

MEDIA RELEASE

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Government drops the ball on climate security risks as issue “Too Hot to Handle”, says former senior security leaders

Addressing the impact of climate disruption on Australia’s defence priorities and on community security appears to be a task beyond the Albanese government, according to analysis released by the Australian Security Leaders Climate Group ASLCG).

In a new report, *Too hot to handle: The scorching reality of Australia’s climate–security failure*, senior former defence and security leaders say the government is refusing to give climate impacts on security any real attention, particularly in regard to how increasing food and water insecurity will profoundly change the global security landscape and drive regional conflict.

Whilst the government was given detailed and frank advice on the climate threats in late 2022 by the Office of National Assessment (ONI), it has refused to release a declassified version of the ONI climate and security risk assessment, or inform the public about its key findings and brief the parliamentarians charged with overseeing the nation’s climate policy.

The ASLCG says it is astonishing that the recently released National Defence Strategy almost completely ignored climate change. It allocates an additional \$18 billion for bases in northern Australia with no acknowledgment that, in a rapidly warming climate, parts of northern Australia will be so hot and humid for much of the year as to become practically unliveable, with climate conditions beyond those which humans, even hardened military professionals, have ever encountered.

Adm. Chris Barrie (Rtd), former Chief of the ADF said: “There are many places where one may choose to fight a war, but not wish to live or work or choose to locate large numbers of defence personnel in peace time due to the harshness of conditions. Northern Australia in the future will be one of those places.”

“This is just one example of climate being missing in action in security analysis. ASLCG agrees with the wide range of global political and security leaders who say that climate is now the greatest threat to human civilisation, not least as shown in recent analysis by the World Economic Forum.¹ Even the US Defence Secretary describes climate as an ‘existential’ risk, something he does not say about the supposed ‘China threat’ which consumes our security establishment,” Adm. Barrie said.

Currently, one of the greatest disruptive physical climate risks concerning scientists is the collapse of the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC), which could occur by mid-century. Adm. Barrie said: “It could wipe out much of agricultural production in the UK, Ireland and Scandinavia, with ramifications which would significantly affect the Antarctic and Australia. I doubt whether the EU or NATO would survive such pressure, but in the two years of this parliament not a single member of the government or the opposition has uttered a word about this severe climate-security risk.”

¹ weforum.org/publications/global-risks-report-2024/in-full

“It appears that the government either doesn't understand what our scientists are telling them, or they are deliberately hiding the facts from the Australian community. Facing down the climate threat will require unprecedented global cooperation, not a new arms race,” Adm. Barrie said.

“Currently, if *Securing Australia* was a movie in production, climate change would be no more than an extra without any speaking role. Climate deserves much more than a mere cameo role on the stage of global security.”

ASLCG proposes that the government should urgently develop a genuinely integrated National Climate-Security Strategy to address these rapidly changing circumstances, which would:

- Establish a Climate Threat Intelligence unit with outputs including an annual, de-classified briefing to Parliament.
- Establish an Abrupt Climate Change Early Warning System.
- Legislate a Global Catastrophic Risk Management Act.
- Release a declassified version of the ONI climate risk assessment report.

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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.