



National Child and Youth Statement on Climate Change

Australian Local Conference of Youth 2024

Foreword

Australia's bid to co-host COP31 in partnership with the Pacific is an opportunity for genuine partnership with Pacific Island nations. Australia, as the second largest exporter of fossil fuels in the world, has reaped the economic benefits that have laid the foundations of our wealthy nation. However, our Pacific neighbours face the existential threat of rising sea levels and growing food insecurity, and future generations who are seven times more likely to experience climate disasters in their lifetime.

If Australia wins the bid, young people have said that we need to recognise that Australia's actions fall short of what's required to support the priorities of the Pacific on climate change. The National Child and Youth Statement calls for governments to listen and act upon the wisdom of First Nations and Pasifika communities who have been the stewards of the land and seas, for tens and thousands of years. It is in doing so that we can bring climate justice and forge a world where all people, including young people, women and girls can thrive.

Eezu

*Youth Activist 2024,
Plan International Australia*

I hope that decision-makers will take their time to deeply reflect on the invaluable insights presented in the National Child and Youth Statement on Climate Change for 2024, and recognise the urgency of centring the rights, voices and perspectives of children and young people in Australia's climate policies. I encourage decision-makers to embed meaningful youth inclusion in climate solutions as an essential and non-negotiable element, ensuring that the needs, concerns, and aspirations of young people are strongly considered in climate policy development. I urge decision-makers to support initiatives that empower young people, especially those from First Nations communities, to actively participate in and lead efforts toward climate justice to create the conditions for an equitable and sustainable future.

Aston

Young Ambassador 2024, UNICEF Australia

The demands outlined in this National Child and Youth Statement on Climate Change provide decision-makers and other stakeholders with actionable steps to support Australia's climate action agenda and increase youth involvement in decisions that affect their lives now and in the future. The demands highlight key aspirations related to First Nations and Pasifika engagement, youth engagement and education, and gender, along with thematics such as mitigation, nature and biodiversity, and climate finance. These are some of the issues that young Australians care most about in relation to climate change, and this Statement should help decision-makers understand their perspective. The choices made today will shape the world that young people will grow up in, and inherit.

Amelia

Global Child and Youth Engagement Lead, AYFICE



Introduction

Whilst children and young people are the least responsible for climate change, they are highly exposed and uniquely vulnerable to its impacts. As climate change threatens the rights of children, Australia’s climate policies must centre their rights and engage them as key stakeholders in the development and implementation of Australia’s climate policies. The UN General Comment 26 on Children’s Rights and the Environment with a Special Focus on Climate Change¹ supports this. It ‘emphasises the urgent need to address the adverse effects of environmental harm and climate change on children.’

As Australia transitions toward net-zero, it is critical that this is a just transition and that children and young people are not left behind. A just transition includes creating a viable green industry in fossil fuel reliant communities and ensuring all voices have a say in the nation’s future. Australia’s youth are seeking a just transition that complies with human rights, including the right to a healthy environment, and honouring Native Title and rights of Indigenous peoples in communities being asked to host renewable technology and transmission lines. In both the transition to the renewable economy and long-term climate policy making, human rights, and particularly child rights, must be centred.

The 2024 National Child and Youth Statement (the ‘Statement’) was prepared after seven face-to-face consultations between May to July 2024, as part of the ‘Local Conference of Youth Australia 2024’ (LCOY Australia). LCOYs come under the umbrella of YOUNGO, the official children and youth constituency to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and take place all over the world. The Australian LCOY consultations occurred in Sydney (two consultations), Melbourne, Brisbane and Canberra,

