



Submission to Standing Committee on the Environment and Energy: Current Inquiries into the Climate Change Bill 2020.

NOVEMBER 2020



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Recommendations

1. The New South Wales Nurses & Midwives' Association supports the Climate Change Bill and the proposed Independent Climate Change Commission. A major reason for our support relates to the widespread deleterious impacts of climate change on individual and community health. The Independent Climate Change Commission will need to address the current climate emergency situation that occurred with recent extreme bushfire weather. It will need to adopt a long-term approach to assess and plan and use adaptation and mitigation strategies to reduce Greenhouse Gas emissions (GHG). Meanwhile bushfire smoke combined with other airborne pollutants from coal-fired power stations and motor vehicles will still be a health issue that needs to be addressed.

The Commission's work to ameliorate the health impacts of climate change should be guided by the National Strategy for Climate, Health and Well-being for Australians, developed by the Climate and Health Alliance. Also the Federal Government's National Preventive Health Strategy needs revision to include material on climate change. To effectively carry out this work health expertise will also need to be incorporated into membership of the Commission.

2. The Association agrees that Australia needs to have a net zero emissions target by 2050, in line with our trading partner countries and our Paris commitments. As the present Australian Coalition government seems wedded to coal and other fossil fuels, it is important to have a



legislated emissions target of zero emissions by 2050 to drive the necessary changes. The New South Wales Nurses & Midwives Association is also of the view that in order to achieve this commitment the Independent Climate Change Committee will need to develop five yearly emissions reduction plans, coupled with related five year emissions budgets and a process to review progress towards the net zero target every 5 years. Such mechanisms should assist in reducing emissions as quickly and smoothly as possible, in a fair and equitable way to the net zero target (#Climate Act Now).

The Association would prefer that more technology should be under public ownership. As Australia appears to have many privately owned companies involved in technology, they would need to be monitored carefully for providing appropriately trained workers, for appropriate pricing, and for maintaining worker safety by the Independent Climate Change Commission.

3. The Association agrees that the guiding principles proposed in the Climate Change Bill are essential and constitute the values of fairness, equity and justice. Assisting disadvantaged communities like the Hunter to develop low energy renewable technologies to generate good jobs is a project to which our Association is committed. A further example is acknowledged through our Association providing financial assistance to our members who were involved in severe bushfires and needed support. Record numbers of communities in NSW lost their homes and possessions and had to live in community shelters or tents on their burnt land. A final example comes from the Association's involvement in Trade Unions for Energy Democracy (TUED). Trade Union workers world-wide are suffering from injustice and in some cases violence as a result



of climate change and energy inequity. Their voice should be heard in the debate and decision making on future development and distribution of renewable energy resources.

Membership of the Independent Climate Change Commission would need to include people with the recommended areas of expertise as well as being capable of representing the needs of such workers and communities.

4. Climate and health policy development needs to occur for our nurses and midwives involved in community clinics and hospitals. Risk and adaptation assessments need to be undertaken on infrastructure; education and knowledge, for example understanding vector ecology and how this will impact people; disaster planning co-ordination; and how climate resilient the health sector is in effectively responding to the health impact of climate change. Health facilities like hospitals are major producers of GHG emissions¹, so risk and adaptation assessments need to be undertaken for all hospitals and health facilities in Australia. Air pollution is also a major focus for the Associations' members and communities in NSW, but also for the rest of Australia. Based on evidence provided on illness statistics and its cost, and the lack of interest in changing this air pollution situation, policy directives need to be undertaken by the Independent Climate Change Commission as soon as possible.

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¹ Charlesworth, KE Stewart, GJ. & Sainsbury, P. Addressing the carbon footprint of health organisations: eight lessons for implementation. Public Health Res Pract. 2018;28(4): e2841830.

Foreword

The New South Wales Nurses and Midwives' Association (NSWNMA) is the registered union for all nurses and midwives in New South Wales. The membership of the NSWNMA comprises all those who perform nursing and midwifery work. This includes registered nurses; enrolled nurses and midwives at all levels including management and education, and assistants in nursing and midwifery.

The NSWNMA has approximately 69,000 members and is affiliated to Unions NSW and the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU). Eligible members of the NSWNMA are also deemed to be members of the New South Wales Branch of the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation.

