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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge and pay respect to the Traditional Custodians and Elders – past and present – of the lands and waters of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation on which the Climateworks Centre head office is located, and acknowledge that sovereignty has never been ceded. We extend our respect to all Traditional Custodians and Elders of the lands and waters where Climateworks operates.

**A look back on 15 years
of Climateworks Centre**



**John Thwaites
remembers the
exact moment when
he understood that
the fight against
global warming had
to radically change.**

It was 2012 and he was sitting in the Melbourne office of Climateworks, listening to a talk by leading climate scientist Malte Meinshausen.

The link between carbon dioxide emissions and temperature rise was well understood. But Malte explained that because carbon dioxide hung around in air for a long time, only a finite amount could be emitted before temperatures reached dangerous tipping points beyond 1.5°C.

In other words, the world had a carbon budget. It wasn't just annual emissions that mattered, it was the total stock.

Secondly, the world had only until 2050 to reach net zero emissions, after which time the budget would be spent. Carbon levels, temperatures and time were all connected. Scientists knew this but policymakers and the public did not.

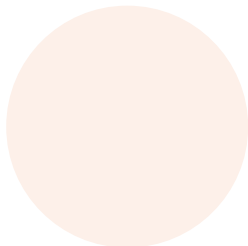
'It was our lightbulb moment,' says John, who has chaired Climateworks from its inception. 'Every last tonne of carbon in the atmosphere matters. Everything we did from then on had to focus on getting to net zero.'



In 2024 Climateworks Centre, formerly ClimateWorks Australia, celebrates its 15th birthday.

In a dramatic time of successes and setbacks for the climate movement, Climateworks has raised awareness and shifted policy in Australia and overseas. It helped to shape the 2015 Paris Agreement, which remains the basis of global climate action today. Climateworks has changed in response to the times, but it has never lost sight of its identity and mission.

Climateworks is non-partisan and highly collaborative. Its work is grounded in rigorous use of data and modelling. It tells stories that emerge from the data in a clear, compelling way. It works with governments of all stripes, and with business and non-government organisations, to produce practical pathways for achieving ambitious change. It bridges the gap between climate research and action.



Beyond these ways of working is an intangible Climateworks factor: a stubborn optimism that humanity can solve this vexed problem. As CEO Anna Skarbek says, 'I've always believed that if you're concerned about something, you get up and do something about it.'

'The analysis that Climateworks provides is scintillating,' says leading economist Jeffrey Sachs, director of the Sustainable Development Centre at New York's Columbia University. 'It is so clear, important and persuasive, that it is opening minds, changing government policy, and making a worldwide contribution.'

That contribution began nearly 20 years ago, with a couple and their kids sitting around a kitchen table.


David and Maree Shelmerdine, members of the Myer family, well known for its philanthropy, were talking with their five children, aged six to 26, about ways to mark two

coming milestones: 75 years of the Sidney Myer Fund and 50 years of the Myer Foundation, both in 2009.


At the time, awareness of climate change was growing. Former US vice-president Al Gore had called it 'the great moral challenge' for a generation.

One of the foundation's most successful projects was ScienceWorks, David and Maree reflected. In this Melbourne museum, kids learn about science while tumbling around in a moon module, making a T-Rex from plasticine, or testing their speed against the world's best sprinters. What about a similar building to educate young people about climate change by immersing them in its physical realities?

But a comprehensive feasibility study into how philanthropy could best support climate action led the foundation to shift focus.



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John Thwaites, inaugural chair of the Monash Sustainability Institute, now Monash Sustainable Development Institute, told David that when he had been a minister in the Victorian Government he had rarely seen university research influence government. No matter how good it was, it rarely shaped policy action or public debate.

That idea provided an opening. After a highly competitive tender, a \$4.6 million Myer Foundation grant saw Climateworks established at the Monash Sustainability Institute, with two desks and two employees: CEO Anna Skarbek and project manager Meg Argyriou.

Anna had been a lawyer, a banker, a ministerial adviser to John Thwaites, and an investment manager at Climate Change Capital in London.

‘She had a pedigree that made her a really good fit for the job,’ David says.

‘We could see that she had an extraordinary gift for grasping an issue, distilling it, then describing it in a very clear, intelligent and short way.’

A second early decision was also important in establishing Climateworks. Two seats on the board were set aside for representatives of the Myer Foundation.

