capita emissions, and high ND-GAIN rankings, indicating relatively low vulnerability and a high capacity to respond to climate impacts. Comparatively, a majority of Australia's Asia Pacific neighbours, including Indonesia, Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea and Bangladesh, populate the bottom 50% of the ranking,

while having lower incomes and per capita emissions. This highlights the vast gulf in climate vulnerability and readiness between Australia and its regional neighbours. While data was unavailable to determine ND-GAIN scores for low-lying small islands states such as Kiribati, the Marshall Islands and Tuvalu, evidence highlights similarly high risks of climate harm and low capacities to adapt.²⁸

III. THE CASE FOR GREATER CLIMATE ACTION BY AUSTRALIA

As noted, as part of its Nationally Determined Contribution under the Paris Agreement, Australia has goals of a 43% reduction of GHG emissions by 2030 against 2005 levels, and net zero by 2050. Yet, while Australia's current commitments represent an increase on past promises, the question must be asked as to whether they represent Australia's fair share of the global burden of responding to climate change.

The methods for determining a country's fair share are controversial. Countries are variously said to have their fair shares determined by their current or past country level emissions, the degree to which they have benefitted from their emitting activities, their ability to shoulder mitigation burdens due to their high level of wealth, or a combination of these different approaches.

The UNFCCC commitment to 'common but differentiated responsibilities' emphasises that a country's *contribution* to climate change via its level of emissions matters. What a country is contributing in the form of its domestic emissions is crucial to working out what its response ought to be. Other things being equal, if a country has emitted more than another country then it should be liable for more of the costs associated with those emissions (the contribution principle). What also matters is its ability to afford to take action and help others do so, based on its level of wealth, often measured by GDP (the capacity principle).²⁹ This paper discusses each dimension in turn in relation to Australia.

TYPES OF CONTRIBUTION

One reason why a country's contribution in the form of domestic emissions is so important is because it gives it a special obligation to do something about the harms the emissions cause. The widely supported polluter pays principle states that a producer of pollution should bear the costs of mitigating any harm that their polluting action causes. As the philosopher Henry Shue writes, 'You broke it, you fix it'.³⁰ This includes addressing harms where they are actually occurring. This approach has intuitive appeal and, in many contexts, seems to track an element of just distribution.

In a climate change context, the polluter pays principle implies that a country's contribution to GHG emissions should inform its climate commitments and

contributions to mitigation and adaptation measures. The polluter pays principle is a key pillar of the UNFCCC's approach.³¹

Historical emissions

Crucial to establishing a country's contribution is its level of domestic emissions. In 2021, Australia's reported domestic emissions were 488 Mts CO₂-e, just over 1% of global emissions.³² That may not sound like much, but it places Australia as the world's 16th largest emitter in gross terms. Countries like Australia have also been heavy emitters for many decades.

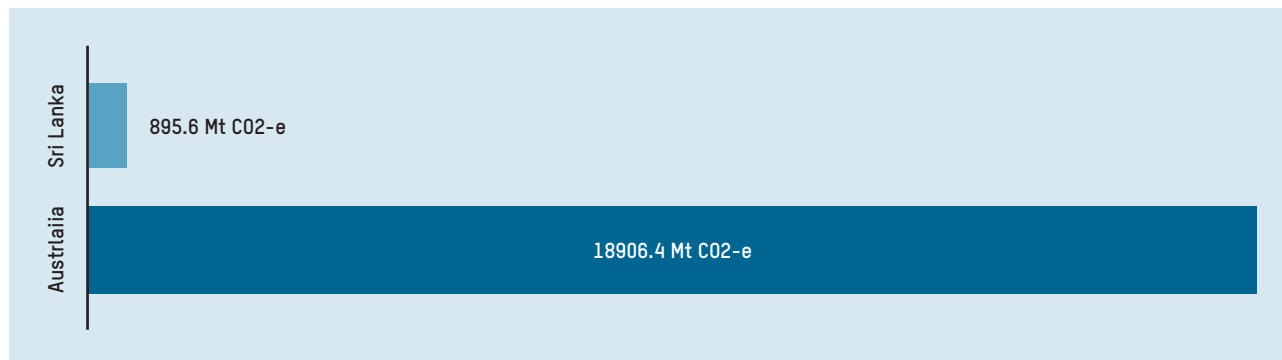
It is undecided where in time counting of historical emissions should begin. An obvious option is 1990, the year the first IPCC report was published, although it is somewhat arbitrary to say that on one day countries were excusably ignorant of the impacts of their emissions, and on the next they were not. The potential impacts of GHG emissions were on the table before the IPCC report. While countries are likely liable for some emissions pre-1990 as well, this paper highlights 1990 as it is a clear date after which there are no excuses.³³

The publication of the first IPCC report provides a clear and distinct epistemic shift. It was the first comprehensive, detailed, impartial examination of the issue by experts. It was publicly accessible, widely reported, and cannot reasonably have escaped the notice of many decision-makers (including voters in democratic countries). It also indicated with confidence that human activity was warming the climate to such an extent that significant and swift reductions in GHG emissions would be required to avoid very harmful warming. There is a strong case to be made for other dates pre-1990, but 1990 is unequivocally a date after which countries must take responsibility for their emissions.