NSWNMA strives to be innovative in our advocacy to promote a world class, well-funded, integrated health system by being a professional advocate for the health system and our members. We are committed to improving standards of patient care and the quality of services of all health and aged care services whilst protecting and advancing the interests of nurses and midwives and their professions.

Our concern about the health of our nurses, midwives and the community in which they work has prompted us to make a submission. The Association supports the reduction of emissions through no fossil fuels and the promotion of 100% public renewables. We therefore support the Climate Change Bill and the setting up of the Independent Climate Change Commission. The latter will mean that adaptation and mitigation strategies needed to be undertaken and the monitoring of Green House Gas (GHG) emissions will successfully be achieved.

We welcome the opportunity to provide a submission to this Inquiry.

This response is authorised by the elected officers of the New South Wales Nurses and Midwives' Association

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Addressing Aspects of the Climate Change Bill 2020

OBJECTIVES AND LONG-TERM EMISSIONS REDUCTION COMMITMENT

a) The Associations' Focus on Climate and Health

Along with other countries like the USA, Australia is now impacted by the effect of climate change. Excessive heat, bushfires producing 'wild-fires', wild storms and floods are happening more frequently which suggests that extreme weather is now playing an important role in the Australian climate. As the NSW Nurses & Midwives' Association with members from communities in NSW we have a focus on climate change and health. We must address the climate and health together and acknowledge the centrality of the climate in terms of our health, above all else. We consider it is very important to reduce Green House Gas (GHG) emissions which fuel these unprecedented dangerous events just described, so that we can hopefully begin to lower emissions and return to a more stable state, important for our planet and our own health.

From October 1st 2019 through to February 10, 2020 NSW, Victoria, ACT, South Australia, and Queensland, in Australia experienced very severe and extreme bushfires. Toxic bushfire smoke containing particulate matter 2.5 (PM2.5) blanketed the east coast around Sydney and surrounds, and the South Coast of NSW on and off for 19 weeks. Air quality monitoring data was obtained for bushfire smoke. The highest reading of 98.5 microns was obtained on January 14, 2020 and quadrupled the national standard, being 14 times more than the historical average. Bushfire smoke was estimated to have caused: 417 excess deaths, 1124 hospitalisations for cardiovascular problems, 2027 for respiratory problems, and 1305 presentations to emergency for asthma.² An international study about cardiac arrest with short-term exposure to low concentrations of particulate matter 2.5, notes an association with gaseous pollutants such as bushfire smoke.³

² Arriagada NB, Palmer AJ, Bowman D, Morgan GG Unprecedented smoke-related health burden associated with the 2019-20 bushfires in eastern Australia. Med J Aust. 23rd March, 2020. DOI: 10.5694/mja2.50545.

³ News Release. Air pollution impacts can be heart-stopping: Lancet Planetary Health paper. Biggest study of dangerously small particulate matter and cardiac arrest. University of Sydney. 27th January, 2020. https://www.eurekaalert.org/pub_releases/2020-01/uos-api012420.php



Right now Australia has officially entered the new bushfire season on 1st August 2020. Further alarming news has been provided by: 'State of the Climate' report from the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) and CSIRO. The latest climate data and projections provides scientific evidence in this report demonstrating that there is more extreme heat fuelling more extreme fire seasons ahead as well as other more frequent extreme events such as greater sea level rises and more cyclonic episodes. Whilst Covid-19 has reduced global emissions this has not made enough impact on carbon dioxide (CO₂) levels in the atmosphere. Measurements taken at Cape Grim air pollution station in Tasmania show that carbon dioxide levels have been increasing since pre-industrial times caused by fossil fuel emissions. The report notes that between 2009-2018, 85% of global emissions from CO₂ were from fossil fuel sources.⁴

Considerable concern has been raised about the toxic effects of bushfire smoke. A research article states that there are no safe levels of particulate matter PM 2.5 air pollution after a large-scale Sydney University -led study⁵ analysed Japanese air quality data⁶ finding that even short-term exposure to low level of PM 2.5 comes with increased risk for people over 65 years of age, there bring a significant association between cardiac arrest and exposure to 2.5 fine particles. Some medical authors have noted that because of bushfire smoke there is an urgent need for a national health protection strategy.⁷

