

## Fresh hope for action on climate change as bushfire recovery continues



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*"You chose hope and unity, decency, science and, yes, truth."*

So said the first woman US Vice President-elect Kamala Harris at the weekend, to a delirious crowd of well-wishers.

When the Vice President-elect referred to science and truth, she wasn't just referring to Donald Trump's dangerously misleading statements on COVID-19 treatment, mask-wearing and the counting of votes in a free and democratic election.

Ms Harris was also referring to her and President-elect Joe Biden's policy on the climate crisis, which includes a commitment to ensuring the United States achieves a 100 per cent clean energy economy and net-zero emissions no later than 2050. on the climate crisis, which includes a commitment to ensuring the United States achieves a 100 per cent clean energy economy and net-zero emissions no later than 2050.

Biden's strong position on climate was overwhelmingly endorsed by the US people. The implications of his victory on the future of global action on climate change have been enthusiastically welcomed by leaders of the nations across the world.

With one notable exception.

Scott Morrison moved quickly to downplay the implications of Joe Biden's win for Australia's greenhouse gas emissions targets, but his recalcitrance is making the Morrison government increasingly isolated both overseas, and at home.

The Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements, held in response to the catastrophic conditions during the 2019/20 bushfire season, finally released its [long-awaited report](#) in October, stating: "Climate change has already increased the frequency and intensity of extreme weather and climate systems that influence natural hazards".

But the report went even further, to the causes of climate change: "The expression 'natural disaster' is something of a misnomer, in part because some naturally-occurring hazards (such as fires and earthquakes) may only turn into a disaster because of what humans do and fail to do. The expression 'natural disaster', while common and used in this report, should not be taken to suggest that there is nothing we can do."



The pressure on the Prime Minister is building. The 2020 State of the [Climate report](#), released on 27 October, found that after the devastating Black Summer, 82 per cent of Australians are concerned that climate change will result in more bushfires.

It also found that only 12 per cent of Australians prefer investment in gas to power Australia's economic recovery, findings that might cause federal Labor to rethink its latest [gas strategy](#) courtesy of shadow agriculture and resources minister Joel Fitzgibbon.

The NSW Coalition government continues to [push ahead](#) with its renewable energy investment plan with or without its federal colleagues' endorsement and independent MP for Warringah Zali Steggall has introduced her [Climate Action bill](#) to the parliament.

Her bill comes as communities across the state begin to mark the anniversary of those terrible events last summer. Federation extends its best wishes and solidarity to all those who continue to be affected by the bushfires. The union will continue to work closely with the Department's Bushfire Relief Strategy Directorate to ensure those school communities get the system-level support they need in terms of both short, medium and long-term recovery from the 2019/2020 devastation and emergency management and response planning for future disasters.

Federation welcomes, in particular, the decision to extend the staffing moratorium for bushfire-affected communities into 2021.

Every step in the recovery must be acknowledged and recognised, like the beautiful new illustrated [children's book](#) published by students at Cobargo Public School.

While the recovery is important and the planning for future disasters essential, prevention is the best cure, and so Federation remains committed to supporting all organisations who are pushing for action on climate change including in the union movement.

The ACTU President Michele O'Neill [said](#) with respect to Zali Steggall's climate bill: "China, Japan, South Korea and now the US have all announced net zero emissions targets and the EU has increased their climate targets. With a change of direction in US climate policy likely Australia now stands alone among our trading partners and allies in not taking meaningful action to limit climate change. The result of the US election is likely to leave Australia even more isolated on the global stage.

"The ACTU supports the goal enshrined in this bill of net zero emissions by 2050, and also supports the creation of a Climate Change Commission to set shorter term targets and report on Australia's emissions and preparedness for climate change."

If there is anything that the COVID pandemic has taught us, it is that facts matter, the truth matters and science matters. It's time for the PM to step up.