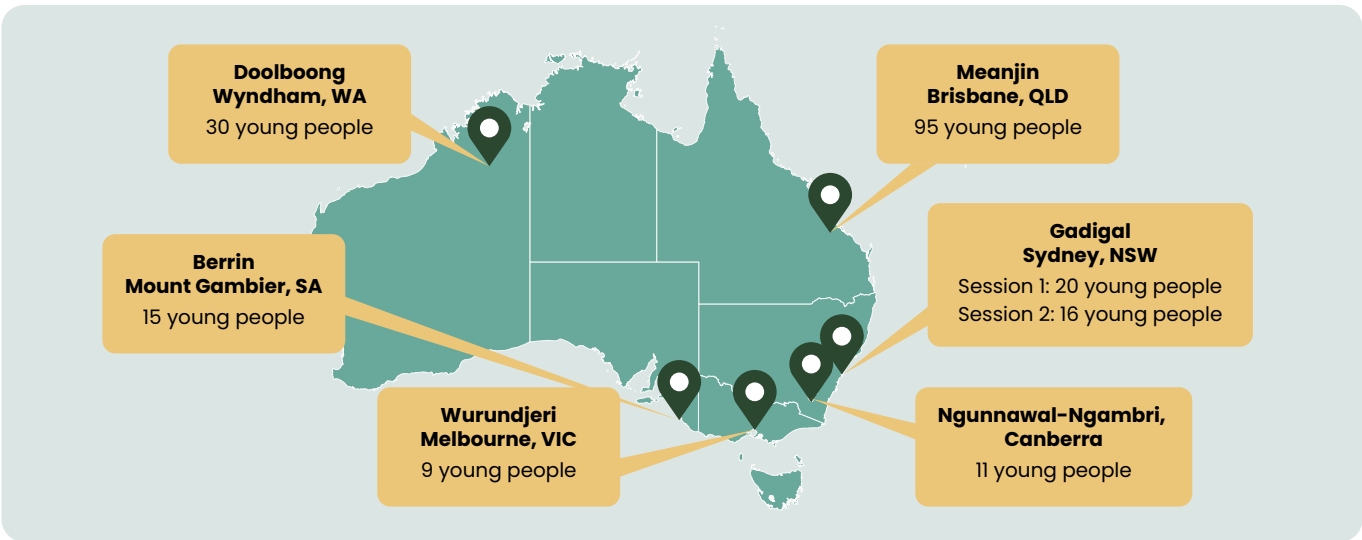
as well as regional consultations in Mount Gambier (South Australia) and Wyndham (Western Australia). Two young people from Timor Leste also attended a Sydney LCOY and added a regional perspective to discussions. Over 190 children and young people were consulted.

The LCOYs were designed and led by young people, for young people. Seventeen young people were involved in an organising group that was supported by UNICEF Australia and Plan International Australia and most also contributed to the drafting of the statement.

Due to the large geographical area of Australia and the vast landscape which it covers, this year’s LCOY aims to include voices from those different regions. From the remote outback where there is the dry and wet season, to inner city Melbourne on the east coast, we have explored the different impacts climate change has had on young people in these communities.

Australia is made up of over 200 First Nations traditional Countries, meaning that there are a significant number of different cultural perspectives on how to care for this one land mass. First Nations people have been caring for Country for over 60,000 years and Australia is recognising the importance of these practices and knowledge. In our process, we ensured that we consulted with First Nations young people. However we note that it is crucial that First Nations communities are supported to lead these types of processes themselves within their own communities.

This document summarises the views, perspectives, realities and actions that young Australians see as necessary for achieving a just and sustainable future for all.



First Nations and Pasifika knowledge and practices

Context

It is First Nations and Pasifika young people that have the most to lose from inaction – climate change is threatening their lives, livelihoods and homes, as well as their connection to Country, cultural heritage and traditional knowledges.

But we also see First Nations and Pasifika young people leading the fight for climate justice. From the work of SEED Mobⁱⁱ to the Youth Verdict vs Waratah Coalⁱⁱⁱ, First Nations young people in Australia are fighting for climate justice for their communities. In the Pacific, Pacific Island Students Fighting Climate Change^{iv} have been campaigning since 2019 to seek an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice on climate change and human rights, and have been successful in gaining support from the Pacific Islands Forum and the UN General Assembly.