Universities like to keep governance of their institutions in-house, but Monash accepted the argument that outside voices on the board would strengthen the new organisation’s policy focus. It would also give the foundation ‘skin in the game,’ says John, who became board chair, with David as his deputy.

In September 2009 Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard launched Climateworks. Its first report, a *Low Carbon Growth Plan for Australia*, produced in collaboration with national and state government departments and international consultants McKinsey & Company, analysed economy-wide data to show that the country could substantially cut emissions for less than \$4 a week per household.

That report, which won a Eureka Science Prize, was followed by another low-carbon growth plan in 2011, this time for Greater Geelong. Julia Gillard, now Prime Minister, also launched this plan, at a Geelong manufacturing plant.

With the factory humming away, and the PM sitting down with local government and business leaders, Anna explained how the low-carbon growth plan linked federal government policy to changes in factories, shops and houses, right down to more efficient light bulbs.

Another 2011 report, *Unlocking Barriers to Co-Generation*, showed

that barriers in the electricity rules were preventing lower emissions solutions for heating and power in office buildings from being installed.

That report, co-written with consultants Seed Advisory and the Property Council of Australia, led to the first advocacy-driven change to Australia's electricity market rules, allowing small and larger co-generators to connect to the grid.

These early reports set out changes organisations could make to cut emissions at the lowest possible cost without upending existing practices in most sectors. The approach was both conceptual and grounded in physical realities. Something of the ScienceWorks idea had survived.

Over time, a Climateworks model emerged. The organisation works at global, national, state and local levels. It builds long-term partnerships so that business and government trust it as an ongoing source of high-quality, practical advice. Its reports are not written to sit on a shelf but to be the first draft of a change agenda.



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Crucially, Climateworks is nonpartisan. Getting off fossil fuels, an energy source that has powered economic growth for two centuries, is a vast undertaking. If climate action is seen as a partisan issue, it will fail. The hard work of changing every human activity needs the involvement of everyone.

Former Liberal Environment Minister Robert Hill has been a director, as has Labor Attorney-General, Mark Dreyfus, and the Governor-General, Sam Mostyn. Anna's external roles include sitting on the advisory board of the Australian Government's Net Zero Economy Agency and the board of Blueprint, a 'socially progressive and economically conservative' climate think tank.

Finally, Climateworks looks for employees with rich and diverse work histories – people like Anna, who can connect the worlds of business, government and activism. Meg Agryriou, the organisation's second employee, studied filmmaking. She later did an MBA in sustainability, but Meg thinks her first degree has been as useful as the second for her climate work. It taught her how to tell stories.

And when Climateworks came to focus on energy as a system, therefore requiring system change, Meg grasped this abstract concept straightaway. A film is also a system,

she says. If you change this actor or this part, the entire thing changes, so always focus on the whole.

Another early employee was Amandine Denis-Ryan, a trained engineer who had worked at Air France in Paris.

Climate change had not been much in Amandine's mind, but she got a shock when she became an analyst at McKinsey in Australia and worked with Climateworks on its first report, *Low Carbon Growth Plan for Australia*. The climate problem was much more serious than she had realised. That thought brought her to a full-time job at Climateworks, where she would become head of national programs.

Amandine was not alone in mistaking the size of the challenge at that time. Even when he was Australia's first Minister for Climate Change in the Victorian Government, John Thwaites had thought the problem could be solved through incremental reforms, bringing down emission levels year on year.

Then came that conversation with Malte Meinshausen in 2012.

That same year, Jeffrey Sachs and UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon founded the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), to advance both the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and climate action.

Monash became the SDSN Regional Centre for Australia and the Pacific, and John Thwaites a global Co-Chair of its Leadership Council. One outcome was the 2014 Deep Decarbonisation Pathways Project.

Under this initiative, scientific and policy experts from 15 countries – including the United States, China, India and Canada – produced plans to show how their nation could get to net zero or low-carbon emissions by 2050. These countries represented 70 per cent of global emissions.

The Australian plan, produced by Climateworks with Frank Jotzo of ANU's Centre for Climate Economics and Policy and with CSIRO, was built on four pillars.

The first was greater energy efficiency. The International Energy Agency has said that energy efficiencies can achieve about 40 per cent of emissions reductions to keep global warming below two degrees.

John likens energy efficiencies to '\$5 notes on the ground that people don't pick up.'

