ACF (Australian Conservation Foundation) Community CERES,
CERES Community Environment Park,
Corner Roberts & Stewart Streets,
Brunswick East 3057 Victoria
14th July, 2019

Re: Response from ACF Community CERES to Interim Emissions Reduction Targets for Victoria (2021-2030)

We write this letter in response to the government’s targets for future climate emissions.

Our group, ACF (Australian Conservation Foundation) Community CERES is comprised of over 100 people from the north-western suburbs of Melbourne. Our members all share a concern for both climate and conservation issues.

We recognise that the Victorian government has already taken some action towards combating climate change. These are steps in the right direction, and it’s evident that Victoria is already seeing benefits from these changes.

Having said that, it’s important that the government realise that immediate and profound changes must now be made to combat climate change. On that basis, we must provide a clear and simple response to the recommendations of the Combet report: the report’s recommendations are grossly inadequate and in no way recognise the crisis that we are facing.

The report’s recommendations for interim targets are as follows:

- 32-39 percent below 2005 levels by 2025
- 45-60 percent below 2005 levels by 2030

Our recommendations are far more direct: we must have zero net emissions as soon as can be
achieved while at the same time providing a just transition for the community.

The time has passed for setting lukewarm targets. Now there is only time for huge change on a global scale. The good news is that Victoria can help lead that change, promoting both job growth and sustainable industries. This government can provide a beacon for the rest of the nation to follow.

The Combet report has failed to adequately address several key factors. These include:

1. The issue of thawing Arctic permafrost, details of which have only come to hand since the release of the report
2. The increased rate of natural disasters due to climate change
3. The financial cost of natural disasters
4. The human cost as a result of heatwaves and an aging population
5. Population increase

We will now address each of these issues.

1. **Thawing of Arctic permafrost**

   The full details of this have only come to light since the report was released and so were not part of the considerations of the Combet report.

   The latest figures released by scientists have shown that the ongoing thawing of Arctic permafrost could lead to a ‘feedback loop’ of catastrophic proportions. The thawing of this permafrost could lead to a series of tipping points that lead to a ‘hothouse Earth’ environment.

   It was only last week that a new study showed that thawing permafrost in Alaska is releasing, not just methane and CO2, but 12 times more nitrous oxide than previously estimated. This is another global warming gas, but is nearly 300 times better at trapping heat than carbon dioxide.

2. **Natural Disasters**

   The Combet report has not properly dealt with the issue of natural disasters. It has now been strongly established that a side effect of climate change is an increased rate of natural disasters. Studies have shown that:

   - The number of record breaking hot days has doubled over the last fifty years.
Heatwaves are both longer and hotter.
Short, intense flash floods, and urban flooding, are more frequent.
Sea levels are rising at an unprecedented rate.

The flow-on effect of these disasters is not adequately discussed in the report. Not only does this include the human cost, but also the financial cost of natural disasters.

3. The Financial Cost

The Combet report does not take into account the full cost of natural disasters. As estimated by the Insurance Australia Group in 2017, the annual cost of natural disasters in Australia is expected to increase annually to $39 billion dollars by 2050. That report showed that:

- The total average economic cost of natural disasters in Victoria over the past decade was $2.7 billion per year, or 15% of the national cost.
- Hail accounted for 36% of this cost, 27% was due to storm and 26% as a result of bushfire.
- The total economic cost of natural disasters in Victoria will cost $3.2 billion a year by 2050, a growth rate of 3.6% per year.

This government needs to do everything possible to head off this financial time bomb created by this climate change crisis.

4. Heatwaves and an aging population

The Combet report has also failed to fully address Australia’s most deadly natural hazard: heatwaves. Since 1900, heatwaves have killed more people than all other natural hazards combined. As the Combet report states, the 2009 heatwave took the lives of 374 Victorians.

The number, and severity, of heatwaves will only rise as time passes. The report does not address the increased threat to our aging population brought about by climate change. By 2051, 2.2 million Victorians are expected to be over the age of 65. This means that elderly people will be particularly affected by climate change, and the danger to them will only increase.

5. Population increases

While the Combet report mentions population increases, it does not specifically address
numbers. The current population of Victoria is around 6.3 million. Statistics from the ABS state that, ‘Victoria's population is projected to reach between 7.5 million and 7.9 million people by 2027.’

The report itself mentions increases in carbon emissions due to electricity usage and transport, but doesn’t recognise the other massive flow on effects from population increases. Every aspect of our society including all forms of public infrastructure, water, schools, hospitals, food production, manufacturing et. al. will be affected.

A rapidly changing environment

The report repeatedly states that, ‘Projections consistently underestimate the scale of growth of new technologies, at the same time as underestimating the reductions in costs that would be achieved over time’ and ‘The uptake of renewables across the globe has consistently outperformed projections over the past 20 years’ (P. 65).

Governments need to be forward thinking: not playing catch up in the wake of technological innovation.

A full transition to renewable energy will happen faster than most people expect. In this respect, five year targets are both too long and therefore completely ineffectual.

New research about climate and new breakthroughs in technologies are happening daily. No government should sit back and wait for five year intervals when vital, new information is rapidly coming to hand.

In conclusion

You asked for our feedback regarding the Combet report. Here it is: we are in the midst of a climate emergency and urgent, decisive action is required. This kind of action requires true leadership at the highest levels. The Victorian government can show the rest of the nation what leadership looks like. This government can show that it’s not afraid to make the big changes and take the bold actions required to protect us and our future.

This government needs to set a bold target to achieve zero net emissions while at the same time providing a just transition for our society. In doing so, other states and territorial governments
around the country will be prompted to follow suit.

The Victorian Government can truly be a leader. We urge the government to take the lead and make the urgent, necessary decisions required. All our futures depend on it.

Thanking you,

ACF Community CERES

C/O: Nick Curmi (Natural & Built Environment Director)