Key observations

- The valuing of First Nations and Pacific perspectives and ways of knowing and being in relation to Caring for Country, and preventing and addressing the impacts of climate change, was a consistent and extremely prominent theme throughout the consultations.
- Young people note that the lasting impacts of colonisation have meant First Nations people are often under-represented, their voices undervalued and their experiences of climate change are exacerbated by the inequity they systematically experience.
- Young people are concerned that the voices of First Nations and Pacific communities are heard but not acted upon. They are concerned about the tokenisation of the voices of First Nations and Pasifika voices in climate processes. Young people are concerned that governments consult with First Nations and Pasifika people for consultation sake, and do not follow this through with changes to policy or appropriate resourcing for locally led adaptation.

Recommendations

- 1 Genuine and regular consultations must be held with Pacific and First Nations young people on Australia's climate policies and funding. This could be integrated as part of the Department of Climate Change, Energy, Environment and Water (DCCEEW) youth advisory group, although consultation and engagement outside of that mechanism is also encouraged. Key elements of this engagement should also include:
 - a Compensation for the time of First Nations and Pacific young people during consultations;
 - b Integration of culturally appropriate and valued practices as part of consultation processes, such as storytelling.
- 2 If Australia is to host COP31, Pacific and First Nations perspectives, knowledge and facilitation techniques must be central to the planning and execution of the Conference.
- 3 Increased resources should be given to First Nations and Pacific communities for locally led adaptation, in ways that they know are appropriate for their land and local communities.



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Child and youth engagement and education

Context

Children and young people have been at the forefront of climate action for decades. There has been some progress in child and youth engagement in the last few years, including the Duty of Care campaign^v, the Federal Government's Engage! strategy to include young people in the decisions the Australian Government makes^{vi}, and the proposed establishment of a federal youth advisory council on climate. However children and youth are still not meaningfully included in domestic and international climate spaces. Thousands of youth activists and organisations continue to push for meaningful inclusion, and this LCOY is an example of this work. There are significant opportunities to highlight and centre the voices of children and young people if Australia is successful in its bid to host COP31, including meaningfully implementing the Action for Climate Empowerment agenda.

Key observations

- Young people want governments to understand the severity of their concerns, and collaborate with them on decision making.
- Young people are concerned about the lack of transparency and accountability in climate decision making. Many young people feel they are not meaningfully considered in climate decision making, even though they will experience the most prolonged impacts.
- Young people want to engage in international climate action, but say that the barriers are complexity of UNFCCC and COP processes, a lack of resources, and a lack of clear pathways for engagement.
- Young people want better climate education, that includes First Nations knowledge and practices, as well as stronger civics education on climate justice, including how the climate crisis is impacting low-income countries.
- Young people recognise the need to amplify the voices of marginalised children and young people, who are often sidelined from climate discussions. They advocate for increased funding to support children and young people on the frontlines of the climate crisis, including in the Pacific, to share their lived experiences with decision makers.

Recommendations

- 1 The Australian Government should use the Child Rights Impact Assessment tool, to assess how children's rights and wellbeing may be affected by new climate laws and policies.
- 2 Federal and State/Territory Governments should establish or, where already in existence, maintain, child and youth advisory councils on climate. These councils should be established with accountability measures to track the implementation of children and young people's advice.
- 3 Alongside advisory council mechanisms, the Australian government should explore engaging children and young people through creative methods, such as social media, art, and storytelling, for children and young people to participate on their own terms and in a way that values their lived experiences.
- 4 The Australian Government should increase funding for children and young people to engage with international climate policy. Funding that supports First Nations participation at COP should continue and this should be expanded to also support young Pasifika delegates for COP31.
- 5 The Australian Government should establish inclusive pathways for international climate engagement, such as a youth negotiators program.
- 6 Federal and state governments should provide holistic, and engaging climate education in the national curriculum, to support children and young people to become current and future climate leaders.

Mitigation



Context

Urgent and ambitious action to reduce global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions is the most effective means of preventing the worst impacts of climate change. The Federal Government has made some progress towards reducing Australia's GHG emissions, legislating a new target of 43% reductions from 2005 levels by 2030 and net-zero by 2050. States and Territories have shown increased ambition, with two of Australia's largest economies, Victoria and New South Wales, committing to 75% and 50% reductions in emissions by 2030 respectively. However there are many voices, including young people, calling for the Australian Government to be more proactive in fulfilling these goals and to act with more ambition.

