

**Urgent Climate Risk Assessment**

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**Handling note**

- First Assistant Secretary Lachlan Colquhoun, National Security to lead.
- Australia's Nationally Determined Contribution, (Australia's plan for climate action) lodged with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Secretariat on 16 June 2022, said the Government would develop an Urgent Climate Risk Assessment of the implications of climate change for Australia's national security.
- A PMO spokesperson said on 22 June that Director General National Intelligence would coordinate an assessment of the implications of climate change for national security, with input provided by the Department of Defence [reported by the Guardian].
- This brief uses the term 'the Assessment' to describe the body of work led by ONI.
- Content and judgments in the Assessment are classified and cannot be shared in this forum. Details on how the Assessment was produced and when it was finalised are also classified.
- The National Assessment Board, which considered the final product, is a publically-acknowledged body enshrined in legislation.
- Further questions regarding the development of the Urgent Climate Risk Assessment should be referred to the Office of National Intelligence with the caveat that ONI cannot disclose classified information.
- Further questions regarding the impact of climate change on defence and defence related Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief should be referred to the Department of Defence.
- Further questions regarding the Powering Australia Plan and associated policies should be directed to the Department of Climate Change, Energy, Environment and Water.

## Framing points

- The Government recognises that climate change has serious ramifications for global security. Climate change is as much a national security issue as it is an economic and social issue.
- The Assessment assessed how climate change affects Australia's national security. This work is well-aligned with our international partners who are similarly exploring the implications of climate change for national security.
- The Assessment forms part of the 'Powering Australia' plan: a comprehensive suite of policies to support Australia's renewable energy transformation and delivery of the Government's climate agenda.
- While climate is not specifically cited in the terms of reference for the Defence Strategic Review (DSR), the DSR has scope to take into consideration the findings of the Assessment and will make recommendations in relation to Defence force structure, force posture, and preparedness over the period 2023-24 to 2032-33 and beyond. It is important not to pre-empt the DSR's findings.
- The Government's Nationally Determined Contribution indicated that climate risk assessments will be an enduring feature of Australia's climate action.
- It is public knowledge that ONI is undertaking a National Assessment with the support of Defence. National Assessments have not, to date, been publicly released.

## PM&C role

- PM&C engaged with ONI and Defence throughout the production of the Assessment.
- Secretary Glyn Davis sat on the National Assessments Board which considered the final Assessment. The specific timing of the Assessment Board is classified.

## Key issues

### *If asked: Will the UCRA be released **publically**?*

- The Assessment draws on classified information. Any decision on whether or how the Assessment is released publically, and any associated policy decisions, will be a matter for Government.

### *If asked: When will the UCRA be **finalised**?*

- The National Assessment Board, which is comprised of relevant agency heads, considered the Assessment. The specific timing of the Assessment Board is classified.
- A public release of this Assessment is a matter for Government.

*If asked: Did PM&C provide **input** to the UCRA?*

- PM&C supported the production of the Assessment.

**Timeline***(Blue entries = PM&C action)*

<b>Date</b>	<b>Action</b>
<b>22 August 2022</b>	The Prime Minister responded to the Australian Security Leaders Climate Group acknowledging their advocacy for an UCRA.
<b>30 June 2022</b>	PM&C briefed the Prime Minister on work commencing on the Urgent Climate Risk Assessment.
<b>16 June 2022</b>	The Government submits Australia's Nationally Determined Contribution to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which references the UCRA.
<b>16 March 2022</b>	Former Shadow Minister for Defence, Brendan O'Connor gives speech to US Studies Centre which outlines details of the UCRA.
<b>3 December 2021</b>	Australian Labor Party releases the Powering Australia plan which first mentions the Urgent Climate Risk Assessment (UCRA).

**Background****Origin of the Urgent Climate Risk Assessment**

- In December 2021, the Australian Labor Party released the Powering Australia plan, which referenced commissioning the Director General of National Intelligence and the Secretary of Defence to lead the development of an Urgent Climate Risk Assessment.
- Former Shadow Defence Minister Brendan O'Connor outlined further details on the Urgent Climate Risk Assessment in his March 16 2022 speech to the US Studies Centre.
  - The speech indicated that, if elected, the Government would develop an urgent climate risk assessment within four months, which would be explicitly required to capture domestic and Indo-Pacific trends and considerations, and economic matters. It would be consistent with President Biden's Executive Order on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad.
  - Shadow Minister O'Connor also indicated that the Urgent Climate Risk Assessment would consider the appropriateness of establishing an Office of Climate Threat Intelligence, which could potentially coordinate a

holistic, whole-of government approach, building capacity across the public service and government agencies.

