

Summit Communiqué: Addressing the threat of climate change to Australia's security landscape



Date: 9 October 2024

Issued by: Australia Security Leaders Climate Group

Conference: National Climate Security Summit

Executive Summary:

The **National Climate Security Summit**, held in Canberra in October 2024, convened experts, policymakers, and leaders from across the nation to address the critical and growing risks posed by climate change to Australia's national security. The Summit roundtable emphasised the urgent need for a whole-of-government response to climate risks and the development of both national and regional resilience strategies.

Key discussions highlighted the systemic threats posed by rising global temperatures, extreme weather events, food and water insecurity, and forced migration, all of which have profound implications for Australia's security landscape and geopolitical stability in the Asia-Pacific region.

The Summit featured an expert roundtable with General Tom Middendorp (Retd), alongside other climate security experts, who stressed the significance of climate security and the existential threat that climate disruption represents to global order.

General Middendorp emphasised that climate change poses a multifaceted threat to global security, highlighting five key areas: its global impact on resource competition and geopolitical instability, regional challenges in vulnerable areas, the increasing frequency of natural disasters, the need for effective regulation and international coordination, and the critical role of technology and innovation in mitigating risks. He urged immediate, coordinated action to address these interconnected security risks.

The message was clear: without immediate and decisive action, climate change will trigger cascading impacts that are likely to overwhelm government institutions and systems designed to safeguard human security.

The increasing pace of global warming is placing humanity on a trajectory toward a future with global average temperatures exceeding 3°C above pre-industrial levels. The consequences of such warming, underpinned by recent scientific analysis, present unprecedented risks to global security, human survival, and ecological stability. This communiqué outlines the major physical impacts of climate change at this level of warming and the profound implications these have for global food systems, migration patterns, political stability, and social cohesion.

At 3°C of warming, the fundamental systems that sustain human civilization—including food security, water availability, and societal infrastructure—will face significant disruption, likely triggering cascading effects that can overwhelm existing governance, lead to mass displacement, and fuel international conflicts over increasingly scarce resources.

Key Climate Security Impacts of a 3°C+ Warming Future:

1. Food Security Crisis:

- **Global Food Production Decline:** Crop yields are projected to decline by 10% for each one degree rise, exacerbating food shortages. By 2050, a 20-30% reduction in crop yields could be locked in, further intensifying global hunger.
- **Desertification and Water Scarcity:** Monsoon failures, droughts, and desertification especially in the dry subtropics will create arid conditions in key food-producing regions, rendering them uninhabitable during summer months.
- **Price Spikes and Social Unrest:** Food price volatility, driven by simultaneous bread basket failure, will lead to widespread social unrest, as evidenced by the Arab Spring.

2. Forced Migration and Displacement:

- **Mass Displacement:** As climate conditions become inhospitable, the world could witness unprecedented internal and cross-border migration. By 2030, up to 700 million Africans alone could face displacement due to water scarcity.
- **Conflict over Resources:** Nations will increasingly struggle to secure dwindling natural resources such as water, potentially leading to resource-based conflicts, as seen in the Nile basin, the Himalayas and other regions.

3. Cascading Systemic Risks:

- **Global Economic Disruption:** The collapse of food, water, and energy infrastructure will have devastating effects on global economies, triggering unsustainable insurance claims, corporate defaults, and shocks to equity markets.
- **Governance and State Fragility:** Fragile states, overwhelmed by the impacts of climate heating, will face governance challenges, including the rise of extremism, the breakdown of civil order, and political instability.

4. The Security Threat to Global Stability:

- **Increased Conflict:** Climate change will magnify existing tensions within and between nations, leading to armed conflicts, particularly in regions where resource scarcity and migration pressures converge.
- **Nuclear Risk:** As regional tensions escalate, the risk of state and non-state actors turning to nuclear options becomes a chilling possibility.

5. Human Habitation and Unlivable Regions:

- **Extreme Heat:** Projections indicate that 1.2 billion people in India, 485 million in Nigeria, and more than 100 million in several other countries will face near-uninhabitable temperatures, leading to mass relocations and heightened geopolitical tensions.

