

MEDIA RELEASE

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‘Full alert’: National strategy to combat climate security risks urgently needed, say former defence & security leaders

A group of former defence force and security leaders are calling on the Australian Government to urgently develop a national strategy to specifically address the security risks to Australians posed by the climate crisis.

The group, which includes former Defence Force Chief Admiral Chris Barrie (Retired), says we have just experienced the hottest three months in recorded history and that should put the Australian Government on ‘full alert’ over the worsening climate crisis and motivate them to take immediate action by developing a National Climate Security Strategy.

“Climate change now poses the greatest threat to our security and the government should be engaging the electorate to build understanding of climate risks and how to respond. Instead, the government has a strategy of non-engagement when it comes to the most significant threat to our future. That is a fatal mistake.” Admiral Barrie said.

“Facing a global avalanche of severe climate events and growing food and water insecurity, the government’s lack of focus increases the risks of economic and supply chain disruption, social tensions, conflict and people displacement in our region becoming the norm.”

The Australian Security Leaders Climate Group’s call for a National Climate Security Strategy comes after it successfully advocated that the government undertake a National Climate Risk Assessment in order to build a comprehensive understanding of climate-security risks. However, the government continues to refuse calls from experts and parliamentarians to make public a declassified version of the climate-security risk assessment completed by the Office of National Intelligence (ONI) in 2022.

Air Vice-Marshal John Blackburn (Retired), a former Deputy Chief of the Royal Australian Air Force and an ASLCG Executive member, reiterated the call for the government to release the National Climate Risk Assessment so that the public and all Members of Parliament can be clear-eyed on the security threats that climate change poses.

“The government’s silence on climate-security risks means there is no informed public debate on the greatest threat to our nation and people. Parliamentarians, including those who serve on foreign affairs, defence and climate committees, have not been briefed on what intelligence services told the government were the big regional climate threats. Behind closed doors, most are saying that this is making it difficult for them to do their jobs,” Air Vice-Marshal Blackburn said.

“How can we expect our decision-makers to act in the nation’s best interest when the government is deliberately keeping us all in the dark? At the very least, a declassified version of the climate risk assessment should be released without delay.”

Admiral Barrie said the completed climate risk assessment is essential analysis and should inform the strategy, which should first focus on overcoming capacity shortfalls and the “thinking in silos” that have hampered the government’s climate response to date.

According to ASLCG, the strategy’s initial actions should include:

- Recognition that climate change is the greatest security threat facing all nations
- Building transparency about the scale of climate security risks to Australia and our region;
- Establishing an Office of Climate Threat Intelligence within ONI, with an annual, de-classified briefing to Parliament;
- Rebuilding the climate science, risk analysis and policy-making capacities of the public service, CSIRO and the Bureau of Meteorology;
- Implementing an integrated climate risk-management methodology across government that avoids silos and recognises the systemic, cascading nature of climate risks; and
- Leadership in promoting national and international preparedness and prevention to address the climate threat.

The group will hold a Climate and Security Briefing for MPs and Senators hosted by Zali Steggall MP at the Federal Parliament this week.

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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. ASLCG works to assist the assessment of risk posed by climate change, and support mobilisation for local and global protection.