Certainly there is a need for health protection action around these bushfires. This is why it is so important that an Independent Climate Change Commission acknowledge that strategies on all fronts can be developed to combat these ferocious fires. GHG emissions must be reduced, using strategies to reduce risk and five-year plans to adapt to these risks which will enable a significant reduction in fossil fuel use. Other measures like adequate resources for the Rural Fire Service, Indigenous Aboriginal people being involved and being paid for land management consultation in National Parks, and payment for all emergency workers and volunteers will enable promotion of equitable action to prevent further fire activity. Hopefully assessment, measurement and recording will provide reliable data that will demonstrate emissions progress to the Independent Climate Change Commission and then be forwarded to the Parliament for further action. Yet while these fires burn some kind of protection strategy needs to be in place because there are now short and long term health effects in the relevant affected populations; there is also a need to update educational advice for health professionals and patients because most of

⁴ Perkins, M. (Friday 13th November 2020). Climate change is here now: scientists. The Sydney Morning Herald. Pages 1 and 8.

⁵ Noyes, J. (29th January 2020). No safe level: Study links PM 2.5 pollution to rise in risk of cardiac arrest. The Sydney Morning Herald Digital Edition.

⁶ News Release 27th January 2020. Air pollution impacts can be heart-stopping: Lancet Planetary Health paper. University of Sydney.

⁷ Vardoulakis S, Jalaludin BB, Morgan, GG, Hanigan IC & Johnston, FH. (24th February 2020). Bushfire smoke: urgent need for a national health protection strategy. Med J Aust, 212 (8):349-353.e1. DOI: 10.5694/mja2.50511

this advice is based on shorter and more localised smoke events, unlike the smoke events that are now of much longer duration. It is important that people exposed, both healthy and those at greater risk like pregnant women and older people, have a good understanding of available health protection measures i.e. masks, air filters and respirators, and how effective they are. These people may need to be moved to more modern houses with better indoor air quality due to older houses allowing bushfire smoke to penetrate indoors over longer periods, producing poor air quality. More government investment is needed in hourly air quality monitoring, forecasting, exposure reduction measures and research undertaken on public health messaging to protect Australians from bushfire smoke. This could be undertaken by the Independent Climate Change Commission who will have access to national experts on air pollution and health protection. Australians need to work toward climate change mitigation targets. These are long-term strategies for managing the underlying causes of the increasing bushfire risk in Australia.⁸

b) Supporting the National Strategy for Climate, Health & Wellbeing for Australians.

The New South Wales Nurses & Midwives' Association is very supportive of the National Strategy for Climate, Health & Wellbeing for Australia, developed by the Climate & Health Alliance (CAHA).⁹ This is an excellent framework for the development of a policy around climate and health. Health Professionals and people generally need guidance on their health issues and strategies to support this. There are seven (7) key policy areas that it acknowledges:

1. Health-Promoting and Emissions-Reducing Policies
2. Emergency and Disaster-Preparedness
3. Supporting Healthy and Resilient Communities
4. Education and Capacity Building
5. Leadership and Governance
6. A Sustainable and Climate-resilient Health Sector, and
7. Research and Data.

This document has been produced from the results of a survey on climate and health for health care professionals and communities. It has solid, reliable data about climate and health issues. The Framework has been presented to Federal Parliament and has the support of Labor and the Greens. This

⁸ Vardoulakis et al. 24th February 2020, as above.

⁹ The National Strategy for Climate, Health & Wellbeing for Australians, The Climate and Health Alliance. Accessed on 16/11/2020 from <https://www.caha.org.au/national-strategy-climate-health-wellbeing>



framework document would make a very useful policy approach for the Climate Change Bill, especially in regard to climate and health. The first two policy areas are very important – the emissions reducing policies, as well as emergency and disaster preparedness. Health care workers and their clients are becoming more aware of the need for all facilities – hospitals as well as community health buildings – to have an emergency and disaster-preparedness plan. CAHA is leading in policy development in this important area which needs to be incorporated into the Climate Change Bill 2020 so that the Independent Climate Change Commission can provide policies involving appropriate assessment, monitoring and evaluation in regard to mitigation and adaptation strategies for Australian communities living with a changing climate impacting on their health.

c) Climate and Health policy must be Linked to the National Preventive Health Strategy.