Key Observations

- The young people we spoke to want to see the Federal Government take an ambitious approach to mitigation. Mitigating the impacts of climate change and transitioning to renewable energy is seen as vital and urgent by young people.
- Young people believe both the public and private sectors must commit to a just transition.
- Young people want to see State and Federal Governments incentivise companies to transition to renewable energy and become carbon neutral. It is essential that companies see renewable energy ventures as worthwhile, which is heavily influenced by the federal government adopting a stable approach that demonstrates a long-term commitment to the investment in renewables. These investments need to prioritise providing young people with the necessary skills, training and labour rights to be active participants in the transition to renewables.
- Young people want to see an end to fossil fuel subsidies and an increase in tax on the fossil fuel industry to fund mitigation and adaptation efforts. Some participants suggest that this money should also be directed to lower income countries to help them adapt to the impacts of climate change.

- When asked where participants would invest critical climate funding, an overwhelming proportion of participants prioritised investment in renewable energy and did not want to see investment in nuclear power.
- Young people believe that the Federal Government has a duty of care to protect them from the adverse impacts of climate change.^{vii} They want to see the Australian Government support mechanisms such as the Duty of Care Bill and the use of child impact assessments in climate policy making.
- Young people wish for elected officials, at all levels of Government, to disclose accurate annual greenhouse gas emissions and explain whether credible offsets are being undertaken.
- Participants also wanted to see greater transparency from corporations so that they can make informed decisions about the products and services that they support.

Recommendations

- 1 Cease all fossil fuel subsidies and increase investments in renewables in order to take more ambitious action to keep warming to as close to 1.5 degrees as possible.
- 2 Ensure that the impact of climate change on children and young people is taken into account in decision-making, through legislating the Duty of Care Bill.
- 3 Create stronger federal consumer legislation that ensures corporations cannot 'greenwash' by tightening conditions around misleading and deceptive advertising. Consumers need to be able to make informed choices with transparent labelling around the environmental impact of products and services, especially financial services.



Climate finance

Context

Climate finance is key to unlocking ambitious climate action that will keep a 1.5°C future within reach for children and future generations. However, available finance does not meet the finance required to tackle mitigation, adaptation and loss and damage. Despite an agreement from wealthy countries in 2009 to provide \$100 billion every year in climate finance to low-income countries, the only year that this target was met was in 2022. Australia increased its climate finance commitment to \$3 billion for 2020 to 2025. However, this remains below our fair share of \$4 billion based on the \$100 billion goal. Australia has also not yet made a financial commitment to the global loss and damage fund. Australia is a strong supporter of both adaptation finance and public grants based finance however many young people believe that Australia's climate financing could go further to fulfil global commitments.

Key observations

- Young people say they want wealthy countries like Australia to pay for our fair share of climate finance.
- Young people highlight the importance of loss and damage finance from wealthy countries like Australia to be accountable for their historical emissions that contributed to the climate crisis.
- Participants note that although children and young people account for nearly 40% of the world's population, only a small portion of climate finance goes towards children and girls, on the frontlines of the climate crisis (less than 2.4% from key multilateral climate funds).^{viii}
- Young people are concerned about the lack of enforcement mechanisms for wealthy countries and polluters to be accountable for their climate finance obligations.
- Young people emphasise the importance of climate finance for climate change education, awareness raising, green skills and health.

- Young people believe that supporting Pacific communities in their efforts to adapt to climate change is Australia's moral responsibility. This is because Australia is the second largest climate polluter from its fossil fuel exports and the largest development partner in the Pacific, whereas the Pacific has only contributed to 0.03% of global emissions.^{ix}

Recommendations

- 1 The Australian Government should pay its fair share of climate finance, towards the New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) once agreed at COP29, and advocate for loss and damage to be included in the NCQG.
- 2 The Australian Government should make a significant contribution to the global loss and damage fund.
- 3 The Australian Government should champion a child and gender-responsive climate finance goal that ensures climate finance reaches children and girls on the frontlines of the climate crisis. This includes highlighting the importance of climate finance for child critical sectors, such as education and health.
- 4 The Australian Government should redirect fossil fuels subsidies, including planned subsidies of \$54 billion over the next four years, to climate finance.
- 5 The Australian Government should advocate for stronger accountability and transparency mechanisms in the NCQG to ensure that climate finance obligations from all stakeholders are being met.
- 6 The Australian Government should allocate more funding to the Pacific to ensure their transition to renewables is just and equitable, and they have resilience to the impacts of climate change, as one of the most climate-vulnerable regions on Earth.

