



Source: MacKay, Canada

The Honorable Peter Gutwein, MP
Premier of Tasmania
3 June 2020
Dear Premier,

As medical doctors who live in Southern Tasmania, we are very concerned about the impact climate change has on health, especially for future generations.

While we congratulate you on your leadership and handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is also a climate emergency which demands action. This has been agreed by international scientific bodies and medical colleges. School students too have made their concerns very clear and many young people are experiencing significant anxiety and distress about their future. All believe that we must act now. In Australia, the climate emergency is evident in our record-breaking drought, the horrific bushfires early this year which were followed by floods, the third mass bleaching event of the barrier reef in the past 5 years, and the massive loss in biodiversity, particularly in our country.

Politicians and businesses have listened to expert scientific advice on COVID -19 and to their credit, have acted. A resilient recovery from COVID-19 must prepare Australia for its next major threat – climate change. The inequalities in Tasmania which have been shown by the disproportionate COVID-19 case fatality rate for our state will be worsened by the effects of climate change. Your decisions in mapping out a “road to recovery” from the COVID 19 crisis must take account of this to have long lasting benefits for Tasmania.

You now have a unique opportunity to invest in environmentally sound projects, focusing on active transport, low carbon/renewable energy, electricity generation and a public health program for healthy eating. Such projects will create jobs, reduce emissions and our carbon footprint, limit pollution and improve our health. These would also result in reduced rates of respiratory and heart disease, stroke, obesity, diabetes, some cancers as well as improved mental health.

Given that the Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council (PESRAC) has been established to address a problem that started with a world health crisis, the lack of a health professional from the membership needs to be compensated by seeking expert health advice on its recommendations, so that economic and social recovery also protects and improves the health of Tasmanians.

Please don't waste the opportunity to make changes that will benefit not only the economy, but also the climate and the long-term health of Tasmanians. These are not mutually exclusive and with intelligent planning and foresight both can be achieved. Climate action does not have to be sacrificed for jobs.

One of us (EH) appreciated meeting with you last year about air pollution standards. Now, on climate change, we are available to answer any questions you might have on our suggestions or to meet with the PESRAC if you would find that useful.

Your sincerely,

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Dr Ingrid Smethurst FRACGP
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