The second pillar was zero-carbon electricity based mostly on renewable energy, where Australia has better options than most countries. The third was electrification, such as switching from internal combustion engines to electric vehicles, and other fuel shifts to low-carbon alternatives such as advanced biofuels. The fourth was sequestration of carbon in soil and forests.

Crucially, the report found that Australia could get to net zero while maintaining strong economic growth. Of the 15 countries involved in the project, only Australia committed from the start to reaching net zero by 2050. The others focused on achieving an 80 per cent emissions reduction, yet many later followed Australia's lead and increased their ambition to net zero.

The Pathways to Deep Decarbonisation in 2050 report provided 'the clearest roadmap to achieving a low-carbon future that I've seen,' said Professor Alan Finkel, Chief Scientist from 2016 to 2020.

Others agreed. Before the 2015 UN climate conference in Paris, Jeffrey Sachs showed the 15 country reports to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. That evidence had a significant impact on the outcomes of the Paris conference and the global adoption of the net zero emissions objective.

Today net zero is a household term, but just how new it was in 2015 is shown by the fact that it does not appear in the conference accords. Nevertheless, the idea is clear in what Anna identifies as the big three changes to emerge from Paris.

First, global temperatures had to be kept well under 2°C, striving for 1.5°C.

Second, national plans were needed to keep the stock of carbon in the atmosphere at a level that would not produce higher temperatures. Specifically, that meant that in the second half of this century, greenhouse gas emissions and removals of these emissions from the atmosphere would have to balance.

Third, every five years countries would submit plans, known as nationally determined contributions, to show how they were meeting the pledges they made in Paris.

These commitments 'lock countries in,' Anna says. 'They set up a global architecture, based fully in the science.'

Around this time, the idea of net zero by 2050 took off. In 2015 the South Australian government asked Climateworks to advise on getting to net zero emissions by 2050 and formally committed to that target after receiving advice on the solutions available to achieve it. Victoria and Queensland soon followed South Australia's lead, and Climateworks produced roadmaps for these states, too. 'I think we had a pretty big influence in getting the states on that journey,' says Amandine.

Climateworks also provided net zero pathway advice to the private sector, including some of the big four banks. Soon banks, superannuation funds, mining and heavy industry companies began adopting net zero policies.



Two other big changes at Climateworks emerged from the decarbonisation project and the Paris conference. The first was a new Climateworks philosophy called backcasting, which means starting with the future goal and working backwards on ways to achieve it.

In other words, if net zero emissions is not negotiable, how does a nation, state or company change its policies and ways of working today to ensure it hits that target in 2050, and interim targets along the way?

Backcasting has taken the work of Climateworks far beyond incrementalism. For example, if the goal is simply to reduce emissions in the short term, a country or company might switch to using gas, because it emits less than coal.

But over the long-term, the installed gas infrastructure will be hard to remove, thereby creating a big obstacle to achieving net zero by 2050. A more holistic and far-sighted approach is required.

The second change was one of the biggest Climateworks has made: its move into Southeast Asia, particularly Indonesia.



A big advocate for this idea was Climateworks board member Howard Bamsey, Australia's former Special Envoy on Climate Change. Indonesia comprises nearly 280 million people, and presented a large opportunity for action, based on bringing together climate and development expertise.

The Climateworks Jakarta office is led by Guntur Sutiyono, a former analyst at the Climate Policy Initiative, the World Bank, and the Indonesian Ministry of Finance.

Guntur says he was keen to work at Climateworks. 'It has the right ambition: to save the planet. We're racing against time and we can't afford to be modest.' Climateworks offered credible decarbonisation pathways and it fostered local leaders, both important for a country where 'relationships and influence play a key role.'

Climateworks built a strong relationship with the Ministry of Planning as the ministry worked on the country's Low Carbon Development Initiative, released in 2017.

Indonesian government modelling, supported by Climateworks, showed that Indonesia could get to net zero by 2045, not 2070, as some other models had it. Moreover, greener development would improve Indonesia's rate of economic growth. For example, a switch to electric vehicles would reduce the severe health costs of air pollution.

Indonesia is also the world's largest exporter of thermal coal, and does not have good conditions for solar or onshore wind. Deforestation of peatlands for palm oil production releases huge amounts of methane. The national government has worked hard to reduce these emissions, but they still occur. Leaders often have to choose between funding climate solutions and building roads or schools.

