

**Submission
No 14**

INQUIRY INTO 2024 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE NET ZERO COMMISSION

Organisation: Doctors for the Environment Australia (DEA)

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Healthy planet, healthy people

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Submission from the NSW branch of Doctors for the Environment Australia to the NSW Parliament's Joint Standing committee on Net Zero Future: Inquiry into 2024 Annual Report of the Net Zero Commission

Doctors for the Environment Australia (DEA) is an independent, self-funded, non-government organisation of medical doctors and students in all Australian States and Territories. Our members work across all specialties in communities, hospitals and private practices. We work to prevent and address the health risks - local, national and global - caused by damage to our natural environment. We are a public health voice in the sphere of environmental health with a primary focus on the health harms from pollution, environmental degradation, and climate change. We note that the seven commissioners of the Net Zero Commission have a range of skills, but none has health expertise despite this being sought during the appointment process.

As a health organisation we are particularly aware of two areas of climate action which have emissions reduction potential and large health co-benefits which make them attractive areas for Net Zero Commission attention. These are the rapid phase out of indoor gas use in domestic residential settings, and the ramp up of active transport ie walking and cycling as preferred modes of travel.

Burning methane indoors releases combustion products with damaging health effects. Nitrogen dioxide is a respiratory irritant that both induces and exacerbates asthma. Gas kitchen stoves are estimated to cause 12% of childhood asthma in Australia so there is a large and important health dividend that will flow from the eventual phase out of gas from Australian kitchens. All previous domestic uses of gas now have a better and cheaper electric alternative, so removing gas from homes benefits health, family budgets, and the climate. We are pleased to see the Annual Report gives considerable attention to household electrification in the chapter on the built environment, and calls for policy development. NSW is way behind Victoria and the ACT in this area.

Transport accounts for a stable 24 Mt of CO₂e per year, and short car trips of less than 10 Km are a large proportion of all trips. Shifting 25% of these trips to cycling and walking would lead to large public health benefits from the increased exercise. NSW Health recently published the "NSW Active Transport Health Model Reference Outcome Values" which estimates every extra Km cycled as a public benefit worth \$2.97 and every extra Km walked a benefit of \$5.24. This is based on the health benefits, ignoring the value of reduced road congestion and parking costs. The principal barrier to increased cycling participation has

been shown in surveys in many locations and over many years to be the lack of safety for bikes on the road. The construction of linked networks of safe cycleways has never had substantial attention from the state government, being left to local councils without adequate resources. We note that the annual report gives attention to active transport with half a sentence on page 26.

Recommendations

To ensure that the people of NSW achieve maximum health co-benefits from the required actions to protect the climate Doctors for the Environment Australia urges the committee to consider the following recommendations:

- Phase out domestic gas connections by halting new connections and removing cost barriers for households wishing to abolish their gas service.
- Conduct public education on the health risks of continued indoor gas use, personal protection strategies to improve ventilation for people who cannot yet avoid gas use, and the practical benefits of household electrification.
- Accelerate the development of the NSW gas replacement road map, including policies to encourage and support end of life replacement of gas appliances with electric alternatives, with particular focus on rental accommodation.
- Support major expansion of funding and planning support for active transport infrastructure to make NSW cities safe and connected for cycling and walking. We think cycleway funding should be 10% of all road funding.
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