The Honourable Steven Miles  
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Minister for National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef  
Department of Environment and Heritage Protection  
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Dear Minister  

Submission on Advancing Climate Action in Queensland Discussion Paper  

Gecko-Gold Coast and Hinterland Environment Council (Gecko) congratulates the government on its advancement of an updated Climate Change Policy for Queensland. We offer our comments on the above discussion paper.  

Background:  

Gecko is a not-for-profit environment association founded in 1989 and has been active for the past 26 years in protecting the environmental values and ecological sustainability of the Gold Coast, Queensland and, when appropriate, nationally. Gecko has a particular focus on climate change, having hosted several community-based information events to encourage individuals to take action on reducing their carbon footprint and to live more sustainably. Our most recent action was to host the Climate Change for Good Conference on July 1-2 this year, showcasing opportunities for individuals and businesses to transition to a low-carbon economy.

The Queensland Department of Environment and Heritage was a generous sponsor and delegates expressed great interest in the Minister’s opening address. We attach our report on the event and the positive response from the community. The preliminary actions commenced post-conference will hopefully provide an enduring community-based response to the challenges of climate change.

Summary:  

There is currently a lack of synchronisation of policy at local government, state and federal levels, partially as a result of neo-liberal reluctance to temper the growth-at-all-costs approach with the required actions to effectively reduce greenhouse gases. According to Fieldman, who examined the impact of neoliberalism on the global political-economic system 1, this is hampering the response of states to meet their greenhouse gas reduction goals.

1. The Queensland government can play a leading role in its discussions with local government councils, at COAG meetings with other states and most especially with the federal government, working in tandem to achieve, if not exceed, the targets set at the COP in Paris last year.

2. Feedback from the above event and our ongoing discussions with community groups and individuals on the Gold Coast identifies a very strong desire for meaningful actions on climate change, carefully modelled on international examples and with cost/benefits clearly articulated.
3. The challenge of effecting the transition to a low-carbon economy is hampered by the refusal of conservative elements, including the media, to acknowledge the reality of climate change and commit to the necessary changes in policy.

The discussion paper overall presents a compelling and easily understood analysis of the need to act, global actions to address climate change and opportunities for transition. Gecko offers further comment on some issues raised.

**Subnational context Page 6:**

There is currently a vacuum of policy at local government level. While some councils have introduced their own strategies, others have neglected to develop their response to climate change. In South-East Queensland, for example, of the 11 councils participating in the regional Council of Mayors, only 4 have a contemporary policy. Climate change is not referenced on the Council of Mayors website and it does not appear to be an area of any focus. Our local Gold Coast City Council, running the 5th largest city in Australia, has no current policy, with the previous strategy lapsing in 2014.

It is at this local level that residents can most meaningfully be guided into sustainable, low-carbon lifestyles, yet there are no uniform leadership or baseline strategies across Queensland. We note that the 120th Local Government Association of Queensland Annual Conference “New World Order” will be held on the Gold Coast on 18th-20th October but the topic of climate change, a matter of great relevance to all councils, is not included in the agenda. As Premier Palaszczuk is scheduled to address the formal opening on 19th October, Gecko is hopeful that the importance of developing effective climate change strategies by all Councils is included in her speech.

The Subnational Global Climate Leadership Memorandum of Understanding (Under 2 MOU) referred to on page 7 is an exciting concept that Gecko hopes will be more widely embraced and Gecko looks forward to the Queensland Government being listed, with South Australia in the list of signatories.

**Impacts of land clearing Page 12:**

A key component of the strategies to address climate change is the passing of the government’s Queensland Vegetation Management (Reinstatement) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016.

Since this discussion paper was released, the Parliamentary Committee reviewing the Bill has failed to approve the Bill and opposition remains high. Finalise once vote is taken

**Continued reliance on coal mining:**

Page 21 refers to Queensland coal production and states that “Due the challenges of meeting the energy needs of developing nations, not supplying these markets with Queensland coal would not result in decreased coal usage and global carbon emissions in the short term: these countries would simply source coal from elsewhere.”

**Comment:** The newly-appointed federal resources Minister Matt Canavan has continued the false argument that the Australian coal industry has an important role to play in alleviating global poverty. An example of current federal policy is the premise that coal exports to India will uplift the living standards of millions of people, despite the fact millions are too poor to pay for electricity or the appliances, there is no national grid and conversely, we read reports of the Indian Government is planning to reduce foreign coal imports and develop its own resources as the country transitions to renewable energy production.