Consider that at the time of writing, of all of the carbon emitted by Australia since 1850, almost *half* has been emitted since 1990. Further, with every year that passes without substantial action to mitigate climate

change, the percentage of these emissions produced after 1990 will increase. In the same period, Australia emitted over 21 times as much as Sri Lanka, with about the same population.³⁴

Figure 3: Australia’s historical emissions versus Sri Lanka 1990-2020.



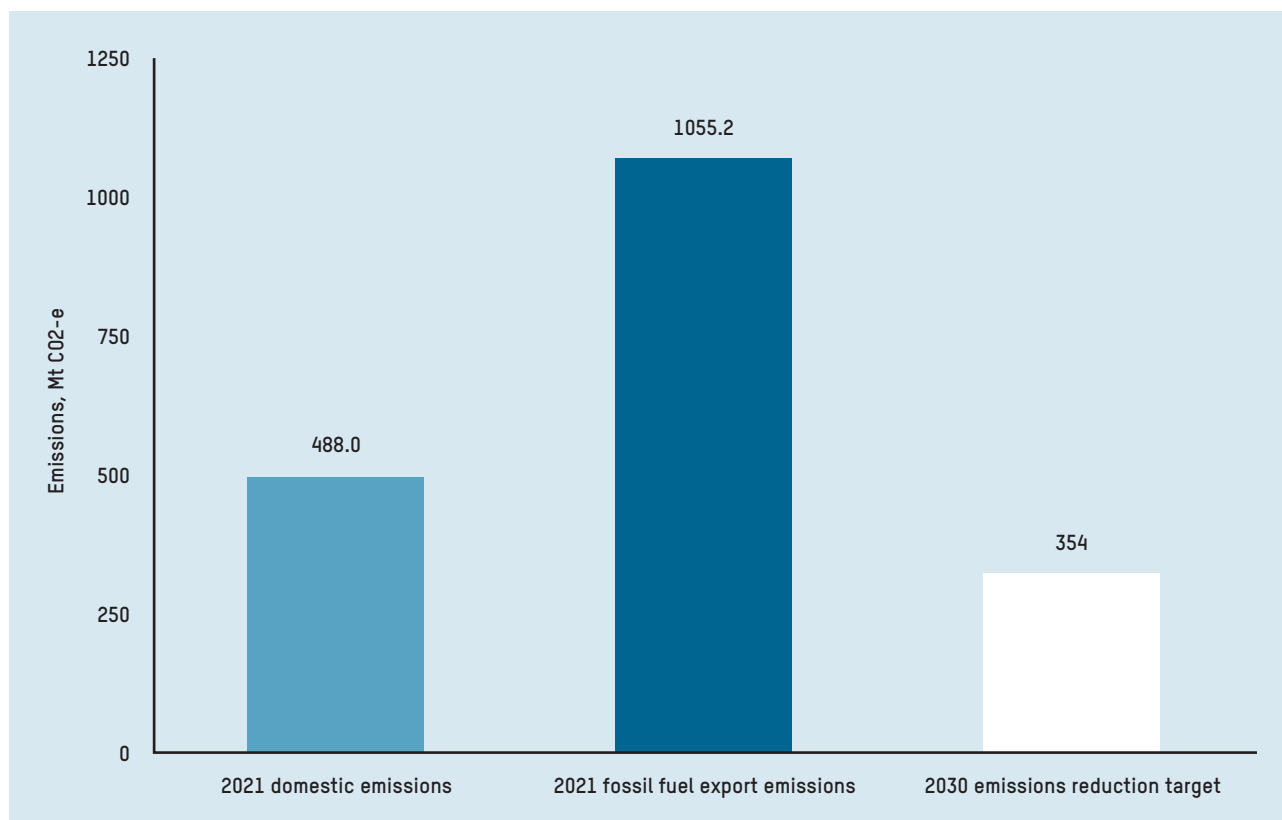
Supply, support and influence

Quantifying responsibility based on historical and domestic emissions, however, does not fully account for Australia’s actual contributions to climate change.

First, as one of the largest fossil fuel exporters in the world, Australia makes huge contributions to global emissions through its fossil fuel exports. As GHG

emissions are attributed in emissions accounting to the countries where they are created, the majority of emissions associated with Australia’s exported fossil fuel products are not attributed to Australia. Figure 4 shows that, in 2021, emissions produced overseas from Australia’s fossil fuel exports more than doubled its domestic emissions from all sources.

