



# MHACA

29.10.19

## **Submission: Northern Territory Government's *Climate Change Response: Towards 2050***

Thank you for the opportunity for the Mental Health Association of Central Australia (MHACA) to comment on the Northern Territory Government's draft 'Climate Change Response: Towards 2050'. Please accept this email as our written submission.

MHACA is a leading Northern Territory community based, non-profit organisation that provides psychosocial support services, NDIS support coordination, individual and group-based supports, educational and training programs in Central Australia.

MHACA joins with other organisations in acknowledging that the Climate Change Response is a positive first step by the NT Government (NTG) in publicly recognising that climate change is having and will continue to have an impact on our health, our economy and our natural environment.

MHACA acknowledges the urgency of climate action and we know that climate change impacts the most vulnerable members in our society first. People with severe and persistent mental illness are often vulnerable members in our communities and face many challenges including homelessness, low incomes, lack of employment and lack of community support and connection.

We also acknowledge the disproportionate effect that both the causes and impacts of climate change are having on Aboriginal land, culture and communities.

There is increasing evidence of the impacts of climate change on mental health. Impacts stated in the US Global Change Research Program include:

- Exposure to climate and weather-related natural disasters can result in mental health consequences such as anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. A significant proportion of people affected by those events develop chronic psychological dysfunction.
- Some people are at higher risk for mental health consequences from weather-related disasters. Among them are children, pregnant and postpartum women, people with pre-existing mental illness, people who are economically disadvantaged, those who are homeless and first responders to the disaster.
- Representations of climate change in the media and popular culture can also influence a person's stress response and mental well-being.
- Extreme heat increases both physical and mental health problems in people with mental illness, raising the risk of disease and death. In part, that's because many psychoactive prescription medications impair the body's ability to regulate temperature.

*(Climate Change is Threatening Mental Health - American Psychological Society*

<https://www.apa.org/monitor/2016/07-08/climate-change>)

MHACA also acknowledges the heightened risk of suicide associated with drought in rural communities in Australia.

MHACA understands that everyone must work together on the issue of climate change. MHACA has recently installed solar panels on our roof and is currently undertaking an organisational audit to assess where we can improve on water, energy, waste and environmentally friendly procurement.

However, the Northern Territory Government must lead on climate change action and develop a comprehensive strategy to reduce emissions and transition to a renewable energy economy.

MHACA supports calls on the Northern Territory Government to commit to:

1. Within the next six months, legislate targets of 100 per cent renewables by 2030 and net zero emissions by 2050, supported by interim targets and clear action plans, with strong accountability mechanisms to achieve rapid decarbonisation across all industries and sectors. This response must lead to the development of a Climate Change Act for the NT to guarantee progress beyond election cycles.
2. Develop and implement time-bound and measurable climate change and GHG emissions related management actions related to the above targets and in doing so enable long-term sustainable development in the NT.
3. A permanent ban on fracking, recognising that the industry is incompatible with a safe climate future and will undermine the Government's positive steps towards clean energy transition.
4. Immediately lead the way with the reduction in emissions from Government operations, and embedding the consideration of climate change impacts and adaptation needs into government decision-making, including all policy, budget, procurement and capital works decisions.
5. Implement an equitable clean energy and low-carbon growth strategy: ensuring all Territorians have the opportunity to share in the economic benefits of transition. This includes ensuring jobs and income from new large-scale renewables projects flow to local communities, providing opportunities for community-owned and operated energy projects, and supporting workforce development in ecologically sustainable industries.
6. Supporting communities to lead their own solutions. This requires listening to communities to understand how they are experiencing climate change, recognising traditional knowledge, ensuring the climate change response is informed by the experience and expertise of local communities, and resourcing locally-driven solutions.
7. Adaptation planning, in partnership with communities, to address the unavoidable impacts of climate change that are already affecting our communities, including extreme heat, drought and more extreme weather events like cyclones and bushfires, prioritising planning with remote Aboriginal communities who are experiencing the impacts first and worst.
8. Develop a comprehensive climate justice strategy within the policy to ensure integration of health, housing and employment are also considered as climate adaptation strategies.
9. Acknowledging that deforestation is a significant source of GHG emissions in the Northern Territory. All land clearing applications must be assessed for their total greenhouse emissions and be required to offset those using accredited carbon offsets.

10. Develop programs to incentivise energy efficiency investment, particularly for large energy consumers. Implement policies for energy performance improvement across all NTG operations. Energy efficiency provides the most cost-effective measures for emissions reduction and is therefore a crucial element of any net-zero emissions strategy.
11. Legislate land management and development approval policies to protect and manage risks to land-based carbon sequestration and carbon offset programs. This should include protecting, enhancing and restoring old growth forests, riparian vegetation, 'blue' carbon sinks such as mangrove forests and sea grass beds all of which are natural carbon sinks .
12. Develop a strategy to maintain and restore biodiversity across NT in response to the major biodiversity risks posed by climate change. This could include revisiting the Territory Eco Link policy to protect land that will be important for strengthening adaptive capacity as habitat areas shift due to global heating.
13. Implement a permanent ban on seabed mining. Sediments on the sea floor act as a major carbon sink. Seabed mining will resuspend sediments and release stored carbon.
14. Build and maintain collaborative relationships across all NTG agencies and with NGO's, researchers and the public that are underpinned by transparency, regular consultation and accountability for all parties. This should include working with other jurisdictions that already have climate change related policies and guidelines in place. NTG should fund this collaboration.
15. Ensure that climate change legalisation, policy and management plans inform and guide existing related NTG policy e.g. the Environmental Protection Act; Land Clearing Guidelines, Offsets Policy etc
16. Fund long term research partnerships throughout the NT to develop accessible and up to date robust climate change data to support industry and community to adapt to the projected changes.
17. Commit to developing a comprehensive strategy to address the role of water quality and supply in improving resilience and adaptive capacity, including investigating solutions to the most pressing issues of water security for remote communities.

Yours sincerely,



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CEO, Mental Health Association of Central Australia