The government has set its own ambitious goal to derive 40% of the country’s energy from renewables by 2030. Similar reporting on a reduction in coal consumption in China signals a transition away from coal.

Gecko recognises the difficulty in moving Queensland away from its past reliance on the coal industry but given the weight of argument against continued support of this polluting industry, we urge the government to rapidly adopt stronger policies. Despite the difficulties in “selling” the need for this transition to Queenslanders, it is clear the government must differentiate its approach from the conservative and outdated voices which continue to champion coal. There is an inherent contradiction in tackling climate change, protecting the Great Barrier Reef and developing clean technologies while at the same time giving approvals for coal mining expansion.
Clean Coal Technology Page 21:

Clean coal continues to be viewed as an option to address CO₂ build-up in the atmosphere and Gecko remains concerned that complacency that such a solution will be developed will encourage continued reliance on coal-fired power and slow or reduce efforts to shift to renewables. The paper quite correctly points out the current unreliable and unproven status of this technology, which is not the “silver bullet” of reducing CO₂ emissions.

The International centre for Climate Governance (ICCG), a highly respected think-tank associated with the IPCC has conducted a review of the current status of carbon capture and storage technology, Advances and slowdowns in Carbon Capture and Storage technology development stating “Carbon capture and storage (CCS) technology, after having been hailed as a promising mitigation option around a decade ago, is undergoing a gruelling path to stay on top of the expectations. Despite potential benefits, CCS development and deployment have proceeded at a far slower rate that what was expected, and CCS is struggling to emerge as a sound low-carbon choice for governments and investors.”

Responses to Discussion Questions:

1. What should Queensland look like in 5, 10 or 30 years in a low carbon global economy?

- An immediate goal is to protect a greater percentage of Queensland from development, agriculture, mining and other resource extraction and provide further incentives to landholders for carbon sequestration projects.
- Commence a re-vegetation scheme across Queensland to re-build our forests, landscapes and cityscapes. Redress the accelerated clearing that has taken place since 2013. Sequester arable land from development.
- Require long-term public transport planning by all councils prior to the approval of large developments.
- Host a long-term infrastructure planning summit in consultation with all political parties to develop a joint planning framework beyond the current 3-year cycle. Base the approach upon sustainability, reduced consumption and opportunities for self-sustaining local communities with reduced transport needs.
- A long-term vision for a truly sustainable Queensland is one in which people live in modest, thriving communities located around hubs of food supply and commerce, working from home or in collaborative collectives, with many industries focused on the sharing, re-use and re-purposing of materials, zero waste and public transport as the main transport option.

2. What do you think are the benefits and costs of taking action to address climate change in Queensland?

Benefits:

- Creates a new mind-set that rejects waste of energy and resources, excessive packaging, products with high-embodied energy, single-use products and makes sustainable living the desired life-style option.
- Cuts the demand for electricity through better housing design (passive heating and cooling).
- Addresses Australia’s obligations as an international partner in the global effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- Increases protection of ecosystems threatened by increasing temperatures and climate instability.
- Sets an example to neighbouring States and beyond our borders to make their own transition to a low-carbon economy.
- Develops a fairer, more generous and self-reliant society.

Costs:

- Adjustment of our lifestyle expectations away from unlimited growth and an unsustainable lifestyle that is beyond the reach of most of the rest of the world.
- The need to restructure traditional approaches to education and training so that the transition to a suite of new jobs and opportunities is supported.
• Cost of providing assistance to communities reliant upon jobs that are increasingly becoming redundant i.e. the mining sector and to farming communities where climate change has rendered some agricultural activities unviable.
• Cost of start-up financing to develop renewable industries or to retrofit existing industries to newer technologies.
• Risk of an economic “game of chicken” whereby states that go about business as usual lure investors away from Queensland where a more responsible attitude towards investment opportunities prevails.

3. What part should Queensland play in meeting global and national climate change commitments?
A leadership role as discussed above, setting an example for others to follow, employing best practice from cities around the world whose climate change response is more advanced. In order to do this, Queenslanders need to be informed, understand the challenge and be inspired by their peers and those in position of power. Success stories need to be widely shared to maintain momentum.