Figure 4: Australia’s emissions³⁵



There is a strong case for at least some of the emissions from fossil fuel exports being counted towards Australia's climate change contributions. While Australia is not wholly responsible for the emissions of its exports, Australia is complicit by choosing to continue, expand and benefit financially from its export industry, while avoiding liability for the harms caused. Even splitting the emissions produced between the supplier and consumer (50% to each) would leave Australia with significantly increased liabilities for funding global responses to climate harm.³⁶

Attributing responsibility for end uses of products such as exports is not a novel concept in international trade and treaties. Exporters are held responsible for the export and end uses of other commodities, including uranium, for which many countries place restrictions on where it can be sold due to risks of weapons proliferation and accidents or storage issues, and live animals, due to welfare concerns.³⁷ In such cases, if issues arise exporters can be held at least partially responsible for not ensuring appropriate use of their exports. Similar concepts can, and should, apply to continued fossil fuel exports, which currently fail to consider or compensate for the climate harms caused by these products.

Other types of activities that make a huge contribution to climate change are not reflected in the *direct* counting of emissions. The federal government supports the fossil fuel industry in different ways, including providing physical infrastructure, such as ports, roads and rail lines, subsidies and financing, and legal and regulatory mechanisms to make it easier for proponents to produce and export fossil fuels and develop new projects. Estimates of the subsidies given in one form or another to fossil fuels in Australia range from AUD \$11 billion to AUD \$43 billion per year, which improve the commercial viability of products.³⁸ These kinds of indirect support are vital parts of the causal chains leading to GHG emissions.

Australia indirectly contributes to global GHG emissions by exerting significant influence over international fossil fuel markets, and climate negotiations and agreements. By lobbying to alter or water down global agreements, Australia has at negotiations, including COP, enabled the continued use of fossil fuels and less ambitious agreements, targets and commitments.³⁹ These kinds of indirect support for fossil fuels should be counted as part of Australia's climate contributions, and further arguments for Australia needing to rebalance its approaches to its climate response.

CAPACITY TO PAY

Approaches to determining a country's climate duties, including the approach adopted by the UNFCCC, generally consider whether a country has the capacity to take the climate action required. Capacity in this sense usually refers to whether the country can easily afford a substantial climate response. This can be measured in various ways, including according to GDP, which can be adjusted to take into account unequal distribution of wealth to shield lowest-income countries from unaffordable responses. Many countries' Nationally Determined Contributions are conditional on receiving financial support, in order to reflect a lower capacity to carry the cost of emissions reductions efforts.⁴⁰

Considering Australia's high historical and current domestic emissions, emissions from fossil fuel exports, and further contributions to climate change through its continued support of fossil fuels domestically and politically, it is clear that it is not doing its fair share of climate action. With one of the highest levels of per capita GDP in the OECD, Australia has the capacity to contribute meaningfully to climate efforts. Several studies have noted the low level of ambition of Australia's current emissions reduction target and the associated liabilities.⁴¹ Given its years of inaction on climate change, some estimate that without factoring in the contribution of fossil fuel exports Australia would have to raise its Nationally Determined Contribution commitment by 170% above its current level.⁴² Higher ambition requires additional spending, likely well above the federal government's current AUD \$25 billion commitment to domestic action.⁴³



Mekko, Indonesia: Marlina waters the community plantation garden. She and her husband, Said, have turned to gardening to be able to feed their family. They have been forced to adapt to climate change, the associated loss of coral reefs and the reduction of fish stock in the ocean locally. The people of the Bajo tribe in Mekko, Indonesia, have lost their secure livelihoods and worry that their cultural identity as 'the people of the sea' will soon be lost too. Photo: Vikram Sombu/Oxfam. Oxfam acknowledges the support of the Australian Government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).

IV. CHANGING THE FOCUS: DUTIES TO THE ASIA PACIFIC REGION

While the ambitions of Australia's domestic climate commitments are lacking, its commitments also need to be more far reaching.

