

GREENNEWSAUSTRALIA



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Dear Mr Morrison,

My name is Nicola Allen, and I am fifteen years old. I wrote the open letter below because I wanted to share my concern about the government's plans for a gas-led recovery from COVID-19. After discovering these plans, I spent a month of intensive research, gathering all the information I could upon the subject, and this is the final product - entirely my own work, entirely without coercion, financial backing or plagiarism. I decided to take on this massive project not only because it is extremely interesting, but because I have a deep love for nature and a passion for solving environmental problems. I hope you can spare a few minutes of your precious time to read this.

All the major scientific groups are in agreement that the climate crisis is real, human caused and requires urgent action - NASA, the IPCC, the CSIRO, Australian Academy of Sciences, the Australian Bureau of Meteorology, the WHO, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, also called NOAA - the list goes on. There have been seven independent studies into the scientific consensus on climate change since 2004, the last in 2015. The mode, or most common score, is 97%.

COVID-19, the novel coronavirus, is having devastating impacts on economies and workers all around the world, and we're heading into a terrible economic recession, even here in Australia. Paradoxically, this could be the start of the energy revolution. We have an excellent chance to turn the climate change ship around and repair the damage caused by decades of lobby-group and fossil fuel-driven inaction, by making huge new investments in renewable and green technology. Across the globe, there is an increasing amount of support for an environmentally sustainable, economically beneficial and humanitarian approach to recovery from the coronavirus, supported by scientific and economic studies which prove the viability of renewable energy and other green technologies as solutions to the climate and coronavirus crises. Because in this pandemic, expert advice has been lifesaving. Now it is time to listen to the climate experts as well.

A report released by the CSIRO in June 2017, called, 'Low Emissions Technology Roadmap,' said in its key findings that, "Australia is endowed with some of the world's best energy resources, has good skills in low emissions technologies, strong institutions and strong trading relationships with key consumers of energy. These advantages leave it well placed to benefit from a domestic and global transition to low emissions energy." This shows that we are advantageously positioned to make the transition to renewable energy, and don't have any resource-related excuses for not doing so.

In May 2018, a report was released by the International Labour Organisation, a branch of the United Nations, titled, 'World Employment and Social Outlook 2018: Greening with jobs'. We learn from this report that by 2030, a shift to a green economy would create 24 million new jobs. It states, "Environmental sustainability can be compatible with decent work, especially when the institutional and policy tools adopted to promote decent work complement measures to advance a sustainable, low-carbon and resource-efficient economy." In other words, when governments support a green energy

transition, good working conditions are more likely to be achieved. So, jobs and working conditions are not major problems facing the transition, either.

This year, as some countries start to get back on their feet, coalitions of groups have formed, pushing for green economic stimulus and recovery - in Australia, for example, the Business Council of Australia and the Australian Conservation Foundation have created an unlikely alliance, along with many other organisations. They are supported by various studies and papers, such the recently released Ernst and Young report, which was commissioned by the WWF. Its findings are very encouraging: a green economic recovery, led by renewables, would create nearly 3 times more jobs than a fossil-fuel-led one; fast-tracking the renewable projects already underway in Australia, along with other low-cost measures, could create 58,000 new jobs in the construction industry; focussing on five more key areas, including transport and the subsidisation of solar and hydro, could create an additional 46,000 jobs; and many more people, in rural tourist hotspots hardest hit by the virus, could be employed in the conservation sector, doing jobs such as pest control and helping wildlife recover from the bushfires, 70% of which would require no expertise.

A few months ago, 200 English business leaders signed an open letter to the British government, in which they said, "Measures that cut greenhouse gas emissions and stimulate the economy have the potential to be more effective in supporting jobs and economic growth. They'll also support our long-term climate goals and deliver better outcomes in other key areas of public interest, such as public health and wellbeing. Investments in projects such as building renovation, offshore wind, electric vehicles, environmental improvements and low carbon industrial clusters have the potential to bring investment and job creation across multiple regions of the UK." While this refers specifically to the United Kingdom, its message is also relevant for Australia, and the rest of the world.

Oxfam has also joined the movement, publishing a briefing paper called, 'AUSTRALIA'S ENERGY FUTURE & THE RECOVERY FROM COVID-19: How we can help end poverty and fight the climate crisis,' which states that, "A renewable energy powered recovery can create a brighter future for all Australians and ensure we play our part in ending poverty worldwide. Doubling down on fossil fuels, like coal and gas, can only bring harm to Australians and to communities everywhere."

The IEA report released in June this year, written with the International Monetary Fund and simply titled, 'Sustainable Recovery,' says, "...governments have a unique opportunity today to boost economic growth, create millions of new jobs and put global greenhouse gas emissions into structural decline." An excellent summary of what I hope for the future. The IEA's plan, which it says it has constructed, "In response to calls from governments around the world," seems to be all-encompassing, and provides for nearly every aspect of energy usage in society, as well as current and predicted economic conditions for a transition taking place mainly in the next three years, and the effects of the pandemic. Therefore, it seems only sensible for governments everywhere to heed their advice as thoroughly as possible.

