

13 December 2022

OPEN LETTER: MILLIONS SAY NO TO JAILING OF PEACEFUL CLIMATE ACTIVISTS

Over 220 organisations representing millions of members across the country have united to condemn the recent 15 month jail sentence for climate activist Deanna ‘Violet’ Coco and to express concern about increasing repression, including the recent introduction of new anti protest laws in multiple states.

“We are seeing fundamental democratic principles stripped before our eyes at an alarming rate. Violet is the 5th person to receive a jail sentence* in the last 12 months for peaceful climate activism, as repression mounts against community activists across the nation. She is one of thousands taking extraordinary action in the face of an urgent crisis.” said Kelly O’Shanassy of Australian Conservation Foundation.

On 2 December, Violet, from Fireproof Australia, was sentenced to 15 months in custody with a non parole period of 8 months. Her appeal for bail will be heard on 13th December. A [solidarity action](#) will take place outside Downing Centre Court.

We reject [the claim from Premier Perrottet](#) that protest should not inconvenience people, and are concerned about the message this sends in a democracy. Peaceful but disruptive protests have won many of the rights we take for granted today, including the 8 hour day, voting rights, end to conscription, and to enjoy the forests and precious places we defended. Australia is a signatory to [conventions protecting our right to freedom of movement, association, peaceful assembly, and political speech](#) which the government must respect, and we must defend.

“The freedom to protest has been a central part of many of the most important movements across this country, from land rights for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, to voting rights, to achieving the eight hour work day. Governments across Australia need to recommit to our democracy, and repeal these laws that criminalise protest” said Alice Drury, Acting Legal Director, Human Rights Law Centre.

We welcome the support from the UN and international human rights organisations, including the recent statement from Clement Voule, UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Association and Peaceful Assembly who [expressed](#) “I am alarmed at NSW court's prison term against climate protester Deanna Coco and refusal to grant bail until a

March 2023 appeal hearing. Peaceful protesters should never be criminalised or imprisoned.”

Violet was charged with several offences, including disrupting vehicles, failing to comply with police direction and resisting or hindering police. The charges arose from her action [blocking one lane of traffic on the Sydney Harbour Bridge](#) for approximately 25 minutes.

“It's outrageous that the state wastes resources seeking jail time and locking up peaceful protestors in custody at the expense of taxpayers. In contrast, fossil fuel corporations are contributing to climate collapse, yet have bi-partisan support for further mining and their subsidies continue at a rate of [\\$22,000](#) a minute.”

Lucy Manne, 350.org

Protestors from Fireproof Australia, Extinction Rebellion, Blockade Australia and Frontline Action on Coal and many more have engaged in peaceful civil disobedience in recent years in support of urgent action on climate change. Thousands have been involved, representing the voices of many more.

“The Aboriginal Legal Service was born out of a protest movement in the 1970s. You would be hard-pressed to find any win for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' rights that wasn't brought about by public protest.

There is no climate justice without racial justice. The right to assemble and demonstrate in our streets, towns and cities is a fundamental cornerstone of democracy. For marginalised communities, public protests enable us to be seen and heard, even — and especially — when those in power would rather suppress our voices. We condemn in the strongest terms this government crackdown on our right to protest.”

Karly Warner, Aboriginal Legal Service NSW

The vast majority of Australians across the political spectrum support, and voted for, strong action on climate. People should not be concerned they could risk heavy penalties simply for taking to the streets. New anti-protest legislation in several states is wide open to police misinterpretation. NSW has already seen increased policing of peaceful NGO-led climate protests and police threats of invoking the laws against a wide variety of actions since their introduction in April.

“This state's ongoing repression of protestors through parliament passing harsher laws, police seeking draconian bail conditions and surveilling protestors, and prosecutors seeking custodial sentences shows just how much contempt this

government holds for protestors and the environment. The repression of peaceful protestors must end.”

Josh Pallas, NSW Council for Civil Liberties

*6 jail sentences have been applied to nonviolent activists in NSW in the last year. 4 have successfully appealed. Please also note that references to explosives devices in media refer to a flare, used by soccer fans.

Peaceful protest should not be a crime. Anti protest laws must be repealed. People engaged in peaceful protest should never be sentenced to jail.