Yet the energy transition also brings opportunities as well as challenges. Indonesia has the world's largest reserves of nickel, which is essential for making EV batteries. Mining nickel carries the risk of significant environmental and social harms, yet decision-makers know that relying too much on fossil fuel exports in a decarbonising world puts economies at risk, as demand for zero-emissions goods and services rises.

The work in Asia brought other benefits for Climateworks. Ambition to do more in the region led to hiring Trang Nguyen, Southeast Asia Lead, another employee whose experience helps her to build bridges across business, government and the climate movement.

Before coming to Climateworks, Trang worked for six years for the British Government in Hanoi, and helped to organise the government's Southeast Asian partnerships ahead of the COP26 climate conference in Glasgow in 2021.

Sustainable Finance Lead Cassandra Williams has also worked across boundaries, having previously held a senior role at the Responsible Investment Association of Australia. The association does hard technical analysis examining green investment products to ensure their claims are true, and not greenwash.

Cassandra and her team are now engaging with superannuation funds, industry peak bodies and federal Treasury to align superannuation investments with net zero.


Similarly, Food, Land and Ocean System Lead Liam Walsh has worked for both the United Nations Development Programme and the World Wide Fund for Nature in Britain.

Editorial Content Manager Allison Courtin formerly worked at the Brookings Institution in Washington.


Allison says she has been deeply impressed by how Climateworks tells stories. 'We say everything in plain English. Our straightforward language ensures that our analysis and solutions stand out. We lay out possibilities, offering advice without finger-wagging. We're not 'must and should'. We're 'can and could'.



'It has the right ambition: to save the planet. We're racing against time and we can't afford to be modest.'



Climateworks research consistently shows that the solutions to climate change have already been invented; the key is getting them adopted through innovation in government policy and in the private sector.



This approach has built trust across the political spectrum. In 2015 the Coalition Government under Tony Abbott cited the *Pathways to Deep Decarbonisation in 2050* report as a key reference when it submitted its first national plan after the Paris Agreement. Opposition Leader Bill Shorten did the same when he committed Labor to a net zero target.

Cynicism is widespread about far-off emissions targets, the proliferation of global conferences, plans and pledges, so many words on paper. But Anna is adamant that these initiatives, while nowhere near enough to address the problem, matter immensely.

She believes that as minds change, actions and laws follow, and they in turn change minds.

Of course, some countries and companies are simply kicking the can down the road. But commitments and targets hold nations, companies, organisations and leaders to account.

For example, the Australian Securities and Investments Commission, the industry regulator, is now taking finance companies that make false sustainability claims to court.

‘Companies know that if they greenwash, they’ll be sued,’ Anna says. ‘They know they can’t hide the problem, so let’s solve the problem. And it turns out, the more you look the more you solve. We have innovations in industry and corporate practice every year.’

Climateworks research consistently shows that the solutions to climate change have already been invented; the key is getting them adopted through innovation in government policy and in the private sector.

Net zero is now the goal of nearly half of ASX200 companies and financial institutions that hold at least half the world’s privately managed money, Anna says. ‘They have recognised that net zero is here to stay and that the planet isn’t safe until we achieve it.’

But time is pressing hard. Anna and John were in New York in 2019 when scientists from the IPCC presented evidence showing that ecosystem tipping points were likely to be triggered at 1.5°C, while 2°C would cause potentially irreparable harm. A lower temperature goal meant a smaller carbon budget and fewer years emitting. ‘It chops off a decade,’ Anna says.


Back in Melbourne, she and her team got to work, partnering with the CSIRO to put new parameters into their shared models. They found that with the right policies, Australia could do its share in achieving 1.5°C by getting to net zero by 2039.

The 2020 *Decarbonisation Futures* report and 2023 update, built on that modelling, lays down a credible pathway for policymakers to take. Now it is up to them – and all of us.


The reasons to be optimistic are getting stronger. The tumbling cost of renewable energy is a game changer, making coal-fired electricity increasingly unprofitable in the National Electricity Market (NEM), and foreshadowing the replacement of gas and much oil. Cheaper batteries open the door to faster uptake of EVs and electrification of all transport. Energy efficiency remains ‘a stealthy superpower at our disposal,’ writes Anna.

What were once mainly the dreams of climate advocates are now becoming big business and settled government policy. As more wind and solar farms, hydro projects and big batteries are installed, the share of electrical power supplied by renewables has shot up from just 17 per cent seven years ago to 39 per cent across the NEM today.

