



## The Thoracic Society of Australia and New Zealand's response to the Senate's Environment and Communications Legislation Committee inquiry into the Climate Change Amendment (Duty of Care and Intergenerational Climate Equity) Bill 2023

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### Introduction

The Thoracic Society of Australia and New Zealand (TSANZ) is a health promotion charity whose mission is to lead, support and enable all health workers and researchers who aim to prevent, cure, and relieve disability caused by lung disease. The TSANZ is the only peak body in Australia that represents all health professionals working in all fields of respiratory health.

TSANZ has over 1,800 members and is the only health peak body representing a range of professions (medical specialists, scientists, researchers, academics, nurses, physiotherapists, students, and others) across various disciplines within the respiratory/sleep medicine field in Australia and New Zealand. The TSANZ is a leading advocate and provider of evidence-based policy for the prevention and management of respiratory conditions in Australia and New Zealand, undertakes professional education and training, is responsible for significant research administration, and coordinates an accredited respiratory laboratory program.

As the leaders in lung health, we promote the:

- Highest quality and standards of patient care.
- Development and application of knowledge about respiratory health and disease.
- Highest quality air standards including a tobacco smoke free society and effective regulation of novel nicotine delivery systems.
- Collaboration between all national organisations whose objects are to improve the wellbeing of individuals with lung disease and to promote better lung health for the community.
- Professional and collegiate needs of the Membership.

The TSANZ is submitting a response to the Senate's Environment and Communications Legislation Committee inquiry into the Climate Change Amendment (Duty of Care and Intergenerational Climate Equity) Bill 2023. We support this Bill and its implications for improving respiratory health for future generations.

### Consultation Topic

The Senate's Environment and Communications Legislation Committee is calling for submissions to its inquiry into the Senator Pocock's private member Bill; Climate Change Amendment (Duty of Care and Intergenerational Climate Equity) Bill 2023. The Bills first and second reading debate was held on 3 August 2023 and referred to the Committee on that day.

The Bill amends the Climate Change Act 2022 to: require decision-makers to consider the health and wellbeing of children in Australia when making significant decisions; and require decision-makers not to make significant decisions in relation to the exploration or extraction of coal, oil or natural gas if the decision poses a material risk of harm to the health and wellbeing of children in Australia.

### The TSANZ response

The Thoracic Society welcomes the introduction of the Climate Change Amendment (Duty of Care and Intergenerational Climate Equity) Bill 2023 to Parliament. This bill is a necessary step towards protecting the health of Australians today and into the future. The focus on children is warranted as their physiology makes them the most vulnerable to the ill-effects of climate change. Infants and small children breathe faster than adults and the younger they are, the greater the volume of air which moves through their lungs each minute. Therefore, children whose bodies are rapidly developing are the most at risk when exposed to air pollution.

The Thoracic Society has previously<sup>1</sup> declared that climate change was a medical emergency based on the strength of the evidence now available. The evidence is clear: climate change is a medical emergency that is already impacting the health of our patients. Studies have established that the changes occurring in our climate contribute to poor air quality and further exacerbate lung health risks. Globally, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates 7 million people die prematurely every year due to air pollution.

However, catastrophic climate change is not inevitable. The report “Clean Air Now,” co-authored by the International Forum of Respiratory Societies (FIRS) and the NCD Alliance (NCDA), documents the success of cost-effective actions to achieve quick results for cleaner air. In particular, the rapid phase-out of health harmful subsidies for fossil fuels, and the redirection of investment into accessible alternatives including clean transport and renewable energy have a significant impact. Australia, as one of the world’s largest fossil fuel exporters, has a significant role to play by immediately reducing its fossil fuel exports to significantly impact on global carbon emissions and air pollution.

The regulatory environment set-up by federal decisions has the power to also influence individual and community decision-making around reducing waste, reusing resources, recycling, investing in clean energy systems and transportation solutions, and making it easier to make “green choices”. Even regulation of the business sector can have systemic effects and influence how decisions are made when it comes to moving to renewables, or supporting organisations which address climate change, health, and education. Instilling a duty of care in decision making will have far reaching and long-lasting effects. The Thoracic Society strongly supports the sentiment of this bill.

### Concluding remarks

The Thoracic Society appreciates the commitment demonstrated by the Committee to the lung health for future generations of all Australians and their recognition of the population level harm linked to climate change. The Thoracic Society supports the proposed duty of care and consideration by decisionmakers of the health and wellbeing of children in making significant decisions that may impact climate change.

As a leading health promotion charity for lung health professionals in Australia and New Zealand, our membership includes world leading clinicians, multidisciplinary respiratory health professionals, and researchers. We welcome the opportunity to engage with you further on this topic. The Thoracic Society can be contacted at: [advocacy@thoracic.org.au](mailto:advocacy@thoracic.org.au).

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<sup>1</sup> The Thoracic Society of Australia and New Zealand (TSANZ) declares climate change a medical emergency, 10 Dec 2019. [https://croakey.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/TSANZ\\_Climate\\_Declaration.pdf](https://croakey.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/TSANZ_Climate_Declaration.pdf)