Nature and Biodiversity

Context

Ecosystems across the world are being transformed by climate change impacts and human activity. Biodiversity is declining at rates unprecedented in human history.^x Despite this, nature and biodiversity play a crucial role in climate change mitigation, and are essential for achieving many sustainable development goals. Although climate change and biodiversity decline have historically been discussed as siloed issues in decision-making spaces, they are interconnected. Internationally, integrating these issues includes strengthening coordination between the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity and the Paris Agreement of the UN Convention on Climate Change. In Australia, it also includes integrating better the skills and knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples who have cared for this highly biodiverse land for tens of thousands of years. Globally indigenous peoples safeguard around 80% of the world's biodiversity.^{xi}

Key observations

- Young people note the detrimental impact of climate change on the natural environment, for example, increases in the severity and frequency of extreme weather events.
- Young people recognise the need to restore ecosystems, including marine ecosystems, and protect biodiversity, to ensure future generations can experience and benefit from Australia's biodiversity and landscapes.
- They want to see the inclusion of a diversity of voices in conversations about nature protection – including the voices of young people.
- Young people note that First Nations peoples have tools, traditional knowledge and practices that should be more valued within environmental management and decision making spaces.
- They advocate for the use of nature-based solutions, to mitigate climate change and protect biodiversity.

- Young people recognise that many Australians have a deep and personal connection with the land and noted that people are more likely to protect what they value.

Recommendations

- 1 Continue to work to ensure inclusive and meaningful community participation in ecosystems management. Nature based solutions should be co-designed with First Nations peoples and local communities to integrate locally attuned perspectives and First Nations laws, practices, knowledge and values.
- 2 The Australian Government should increase investment and ambition in the protection and conservation of ecosystems and species.
- 3 The Australian Government should increase research into the drivers of ecosystem change to ensure environmental management and nature-based solutions are underpinned by the latest evidence and monitoring.
- 4 The Australian Government should continue to promote climate change and biodiversity education and public participation.



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Adaptation

Context

Australia is particularly vulnerable to climate change impacts, with future climate scenarios projecting more frequent and severe heatwaves and bushfire events, rainfall variation, prolonged drought, and increases in temperature.^{xii} Robust adaptation strategies are consequently crucial to build Australia's resilience to climate change.^{xiii} This includes protecting species, managing resources, upgrading buildings and transport systems and supporting the wellbeing of Australia's most impacted by climate change. Children and young people will be at the frontlines of experiencing these impacts. As Australia develops its new National Adaptation Plan^{xiv}, it is therefore critical that the voices and views of children and young people are considered in this process.

Recommendations

- 1 The Australian Government should prioritise disaster preparedness and risk reduction as critical adaptation measures, and supporting community led and child centred disaster preparedness and recovery in regional and remote communities.
- 2 Ensure that young people have access to quality disaster resilience education that includes and values First Nations knowledge of Country.

Key observations

- Young people highlight the importance of adaptation, particularly locally-led adaptation, to reduce vulnerability to climate change impacts such as weather extremes, sea-level rise, food insecurity and biodiversity loss.
- Young people spoke about the anxiety that they feel in relation to these impacts of climate change.
- Participants note that children and young people are already experiencing climate-related impacts. For example, some raised how they were affected by the 2022-23 Murray River flood, the third highest flood ever recorded in South Australia.
- Young people highlight the importance of disaster preparedness and risk reduction and ensuring that those in regional and remote communities have the knowledge and resources to effectively respond to climate-related disasters.
- In some areas, young people spoke about the importance of adapting houses.



