



Ms Carole A Theobald
Coordinator
Zonta Says NOW to Gender-Equal Climate Action
District 23, Zonta International
8 Cormorant Cross
WILLETTON WA 6155

14 November 2023

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
PO Box 1600
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Email: ec.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Sir or Madam,

Climate Change Amendment (Duty of Care and Intergenerational Climate Equity) Bill 2023

Zonta International¹ is a global human rights organisation committed to building a better world for women and girls. It achieves this through a wide range of service and advocacy programs that, in short, say 'yes' to gender equality, 'no' to violence against women and 'now' to gender-equal climate action.

I have the privilege of leading Zonta International's *Zonta Says NOW to Gender-Equal Climate Action* Global Working Group as well as coordinating the *Zonta Says NOW* program in District 23², which includes Western Australia, South Australia, Northern Territory, Victoria, and Tasmania.

In 2021, Zonta International released its *Statement on Climate Change: a gender equality issue*³ (the Statement) in response to the growing body of evidence⁴ showing that climate change is an intergenerational concern that disproportionately affects women and girls⁵.

Zonta Says NOW to gender-equal climate action was established to implement the Statement's recommendations. The Statement works towards gender-equal climate justice and is based on the Paris Climate Agreement, the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction, and the Sustainable Development Goals.

On Earth, all humans breathe the same air and share one polluted atmosphere.

The links between increased greenhouse gas emissions, global heating and an increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events have been well documented in the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.⁶

In 2020, the Lancet reported that the global north (of which Australia is a part) contributed 92 per cent of the excess atmospheric carbon dioxide concentration⁷, yet all countries, rich and poor, feel the impacts of climate change – with the poorest nations having the least ability to adapt⁸.

Girls' education is particularly at risk from climate change in poorer countries. For example, the Global Center on Adaptation observed that in Africa⁹:

- Girls in drought-impacted countries spend longer collecting water, food, and fuel, exposing them to a greater risk of sexual violence and causing them to miss school or be too tired to learn.
- Girls whose families have been economically impacted by floods, fires, and storms are forced to leave school and find a job or be sold into child marriage.
- When floods and droughts affect the availability of water at school, menstruating girls and teachers are likely to miss school, and
- The longer climate-related disasters keep girls out of school, the less likely they are to return.

UNICEF also reports¹⁰ that at the current pace, the world is at least 300 years away from ending child marriage – and analysis of historical data found that every 10 per cent increase or decrease in rainfall was associated with a 1 per cent increase in child marriage.

Closer to home, Gender and Disaster Australia points out that gender-based violence increases after a disaster¹¹. Children exposed to violence experience long-lasting developmental, health and well-being issues¹², and in Australia, one in six girls and one in nine boys have experienced physical and/or sexual violence or witnessed parental violence before the age of 15.¹³ In the coming years, how many more children will suffer from violence triggered by extreme heat, drought, bushfires, floods, storms and sea level rise?

Climate change presents serious mental health risks, especially for young people. In a survey of 10,000 young people (aged 16-24) in 10 countries, nearly two-thirds of young Australians felt the government lied about the effectiveness of its climate actions and was failing young people across the world. Overall, the survey concluded that *climate change, climate anxiety, and inadequate government response are all chronic stressors that could threaten the mental health and well-being of children and young people around the world*¹⁴.

What we do in Australia ultimately contributes to the suffering of children at home and abroad. In Wales, a Future Generations Commissioner is a guardian of future generations¹⁵, but in Australia, who can we rely on to protect our grandchildren's future?

Australia is a rich, well-educated nation responsible for meeting its obligations under the Paris Climate Agreement. We have immense natural resources with the potential to create a world-leading economy based on renewable energy¹⁶. We can create sustainable jobs for future generations – green hydrogen and steel are all doable.

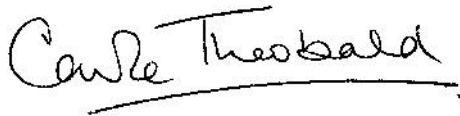
Yet, we choose to throw away a secure long-term economic future by supporting the expansion of short-lived fossil-fuel-based industries.

It is morally reprehensible, knowing what we know about climate change, that fossil fuel industries can legally expand their operations in Australia¹⁷. Something is fundamentally wrong when the Environment Minister is not required to consider climate threats when assessing projects¹⁸. We must do better. We can do better.

The Duty of Care Bill takes a sensible approach, enabling 'joined-up thinking' across key government departments on significant decisions that facilitate the financing and development of projects that may significantly increase greenhouse gas emissions. Ministers will no longer be hamstrung by the inadequacies of the law and will be able to consider issues holistically. Will it be enough to protect future generations? Only time will tell.

As a climate justice advocate, mother, and grandmother, I strongly support this Climate Change Amendment (Duty of Care and Intergenerational Climate Equity) Bill 2023.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carole Theobald". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal line.

Carole Theobald

Coordinator
Zonta Says NOW to Gender Equal Climate Action
Zonta International District 23

Chair 2022-2023, Working Group
Zonta Says NOW to Gender Equal Climate Action
Zonta International

Att: Reference list

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