

# MEDIA RELEASE

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## **“Missing in Action”: Former security leaders declare climate change a national security threat; call for rapid decarbonisation**

The Australian government has been “missing in action” on the growing national security risks posed by climate change, according to a non-partisan network of former defence and security leaders that includes some of Australia’s most senior former military personnel.

*Missing in Action: Responding to Australia’s climate & security failure*, a new report released today by the Australian Security Leaders Climate Group, calls on the Australian government to “prevent devastating climate impacts by mobilising all resources necessary to reach zero emissions as fast as possible”, starting with a comprehensive Whole-of-Nation Climate and Security Risk Assessment and the establishment of an Office of Climate Threat Intelligence as the foundation for a *Climate-Security Risk Action Plan*.

The report describes global examples of climate security impacts, including: how climate-fueled water and food insecurity contributed to armed conflicts in Syria, the Maghreb and the Sahel; and the Arab Spring rebellion in the Middle East, which occurred after the spot price for wheat tripled due to reduced wheat supply in Russia and China following extreme climate events. Recent commentary has also highlighted climate related food and water issues in Afghanistan that are contributing to insecurity in the region.

“Australia has been “missing in action” on climate security risks. We are falling well behind our allies and failing in our responsibility to protect our own people,” Former Australian Defence Force Chief, Admiral Chris Barrie AC (Retd), said.

“The dangers that climate change impacts pose to international peace and security are real and present. In vulnerable countries, climate-fueled water and food insecurity have mixed with instability, leading to the collapse of governments and civil wars, as we’ve seen in the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa.

“The failure of leadership and inaction by Australian governments have left our nation ill-prepared for the security implications of devastating climate impacts at home and in the Asia Pacific, the highest-risk region in the world.

“We must stop pretending to act by diverting attention to the symptoms of climate change, and start addressing the fundamental causes, primarily by rapidly decarbonising the economy.

“Yet, as the latest IPCC report demonstrates, we are likely to underestimate the scale and scope of the security risks posed by climate change because they have not been fully assessed by our governments. Climate-security risks will blow up in the future, and we must be better informed and prepared by urgently undertaking a comprehensive Whole-of-Nation Climate and Security Risk Assessment.”

The report highlights how water inflows into Australia’s food bowl of the Murray-Darling Basin have reduced by 40 per cent since 2000 and warns of greater domestic water insecurity in future. It also highlights the threats posed by climate change to Australia’s supply chains.

“Climate impacts on agriculture have the potential to significantly threaten food production in Australia,” Admiral Barrie (Retd) said.

“Australia’s supply chains are precarious, being a distant island in a hyper-connected global economy. In a global emergency where supply chains are disrupted, domestic oil supplies would last only weeks. If that coincided with extreme climatic impacts, as may well occur, civilian and military capacity to provide disaster relief would be severely compromised.”

The report details how Australia’s military resources are already being used and stretched in climate-related disasters, such as during the Black Summer fires in 2019-20, which were worse than projections of fire severity for the year 2100.

“Climate change is already placing great pressure on the ADF to pick up the pieces in the face of accelerating climate impacts. Higher levels of warming will stretch them beyond their capacity to respond,” Admiral Barrie (Retd) said. “Australia must start to contribute fairly to the global effort to limit these impacts.”

Writing in the foreword, Rear Admiral Neil Morisetti CB RN (Retd), Professor of Climate, Resource Security at University College London, says the responsibility for emissions reduction “sits squarely on the shoulders of all governments but perhaps more so on those of Australia, for not only is the Australian continent particularly vulnerable to climate change, but the country is one of the world’s largest exporters of fossil fuels.”

The report lays out a *Climate-Security Risk Action Plan for Australia* based on four themes: demonstrating leadership, assessing climate risks, coordination and cooperation across government, and acting and investing with urgency. It calls on the Australian government to undertake the following actions to make it fit-for-purpose on climate-security risks:

1. Appointment of an independent expert panel to urgently conduct a comprehensive Whole-of-Nation Climate and Security Risk Assessment, using the best available information;
2. The establishment of a specific Office of Climate Threat Intelligence that can provide an integrated flow of analysis to governments and departments;
3. The establishment of a national climate risk assessment, as occurs in the US, where a high level expert group works with relevant agencies to provide a regular, publicly-available assessment of climate trends, risks and impacts; and
4. The preparation of a policy of Responsibility to Prepare and Prevent (R2P2) which systematically and holistically addresses climate-security risks.

The report was produced by:

- Former Chief of the Australian Defence Force, Admiral Chris Barrie AC (Retd)
- Former Deputy Chief of the Royal Australian Air Force, Air Vice Marshal John Blackburn AO (Retd)
- Iraq and Timor Leste veteran, Colonel Neil Greet (Retd)
- Former Director Preparedness and Mobilisation at the Australian Department of Defence, Cheryl Durrant
- Senior Fellow and Co-Leader Indo-Pacific Program at Centre for Climate and Security (Washington) Major Michael Thomas (Retd)
- Former Chair of the Australian Coal Association, Ian Dunlop

Download the report at <https://www.aslscg.org/missinginaction>.

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*The [Australian Security Leaders Climate Group](#) is a non-partisan network of Australian security and policy professionals working to reframe the climate debate and make climate an immediate security priority in Australia through assessing the full level of risk posed by climate change, and building resilience for local and global protection.*