Australia’s electricity roadmap makes this budding transformation clear: ‘Renewable energy connected by transmission, firmed with (battery) storage and backed up by gas is the lowest cost way to supply electricity to homes and businesses through Australia’s energy transition,’ says the Australian Energy Market Operator in its 2024 Draft Integrated System Plan. That transition, it adds, is ‘already well underway.’



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The challenges change, but the ambition, optimism and imagination of Climateworks remain.



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'Imagine a prosperous net zero society 30 years from now,' Anna writes.

'Huge industrial regions feature battery blocks, not exhaust stacks. Cities hum, more quietly than today, with electric vehicles. Homes are warmed and cooled by the power of the sun, and we breathe fresh air.'

'Once we put ourselves in that future, and look around at the infrastructure and relationships needed to create it, the rest of the equation can – and I believe will – be solved.'


Building that future is the Climateworks mission. 'We are a permanent part of achieving climate progress in Australia,' says Anna. 'After 15 years in operation, we have momentum. We've got net zero

commitments by governments and the private sector – now we have to get them implemented.


'Our north star is high ambition – showing what is possible – wedded to practical knowledge translated into lasting action. We are still in a race against time, but it is clear now that it is a race most humans want to win.'

It has been a long journey from that kitchen table conversation nearly 20 years ago. David Shelmerdine says that of all the initiatives the Myer Foundation has funded, Climateworks is by far the one of which he is most proud.

'We've ridden that roller coaster of political division and uncertainty, disappointment and hope,' David says. 'But we've stuck to our mission. And we always will.'



'Once we put ourselves in that future, and look around at the infrastructure and relationships needed to create it, the rest of the equation can – and I believe will – be solved.'





AUTHOR

This piece was written and reported by James Button, a former speechwriter, journalist and Europe correspondent for The Age and Sydney Morning Herald. He is the author of *Speechless: A year in my father's business* and *Comeback: The fall and rise of Geelong*, and has won three Walkley awards and a Melbourne Press Club Quill for feature writing.

15 years of Climateworks Centre

2009

CO-FOUNDED BY THE MYER FOUNDATION AND MONASH UNIVERSITY

2010

Low Carbon Growth Plan for Australia won Eureka Prize, with McKinsey

2011

Influenced inclusion of billion-dollar energy efficiency and carbon farming programs in Australia's carbon price legislation

2012

Appointed to government roundtable that shaped carbon price legislation for Australia

2013

Commissioned by the Australian Energy Department to analyse industrial energy efficiency potential, advised Minister on 'direct action'

2014

Developed first Australian net zero pathways, with CSIRO & ANU. Pathways to deep decarbonisation in 2050: How Australia can proposer in a low carbon world showed that Australia could reach net zero emissions – part of the global Deep Decarbonisation Pathways Project presented to the UN and cited heavily in Australia.

Low Carbon Growth Plan used by the Australian Government for energy efficiency programs and by states for regional low carbon growth plans

Developed first customer-led electricity market rule change, approved in 2013

Climateworks CEO appointed to Board of newly established Clean Energy Finance Corporation

Australian Government created Land Sector Carbon and Biodiversity Fund, appointed Climateworks CEO to its board

Tracking progress report, the first assessment of Australia's emissions reduction activities, cited by the Climate Change Authority

2015

Advised on South Australia's commitment to net zero by 2050, led to work with three more states and their own commitments

Two 'big four' banks commissioned decarbonisation analysis, upgraded published policies as a result

Cited in the then Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Energy Council's National Energy Productivity Plan

Cited in Australian Government's submission to Paris meeting, and in federal Opposition's commitment to net zero

2016

UN Paris Agreement Ratified, informed by Deep Decarbonisation Pathways Project

Victorian Government legislated net zero target and implementation plan, following advice from Independent Review Panel that included Climateworks' CEO

Published *Built to Perform*, recommending a 'zero carbon ready' building code, with ASEBEC

2017

CLIMATEWORKS LAUNCHES INTERNATIONAL PROGRAM

Monash University drew on Climateworks advice for commitment to net zero emissions campuses

Deep Decarbonisation Pathways Project won 'Excellence in Climate Research' award from UN Association of Australia

Myer Foundation won Philanthropy Australia award for 'Best Large Grant' for Climateworks formation

2018

Climateworks multi-year *Land Use Futures* program launched by Jeffrey Sachs

Hosted Indonesian climate ambition panel at UNFCCC COP24

Monash University and Climateworks won UN Global Momentum for Change Award for Net Zero Initiative