The Broader Picture of 3°C+ Warming:

As we move closer to a 3°C warming scenario, it becomes clear that global civilization itself is at risk. A combination of natural system collapse, such as the loss of biodiversity and the breakdown of marine and forest biomes, alongside rising sea levels and the destruction of critical infrastructure, will push societies to their limits. The interconnected crises—spanning food, water, energy, health, and migration—are driving the global system towards what many experts are calling a "polycrisis."

Urgent Action Required:

The Summit presented the [‘Protect, Prevent & Prepare A Climate & Security Action Plan For Australia’](#). The Action Plan outlines the urgent need for a radical overhaul of the federal government’s approach to managing climate threats. The plan emphasises that the escalating dangers of climate change now require an "emergency mobilisation" to accelerate decarbonisation and to intensify pressure on industries to transition to zero emissions.

The plan calls for the following key actions:

1. **Integrated, Whole-of-Government Climate Risk Management**

Climate disruption poses an existential threat to human civilization, particularly impacting Australia’s national security. This calls for an emergency response on par with the magnitude of the risk. To effectively tackle these challenges, the government must adopt an integrated climate risk management approach. This involves establishing a **Climate Threat Intelligence Unit** within the Office of National Intelligence (ONI) to provide real-time climate threat intelligence, including an annual declassified briefing to Parliament, and an **Abrupt Climate Change Early Warning System**. Additionally, climate research in Australia should be reorganised to meet the needs of realistic risk assessment and policy-making, with a specific focus on eliminating bureaucratic silos that hinder comprehensive climate-security analysis.

2. **Leadership in Climate Preparedness and Prevention**

The Australian government must demonstrate leadership in both national and international efforts to mitigate the climate threat. This includes actively engaging the public in understanding climate-security risks and prioritising human security as a core government responsibility. Rather than focusing solely on militarised responses, the government should build a comprehensive **National Prevention and Resilience Framework** to address vulnerabilities across key sectors—such as energy, water, health, and agriculture—while ensuring emergency processes are coherent and aligned across all areas.

3. **Regional Cooperation for Climate Resilience**

Given the systemic and cascading nature of climate risks, global cooperation is essential to avoid conflicts exacerbated by climate change. Australia should spearhead efforts to build **regional climate mobilisation alliances** with Asia-Pacific nations, both large and small. Increasing support for developing countries in their climate preparedness efforts is critical, as is deploying systems to monitor potential food insecurity hotspots and enhancing supply chain and energy resilience in the region.

4. **Protection of Vulnerable Communities and Ecosystems**

A central goal of climate action should be the protection of the most vulnerable communities, nations, and natural systems. The government must ensure that mitigation efforts are designed to avoid the worst-case climate scenarios, acknowledging that the most damaging impacts often occur at the extreme ends of potential outcomes. Mobilising all available resources to achieve **zero emissions as quickly as possible** and prevent irreversible tipping points will be essential for long-term climate resilience. Furthermore, developing the capacity to **draw down greenhouse gases** to safer levels will be critical in addressing the long-term implications of climate disruption.

In Conclusion:

As global temperatures rise toward a 3°C threshold, the world faces unprecedented threats to climate security. The impacts on food systems, migration, political stability, and societal infrastructure are likely to be severe, presenting profound challenges to global governance and human well-being. Without concerted efforts to prevent and mitigate these changes, humanity will face a future of escalating conflicts, mass displacement, and social collapse.

The irrefutable evidence presented at the National Climate Security Summit made it abundantly clear that we are already further on the path towards these dire consequences than is commonly acknowledged. Some of these predicted outcomes are playing out now; in real time. This only serves to validate a plan of action and the call to urgently pick up pace.

This communiqué urges Australia's leaders to act with an effective scale and speed of action, to secure and protect both present and future generations.

References:

> [*The Climate Security Challenge*](#)

> [*Protect, Prevent & Prepare A Climate & Security Action Plan For Australia*](#)

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