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Submission to the Climate Health WA Inquiry



A collaboration with Friends Of the Earth Perth

Maar Koodjal is a recently established Aboriginal organisation based on the traditional values of the First Nation People of Nyoongar country. The vision for Maar Koodjal is to establish a Nyoongar Cultural Academy with the purpose of providing health and wellbeing, education and training for the Aboriginal and wider community. Maar Koodjal values are guided by ecology, equality, reconciliation, spirit and integrity. Strong, fundamental inherent links exist between our communities, and the need for climate justice, health justice and safe climate health. We work with Aboriginal people, low income communities, corporates, the art sector and other diverse peoples connected to the cultural projects we run.

The health of humanity and the environment is at the heart of the work we do. Dealing with the effects of climate change, climate injustice and racial injustice at the core of our work is reflected in the climate health space. We acknowledge the fragile and detrimental links between the poor, declining health of our planet's ecosystems and the health of our people in the communities we work directly with and those we work in solidarity with across the state, nation and globe. First nations people in Australia and globally are already experiencing the harmful destructive effects of climate change and the impact it's having on the health of our communities and the wider society we live within. First nations people and Maar Koodjal are in tune to the changes happening to our seasons, weather patterns and ecological systems. The shifts local elders and communities have identified in seasons, land and water represent a concerning period and patterns which have previously existed consistently since the pre-colonisation era. These are clear signs that the health of our communities will not escape the devastating trajectory we are headed for if urgent action is not taken.

Friends of the Earth Perth (FOE) is a local group of FOE Australia which is a member of , the world's largest grassroots environmental network challenging the current model of economic and corporate neoliberal globalization, and promoting solutions that will help to create environmentally sustainable and socially just societies. Our vision is of a world where everyone's needs are met in a way which safeguards the future of the environment. Our philosophy and practice is grounded in our messaging 'mobilise, resist, transform'. In partnership with Maar Koodjal we recognise that there is an inextricable link between people

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and the environment and acknowledge that first nations people and vulnerable communities must be considered at the forefront of decisions related to climate health.

The Maar Koodjal community is built on a connection with country and under climate change this is disturbed, interrupting historic stories and learnings that have been passed down generations. Extreme weather events put low income families at high risk of injury that is difficult to recover from due to prevailing health conditions or lack of funds to adequately support one's health. In our communities people are already recognising the decline in water quality, experiencing barriers to accessing water and changes in land that results in bush plants and food growing becoming unpredictable.

Increased temperatures are dangerous for those living in homes with poor cooling systems and those working in national parks or outside. First nations people have greater risks of inheriting health issues and environmental factors increase the risk further, with the addition of new disease and illness we haven't built resilience to. For families living in low income or public housing climate induced threats have the risk of further destabilising the structure of buildings or security of places which can lead to social repercussions such as homelessness.

In Australia and globally we are experiencing a polarisation of politics which puts the topic of health, support systems and funding in question to a divided public. The repercussions of these health impacts can be traced back to tightening of neoliberal policies in an unstable climate future and we can expect this to worsen as climate effects increase. People who are subject to systemic disadvantage such as Aboriginal communities and low income families need systemic change in order to survive the increased pressure from the state and public that is putting people on a trajectory towards social isolation, poor health and decreased wellbeing.

Increased scarcity and prices will be an effect of climate change that will put strain on the health of families. Buying necessities such as food, water and fuel in an economy dealing with inflation is putting additional strain on vulnerable communities such as Aboriginal and/or low-income households. When food prices are increased it is common that the unhealthy quick easy options are the cheaper option. In a world where time is scarce, and people struggle to juggle hours working and doing domestic labour trends around poor food health which already exist will continue exponentially. This alone has a huge potential to damage the health of populations struggling to pay for food.

Infrastructure such as public transport is relied upon amongst our communities as an affordable and sustainable way of traveling which if destabilised, impaired or weakened could add mental stress to a means people rely on for daily activities.

The impacts outlined above more greatly exacerbate challenges already faced by vulnerable communities such as First Nations people, people of colour, women and non binary folks,

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queer folks, people living in poverty, people experiencing homelessness, people on a low income, people in insecure work and at risk/outdoor industries, people with disabilities, people of non english speaking backgrounds, newly arrived migrants and refugees, children, young people and older persons, people with existing health problems, people living in rural and remote areas, farmers, people living in climate risk areas, and emergency responders. . We acknowledge that for all vulnerable communities already struggling physically, mentally and or socially the climate emergency which is already upon us compounds marginalisation in regard to people's health through issues with accessibility to resources and increases risks to increasingly poor mental health.

It is proven through scientific research that we as a state must urgently transition to net zero emissions by 2030 to limit global warming, therefore we see the Health Sector as a science based, professional led sector with institutions that have the opportunity and responsibility to guide the state on this emissions reduction transition. A transition to net zero emissions by 2030 could start with reducing greenhouse gas emissions within the sector but should not be limited to such. The transition away from a fossil fuel dependent sector and society includes health sector institutions and events rejecting sponsorship from fossil fuel companies for health programs, facilities, research or staff support programs and to instead highlight how emissions reduction will increase chances of good health while decreasing risks of air pollution related heart and lung disease and obesity. We would like to see the health sector advocating for policies and practices which protect our communities from climate induced health risks and for the health department to step up to the role of communicating the connection between ecological collapse and humanity's health, speaking publicly about the need for emissions reduction and adaptation planning

In planning for adaptation, it is important that vulnerable communities are considered as those who will experience the effects of climate health impacts first and worst. We ask that projections of shifting health factors consider how Aboriginal communities, low-income communities, people with disabilities and other minorities will be disproportionately impacted by compounding consequences under a destabilising climate. We believe that the best solutions involve the people most affected by climate change to be included in co-design of climate health programs and policies.

We understand the government has a responsibility to ensure the health of communities and state of WA is protected. We view the ideal response similarly to the way the health sector regulates the asbestos industry which also presents a public health risk. With this knowledge applied to the case of fossil fuel induced climate effects, we are calling on the government to regulate sources such as offshore gas projects to limit dangerous levels of emissions that will cause direct and indirect health effects.

Thank you for considering this submission.

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