



Opening Statement on Climate Change Amendment (Duty of Care and Intergenerational Climate Equity) Bill 2023

About Psychology for a Safe Climate

Psychology for a Safe Climate (PSC) is a not for profit Health Promotion Charity. Our vision is *Supporting People Emotionally in Facing the Climate Reality*. PSC has been a leading organization, nationally and internationally, in the emerging field of Climate Psychology, since our formation in 2010.

PSC provides:

- Support for people working on climate change.
- Professional development for mental health professionals
- Consulting services such as workshops, talks and interactive seminars for the broader community including organizations. PSC has worked with young people, parents and educators.

Climate Distress

PSC's focus is on **climate distress** (also referred to as climate anxiety) which includes a variety of feelings, including grief, anger, fear, anxiety and powerlessness.

Climate distress is associated with awareness and knowledge of current and predicted impacts of climate change, even when a person is not directly affected by a particular climate change impact. .

Climate distress can significantly impact an individual and develop into a mental health condition such as clinical anxiety or depression, particularly if not adequately helped by a climate aware practitioner. There is no doubt that climate change is both causing and exacerbating mental health problems.

Young people are particularly distressed by the climate crisis as their whole lives will inevitably be impacted by it. The climate distress of young people has been outlined in a very significant Lancet paper in 2021. The study of 10,000 young people from 10 countries showed much evidence of distress: 75% said the "future is frightening" because of climate change (76% of Australians). 39% were hesitant to have children. These findings correspond to the levels of distress Psychology for a Safe Climate witnesses in our workshops.

Government Betrayal

The study above also reports a correlation between feelings of climate anxiety and government inaction on climate change, with 58% of those surveyed (55% of Australians) saying that governments are betraying them.

We depend on our leaders to engage with climate reality. However we know they are only taking limited action. To feel this uncared for is deeply traumatic and can also lead to unbearable anxiety, born of a feeling of helplessness and aloneness in the face of survival threats.

Government Denial

It is important to view the lack of necessary government action through the lens of denial. Denial has been classified as literal denial or implicative denial. In implicative denial there is no attempt to deny either the facts or their conventional interpretation. What is denied or minimized are the psychological, political or moral implications. Unfortunately this type of denial is very common institutionally, both in government and in the legal system, and also culturally and individually. An example is the Government's continued expansion of fossil fuel extraction.

Duty of Care

There are a number of ways that young people's wellbeing can be helped, and this Duty of Care bill has great potential to achieve this, particularly with regard to items 2, 3 and 4:

1. The lowering of Humanity's carbon footprint
2. The Australian government doing everything it can to reduce emissions
3. The government showing that they care about young people's wellbeing
4. Offering increased government funding to help those young people (and their families and educators) distressed by the climate situation.

Psychology for a Safe Climate strongly supports this Duty of Care bill which will offer considerable help for young people's health and wellbeing in Australia, for current and future generations. Not only will it help to lessen some of the adverse psychological implications of climate change, but it also follows the moral implications of an escalating climate crisis by requiring decision makers to consider the wellbeing of current and future children when making certain decisions that are likely to contribute to climate change

Dr Charles Le Feuvre, Senior Adviser

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Supporting people emotionally in facing the climate reality