Published second *Tracking progress* report, highlighting gaps and progress across Australian sectors

2019

JAKARTA OFFICE OPENS

Published analysis of Indonesia, Vietnam and the Philippines' comparative advantages in a decarbonising world, with Vivid Economics

Australian building code for commercial buildings changed per recommendations in *Built to Perform*

Identified Australia's most significant economic, social and environmental challenges to 2060 for Australian National Outlook, with CSIRO

2020

Decarbonisation Futures report demonstrated first 1.5°C pathway for Australia

Launched first forward-looking green equities index for ASX300, with BNP Paribas

Published *Investment Vision Guide* to align public and private finance with sustainable development and climate goals

Supported Tonga's long-term low emissions development strategy



2021

NAME CHANGE TO CLIMATEWORKS CENTRE REFLECTS REGIONAL FOCUS

ASEAN Green Future reports demonstrated greater climate ambition is achievable and desirable, with SDSN

Findings that Australian state and territory climate targets exceeded national targets made front-page news

Developed first economy-wide net zero scenarios for AEMO, including a 1.5°C-aligned 'hydrogen superpower' scenario, with CSIRO

2022

Net Zero Momentum Tracker presented first-of-its-kind analysis of ASX200 companies against an Australia-specific 1.5°C pathway

Drafted Indonesia's first sustainability framework for the Financial and Development Supervisory Board (BPKP)

Living within limits demonstrated Australia had transgressed three planetary boundaries

Accelerating EV uptake sets policy priorities for Australia's EV transition, including fuel efficiency standards

2023

Australia-Indonesia Energy Transition Dialogues supported Indonesia's 2022 G20 Presidency and 2023 ASEAN Chairmanship

ASFI adopted Climateworks decarbonisation scenarios for its Sustainable Finance Taxonomy, defining sustainable 1.5°C-aligned investments in Australia

Australian Industry Energy Transitions Initiative informed legislated policy and billions of dollars of federal budget funding

SEAFOAM project identified ways for Indonesia to raise ambition for its upcoming NDC, later signalled by Indonesian Government

2024

CELEBRATING 15 YEARS

Australian Vietnam Green Economy program lauded by business and government as game-changing Australia-Southeast Asia collaboration, with Asialink and DFAT

Australian Government created Net Zero Economy Authority; appointed Climateworks CEO to establishing advisory board


Climateworks' net zero pathways informed Australian Climate Change Authority's advice to parliament on sector pathways



ABOUT US

Climateworks Centre bridges the gap between research and climate action. We are climate transition specialists, working in Australia, Southeast Asia and the Pacific with decision-makers who have the power to reduce emissions at scale. Climateworks develops evidence-based solutions to accelerate emissions reduction in line with the global 1.5°C temperature goal and shared climate safety.

Co-founded by philanthropy and Monash University, Climateworks is an independent not-for-profit working within the Monash Sustainable Development Institute.



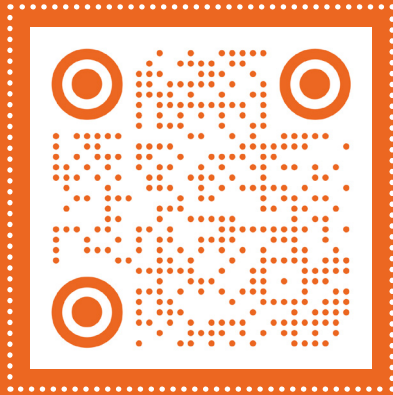
'We are still in a race against time on climate impacts, and while the fear of those harms drives us, so too does the sense of opportunity – it is more clear than ever that this is a race we want to win.

Please continue with us on this journey and help us all win.

We need you as much in the next 15 years as we did in our first 15.'

- Anna Skarbek, CEO
Climateworks Centre

We invite you to be an integral part of the next
15 years of Climateworks Centre.



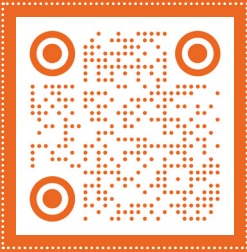
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Your support will enable us to remain a trusted, independent knowledge translator in the push to net zero emissions.



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Co-founded by philanthropy and Monash University, Climateworks Centre is an independent not-for-profit working within the Monash Sustainable Development Institute.