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Gender and Climate

Context

Climate change is not gender neutral, it amplifies already existing gender inequalities with the most marginalised communities experiencing the greatest impacts. Girls' education and safety are particularly at risk in the context of climate-related disasters and resource scarcity, which may disrupt schooling, force them into child, early and forced marriage or child labour, and increase the risks of sexual and gender-based violence. In Australia, women take on more responsibility for household sustainability efforts, and as climate change triggers rising costs of living, homelessness and under-insurance of houses, women are particularly vulnerable to losing shelter and food security.^{xv} Women bear a higher burden in terms of disaster recovery, and there is less acknowledgement of the impact of climate change on care based and feminised sectors.^{xvi} The impacts of climate change and more frequent disasters can also put women and girls more at risk of gender based violence.^{xvii}

Key observations

- Young people recognise the different ways people are impacted by climate change due to their gender, the ways in which climate change exacerbates gender inequality, and the link between climate change, disasters and increases in gender based violence. Participants also note that women with children, particularly younger women, may feel heightened anxiety around their children's future because of the impacts of climate change.
- Young people want to see this unequal impact of climate change acknowledged and addressed – not dismissed.
- Young people also note that women, and particularly young women, are not equally represented in decision making spaces, which means their views are sidelined or not considered in climate action.
- Young people also recognise the role that women play in climate activism, and in leading and driving mitigation and adaptation efforts, especially women in lower income countries. Many young

women are participating in every day climate activism – despite being the affected the most by climate change they are also doing the most.

- Participants recognise that LGBTIQ+ young people may feel particularly disenfranchised and underrepresented in climate spaces, due to the intersection of their age, gender and sexuality.
- Participants call for a centring of young women's voices, particularly women of colour, First Nations women, Pasifika women and LGBTIQ+ young people, on issues of gender and climate.

Recommendations

- 1 The Australian Government should continue to advocate for equal representation based on gender at formal UNFCCC processes. This should also be a consideration in Australia's climate consultative mechanisms domestically, and within DCCEEW.
 - a Consideration should be given to diversity of voices, including from young women of colour, First Nations women, Pasifika women, women with a disability and LGBTIQ+ young people.
- 2 Australia's climate policies, including the National Adaptation Plan and Nationally Determined Contributions, should be age and gender sensitive – considering and responding to the unequal way people experience climate change due to their age and gender.
- 3 The Australian Government should increase investment in girl and women led climate mitigation and adaptation efforts in Australia and the Asia Pacific.



Endnotes

ⁱ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/crccgc26-general-comment-no-26-2023-childrens-rights>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.seedmob.org.au/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.youthverdict.org.au/waratah>

^{iv} <https://www.pisfcc.org/icjao>

^v <https://adutyofcare.davidpocock.com.au/>

^{vi} <https://www.youth.gov.au/engage/resources/engage-our-new-strategy-include-young-people-decisions-we-make>

^{vii} The Australian Climate case asserting that there is a duty of care in tort owed to Indigenous peoples; CRC General Comment 26 asserting the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment for children; the Duty of Care Bill; *Sharma v Minister for Environment*.

^{viii} <https://www.unicef.org/reports/addressing-climate-finance-gap-children>

^{ix} UNSW Australian Human Rights Institute, *Escalation: The destructive force of Australia's fossil fuel exports on our climate*, August 2024.

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^{xi} Cresswell ID, Janke T & Johnston EL (2021). *Australia state of the environment 2021: overview, independent report to the Australian Government Minister for the Environment, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra*. DOI: 10.26194/flrh-7r05

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^{xiii} Biswas et al., (2023). 'Adaptation to climate change: A study on regional climate change adaptation policy and practice framework', *Journal of Environmental Management*.

^{xiv} DCCEEW (2024). *Climate adaptation in Australia - National Adaptation Plan Issues Paper*.

^{xv} <https://wela.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Full-report-Gender-Climate-and-Environmental-Justice-in-Australia-WELA.pdf>

^{xvi} Ibid.

^{xvii} Ibid.



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