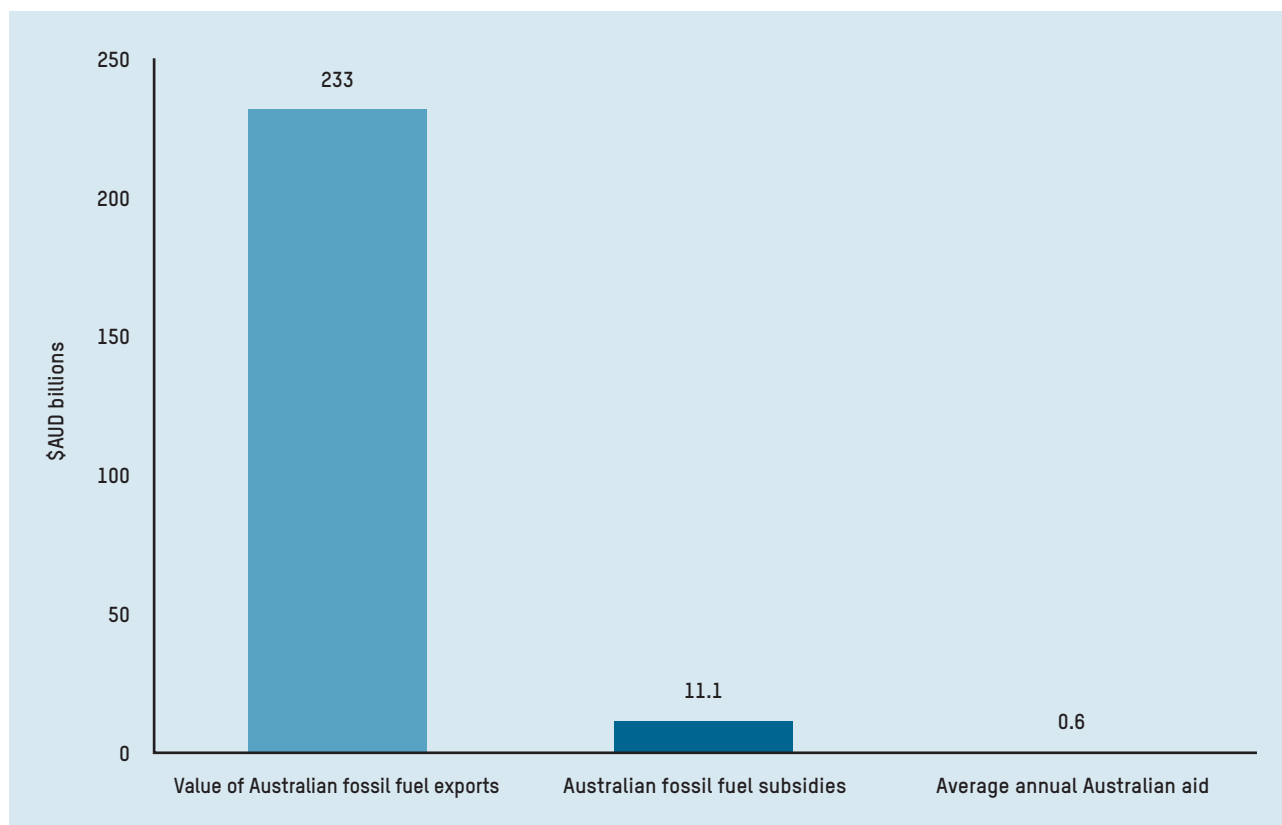
Given Australia's significant contribution to climate change and unequal distribution of impacts internationally, the country needs a better roadmap for sharing responsibilities for strong climate action. This includes considering what the polluter pays principle requires of contributing parties. To meaningfully address their impacts, countries such as Australia need to consider the unequal distribution of climate harms, particularly for developing countries and SIDS, when planning their climate responses, including by considering not only domestic ambitions, but what resources ought to be used to address harms globally. This is how questions of liability for harm are approached. For instance, in the case where a company pollutes a river and accepts that it has wrongly caused a harm, it would be considered odd if its response was to only remediate damage to the part of the river that it occupied. A more appropriate response would be for the company to address the harms its pollution caused areas and people downstream *before* it looked after its own interests. The same type of argument applies to climate change. This paper focuses here on the duties that Australia has to the Asia Pacific region. A regional focus is warranted, given that Australia has existing aid obligations and relationships in the region, and this is where many of the more severe climate harms are likely to occur. This is not to say that Australia should only assist communities in the region, just that it ought to be a priority.

What is the right split between Australia's domestic and global actions? Estimates of the overall global cost of climate action for developing countries vary greatly. Using the US \$100 billion commitment to global climate finance as a guide, Australia's resource allocation to this goal must come close to matching its domestic commitment. Estimates from ActionAid and Oxfam Australia put Australia's fair share of the US \$100 billion climate finance goal at AUD \$4 billion per annum up until 2025.⁴⁴ The Climate Equity Reference Calculator also estimates that Australia's burden of climate finance is of this order of magnitude.⁴⁵ Adding the increased liability from fossil fuel exports, this is likely to increase. If historical responsibility for

emissions and capacity to act are both weighted at 50% and the former is doubled by adding the volume of exported emissions (in line with Figure 4), then the projected new finance commitment increases by at least 25% again to around AUD \$5 billion per annum in new funding if it is to adequately address its real contribution to climate change and focus on where the harms associated with its contribution actually occur.⁴⁶ This would require dramatically altering the ratio of federal government spending on domestic to overseas climate spending from the current ratio of one dollar spent overseas versus six domestically.

While significant, AUD \$5 billion per annum is still less than half of the lower estimate of Australia's existing annual subsidies to the fossil fuel industry, being AUD \$11.1 billion.⁴⁷ Moreover, the value of Australia's fossil fuel exports in 2022–2023 alone was around AUD \$233 billion dollars – 65 times the federal annual expenditure on meeting Australia's net zero targets and more than 388 times the current annual amount spent on overseas climate aid.⁴⁸ While the revenue from fossil fuels exports flows to private companies, relatively small additional taxes could raise amounts that are significant in this context, as others have argued.⁴⁹

Figure 5. Fossil fuel revenue versus overseas climate aid, per annum



Looking to the future to needs-based climate finance goals from 2025 and beyond, Australia’s fair share of climate finance will increase significantly. In one estimate, in a global stocktake report, the United Nations calls for increases in adaptation finance to USD \$200-250 billion by 2030, and loss and damage finance to USD \$200-400 billion to meet escalating needs.⁵⁰ The more Australia delays action, the more Australia will owe developing countries experiencing the impacts of climate change in the future.