In light of all this, one would expect the Australian government to lead the way in the renewable energy transition, following the advice of scientists, environmental groups and economists. After all, Australia has always been regarded as a global beacon of progress, since Federation. But unfortunately that is not what is happening, and that is why I have written this letter. The government's plan relies heavily on carbon-intensive manufacturing and massive subsidies for the gas industry in particular. While gas is about half as polluting as coal, framing it as a 'transition fuel' is a mistake, because at the end of the day we won't need any fossil fuels in the future. The gas industry is embedding itself in the system for the long term, not helping Australia or the climate. Bruce Robertson, a financial analyst for gas and LNG at the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA), says that due to an ongoing global gas glut where prices have dropped through the floor, "Australia can't develop an industry when that industry itself is telling us that it can't develop without significant subsidies... I don't think that it serves the national interest. It does serve the gas industry's interests." The government has planned to spend our precious recovery money on subsidies

to the gas industry, rather than following the advice of the scientists and investing in renewables, conservation and energy efficiency.

This excerpt from the Oxfam report describes the problem with Australia's gas plan: "Stacked with people linked to fossil fuel companies or interests, leaked documents from the Government's National COVID19 Coordination Commission have suggested the Government underwrite a huge expansion of Australia's gas industry. Meanwhile, the draft Technology Investment Roadmap places a similar emphasis on gas and ignores Australia's responsibility to respond adequately to the challenges of climate change. In this briefing we present a broad range of arguments against attempting a gas-fired recovery and in favour of a renewable energy powered recovery."

When calculating the cost of continuing to use fossil fuels, we also have to factor in the cost of the climate catastrophes they cause. For example, our recent black summer bushfires here in Australia cost a staggering \$100 billion. The 2018 California wildfires cost \$350 billion. The ongoing floods in the Ukraine, which have decimated 2 to 3 hundred mountain villages, are blamed on climate change and logging and are expected to cost the Ukrainian government millions, on top of the economic burden of the pandemic. According to the International Monetary Fund, "Over the past decade, direct damages of such disasters are estimated to add up to around US\$ 1.3 trillion (or around 0.2% of world GDP) on average, per year." Should Australia still be subsidising the fossil fuel industry \$11 billion a year? Although we don't contribute much to global emissions, we are one of the highest emitters per capita, meaning that the only reason our emissions are low is because our population is small. How can we expect developing countries to get on top of their sometimes massive emissions which are driven by their populations, when we won't lift a finger to cut our relatively small ones, and we have the technology, infrastructure and money to do so?

Over the past few decades, differences along party lines have sparked fierce political debates in Australia and led to social polarisation spurred on by the lobby groups which have successfully delayed any real action. Judith Brett, an Emeritus Professor of Politics at La Trobe University, wrote, in an article for *The Conversation*, "Because we are rich in coal and gas, Australia has been plagued with two decades of wars over climate policy. The wars have claimed three prime ministers: Kevin Rudd, Julia Gillard and Malcolm Turnbull." So, it is understandable that the climate is a touchy subject in Parliament. But that is no excuse to avoid climate action.

The lobby groups have infiltrated both major parties, and only with a bi-partisan, green economic recovery plan which focuses on renewables can we hope to defeat them and climate change, and set an example for the rest of the world. My generation is already facing unprecedented challenges for the future, and it is crucial that our leaders, such as yourself, use the allocated recovery funds wisely in funding renewable energy projects, instead of simply propping up the gas industry.

The government's response to the COVID-19 crisis has been, in general, outstanding, with low infection and mortality rates and strict social distancing measures immediately being put into effect. I was particularly impressed by the calm and efficient briefings which you have been giving daily, Prime Minister, and the extraordinary measures which have been taken to support the economy and your fellow Australians. This is what a country in crisis would expect from its government. Can the government now show the same leadership and decisive action on the global and ultimately more devastating climate change crisis, which is already taking its toll on developed countries like Australia, and has been ravaging developing countries for decades? The bushfire season wasn't a good look for the government, but this can be remedied by doing that which no one would expect but many would welcome: establishing effective climate policies and following them up with real action, including supporting those communities who are still suffering from the bushfire season and waiting for economic stimulus. What this country needs now is a strong government like yours which will take the helm with bold vision and steer us out of this triple crisis of climate, bushfires and corona.

I trust that you are able to see vested interests for what they are, and that you will listen to those who wish only the best for Australia.

Sincere Regards,

Nicola Allen

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized capital 'N' followed by a cursive 'A' and a flourish.