How should Queensland work with the Commonwealth, state and territory governments and local governments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions?
• Make development of and adherence to climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies mandatory at local government level. Provide strong policy guidelines to assist with this development and develop a consistent means of evaluating regional contributions to net reduction. Conduct annual reviews of the effectiveness of Council and State policies and adjust strategies or reset targets accordingly.
• Make climate change policy a prominent agenda item at COAG meetings so that the information regarding each State’s carbon reduction contribution is reported and evaluated against Australia’s overall target.
• Continue to lobby Federal Government to make its response to Climate Change more consistent with the severity of the threat, including how it communicates about climate change i.e. unambiguous language that clearly articulates the problem and how it should be addressed. The current lack of sincerity and inadequate responses show no leadership.

4. What kind of goals or targets should Queensland set in order to achieve this?
• No new coal mines.
• No new coal ports.
• Develop investment incentives into renewable industries rather than new integrated resorts, casino’s and energy-intensive development.

5. What could the Queensland Government do to further stimulate innovation and commercialisation of low emissions and clean technologies?
• The targets set by South Australia are mentioned on Page 27 provide an excellent example for Queensland to develop its own similar if not even more ambitious targets. It appears that, for South Australia, the setting of ambitious targets for renewable energy has resulted in ever-increasing up-take. A race to sustainability between the States would be the most desirable outcome. The issue of selling off the electricity network to foreign investors to improve the bottom line is a temptation to the States and has to be viewed with extreme caution regarding the long-term impact of such a sale on efforts to transition to solar and other renewable energy sources.

6. Should Queensland sign the ‘Under 2 MOU’?
Yes!

7. What are the opportunities for Queensland in transitioning to a clean energy future?
8. What are the major barriers in adopting clean energy technologies in Queensland?
9. What programs would you like to see put in place to encourage greater uptake of energy efficiency and clean energy?

10. What steps should Queensland take to improve energy efficiency in the built environment sector?

11. What are the main challenges to achieving successful, sustainable communities in Queensland? What types of innovations might address these challenges?

12. What would an efficient, affordable, low emission transport system look like in 10 or 20 years?

13. What are the major barriers in shifting to lower carbon transport options in Queensland?

14. What strategies would you like to see put in place to encourage greater uptake of low emission transport options?

15. What strategies would be effective in encouraging greater patronage on public transport and fewer private vehicles on the road?

16. What could the Queensland Government do to support greater uptake of EVs?

17. How could the Queensland Government maximise the carbon reduction potential of EVs?

18. What do you think the key waste priorities are in Queensland?

19. What are the key issues the Queensland Government should address with respect to land use and land use planning?

21. **How can we provide some stability in the livelihood of our farmers, and support the potential for transition to new industries such as carbon farming?**

   Identify areas where agricultural activities are at best marginal, are unsuitable for the local area or have been impacted by climate change. These would include areas where long-term drought has triggered calls for assistance from farmers. Develop alternate sustainable land use options such as carbon farming and offer training to land owners to take up these options. This would be a better investment rather than handouts to struggling farmers who face even worse climate impacts.

22. **What role do you think the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments should play in securing terrestrial and marine blue carbon storage areas?**

   - Legislate immediate protection for coastal mangrove communities by banning clearing for development.
   - Create mangrove re-vegetation programs, especially for Indigenous communities traditionally reliant upon marine ecosystems to provide food.

23. What strategies should Queensland pursue to support industry to reduce emissions generated in the process of mining and production?

**Conclusion:**

This discussion paper contains many admirable strategies and identifies key areas in which reform is needed. Taking the broader view, the government needs to consider the inherent problems in the current economic paradigm that views continual growth as the desirable path, fuelled by increasing exploitation of resources and served by an ever-growing population. In a finite world this situation in untenable. In reading Fieldman, the challenges faced by any government to undertake any meaningful climate change reform face multiple challenges from conservative elements, including those within the government itself. He argues that “the neoliberal system produces vulnerability to climate-induced (and other) changes and effectively incapacitates effective responses. Adaptation policy is not something that can simply be tacked onto, or absorbed into, neoliberal development policy more broadly, because “development as presently conceived and practiced is itself maladaptive.”
Gecko thanks the government for the opportunity to participate in this important consultation, which we hope will deliver an effective climate change policy for Queensland. The greater challenge will be gaining broad acceptance of necessary changes to our current approach to economic development.

Yours sincerely,

Rose Adams
Secretary

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