An obvious place to start rebalancing Australia’s climate commitment towards greater overseas climate aid is with a redirection of expenditure away from the fossil fuel industry. The fossil fuel industry can also provide a source of revenue to fund international climate measures; while the industry continues to operate, greater taxation of revenue would provide additional funding, as the Queensland Government recently demonstrated through its increase in coal royalty rates.⁵¹ Currently, the federal government’s Petroleum Resource Rent Tax raises only a small amount of revenue (AUD \$2.23 billion in 2023–2024), well below forecasts.⁵² Taxation of the fossil fuel industry to fund climate measures would be morally appropriate, given the industry’s climate change contributions, and would also not impede domestic mitigation measures.

Increasing the priority of addressing harms where they have occurred globally will make a difference across all areas of climate mitigation, adaptation and loss and damage.

Importantly, there is an interesting twist to the allocation of resources for mitigation. If it is correct that countries such as Australia ought to do substantially more mitigation because of the real level of their contribution, it may not be feasible to undertake all that mitigation within Australia’s territorial borders, as the emissions cuts required are greater than current levels of domestic emissions. As noted above, estimates of a fair share of emissions reductions might mean that Australia has to raise its Nationally Determined Contribution commitment by 170% above its current level. In this case, financing of and assisting with mitigation in developing countries must be a key pillar of Australian climate policy in order to meet global obligations. To clarify, assisting other countries with their mitigation efforts is not a kind of offset for Australia’s continued high level of emissions, but ought to count against the assisted country’s mitigation efforts.

Alongside a domestic and regional just climate transition, the argument above also highlights Australia’s role and responsibility in supporting



Bangladesh: Moina and her child cross flood waters after Cyclone Bulbul in 2019. The cyclone killed 17 people and forced the evacuation of over 2 million. Oxfam joined the humanitarian response through its Empowering Local and National Humanitarian Actors program, as part of the Humanitarian Response Grant Facility. Photo: Fabeha Monir/Oxfam.

countries to adapt to the impacts of climate change caused by Australia's emissions and its appropriation of the atmospheric commons.⁵³ Even if the world reaches net zero emissions by 2050, climate change impacts will stay with us for decades, even centuries, until the climate reaches equilibrium again.⁵⁴ This then necessitates robust and expansive measures for adaptation to those impacts. Receiving adaptation funding is arguably of higher priority to many countries in this region. This includes Pacific Island states who have negligible emissions but are currently facing the impacts of rising sea levels, flooded crops, depleting fish stocks and extreme weather events at unprecedented frequencies and intensities.

Furthermore, when the adaptive capacities of developing countries in the region are met and exceeded, action on loss and damage becomes a key pillar of climate action alongside adaptation and mitigation. As loss and damage solidifies conceptually and legalistically, through the establishment of a new dedicated fund agreed at COP27, Australia must play a productive role in supporting loss and damage efforts across the region. This includes ensuring funds dedicated to loss and damage meet escalating costs and needs, and that Australia's outward climate policy posture considers loss and damage as integral to regional solidarity and distinct from mitigation and adaptation.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AUSTRALIA'S RESPONSE

PRINCIPLES

The allocation of greater resources to new global climate measures must be delivered in the right kind of way. Just as the allocation of resources must be guided by appropriate principles, so too the delivery of those resources.

Australia's response must be:

- **comprehensive**, with action extending across mitigation, adaptation and loss and damage, domestically and internationally. Focusing on just one of these elements risks ignoring harms for which countries urgently need assistance.
- consistent with **principles of justice**, intersecting with and incorporating other urgent social goals like reducing wealth inequality and poverty, reducing injustices caused by climate change and colonisation, and improving gender equality and human rights.
- **targeted**, prioritising climate-vulnerable communities, including women, First Nations people, gender diverse people, people with disability and displaced people.
- **participatory**, with mechanisms to ensure, and solutions determined by, genuine leadership and involvement from affected communities.
- **transparent and accountable**, with actions and financing available for scrutiny and evaluation.
- **timely**, being responsive to 1.5C targets and ensuring time-bound achievements of international climate commitments.
- **fungible**, with resources and measures adapted to ensure that communities are able to flexibly deploy them in a manner that centres local needs and perspectives. A key part of the deployment will be ensuring that the resources function for the benefit of the relevant communities.
- representative of a **'fair share'**, with new and additional funding to development assistance to meet scales of need.
- **no strings**; community-led and owned. Ownership or sale structures that primarily benefit the donor will further increase inequalities. For example, assistance that is designed to benefit Australian manufacturing or provide an excessive ongoing

income stream via ownership of an energy asset is not primarily for the benefit of the recipient country.