The Federal Health Minister has recently initiated a project which presents a National Preventive Health Strategy to reflect important strategies and approaches in an Australian future. A Committee has been set up and forums are being held to advance the substance of this project.¹⁰ The concern for organisations like the New South Wales Nurses & Midwives' Association, the Climate and Health Alliance as well as many health care professionals and like-minded health organisations, was that there was no real content which related to health and our changing climatic environment. This had been disregarded in these developing documents. Yet human beings have to live in the environment and experience climate change and the way it impacts them. When developing a preventive health strategy for the Australian community we cannot forget climate change now, especially if we are looking at a futuristic perspective. There are many vulnerable families – those Indigenous Aboriginal families and families living in poverty – who are at risk, especially with the changing, extreme climate. These families need to be considered in the Climate Change Bill and accounted for in the adaptation and mitigation strategies generated through the Independent Climate Change Commission.

WHY LEGISLATING NET ZERO BY 2050, TECHNOLOGY ASSESSMENTS AND REGULAR 5 YEAR EMISSIONS BUDGETS ARE IMPORTANT

The latest science suggests that to meet the Paris Agreement's temperature goals, the world will need to reach net-zero emissions in scenarios that limit warming to 1.5 degrees C reaching net-zero on average

¹⁰ The Department of Health (June 2019). National Preventive Health Strategy. Accessed on 16/11/2020 from <https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/national-preventive-health-strategy#:~:text=%20National%20Preventive%20Health%20Strategy%20%201%20Public,Relevant%20Materials.%20%206%20Contact.%20%20More%20>



by 2050. Many westernised countries like France, Denmark, Germany, New Zealand, Hungary, and Japan support having a net zero emissions target by 2050. Other countries have even reduced their targets further like Sweden to net zero by 2045 and the UK by 2040.¹¹ There is no travel ban on greenhouse gas emissions, which means that burning coal, gas, oil and wood anywhere in the world has an impact on the atmosphere we all share.

Australia has made a promise to the Paris Agreement to reduce its emissions by 26 to 28 percent from 2005 levels by 2030, using the Kyoto credits to do so. Since 2015 our emissions have been going up year on year.¹² To be on track with other countries and to share its International responsibility Australia needs to adopt the approach of having a net zero emissions target by 2050. Australians must lobby the Federal Government to achieve this target. Due to the target's importance it must be legislated in the Climate Change Bill.

In order to keep up this commitment the Climate Change Bill will develop a process to review the net zero target every 5 years. This means having a five-year emissions budget to reduce emissions as smoothly as possible, in a fair and equitable way, to net zero as well as a five-year emissions reduction plan to ensure that Australia meets those emissions budgets (#Climate Act Now).

The Association agrees that The Climate Bill would need to provide updates on low energy renewable technology as new initiatives are happening all the time; that it should provide us with the latest news and evidence on the best technologies to reduce emissions, and produce figures to show the savings produced from using low-emission technologies.

The Association would prefer that more technology should be under public ownership. As Australia appears to have many privately owned companies involved in renewable technologies, they would need to be monitored carefully by the Independent Climate Change Commission for providing appropriately trained workers, for appropriate pricing, and for maintaining worker safety.

¹¹ Vevia, K & Davis, C. (September 17, 2019). What Does Net Zero Emissions Mean? 6 Common Questions Answered. World Resources Institute.

¹² March, S. Will we make it? Are Australia's efforts to curb global warming enough to meet the Paris target? 2nd April 2019. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-04-01/is-australia-on-track-to-meet-its-paris-emissions-targets/10920500?nw=0>

THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Division 2 of the Bill sets out 8 Guiding principles, all of which the Association supports. Three of these principles, which have guided the Association's own work in this area are discussed below.

a) Principle 6 – fair employment transition

The New South Wales Nurses & Midwives' Association supports the ACTU Policy discussion paper "Sharing the challenges and opportunities of a clean energy economy" released in 2016 which advocates a Just Transition for coal-fired electricity sector workers and their communities.¹³

