GOVERNMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Climate Health WA Inquiry

About your submission

Are you responding on behalf of an organisation or group?

☐ No

☒ Yes

If yes, please identify the organisation: Environmental Health Australia Ltd (EHA National)

Your contact details

The following information will not be published without your permission but enables the Inquiry to contact you about your submission if required.

First name	[redacted]
Surname	[redacted]
Address	[redacted]
Phone	[redacted]
Email	[redacted]

Publication of submissions

Submissions will be published with the name of the submitter unless otherwise indicated below. Do you consent to be identified in the published submission?

☒ Yes, I / my organisation agree to be identified

☐ No, I / my organisation request to remain anonymous

Terms of Reference

You are encouraged to address at least ONE of the Terms of Reference as listed below. Please select which item/s you will address:

☐ 1. Establish current knowledge on the implications of climate change for health in Western Australia (WA) and recommend a framework for evaluating future implications.

☒ 2. Identify and recommend a program of work to manage the implications of climate change for health in WA, which will protect the public from the harmful health impacts of climate change.

☒ 3. Identify and recommend a program of work to manage the implications of climate change for health in WA, which will strengthen the preparedness and resilience of communities and health services against extreme weather events, with a focus on the

most vulnerable in the community.

☐ 4. Identify and recommend a program of work to manage the implications of climate change for health in WA, which will reduce the contribution of WA health services to climate change and other detrimental impacts.

☐ 5. Identify and recommend a program of work to manage the implications of climate change for health in WA, which will enable WA Health services to implement change, including energy efficiency, to a more sustainable model.

☐ 6. Evaluate the likely benefits (health and wellbeing, social and economic) arising from climate change mitigation strategies, with a focus on WA health services.

☐ 7. Define the role of the Department of Health in leading public policy on climate change and health.

☐ 8. Recommend the Terms of Reference, scope and preferred methods for undertaking a climate change vulnerability assessment for the health sector.

☐ 9. Recommend the Terms of Reference, scope and preferred methods for developing a Climate Change Adaptation Plan for the health sector.

Submissions response field

Please type your response to the item(s) selected above into the field below. Alternatively you may provide your submission as a separate attachment (suggested maximum 5 pages).

I make this submission in my capacity as the National President of Environmental Health Australia. Environmental Health Australia (EHA) is the premier environmental health professional organisation in Australia which advocates environmental health issues and represents the professional interests of all environmental health practitioners. EHA is committed to the professional development and status of its members and the enhancement of environmental health standards and services to the community through advocacy, promotion, education and leadership. The professional organisation has been in existence since 1936 and has undergone several names changes over time to reflect the changing nature of the organisation and its membership. EHA is a member of the International Federation of Environmental Health (IFEH).

EHA recognises that climate change is a threat to human health and the quality of life. EHA acknowledges that there is overwhelming, credible scientific evidence that anthropogenic climate change threatens the health, well-being, and indeed survival, of the human population.

There is a wealth of further supporting evidence of the health impacts of climate dating back more than a decade, (see the Garnaut Report 2008, and the World Health Organisation publication - Protecting health from climate change: connecting science, policy and people, 2009). Whilst there have been numerous reports since the well articulated policy development at that time, governments at state and federal level in Australia have been slow to react with meaningful policy, that will actually stabilise and eventually reduce emissions. The international experience is not dissimilar, however, some countries are doing much more than others.

Submissions response field

Please type your response to the item(s) selected above into the field below. Alternatively you may provide your submission as a separate attachment (suggested maximum 5 pages).

The likelihood, in terms of health, is that threats in coming decades will be far worse than those predicted in the 1980's, 1990's and early 2000's. EHA considers it imperative that society is adapting to climate change, while mitigating emissions, to decrease the rate and magnitude of harm. Adaptation alone is not expected to cope with all the projected effects of climate change.

In Western Australia, elsewhere in Australia and internationally, environmental health professionals are ideally placed (within both their own organisations and the wider community) to exert significant professional pressure, and to provide technical advice and support for measures aimed at adaptation and mitigation against the negative health impacts of climate change.