- **not undermined** by domestic or international actions. Continuing heavy support for fossil fuel extraction and export will only undermine global climate action commitments.
- **sustainable**, with support being long-term, predictable and programmatic rather than project-based.

SPECIFIC MEASURES OF AUSTRALIA'S RESPONSE

Informed by the above design principles, this paper highlights, below, specific measures that can be employed to increase investment across the three pillars and measures to raise the revenues required for a globally just transition to climate change. Australia's climate investments need to be directly in line with its 'fair share' and work towards meeting estimated costs for global mitigation, adaptation and loss and damage.

Australia's response cannot only be financial, although this is important. Its response must also include legislative, regulatory and policy measures to create appropriate settings for the investments needed to make large-scale climate action possible.

Australia can also respond via influencing measures, using its position in international institutions and organisations such as the UNFCCC, the OECD, the G20 and multilateral development banks such as the Asian Development Bank, to represent the interests and needs of its climate-vulnerable neighbours and enable genuine global cooperation for a just climate transition. There is an opportunity, after decades of blocking action at the global level, for Australia to switch course and become a leader in international climate negotiations. It can meaningfully stand shoulder-to-shoulder with its Asia Pacific neighbours, ensuring that current and future mechanisms for climate action, such as the Global Goal for Adaptation, the New Collective Quantified Goal for Climate Finance and the Loss and Damage Fund, match the scale of need for developing countries, reach local communities where they are, address intersectional inequalities, and enable flexibility and programmatic stability over the long-term.



Hilabaan Island, Dolores municipality, Philippines: Celsa is a member of one of the women's groups that launched the solar project on Hilabaan Island. Members appreciate the financial, health and environmental benefits of using solar power rather than fossil fuels like kerosene. It has enabled them to work in the evenings, and their children can do their homework safely. Women's groups play a key role in disaster management in their community. Oxfam and partner SIKAT provided training and helped fund the solar installation as part of the Disaster Risk Reduction: Asia Community Disaster Preparedness and Transformation Philippines program. Photo: Elizabeth Stevens/Oxfam.

Australia must work closely and directly with affected communities to build local resilience. Australian climate assistance benefits from having a locally led justice framing, ensuring every dollar spent enables communities to respond to climate change and address inequalities on the ground. Funds that incorporate participatory funding structures and community feedback mechanisms have been particularly successful at enabling locally led action on poverty reduction, sustainable development and climate action. For example, the World Bank's Community and Local Development programs demonstrate and model the benefits of giving local communities enhanced direct access to flexible and reliable finance. Communities work together with local government officials and technical experts to address local development challenges, allowing the incorporation of local knowledge in the planning, project identification, development and evaluation process.⁵⁵ Communities often receive block grants,

distributed by community leaders according to specific and self-identified needs and enabling responses that enjoy local legitimacy and maximise local benefits for each dollar invested.⁵⁶ Oxfam's own B-READY (Building Resilient, Adaptive and Disaster Ready Communities) pilot project focuses on enabling a shift from humanitarian response after disasters to better align systems, policies and financing for better disaster response. Delivered by a consortium of government and civil society partners including Oxfam, the pilot project focuses on building community resilience to shocks brought on by natural hazards across nine *barangays* (villages) in Salcedo, Eastern Samar, Philippines. As a collection of anticipatory actions delivered through smartphones, communities get instant information and access to resources to evacuate before cyclones make landfall, mitigating damage and loss of life. This pilot supports the idea that anticipatory action, informed by local knowledge and direct, inclusive, participatory modes

of assistance is necessary for the humanitarian and climate finance system to be more effective. Examples like this are instructive for Australia and demonstrate how the types and quality of support and climate assistance, alongside quantum, are critically important in making the just climate transition work.

Finally, Australia can play a key role in disseminating and collaborating with regional partners on climate action research, as well as the transfer of green technologies and expertise relevant for mitigation, adaptation and loss and damage to developing countries. Building research capacity in the region, collaborating with universities, research and industry networks, and advocating for measures to democratise patents needed for technology transfer, are all key in ensuring all countries, developed and

developing are appropriately equipped to mitigate emissions and adapt to climate impacts.

Appendix 1 lays out specific actions and measures that Australia could do in order to match its historical responsibility for climate change and its capacity to pay. Measures are matched against the aforementioned design principles and organised across the foci of mitigation, adaptation and loss and damage. Also included is a 'cross-cutting' focus for those measures that address two or more pillars at once. This is by no means a complete list of measures Australia could possibly take, but it is a starting point to reflect on where Australia is now (Australia's current commitments and spending), where it could be and what it ought to be doing as the effects of climate change intensify and worsen for communities on the frontlines.