350.org Australia	Australian Manufacturing Workers Union
Dr David Abello, on behalf of the 78ers, the First Mardi Gras Inc	Australia
Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT) Limited	Australian Marine Conservation Society
ACF Community Geelong	Australian Nonviolence Projects
Action Ready	Australian Progress
ADAC - A Different Approach Community	Australian Religious Response to Climate Change
Aid/Watch	Australian Services Union NSW ACT (Services) Branch
Amnesty International Australia	Australian Services Union Victorian Private Sector Branch
Andrew Denton	Australian Unemployed Workers' Union
Animal Liberation NSW	Australian Youth Climate Coalition
Antipoverty Centre	Author - The 99th Koala
Arid Lands Environment Centre	Bayside Climate Crisis Action Group
Armidale Action on Coal Seam Gas and Mining	Bellingen Activist Network
Arshak Makichyan	Beyond Gas Network
Asylum Seeker Resource Centre (ASRC)	Beyond War
Australian Communist Party	Black Flag Sydney
Australian Conservation Foundation	Black Wallaby Forest Action
Australian Democracy Network	Blockade Australia
Australian Forests and Climate Alliance	Bob Brown Foundation
Australian Lawyers Alliance	Dr Luke Buckmaster
Australian Lawyers for Human Rights	BurnZero.com
Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (NSW State Division)	Bushfire Survivors for Climate Action
	Caldera Environment Centre

Castan Centre for Human Rights Law
(Monash University)
Central Victoria Climate Action
Centre for Climate Safety
CFMEU Construction and General
Division
Chipstop Campaign Against
Woodchipping
CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen
Participation
Cristy Clark
ClimActs
CLIMARTE
Climate Action Monaro
Climate Action Network Australia
Climate Action Radio Show
Climate and Health Alliance (CAHA)
Climate Change Action Network
Climate Council of Australia
Climate for Change
Climate Justice Programme
Climate Justice Union
Commons Social Change Library
Comms Declare
Community Action for Rainbow Rights
Community Legal Centres Australia
Community Legal Centres NSW
Community Power Agency
Conservation Council ACT Region
Conservation Council of SA
Conservation Council of WA (CCWA)
CoPower (Co-operative Power
Australia)
CounterAct
Darebin Climate Action Now
Defend the Right to Protest
Digital Rights Watch
Do Gooder
Drum Rebellion

East Gippsland Climate Action
Network
Edmund Rice Centre for Justice and
Community Education
Environment Centre NT Inc
Environment East Gippsland inc
Environment Victoria
Environmental Justice Australia
Environs Kimberley
Extinction Rebellion Australia
Extinction Rebellion Cairns
Fireproof Australia
First Dog on the Moon
FlightFree Australia
Flinders University
Frenzal Rhomb
Friends of Bats and Habitat Gippsland
Friends of the Earth Australia
Friends of the Earth Melbourne
Friends of the Forest - Mogo
Frontline Action on Coal
Galilee Rising
Geelong Sustainability
GetUp
El Gibbs, writer, disability advocate
Glen Eira Emergency Climate Action
Network (GECAN)
Goongerah Environment Centre
GraceTree
Grassroots Action Network Tasmania
Grata Fund
Green Institute
Green Music Australia
Greenpeace Australia Pacific
Gudanji For Country
Heal the Earth Now ॐ (international)
Healthy Connection For All
Dr Tamar Hopkins
Human Rights Law Centre

Dr Rebecca Huntley, Author, "How to
Talk About Climate Change in a Way
That Makes a Difference"
Dan Ilic
Institute of Collaborative Race
Research
International PEN Melbourne Centre
International Service for Human Rights
Jews Against Fascism
Ketan Joshi, Author "Windfall:
Unlocking a fossil free future"
Jumbunna Research, UTS
Justice Reform Initiative
Knitting Nanas Hunter Loop
Sydney Knitting Nannas & Friends
Kooyong Climate Change Alliance
Lane Cove Sustainability Action Group
Carmen Lawrence, academic, Ex WA
Premier, Head Australian Labor Party
Legal Observers NSW
Liberty Victoria
Lighter Footprints
Lincoln Ave Progressives
LIVE
Loud Jew Collective
Mackay Conservation Group
Margaret River Regional Environment
Centre
Maritime Union of Australia (Sydney
Branch)
Melbourne Activist Legal Support
Muslim Collective
Nannas for Native Forests
National Justice Project
National Tertiary Education Union
(NSW)
Nature Conservation Council NSW
George Newhouse, Adjunct professor
Nillumbik Climate Action Team
North East Forest Alliance

North Queensland Conservation
Council
NSW Council for Civil Liberties
Claire O'Rourke
Oxfam Australia
PASA (Philippines Australia Solidarity
Association)
Paul Gilding
Pax Christi Australia
Peace in Papua
People's Climate Assembly
Peter Garret
Pride In Protest
Progressive Cinema, Armidale, NSW
Proposition One Campaign for a
Nuclear-Free Future
Public Interest Advocacy Centre
Public Services International (Asia
Pacific Regional Office)
Queensland Conservation Council
Queensland Council for Civil Liberties
Redfern Legal Centre
Retail and Fast Food Workers Union
(RAFFWU)
Rising Tide
Save the Bay Coalition
School Strike 4 Climate
Scientists Warning Foundation,
California, US
Seed Indigenous Youth Climate
Network Ltd
Socialist Alliance
South East Forest Rescue
South East Region Conservation
Alliance (SERCA)
Anna Spargo-Ryan, Writer / A Kind of
Magic
Spirit of Eureka SA
Dr Joan Staples
Stop Fossil Fuel Subsidies
Stop Russell Vale Mine

