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Greetings to all at the Better Futures Forum.

It is good to see people from so many backgrounds gathered to discuss the critical issue of climate change. I wish to particularly acknowledge attendees from the First Nations - The oldest living culture in the world today has much to teach us all.

This is a critical year. Global heads of state are preparing to meet at the UN Climate Summit, COP26, in Glasgow in November.

Nearly six years ago, as Secretary-General of the United Nations, I called world leaders together for COP21. 191 parties, including Australia, have ratified the Paris Agreement agreeing to limit global temperature rise to well below 2 degrees Celsius, and to strive for 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels.

We have made some progress, but our planet is still set on a dangerous trajectory. In Glasgow, heads of state will make emission reduction commitments that set a better course for our collective future. The world is looking to Australia to take its place amongst the international community and lift its national ambition on climate.

Australia is a wealthy democracy - rich in both entrepreneurial spirit, ingenuity, and an abundance of natural resources. It is the world's sunniest nation, and one of the

windiest - a significant natural advantage in a world moving rapidly to clean energy. However, of all developed countries, Australia is also one of the most susceptible to the effects of a changing climate.

I was horrified as fires raged on the east coast in 2020, burning around 21 percent of Australian temperate and mixed forests. More than 30 people and a billion native animals lost their lives. These fires were preceded by Australia's hottest, driest year on record. Then, after the fires, came devastating floods.

The science, and the economics, are clear: without decisive action to reduce emissions, escalating climate change will increase the frequency and intensity of disasters, having profound impacts on health, businesses and livelihoods, infrastructure, national security, and the natural environment.

The shift to a zero-carbon world is now inevitable; Australia is well placed to be a global renewable energy leader in this transition. The opportunities are enormous if you choose to get ahead of the challenge.

During the next three days of the Better Futures Forum I know many Australians will demonstrate their readiness for decisive national climate action by showcasing solutions already underway.

For example, Matt Kean, the energy minister of New South Wales, is accelerating the energy transformation by investing billions in regional renewable energy zones to replace coal-fired power stations. He is joined by mayors of major cities that are electrifying transport and going carbon neutral by 2030; regional towns building competitive, renewable-powered manufacturing, and sustainable jobs; finance leaders who are decarbonising trillions of dollars in assets; and the Australian founder of the world's first and only zero-carbon lithium company.

Solving climate change will take all of us. First Peoples have practiced holistic land management for thousands of generations. Internationally, Indigenous Peoples make up less than 5% of the world's population, but they manage and protect 80% of global biodiversity. We ignore the wisdom and science of First Peoples, gathered over many millennia, to the detriment of us all. We need medical experts, farmers, city planners, architects, financiers and our Indigenous communities. Crucially, we must remember those whose livelihoods have historically depended on the fossil fuel industry and ensure a just transition leaving no one behind.

There is already huge momentum for change. All Australian States are now [committed to net zero emissions by 2050](#) and to ambitious reductions in this critical decade to 2030. Many of Australia's [leading investors](#) have publicly committed to a zero emissions economy.

Internationally, Australia's major trading partners, including Japan, South Korea and China have mid century [net zero targets](#). In the short term, the US, Japan, the EU and the UK have committed to emissions reductions that are roughly two to three times as deep as Australia's current effort.

Australia's current goal of a [26-28% reduction on 2005 levels by 2030](#), and the absence of a national zero emissions target, is out of step with its States, its trading partners, and other comparable nations. It is insufficient to meet Australia's Paris Agreement commitments.

Ethically, the toll of inaction on climate is incalculable. Economically, failing to set ambitious, credible emissions targets in line with the rest of the world poses a huge threat to Australia's future prosperity and international standing. Australia risks finding itself on the wrong side of carbon-border tariffs as other nations move ahead, seizing the opportunities of the zero-carbon age.

Australia's business community and state and city governments know there is no time to waste. The Federal government now has an historic opportunity to seize the moment.

Australia must at least halve emissions this decade, and commit to zero by 2050.

In so doing, Australia will take its rightful place on the world stage at Glasgow. It will meet its Paris Agreement obligations, protect its national interests, and provide the certainty the nation needs.

Australia can help carve a path to a better future for all – a future that is within our reach on this one remarkable planet that we all share.