The well documented environmental health impacts of climate change include increases in vector type and number, infectious diseases, heat stress, food safety and security, disaster management, indigenous health, environmental protection, waste management, and air and water quality.

As an example, as climate changes, vectors of disease will move and change. This has already occurred in other parts of the world such as North America. Climate shifts have resulted in the northerly movement of tick infestations, with subsequent disease implications including Lyme disease risk and specific forecasts of the emergence of tick-borne infectious disease in Canada. The emergence of potential disease implications in this way highlights both the risk implications and the need for more research in Australia of emerging environmental health implications, related to climate change.

With respect to disaster management it is worth noting that the powers in the new Public Health Act and expectations in disaster recovery in Western Australia, highlight the contemporary nature of the legislation, which are still evolving.

Environmental health professionals have the knowledge, skills and the opportunities to make an important contribution to reduce the health impacts of climate change and implement adaption measures against foreseeable consequences which include:

- The overall health effects of a changing climate are likely to be negative. Climate change influences the fundamental requirements for health – clean air, safe drinking water, sufficient food and secure shelter;
- There are likely more frequent or intense extreme weather events such as heat waves, storms, droughts, floods and cyclones;
- The habitats of vectors and the spread of vector-borne disease will be influenced by changes in climatic conditions;
- Climate change may affect the development, transport, dispersion and deposition of air pollutants;

Submissions response field

Please type your response to the item(s) selected above into the field below. Alternatively you may provide your submission as a separate attachment (suggested maximum 5 pages).

- Harmful algae blooms (HAB) are an emerging environmental health concern and temperature increase may further affect water quality;
- Increased temperatures can lead to higher incidences of food-borne and water-borne disease.

Substantially more effort in Australia needs to be devoted to ensuring that all health professionals fully understand the health implications of climate change. The overlaps with primary versus preventative care will become more stark if epidemics and endemic suffering occur, as a result of the health implications of climate change. EHA is endeavouring to develop enhanced climate change understanding, risk communication and health education of its members by:

- promoting career development by assisting in training of new generations of competent experienced environmental health professionals, to respond to the health threats posed by climate change;
- requiring accredited university courses to include appropriate climate change, sustainability and environmental health related content to ensure that graduates have relevant knowledge to meet future challenges;
- developing appropriate sustainability policies and practices for application by the broader EH profession;
- encouraging EH professionals to develop themselves as ‘climate change champions’ within their own organisations.

EHA is also working to increase public awareness that climate change is a threat to human health by:

- being a trustworthy source of information on the health consequences of climate change for the population;
- providing leadership to state and local governments, regarding the health protection, adaptation and mitigation necessary from the impacts of climate change;
- working with all levels of government and other appropriate stakeholders, to develop increased public awareness that climate change is a threat to human health.

While recognising that other available initiatives may not be within its direct capacity, capability or scope, EHA supports further appropriate measures to reduce climate change impacts by the private sector, state, federal and local government with the;

- building of partnerships between government agencies, private sector, nongovernmental organisations, universities, and other organisations to ensure that health is accurately represented in the climate change agenda;
- regular review of updated scientific evidence on links between climate change and health, to improve understanding of the relationship;
- identification of locations and population groups at greatest risk of specific

Submissions response field

Please type your response to the item(s) selected above into the field below. Alternatively you may provide your submission as a separate attachment (suggested maximum 5 pages).

health threats from climate change;

- continued advocacy for greenhouse gas mitigation measures to reduce the impact for populations adapting to future catastrophic climate change;
- publication of all background guidance documentation necessary to assist in understanding of the climate science and human health relationship.

In closing it is worth highlighting that environmental health science is especially valuable in addressing emerging health issues associated with climate change due to its applications with pollution control, toxicology, food and water safety, contaminated sites, waste management, emergency management, nuisances and infectious disease control. The evolution of appropriate responses, in such circumstances, will require significant consultation with environmental health professionals, that have the appropriate risk management and toxicological understanding, to respond appropriately in varying circumstances. And the profession remains ready to assist in any way it can.

Please complete this sheet and submit with any attachments to: Climate Health WA Inquiry