## **National Assessments**

- National Assessments are governed by the Office of National Intelligence Act 2018 (ONI Act).
- All National Assessments are considered by the National Assessments Board, which is established in Part 5 of the ONI Act.
- The National Assessments Board consists of:
  - the Director-General; and
  - an official of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet; and
  - an official of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade; AND
  - an official of the Defence Department; and
  - an official of the Department of Home Affairs; and
  - an official of the Department of the Treasury; and
  - a member of the Defence Force; and
  - such other persons as the Prime Minister directs.
- For the purposes of a particular national assessment, the Director-General may add one or more persons to the membership of the National Assessments Board.
- The Director-General must consult the National Assessments Board in relation to each national assessment made by ONI, and if practicable, before providing the assessment.
  - If there is a significant difference of opinion between the Director-General and the National Assessments Board in relation to a national assessment, the Director-General and the Board must endeavour to reach agreement.
  - If the Director-General and the National Assessments Board are unable to reach agreement, the Director-General must give a statement to each person to whom the national assessment is provided that sets out the matter on which there is a difference of opinion.

## **International Comparisons**

### **United States**

- In October 2021, the US Government released 'National Intelligence Estimate: Climate Change and International Responses Increasing Challenges to US National Security Through 2040'.

- The report states that US national security interests through to 2040 will increase as countries respond to the intensifying physical effects of climate change.
- It also states that global temperatures most likely will surpass the Paris Agreement goal of 1.5 degrees around 2030, and the physical effects are projected to continue intensifying.
- At AUSMIN 2022 (6 December), Australia and the United States committed to:
  - Strengthen information sharing and exchange best practices between both Departments of Defense to accelerate progress towards climate resiliency objectives.
  - Explore the inclusion of updated climate verbiage in a review of the 2005 Joint Statement of Environmental and Heritage Principles for Combined Activities.
  - Explore establishing a new senior officials working group to share assessments and advice on the national and regional security risks posed by climate change.

## United Kingdom

- s 33(a)(iii)  
 the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office did commission a Chatham House report on climate risk ahead of the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference Glasgow Conference (Climate change risk assessment 2021, Daniel Quiggin, Kris De Meyer, Lucy Hubble-Rose and Anthony Froggatt).
- This paper states that if policy ambition, low-carbon technology deployment and investment follow current trends, 2.7°C of warming by the end of this century is likely, and expected to cause higher mortality rates, drive political instability and greater national insecurity, and fuel regional and international conflict
- On 30 March 2021 the UK Ministry of Defence produced a report called 'Climate Change and Sustainability Strategic Report'. The report steps out the impacts of climate change on resource competition, mass migrations, health crises, civil unrest and other national security concerns. It outlines three goals for Defence: adaptation and resilience, sustainability and net zero, and global leadership.
- At AUKMIN 2022 (21 January), Australia and the United Kingdom committed to work together to help increase the region's capacity to analyse climate security issues. At AUKMIN 2023, Ministers committed to reducing and mitigating the climate impacts of our respective defence activities.

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s 22(1)(a)(ii)	Strategic Policy and Industry Section.	s 22(1)(a)(ii)	
Adviser			
Consultation	Climate Change and International		

**ATTACHMENT A****Powering Australia Plan**

During the election, the Australian Labor Party announced the Powering Australia Plan which would:

- Demonstrate Commonwealth leadership by reducing the Australian Public Service's own emissions to net zero by 2030 (Department of Defence and National Security Agencies are exempt).
- Commission the Director General of National Intelligence and the Secretary of Defence to lead the development of an urgent climate risk assessment.
- Upgrade the electricity grid to fix energy transmission and drive down power prices.
- Make electric vehicles cheaper with an electric car discount and Australia's first National Electric Vehicle Strategy.
- Protect the competitiveness of Emissions Intensive Trade Exposed industries by ensuring they will not face a greater constraint than their competitors.
- Allocate up to \$3 billion from Labor's National Reconstruction Fund to invest in green metals (steel, alumina and aluminium); clean energy component manufacturing; hydrogen electrolyzers and fuel switching; agricultural methane reduction and waste reduction.
- Provide direct financial support for measures that improve energy efficiency within existing industries and develop new industries in Regional Australia through a new Powering the Regions Fund.
- Roll out 85 solar banks around Australia to ensure more households can benefit from rooftop solar.
- Install 400 community batteries across the country.
- Invest in 10,000 New Energy Apprentices and a New Energy Skills Program.
- Work with large businesses to provide greater transparency on their climate related risks and opportunities.
- Re-establish leadership by restoring the role of the Climate Change Authority, while keeping decision-making and accountability with Government and introducing new annual Parliamentary reporting by the Minister.