

Human Rights and the Environment

The Australian Government’s recent [National climate risk assessment \(2025\)](#) details how, without immediate and transformative action, climate shocks will devastate Australian communities, overwhelm emergency services and strain health, housing, food and energy systems beyond repair. Extreme weather and climate disasters are already claiming lives and costing Australia billions in property and infrastructure damage and loss of productivity. Australia is a part of global systems that are breaking down due to climate inaction.

Failure to take meaningful action to minimise the causes of climate change prevents current and future generations from realising their human rights, from the rights to food, water, health, housing and the right to a healthy environment to the most basic right to life.

In 2025, The Australian Human Rights Commission released [Human rights on a warming earth](#). This report describes the connection between climate change and human rights and outlines the critical importance of addressing climate change to protect people’s rights in Australia.

Positive developments

Economic justice

Recent human rights advances

The Australian Government has made improved commitments to address climate change with a legislated goal to reduce emissions by 62–70% below 2005 levels by 2035, and to reach net zero by 2050.

Environmental Protection and Climate Action

In response to Australia’s international commitments under the Paris Agreement to restrict greenhouse gas emissions, the Australian Government introduced the **Climate Change Act 2022 (Cth)** (CCA) in 2022.

The CCA sets out four key objectives:

- Advance an effective and progressive response to the urgent threat of climate change, drawing on the best available scientific knowledge.
- Set out Australia’s greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets to contribute to global goals of reducing the global average temperature.
- Promote accountability and ambition by establishing ministerial responsibility to prepare an annual climate change statement that is presented to the Australian Parliament.
- Ensure that both the climate change statement and Australia’s greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets are informed by independent advice from the Climate Change Authority, an independent statutory Australian Government agency established to advise the Australian Government on climate change policy.

The CCA confirms Australia’s greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets of a **43 per cent reduction from 2005 levels by 2030**, and **net zero emissions by 2050**. A range of Australian Government policies prioritise renewable energy investment as a means of achieving these targets, underpinned by an **82 per cent renewable electricity target by 2030**.

Climate change is an urgent and increasing threat to Australian lives and livelihoods

Economic justice

Urgent human rights issues

Climate change, extreme weather events and increased frequency and severity of natural disasters are creating major human rights challenges. Australia’s climate targets, while improved, are not sufficient to avoid major negative climate impacts on people’s lives in Australia and globally. Australia needs to accelerate its transition to renewables increasing the pace of phasing out of fossil fuels and fossil fuel subsidies. Australia needs to ensure a just transition for workers and communities affected by the shift from fossil fuels to renewables.

Climate change is driven primarily by the burning of fossil fuels (coal, oil and gas) that release greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere. These emissions are causing global temperatures to rise and contributing to more frequent and intense extreme weather events. To avoid the worst impacts of climate change, immediate, deep and sustained emissions reductions are essential to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius. Climate change is also deeply interconnected with the biodiversity and pollution crises, each compounding the effects of the others and threatening the health of people and the planet.

In 2024, [the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation and the Bureau of Meteorology](#) reported Australia's climate had warmed by an average of 1.51 degrees Celsius. Based on 2024 emission projections, Australia is unlikely to reach its legislated 2030 target of reducing emissions by 43% below 2005 levels.

In September this year, the Australian Government announced a more ambitious [target to cut emissions](#) by 62-70% below 2005 levels by 2035. This announcement has been acknowledged as progress, however criticised as not enough of a global contribution to prevent the catastrophic impacts laid out in the National Climate Risk Assessment.

While the Australian Government has legislated the Climate Change Act 2022 (Cth) (CCA), the CCA is not sufficient in enforcing duties in relation to achieving Australia's emissions reduction targets or requiring human rights consideration in decision making concerning climate change, emissions or the environment.

Climate change disproportionately threatens certain communities

Climate change's impact on Indigenous rights is already evident in several parts of the world, including Australia. Increasing and shifting coastal tides pose significant risks to culturally significant sites and practices for Torres Strait Islander communities. Communities have reported the need to relocate ancestral remains due to sea level rise uncovering grave sites close to the coast.

There are also growing concerns about difficulties in sharing cultural practices, such as fishing, with younger generations as a result of habitat changes and the loss of local species. These impacts have contributed to a loss of language and culture.

In June 2025, the Minister for Climate Change and Energy stated that the Australian Government intends to engage in reconciliation with First Peoples through the renewable energy transition.¹⁶⁸ As this transition will require access to large areas of land and sea Country, the First Nations Clean Energy Network recommends that medium to large renewable energy projects follow its 10 best practice principles.

These principles are intended to ensure economic and social benefits for First Nations communities, promote mutual respect and clear communication, and appropriately consider cultural and environmental values. They also emphasise business and employment opportunities for First Nations peoples, as well as the importance of obtaining free, prior and informed consent.

Priority action

The Australian Take action to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees including by urgently phasing out fossil fuels and fossil fuel subsidies.