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Government of South Australia

Premier's Climate Change Council

8 August 2014

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The Hon Ian Hunter MLC
Minister for Sustainability, Environment and Conservation
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Dear Minister

I refer to your letter of 1 August 2014 in which you request the Premier's Climate Change Council to provide you with its view as to whether it should be retained following the State Government's review of boards and committees.

I am pleased to provide the following information to assist you in your deliberations regarding whether the Premier's Climate Change Council should be exempt from the policy to abolish all State boards and committees.

The Council is established under the *Climate Change and Greenhouse Emissions Reduction Act, 2007*. Its legislated role is to provide independent advice to you, and to engage with business, the environment and conservation movement, and the community about matters associated with reducing greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to climate change.

Due to the politicisation of climate change, it is important that there is an independent body that can advise Government on climate change issues. Council's independent advisory role illustrates that the State Government takes climate change seriously, especially when juxtaposed against the Federal Government's closing of the Climate Commission. The Federal Government has been severely criticised in its dismantling of the range of independent bodies that provide advice on climate change at a national level, with concerns raised about the robust nature of advice now being available. South Australia would be ill-advised to follow this trend given that climate change is recognised internationally as one of the most pressing and 'wicked' problems facing the current generation.

In providing its advice to you, Council plays an important role in the germination of strategic climate change policy. In particular, advice has been provided to you on:

- A review of the *Climate Change and Greenhouse Emissions Reduction Act, 2007*
- Facilitating climate smart precincts
- Building upgrade finance
- Appropriate land use decisions to adapt to sea level rise
- A vision for South Australia transitioning to a low carbon economy, and adapting to climate change - *South Australia's climate change vision: Pathways to 2050*.

Council members represent business, industry, science, planning and development, local government, the environment movement, and regional South Australia. The

diverse skill set and independent nature of the membership brings a broad perspective, and robust debate to advice on climate change. The composition of Council also provides it with credibility when bringing together stakeholders with divergent views to participate in workshops on complex and contested climate change issues, such as land-use planning decisions in coastal areas vulnerable to predicted sea level rise, or the transition of South Australia to a low carbon economy.

Council's role to engage business, the environment and conservation movement, and the community complements the collaborative and voluntary approach to climate change action under the *Climate Change and Greenhouse Emissions Reduction Act, 2007*, which does not rely on the regulation of activities. Abolishing the Council would undermine the intent and credibility of both the Act and the State Government's successful partnership approach to tackling climate change through sector agreements and the implementation of the adaptation framework across the State.

Council recognises that there are broader mechanisms to support community engagement, however these tools will not be able to replace the Council's role as an independent advisory body. Furthermore, the strong networks that Council members have into their respective sectors could not be replicated as credibility, effectively or efficiently by Government departments. The value of Council's cross-sectoral engagement is evidenced by the property, financial and local government sectors' support for the introduction of a Building Upgrade Financing mechanism, as well as the advocacy by Business SA, in its 2014 Charter, for the Council to play an ongoing role assisting businesses to transition to a low carbon economy.

Council's work plan for the current term is focused on engaging key stakeholders identified during its last meeting as having significant influence over the acceptance and implementation of the advice, *South Australia's climate change vision: Pathways to 2050*. Our engagement activities will support the whole of Government response to the advice, and provide a platform to underpin the State Government's commitment to develop a new strategy for climate change action in consultation with the community.

The removal of Council would result in a loss of leadership and individual advocates for action on climate change, undermining the national leadership shown by the South Australian Government. There is a risk that it could be seen as a withdrawal of State Government commitment to climate change action, whereby climate change policy retreats to being solely an 'environmental' issue, rather than being given the prominence it needs to address the far-reaching economic, social and environmental challenges we face.

I have consistently advocated for the Council to be supported more strongly and visibly by the Premier. The Premier's support is essential to send a clear message to government agencies, industry and business, the environment and local government sectors, and the community that the State Government is serious about taking action on climate change. Further to this, secretariat support for the Council should reside in the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, as the central agency, so that the significant issues Council provides advice on is coordinated across government. This includes advice in relation to energy (Department of State Development), low carbon economy (Department of State Development and Green Industries SA), planning and infrastructure (Department of Planning, Transport and Infrastructure), the Commonwealth's Emissions Reduction Fund (Department of the Premier and Cabinet), adaptation and sea level rise (Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources). I ask that you convey my strong view on this matter to the Premier when you discuss the future of the Council with him.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide you with details of the valuable contribution Council makes to the climate change agenda in South Australia. I can assure you that the Council is operating effectively and has a schedule of work for the current term that will support the development of the Government's new strategy for climate change action.

I urge you to support the retention of Council to ensure that South Australia will remain strong, resilient and prosperous, while transitioning to a low carbon economy in the face of an uncertain climate future.

Yours sincerely



Bruce Carter
Chair
Premier's Climate Change Council