CONCLUSION

Overall, Australia's contribution to a global just transition in response to climate change is falling well short of what could be considered by any measure to be a just response. Its mitigation targets and the funding attached to them do not reflect the scale of Australia's climate duties generated by its historical and current emissions, comparative wealth and support for the fossil fuel industry.

If Australia is genuinely to take on its fair share of the burdens of addressing climate change, it must dramatically increase its financial and non-financial commitments to assisting developing countries. Australia needs to change the ratio of resources committed to domestic actions versus overseas actions to better reflect the global impact of its actions.

The shortfall in overseas commitments undermines the world's, and the Asia Pacific region's, ability to meet the challenges of climate change. To meet these needs, Australia must adopt robust justice considerations in its decision-making to fully assess all of its contributions to climate change and the appropriateness of any responses. As this report has argued, not only are Australia's emissions high currently and historically, but Australia makes a huge contribution via being one of the largest exporters of fossil fuels in the world. Recognising the 'global debt' that these actions generate is a key dimension of a just response. These considerations alone increase Australia's obligations to developing countries. Moreover, continuing to be a major fossil fuel exporter will undermine efforts to address climate change.

Establishing that Australia must do more is only the first step. As this report has argued, the provision of increased assistance must also align with sound just transition policies, including ensuring that assistance meets local needs, is targeted, and is able to achieve other important social goals. Without a just response, Australia risks creating further harms.

If Australia is to act morally, it must acknowledge the full extent of its climate change contributions, including historical emissions, current domestic emissions and, crucially, emissions from fossil fuel exports. It must commit to allocating far greater resources to assisting developing countries to mitigate and adapt, and compensate them for their climate losses.

APPENDIX 1: SPECIFIC MEASURES FOR A JUST TRANSITION

Focus	Measure type	Measure	Related delivery principles
Cross-cutting	Influencing	Recognise the importance of climate finance and loss and damage funding in climate change legislation and policy.	Comprehensive; Just
		Take a whole-of-government approach to the just climate transition, embedding climate justice considerations in decision-making across all government departments.	Comprehensive; Just; Not undermined
		Embrace a leadership role in climate diplomacy and negotiations to meet the urgency and pace of action needed now to avert catastrophe.	Comprehensive; Timely
		Represent the interests and support the calls of regional neighbours at the UNFCCC, G20, World Trade Organisation, Association of Southeast Asian Nations, Pacific Island Forum, the Quad, multilateral development banks and other relevant forums and summits to ensure action meets the scale of need.	Not undermined
		Contribute to the International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion on the obligations of states on Climate Change.	Just
	Legislative, policy, regulatory	Ensure Australia is led by a human rights and environmentally sustainable approach to its domestic and international climate action.	Just; Not undermined
		Ensure living wages are provided to workers involved in renewable energy infrastructure production and operation for Australia, and in programs Australia funds across mitigation, adaptation, and loss and damage internationally.	Just; Not undermined
		Ensure the free, prior and informed consent of Indigenous peoples for projects on their land and ensure local communities are included and receive benefits from climate change solutions.	Just; Not undermined
	Financing	Stop incentivising fossil fuel extraction, use and export through fossil fuel subsidies and redirect funds towards climate solutions.	Not undermined; Timely
		Increase quantum to meet the fair share of climate finance for adaptation and mitigation, being USD \$5 billion per annum as part of the global USD \$100 billion goal until 2025, increasing from 2025 based on need. This includes AUD \$2.5 billion per annum each for mitigation and adaptation finance. ⁵⁷	Represents 'fair share'; Timely; Just

Focus	Measure type	Measure	Related delivery principles
Cross-cutting (continued)	Financing (continued)	Ensure funds committed for adaption, mitigation and loss and damage are new and additional to Official Development Assistance.	Represents 'fair share'
		Ensure funding is delivered as grants, not loans, and advocate to multilateral development banks and other development finance institutions to significantly increase grants and stop non-concessional lending to developing countries.	No strings; Just
		Advocate for and implement taxation measures that disincentivise fossil fuel extraction, use and export, and raise revenues for climate action. Options include taxes on wealth, windfall profits or super profits, particularly on fossil fuel companies (e.g. reform the Petroleum Resource Rent Tax to more effectively tax fossil fuel projects), climate damages taxes, or climate sectoral levies such as frequent flyer and an international shipping levy.	Represents 'fair share'; Not undermined; Just
		Advocate for increased international ambitions for mitigation, adaptation and loss and damage finance.	Timely; Comprehensive; Represents 'fair share'; Just
	Research, knowledge and technology sharing	Facilitate collaboration with Pacific Island countries and territories to build capacity for environmentally sustainable research. Determine research priorities, identify issues and lead joint initiatives on adaptation, mitigation and loss and damage interventions.	Comprehensive; Participatory; Fungible
		Expand in-country skills programs and scholarship programs such as the Australia Awards program so students from developing countries can study in Australia and bring key skills, expertise and knowledge to the region in a 'reverse brain-drain'.	Participatory; Just
		Provide research and technology support for climate vulnerable countries to collect climatic and meteorological data as well as data to capture the impacts of climate change in-country.	Participatory
		Support reform of the international intellectual property regime to facilitate access to and transfer of green technologies from wealthy to developing countries.. This may include internationally agreed guidelines on technology licensing or the creation of a 'Global Technology IP Rights Pool' for climate change that promotes access for developing countries on fair and reasonable terms. ⁵⁸	No strings; Just