In line with our commitments in this area, the Association has been involved in the formation of the Hunter Jobs Alliance (HJA).¹⁴ A group of like-minded unions, ourselves included, and the Labor Environment Action Network (LEAN) were able to hold meetings and develop the possibility of low energy renewable jobs in areas such as transport, recycling, manufacturing, and educational skills within the Hunter area. The decision to form an Alliance was determined on the basis of the principle of community engagement, pursuing sustainable economic, social and ecological solutions for the Hunter Valley communities, prioritising employment transition in these communities; offering appropriate education and training with these opportunities and allowing reasonable time for the economic transition. The Hunter Jobs Alliance hopes to work with governments and industry to deliver a safe, prosperous future for the Hunter.

b) Principle 7 – community engagement and self-determination

In Southern NSW many people living in these communities have been dispossessed through the devastating fires causing them to live in community shelters or tents on their damaged landsites. The Association understood the hardship that had been caused to these people and provided financial assistance to our members who were in this situation. Large numbers of people have become dependent on Charities to support them in addition to Government initiatives. Communities affected by climate change and energy issues must be included in the ongoing consultation.

¹³ ACTU Policy discussion paper, Sharing the challenges and opportunities of a clean energy economy: A Just transition for coal-fired electricity sector workers and communities, 9 November 2016, at: <https://www.actu.org.au/media/1032953/actu-policy-discussion-paper-a-just-transition-for-coal-fired-electricity-sector-workers-and-communities.pdf>, accessed 9/11/2016.

¹⁴ 2020 Hunter Jobs Alliance Inc. Uniting to build a prosperous, safe and sustainable future for the Hunter. Accessed on 16/11/2020 from <https://www.hunterjobsalliance.org.au>



c) Principle 8 – national and international cooperation

Another role the NSWNMA has is its work with the Trade Unions for Energy Democracy (TUED)¹⁵. We are a member of TUED and are supportive of the growing global network of unions and close allies working to advance democratic control and social ownership of energy. We are interested in the promotion of solutions to the climate crisis, in addressing energy poverty, in resisting the degradation of both land and people, and responding to the attacks on workers' rights and protections. TUED is a valuable source of information on the international impacts of climate and energy on working people.

RISK AND ADAPTATION ASSESSMENTS FOR ALL SECTORS

There are many risk and adaptation assessments that need to be undertaken in all sectors, those sectors being economic, social, health, water and food security, environmental, ecological and cultural effects of climate change. The impacts of climate change on human health are a focus of the Association and its members.

Nurses and midwives are involved in community clinics and hospitals, so risk and adaptation assessments need to be undertaken on infrastructure; education and knowledge, for example health professionals understanding vector ecology and how this will impact people; disaster planning co-ordination; and how a potentially climate resilient health sector is effectively responding to the health impacts of climate change. Health facilities like hospitals are major producers of GHG emissions,¹⁶ so risk and adaptation assessments need to be undertaken for all hospitals and health facilities in Australia.

The Association is concerned about food and water security with the decision of the Independent Planning Commission to allow the Narrabri Gas Project to go ahead. There is considerable anxiety around food security due to the establishment of 850 CSG mines on 'food bowl,' pristine farming land. Food security can be put at risk as a result of these decisions. Another issue is the problem preventing aquifers being contaminated in this area. Previously this has occurred with a site close by, caused by Santos, the same mining company to be allowed to start this new project. Although risk and adaptation assessments were

¹⁵ Trade Unions for Energy Democracy. Accessed on 17/11.2020 from <http://unionsforenergydemocracy.org/why-its-important-for-unions-to-support-tued/>

¹⁶ Charlesworth, KE Stewart, GJ. & Sainsbury, P. Addressing the carbon footprint of health organisations: eight lessons for implementation. Public Health Res Pract. 2018;28(4): e2841830.

carried out before this project was approved it is now the responsibility of the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) and the community to check that Santos has undertaken the 134 recommendations required.¹⁷