Sweltering Cities
Tom Tanuki
The Australia Institute Tasmania
The Future Makers
The Independent and Peaceful
Australia Network
The Industrial Workers of the World
(IWW) Sydney Branch
The Sunrise Project
The Sustainable Hour Podcast
The Wilderness Society
Tomorrow Movement
Transition Streets Geelong
UnionsNSW
Uni Students for Climate Justice
United Workers Union
University of Melbourne Student Union
Environment Department
UNSW Centre for Crime, Law and
Justice
UTS Criminal Justice Cluster
Victorian Pride Lobby
Victorian Socialists
Vote Climate
Vote Earth Now
Wage Peace
Warriors of the Aboriginal Resistance
VIC
Water for Rivers
What Can I Do? Australia
White Rose Society Australia
Wollongong Against War and Nuclear
weapons (WAWAN)
Women's Environmental Leadership
Australia (WELA)
Women's Justice Network
Workers for Climate Action
World Animal Protection
WSU Network for Law and Human
Rights

Yarra Climate Action Now
Yassmin Abdel-Magied

“The right to protest is a human right. No-one should be imprisoned for exercising this right, and Violet’s sentencing represents a concerning escalation in NSW’s crackdown on people’s right to protest, and to address human rights abuses including climate inaction.”

Nikita White, Amnesty International Australia

“It is a disgrace that in NSW a young woman is facing up to 15 months in jail for a protest that blocked traffic for 25 minutes. The right to protest is an essential part of a functioning democracy and one which trade unionists have fought hard to safeguard all around the world. The jailing of Violet Coco shows this right is under attack in NSW today. Public protest has a long and proud history in NSW and has helped shape our state for the better”

Darren Greenfield, State Secretary CFMEU C&G NSW

“Many unions will be in attendance at the protest tomorrow to support Violet. UnionsNSW condemns the imprisonment of environmental activist Violet Coco and demands her immediate release. As a movement that was born out of protest we unanimously call for these laws to be repealed by law makers. The most important social changes have been achieved through protest with unions at the forefront of many of them.”

Vanessa Seagrove, Assistant Secretary of UnionsNSW

“Repression will not cool the planet.”

Blockade Australia

“If these laws were in place in 1978 we would have all ended up in gaol. As it was many of us did. Under the provisions of the NSW Summary Offences Act police were able to shut down protests, to judge whether a person's behaviour was offensive or not, and to entrap gay men with contrived homosexual advances. At the time there were over 100 convictions every year for sexual assault of a male person in NSW. Many ended with gaol terms of up to 14 years and others accepted court-directed homosexual aversion therapy. Radical social movements changed everything. They didn't have liability insurance or permission from the state.”

First Mardi Gras Inc. - a community association for 78ers

"Like MLK and Gandhi, Violet Coco took a courageous, nonviolent stand for the common good. People were inconvenienced, not harmed. It's so wrong that she is jailed for advocating for a liveable planet, while the people who legislated these excessive penalties are jeopardising our future by allowing the expansion of coal and gas mining."

Thea Ormerod, Australian Religious Response to Climate Change

"Every single adult and child in New South Wales has a fundamental human right to peaceful assembly. Australia is bound by international law to uphold this right which extends to all gatherings for peaceful purposes, regardless of the degree of public support. Importantly, the right to peaceful assembly can only be legally limited in ways that are strictly necessary and proportionate. These measures were rammed through the NSW Parliament without any adequate scrutiny or consultation. We now see Deanna 'Violet' Coco, refused Bail in circumstances where it would normally be granted and sentenced to 456 days in prison for stopping traffic for 25 minutes. It is impossible for the NSW Government or the Opposition to establish that these measures meet these necessity and proportionality thresholds established under international human right law."

Kerry Weste, President, Australian Lawyers for Human Rights

"In the early 1980s the Wilderness Society originated out of one of the most massive acts of civil disobedience in Australia's history, the campaign to save the Franklin River. Peaceful, non-violent protest is an essential part of a functioning democracy. Without it, today the Franklin River would be dammed, and other natural wonders like Kakadu, K-gari / Fraser Island, Walmadany / James Price Point, and old growth forests the breadth of this continent would be destroyed. If the Franklin protest happened today, conservationists would be jailed for months to years, not days to weeks—yet, the threats facing nature and people are even more urgent."

Amelia Young, National Campaigns Director, Wilderness Society