Focus	Measure type	Measure	Related delivery principles
Mitigation	Legislative, policy, regulatory	Increase Australian Nationally Determined Contributions to match science-based pathways to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees.	Timely; Not undermined
		A new Climate Change Act to lock in science-aligned domestic action to achieve net zero emissions by 2035. This must include: stopping new domestic coal, oil and gas projects; phasing out fossil fuel exports; ending land clearing and native forest logging; transitioning the country's vehicle fleet to renewable electricity; enhancing the sustainability of the agriculture sector, among others.	Timely; Not undermined
		Strengthen the Safeguard Mechanism in line with science-based emissions targets and limit the use of offsets.	Timely; Not undermined
		Ensure climate standards are reflected in investments in mining and extraction in the region.	Not undermined
		Ensure human rights are upheld and living wages are provided to workers involved in renewable energy infrastructure production and operation.	Just; Not undermined
		Ensure the free, prior and informed consent for renewable energy projects on First Nations' land and that First Nations people are supported to be part of and benefit from renewable energy projects.	Just; Not undermined
		Consider strategies moving to 'beyond net zero' and beyond Australia's science-based emissions reduction pathway to 1.5 degrees, freeing up additional carbon budget for developing countries.	Timely; Just
	Influencing	Support the Port Vila Declaration for a Fossil Fuel Free Pacific and support calls for and sign a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty to govern the end of fossil fuel expansion, equitable phase out of fossil fuels, and a global just transition. ⁵⁹	Timely; Just
		As part of the declaration committing to transparently disclose fossil fuel investment and projects, demand that other governments do the same, including through the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative and Global Registry of Fossil Fuels.	Transparent and accountable
	Financing	Activate blended finance for impact investment in mitigation projects with strong social and environmental safeguards to ensure the investments are owned by and deliver for local communities, reduce inequality and improve human rights, including access to essential services for all.	Timely; Comprehensive

Focus	Measure type	Measure	Related delivery principles
Adaptation	Legislative, policy, regulatory	Advance research agendas that promote just adaptation in Australia and internationally, including First Nations-led research, and the establishment of a national institute for sharing knowledge, practices and lessons learned. ⁶⁰	Comprehensive; Participatory
		Adopt the Principles for Locally Led Adaptation in Australian bilateral climate finance.	Participatory; Fungible; Transparent and accountable; Sustainable
		Continue prioritising investments in climate adaptation projects (76% of Australia's climate finance was dedicated to adaptation only, and 79% was dedicated to adaptation + cross-cutting investments in 2019–2020) via grants in the region. ⁶¹ Scale up dedicated climate adaptation and resilience that goes beyond mainstreaming and consider transformational adaptation programs for communities.	No strings; Comprehensive
	Influencing	Play a strong role in UNFCCC negotiations and diplomacy, ensuring the New Collective Quantified Goal meets the scale of need, operates quickly and flexibly, and reaches people most at risk of vulnerability.	Represents 'fair share'; Targeted; Fungible
		Advocate for reform of UNFCCC climate funds, including the Green Climate Fund, to ensure greater accessibility for climate vulnerable countries and greater funding for locally led adaptation, with leadership and meaningful participation from impacted communities.	Targeted; Equal and just; Participatory; Transparent and accountable
Loss and damage	Legislative, policy, regulatory	In bilateral funding, prioritise flexible funds for long-term programs, including programs aligned with national climate and development plans, to reduce administration costs associated with project-by-project funding, and better respond to evolving needs.	Sustainable; No strings
		Incorporate loss and damage considerations and interactions with achieving Australia's development goals into the new International Development Policy.	Comprehensive; Just
	Influencing	At UNFCCC negotiations, advocate for the establishment of the Loss and Damage Fund, which is designed to be comprehensive, covering slow and rapid onset, economic and non-economic loss and damage, and to be accessible to all developing countries and local communities, including the most climate-vulnerable.	Comprehensive, Just

Focus	Measure type	Measure	Related delivery principles
Loss and damage (continued)	Influencing (continued)	Ensure the new Loss and Damage Fund embeds the Principles for Locally Led Adaptation.	Targeted; Participatory; Fungible; Sustainable; Just
	Financing	Advocate in international fora for a USD \$400 billion baseline per annum for loss and damage funding directed towards developing countries. ⁶²	Comprehensive; Timely; Just
		Make new and additional contributions to the Loss and Damage Fund, reflecting Australia's historical responsibility for global emissions, continued fossil fuel use and high capacity to pay.	Represents 'fair share'; Just



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