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sent via e-mail: sally.truong@climatechange.gov.au
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Dear Sally

Re: UNFCCC Review – Community NGO Representations

We are writing further to your emailed invitation of 28 March and our subsequent conversation. We are unable to attend the session scheduled for tomorrow morning in Canberra. Thanks for creating an opportunity to contribute to the In-Depth Review (IDR) in this remote fashion.

Introduction

ACOSS has a strong and growing interest in climate change and in climate change responses: mitigation and adaptation. ACOSS is the peak council of the community welfare sector in Australia and the national voice for the needs of people affected by poverty and inequality. Our vision as an organisation is that we work towards a fair, inclusive and **sustainable** Australia where all individuals and communities have the resources they need to participate in and benefit from social and economic life. Our interest in climate change is primarily the result of our interest in matters affecting low income and disadvantaged Australians. We believe that the impacts of climate change will be particularly harsh on low income households and disadvantaged communities.

We note that the term NGO is understood differently in different contexts. The context afforded by the UNFCCC is probably quite specific. ACOSS is itself a non-government organisation; independent, not-for-profit, national in scope and representative of a wide range and large number of member non-government organisations. We have enclosed with this letter a report released last week, *Energy and Equity*, the product of a partnership with two other major Australian NGO's, that sets out the more concrete of our views. As we respond to the plethora of interlinked issues under the banner 'climate change' we will continue to develop our policy positions.

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Last week in Melbourne ACOSS presented a two day conference to an audience of more than seven hundred people; drawn mostly from community welfare organisations but including also government officials, academics and representatives of the private sector. The theme was 'social inclusion – a fair go for all'. One of ten concurrent workshops on the second day was devoted to the topic 'climate change, essential services and equity'. We are working on the outcomes of that day which we hope will go to inform further work in the area of climate change.

We note that, in our view, climate change will affect all areas of government activity and that a whole of government approach is the ideal. However, for a relatively small organisation such as ACOSS, the challenge will be to develop sufficient levels of knowledge particular to climate change, contextualised by our longstanding expertise in matters affecting low income and disadvantaged Australians, in order to advocate for appropriate policy and program development.

While our remarks are brief, we have endeavoured to answer each of the questions put to us. We would be happy to discuss any matter raised in this letter or the report at a later stage.

Review team questions

What are NGO's views of the problem of climate change?

Community welfare sector NGO views are probably quite diverse, reflecting the range of views in the community more generally. Views about how best to respond, about priorities and responsibilities for responses are probably likewise diverse. Most community welfare sector organisations, especially service delivery organisations, have a relatively narrow focus of operations. If they are in a position to undertake policy development or advocacy it is usually in their area of focus and with regard to immediate concerns.

It is important to note that where there might previously have been a divergence of views between community welfare sector NGO's and environment NGO's, in terms of priorities for policy, there is increasingly a shared understanding of the need for mitigation tempered by measures that ensure equity.

What are NGO's actions to address the problem of climate change?

Responses from community welfare sector NGO's range across a wide range of actions. It could be argued that some service delivery NGO's are already dealing with the effects of climate change as they respond to the needs of clients affected by extreme weather events, the continuing drought and so on.

Some organisations are taking steps towards research and policy development (notably, for example, ACOSS, the Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS), the Brotherhood of St Laurence, the Society of St Vincent de Paul). ACOSS is consulting with its constituency while building its expertise, advocating fundamental principles of equity for policy development in the area, and developing partnerships with other NGO's, government and the private sector (through for example, electricity retailers).

There are arguments such that opportunities may open for community welfare sector NGO's as programs directed to mitigation and adaptation are developed. For example there may be potential to extend programs that audit and retrofit homes and appliances for low income households.

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How familiar NGO's are with the 4th National Communication and its findings

We will suggest that few community welfare sector NGO's are at all familiar with this document, including ACOSS. Drawing from the executive summary of the document we will note also that we were unaware of a climate change public awareness strategy.

The [former] Australian Government's climate change public awareness strategy aims to ensure broad understanding of human-induced climate change, inform key stakeholders and the general community of government policies and programmes, and encourage industry, community and individual action in greenhouse gas reduction initiatives.

How NGO's actions interact with, or relate to, governmental policy and actions on climate change

The recent change of federal government has brought swift and significant change in approaches to climate change. The appointment of a Cabinet level minister and the establishment of a Commonwealth department promise higher level, better coordinated, well resourced efforts to address climate change. The Department of Climate Change has established an Emissions Trading Scheme Roundtable for Social and Environment Organisations at which ACOSS has a seat. The Garnaut Climate Change Review has engaged with NGO's in a welcoming and substantive manner and indications are that the Review process is taking account of community welfare sector views. The joint NGO report published last week, *Energy and Equity*, will be distributed widely amongst community welfare and environment NGO's as well as to governments and officials, academics and relevant private sector interests.

As the Government works to develop policy responses to climate change, through green paper and other processes, ACOSS will endeavour to contribute where possible and valuable.

A continuing concern for NGO's is the matter of resources to support information about climate change issues and engagement in policy development and advocacy processes.

We trust that these remarks are of some value. We wish you and the review team well for this process and for the work more generally. Please contact us by phone at 02 9310 6200 or email tony@acoss.org.au should we be able to provide any further assistance.

Yours sincerely
Australian Council of Social Service

Tony Westmore
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