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Dear Sir/Madam,

Thank you for the opportunity to read and review the Productivity Commission's Draft Report on Barriers to Effective Climate Change Adaptation.

The Australian Psychological Society made a submission to the Productivity Commission last year (<http://www.psychology.org.au/Assets/Files/APS-submission-Barriers-to-adaptation.pdf>). In our submission we recommended a number of strategies for helping to overcome behavioural barriers to effective adaptation. Most of our suggestions have not yet been included in this draft report, so we are recommending them again at the end of this document.

The APS has a Climate Change and Environmental Threats Reference Group (CCRG) comprised of psychological experts in environmental and social psychology. Members of this group reviewed and commented on your draft report, and their comments are summarised below. We have also made some specific suggestions for changes in content and text, and these are also summarised below.

General comments

We focused our review particularly on chapters 3, 10 and 11. Unfortunately, we found the draft report to be a difficult document to read, mainly because of the writing style. The document is very long, the language is complex, and the meaning is often quite obscure so that the reader has to work very hard to understand what point is being made. The example on page 62 illustrates these criticisms: *"While these decisions may not always be ideal, they still could be as economically efficient as possible given the costs of seeking and processing information and thus may not constitute a barrier to adaptation"*.

Once interpreted, the point being made is often so vague or general that it is meaningless and does not seem to point to any useful action. In addition the tone of the document, Chapter 3 particularly, is often negative and pessimistic. The overall message conveys the impression that dealing with barriers is all a bit too hard and there is little that Government can do. We disagree with this interpretation of the social science about cognitive and behavioural barriers. Our submission outlines several useful policy strategies for helping people to overcome barriers. Some examples are provided below, and we refer the Commission once again to our original submission.

This document will be much improved once it is written in plain English, using engaging, user-friendly language. The document will also be much more useful once it is re-written in a more hopeful and positive way that also offers solutions rather than just describing the complexities of human behaviour.

Detailed recommendations

Chapter 3 – Barriers to effective adaptation

Cognitive constraints on decision making

The opening sentence in this section is incorrect. Not all effective adaptation requires individuals to absorb complex scientific evidence on the impacts of climate change.

First, adaptation is not confined to activities by individuals, but encompasses responses by social groups, communities, organisations, firms, and governments. Adaptation includes structural changes, changes in policies and systems, not just individual behaviours. Adaptation also includes psychological adaptation, which has not been addressed in the draft document. A detailed definition of adaptation is included in the original APS submission to the Inquiry, available at <http://www.psychology.org.au/Assets/Files/APS-submission-Barriers-to-adaptation.pdf>.

Instead of just listing common cognitive constraints, this section would be improved by following each example with a recommendation for overcoming each particular barrier. This does not happen in the current draft. Instead, this section feeds the perception that our cognitive processing and decision making always results in negative consequences.

For example, paragraph 3 talks about temporal discounting. This could be followed by a recommendation that adaptation programs highlight salient immediate/short term benefits to capitalise on a human tendency to discount future risks.

A useful conclusion for this section would be to summarise the factors that *enable*, rather than inhibit, people to make decisions for effective adaptation.

3.3 How should we respond to barriers?

This section reads quite negatively. It also underestimates what governments can influence and achieve through good policy. This section would be greatly improved if it provided guidelines on how to identify a barrier, how to choose which barriers to target, and how to remove barriers in order to increase adaptation. This is covered in the APS submission.

Chapter 10 – Emergency Management

P192. "Emergency management includes..."

Recommendation: Insert *psychological preparedness* into second dot point on preparedness, second sentence, e.g., "For example, public education programs on *physical and psychological preparedness*, evacuation procedures..."

Recommendation: Insert *psychological first aid* into third dot point on response, second sentence, e.g., "For example, ambulance and fire-fighting services, search and rescue operations, evacuating people from disaster-affected areas, *psychological first aid*".

P221. **Box 11.6** Climate change and human health.

Recommendation: Insert words *physical and psychological health* into first sentence.

Recommendation: add additional dot point to table, such as:

- *Psychosocial and mental health impacts can also result. Environmental changes that cause loss of habitat, water and food shortages, and threats to livelihood can trigger displacement, dislocation from community, financial and relationship stress, conflict, multiple losses, increased risks of depression, anxiety related disorders, grief and substance use disorders. (Fritze, J. G., Blashki, G. A., Burke, S. & Wiseman, J. (2008). Hope, despair and transformation: Climate change and the promotion of mental health and wellbeing. International Journal of Mental Health Systems, 2(13). Retrieved April 30, 2009, from <http://ijmhs.com/content/2/1/13>).*

Key points from Australian Psychological Society 2011 Submission to Productivity Commission Inquiry into Barriers to Effective Climate Change Adaptation

Useful adaptation interventions include:

- Policy initiatives that make healthful, adaptive behaviour (e.g., recycling grey water, purchasing renewable electricity) the default option, so that people have to opt out if they do not want it.
- Using models which combine different incentives, like financial incentives, attention to customer convenience, quality assurance, and social marketing
- Using information and education campaigns in conjunction with practical and effective intervention strategies
- Building in feedback mechanisms which provide frequent information about the financial consequences of energy use and behaviour immediately or daily, rather than monthly or even less frequently.
- Designing effective disaster communication that combines appropriate psychological advice and education, along with best practice communication of warning message content for dealing with the actual emergency situation.
- Ensuring emergency warnings have the following characteristics: specificity, consistency, certainty, accuracy, clarity.
- Using social influence models to maximise spread of adaptation behaviours through a community: modeling, social norms, peer messages, using social marketing techniques

- Building and refurbishing healthcare facilities and infrastructure for sustainability and to maximize convenient access and ensure it is fit for and resilient to future climate impacts.
- Expanding mental health servicing capacity.

All adaptation actions must take into consideration their impact on those most at risk. This involves attention to:

- the social safety net
- the need for targeted assistance and short term assistance to aid recovery from disasters
- the need for psychological/trauma services.

For more information about this submission, or related matters, please contact Dr Susie Burke at the Australian Psychological Society.