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CLIMATE COUNCIL STATEMENT ON THE FLOODS

This is climate change. Now is the time for leadership.

The scale and speed of the flooding disaster still unfolding across Queensland and New South Wales is breathtaking. Some communities remain cut off and in dire need of fresh water and food, emergency housing, telecommunications, and power.

The emergency response is still underway, but we already know of widespread devastation with lives lost, livelihoods swept away and entire towns destroyed.

As extraordinary flooding and extreme rainfall were sweeping the east coast, hundreds of the world's most eminent scientists were providing information painfully relevant to what Australians are experiencing.

The latest report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change makes it crystal clear that climate change is intensifying extreme weather events including rainfall events like this one.

The report warns that our ability to cope with these events as well as escalating heatwaves, bushfires, and other extremes is rapidly diminishing. It spells out how the decisions of governments this decade will determine how much worse things get.

In short: unless we rapidly and drastically cut greenhouse gas emissions this decade, extreme weather will get much, much worse.

Climate change isn't a footnote to the story of these floods. It is the story.

Some politicians claim this flooding disaster was something no one could have predicted. The implication is that the heartbreak and loss being experienced by so many Australians right now is unavoidable.

The truth is, scientists have been warning us for decades that climate change will worsen all extreme weather in Australia. Deadlier heatwaves. Devastating droughts. Megafires like Black Summer. Rainbombs such as this.

Many of these flood-affected communities have experienced multiple “unprecedented” disasters in the past 10 years. If we don’t start talking about why this is happening then we won’t be able to respond appropriately to this disaster over the coming months and years. Nor can we adequately prepare for those on the way.

Worsening disaster after disaster - with fewer reprieves between are our reality, because the Earth’s atmosphere is warmer, wetter, and more energetic. This is climate change.

Unprecedented is no reason to be unprepared.

We’ve had decades to respond to expert advice and help communities prepare for a massive escalation in extreme weather.

It’s been almost 500 days since the Royal Commission into Natural National Disaster Arrangements handed its report to the Morrison Government. The Commission acknowledged the role that climate change is playing in worsening disasters such as the Black Summer bushfires: *“Natural disasters have changed, and it has become clear to us that the nation’s disaster management arrangements must also change.”*

Our frontline responders are being stretched past their absolute limits. Battered communities are struggling to cope, often experiencing multiple record-breaking disasters within a few years. In some parts of Australia people can no longer afford insurance and many will be left with little after these waters recede.

Major investment and careful planning are required to prepare communities and first responders.

Where are our leaders?

Too many leaders are silent or absent. Some are wilfully misleading the public about what little has been done to address the climate challenge. Time and again expert advice is offered but ignored.

Now is the time to talk about the Morrison Government’s inadequate response to climate change, because burning coal, oil, and gas is supercharging extreme weather. Those who argue otherwise want debate gagged because they are failing to step up on this issue.

Australians are paying a high price for the lack of meaningful national action to tackle climate change and prepare communities for worsening extreme weather.

Elected leaders must be held accountable.

The media has a critical role to play in explaining why extreme weather events are becoming more frequent and severe. Today, it is remiss to report on any extreme weather event without providing information on how climate change worsens these events, and what should be done in response.

Australians want and deserve better than this.

We call on all federal political parties and candidates to:

- a) Tell Australians what concrete steps you will take to prepare and equip emergency services and communities for inevitable climate-fuelled disasters.
- b) Actively acknowledge the destructive role that climate change is playing in driving worsening disasters including these megafloods.
- c) Explain to the public how in the next term of Federal Parliament you plan to get national emissions plummeting by rapidly scaling up readily available renewable energy and building an economy that is free from fossil fuels.
- d) Ensure that towns, cities and communities are rebuilt in a way that takes into account the inevitable future changes in climate and makes them more resilient.

It's time to show leadership and step up to the most critical issue not just of our time, but all time. We have everything to lose, the time for action is now.

The Climate Council brings together Australia's preeminent experts of climate science, impacts and solutions. We provide authoritative, expert and evidence-based advice on climate change to journalists, policymakers, and the wider Australian community. Our full team of experts can be found:

<https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/team/>

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