

**Protecting our environment** Advertising Feature

# Medicos pressing for greater climate action

Doctors and medical staff are finding themselves increasingly on the frontline in our battle against climate change.

As the number of extreme weather events increase around the world, the impact of climate change on human health is becoming increasingly apparent, and more severe.

As many Australians know from first-hand experience, floods, storms and bushfires are having a major impact on people's physical and mental health.

In recent years, Dr Kim Loo, a GP working in north-west Sydney and NSW chair of Doctors for the Environment Australia (DEA), has helped patients through drought, heatwaves, bushfires, 80 days of smoke and three sets of floods, as well as COVID-19.

"It has been a compounding, cascading series of disasters and it's so hard to recover from one and then cope with another," says Loo. "This is a public health crisis. Many people don't understand the direct and indirect health impacts of burning fossil fuels. It is really important for the health sector to step up and speak out about it."

According to Dr Ben Ewald, chair of DEA's Air Pollution Special Interest Group, heatwaves are the "silent killer", responsible for the death of more Australians than any other natural disaster.

"Heatwaves are the biggest and most direct threat of climate change to human health but I don't think the scale of it is fully appreciated," he says. "In early 2009, 173 people died as a direct result of the Black



**'This is a public health crisis ... It is really important for the health sector to step up and speak out about it.'**

Dr Kim Loo

Dr Kim Loo is NSW chair of Doctors for the Environment Australia. PHOTO: Isabella Moore

Saturday bushfires but there were 374 excess deaths from the heatwave.

"In western Sydney, they have nine days each year above 35 degrees. The way climate change is heading, by the end of the century this may be as high as 46 degrees. These temperatures are not just uncomfortable, they are a threat to human health."

This frightening reality is the reason DEA has put forward a submission on the health risks associated with climate change as part of the NSW Environment Protection Authority's development of a climate change policy and action plan.

The EPA draft policy, which acknowledges greenhouse gases are pollutants that need to

be regulated, is the result of a historic win by the Bushfire Survivors for Climate Action (BSCA) in the NSW Land and Environment Court, which found that the EPA had a duty of care necessitating it take action on climate change.

Ewald says there is a federal safeguard mechanism that places conditions on environmental licences for large polluters but "we are hopeful this plan will cover the smaller polluters".

As for the summer ahead, Ewald says it is already looking like extreme flooding events will continue to up-end people's lives and put their health at risk.

These extreme conditions have already

led to a breakout of the mosquito-borne Japanese encephalitis earlier this year, the first time in Australia. While still rare in humans, the virus can be fatal.

Ewald says all such health events are linked to climate change and "the biggest contributor to climate change, from a NSW perspective, is that we are still mining coal. As long as we keep digging it up, we are making the problem worse."

"DEA is committed to working with government agencies such as the EPA and others to ensure emissions are reduced as quickly as possible this decade and we can protect our communities from the impact of climate change."

## Together we can protect our health by protecting the planet

Doctors for the Environment Australia's 2700 members call on the NSW Environment Protection Authority to include in their Climate Change Policy and Action Plan:

- Stop installation of gas in new suburbs to reduce pollution in the home.
- Set CO2 emissions limits for licenses under the Protection of Environmental Operations Act.
- Include environmental non-government organisations on the EPA board.
- Make the urban environment safer during heat waves.



**Join us!**  
If you're a doctor or medical student, join us now to protect health by protecting the environment.



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