By far the most worrying aspect for the Association is the air we breathe. I note this has not been included in preparing a national climate change risk assessment (see Section 38, Division 2 – Emissions reduction plans of the Climate Change Bill 2020). Australia's air quality needs urgent attention.¹⁸ The Association's submission, along with thousands of others, to the National Environment Protection Council on the proposal to vary the National Environment Protection (Ambient Air Quality) Measure Standards for NO₂, SO₂, and O₃,¹⁹ stated that there should be a lowering of NO₂, SO₂, and O₃ standards and the way they are measured to reflect international best practice. Furthermore, they should be compelled to legislate these standards, as well as providing more obvious monitoring capacity. Melissa Price, the Australian Minister for the Environment at the time, decided to postpone decisions on Australia adopting Euro 6 fuel standards until July 2027!²⁰ There is no fuel efficiency standard in Australia, unlike the US and NZ and other countries. This is a major oversight when countries like UK and France have announced plans to ban the sale of new petrol and diesel cars in 2040.²¹

Australia is also behind when the situation on coal-fired power stations and their toxic emissions is examined. In December 2018 the NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA) asked for submissions on coal-fired power stations in order to make a decision about whether their licences would be reviewed with the recommendation that they provide pollution controls. The New South Wales Nurse & Midwives' Association made a submission, along with other like-minded health organisations, and were informed by the NSW EPA that they were pleased with the way the power stations were operating and that they would take no further action. They were unconcerned with the amount of toxic gas produced. A population researcher Ewald, 2018²² who undertook air quality research at five coal-fired NSW power stations

¹⁷ Narrabri Gas Project. New South Wales. Government Department of Planning accessed on 24th March, 2017 from http://www.majorprojects.planning.nsw.gov.au/index.pl/action=view_job&job_id=6456

¹⁸ Roden, J. (October 2020). Air Pollution Issues in Australia. Medical Research Archives, vol 8, issue1,,pages 2-11.

¹⁹ Submission by New South Wales Nurses & Midwives' Association, to the National Environment Protection Council on the Proposal to vary the National Environment Protection (Ambient Air Quality) Measure standards for NO₂, SO₂, and O₃, August 2019.

²⁰ Gazette Government Notices, C29019G00039. Notice of Intention to Vary the National Environment Protection (Ambient Air Quality) Measure. January 18, 2019. Commonwealth of Australia.

²¹ March, S. Will we make it? Are Australia's efforts to curb global warming enough to meet the Paris target? 2nd April, 2019. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-04-01/is-australia-on-track-to-meet-its-paris-emissions-targets/10920500?nw=0> Accessed on 17/11/2020.

²² Ewald, B. The health burden of fine particulate pollution from electricity generation in NSW. November, 2018.



revealed that every year in NSW there will be 279 premature deaths, 361 people will develop diabetes type 2, and 233 underweight babies will be born. The toxic pollution responsible is produced mainly from the Central Coast of NSW to Sydney communities. Sydney, the largest Australian city, is within a 200 kilometre radius of these NSW coal-fired power stations. Coal-fired power stations emit a range of toxic substances that contribute to illness and premature death. They are Australia's single largest source of fine particle pollution, sulphur dioxide (SO₂) and oxides of nitrogen (NO_x). Air pollution from power stations can travel long distances. The power stations on the Central Coast and in the Hunter Valley are responsible for 51% of Sydney's NO_x emissions, 200 kilometres away, and 88% of Sydney's SO₂ pollution, exposing millions of people to toxic emissions.²³ These toxic pollutants are hazardous to human health and are estimated to cost our health system \$2.6 billion per year.²⁴

There is adequate evidence of dangerous pollution – an absence of adequate fuel standards, dated controls on emissions produced from 35 plus year old power stations, the recurrent risk of bushfires, and increased greenhouse gas emissions through coal use and gas mining. Air pollution in Australia must be reduced by strategies, actions and policies, provided by the Independent Climate Change Commission.

The New South Wales Nurses and Midwives Association supports the legislation and the establishment of the Independent Climate Change Commission.

²³ NSW Environment Protection Authority (2018), Review of Coal Fired Power Stations Air Emissions and Monitoring, page 5, at: <https://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/-/media/epa/corporate-site/resources/air/18p0700-review-of-coal-fired-power-stations.pdf?la=en>, accessed 9/12/2018.

²⁴ Tom Biegler, 'The Hidden Costs of Electricity: Externalities of Power Generation in Australia,' Report, Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering, March 2009.



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