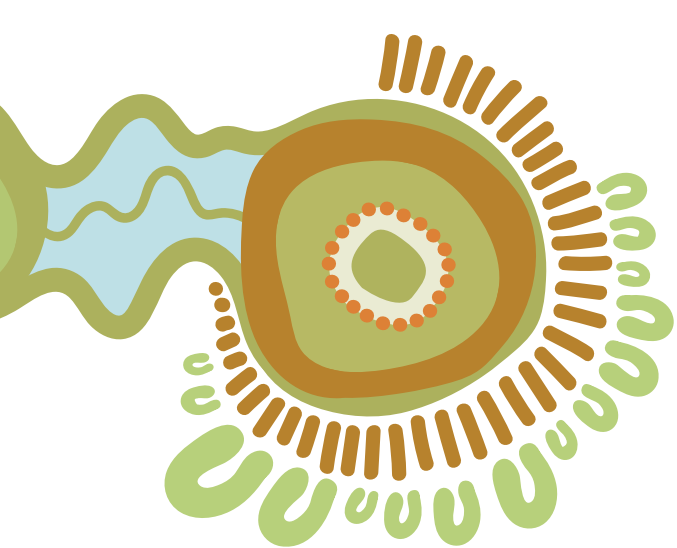




2026 National Child and Youth Statement on Climate Change



Acknowledgements

We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia, and their tens of thousands of years of environmental stewardship. We recognise their steadfast leadership in advocating for climate action, biodiversity protection, and climate justice — fighting for Country and community amidst an environmental crisis they did not cause.

We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples reading this today.

We thank the following core organising group of the 2026 Australian LCOY, who designed, coordinated, and implemented the process for conducting youth-led consultations around Australia: Tash Lutz, Grace Harkins, Amelia Turk, and supported by Daniella Conser, Shreya Maknoor, Stephanie Archer, Caleb Murphy, Jasmeen Chhabra and Trinity Williams-Jones.

This statement was made possible through the dedication of the following young people, who compiled the outputs of the consultations and contributed to the writing of this document: Caleb Murphy, Connor Shaw, Daniella Conser, Esther Klerck, Grace Harkins, Hannah Ishimura Wright, Harry Jang, Luke Gelder, Jack Hegarty, Phebe Fidge, Tegan Clark, Shreya Maknoor, Tash Lutz, Urvee Sarkar, Felicity Okolie, Waliba Azam, Amelia Turk and Zali Fisher.

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The 2026 Australian LCOY logo was designed by Vasil Samardzhiev.

The front-cover art and graphic design are by the talented Bayley Misfud, Merindah-Gunya, a proud Whurrong woman of the Maar nation from Warrnambool in south-west Victoria.

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Front-cover artwork name - *Flowing Together*

‘National Child and Youth Statement on Climate Change’

Created by Aboriginal artist Bayley, Merindah-Gunya, this artwork was created as the cover artwork for the National Child and Youth Statement on Climate Change, representing the voices, connections and collective action of young people across Australia and the Pacific.

Water is a central theme within the artwork, reflecting the significant water-related challenges facing Australia and the Pacific, including rising sea levels, water insecurity and the importance of caring for and managing Country. Water connects communities across borders and carries deep environmental, cultural and social significance.

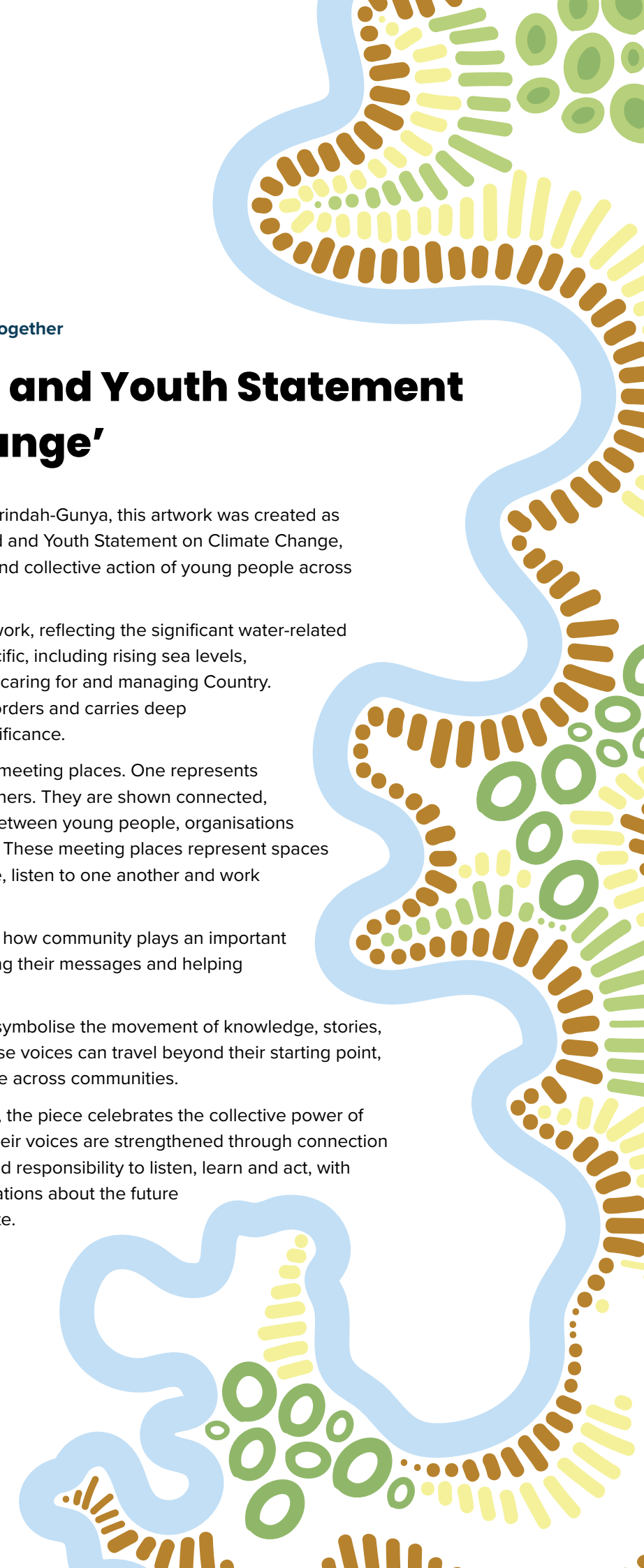
An additional key story element is two meeting places. One represents LCOY and the other represents its partners. They are shown connected, reflecting the important relationships between young people, organisations and networks working alongside them. These meeting places represent spaces where people gather, share knowledge, listen to one another and work towards meaningful change.

Community symbols around, represent how community plays an important role in supporting young people, sharing their messages and helping transform ideas into action.

The pathways throughout the artwork symbolise the movement of knowledge, stories, ideas and youth voices. Like water, these voices can travel beyond their starting point, connecting people and creating change across communities.

As the cover artwork for the Statement, the piece celebrates the collective power of young people while recognising that their voices are strengthened through connection and collaboration. It represents a shared responsibility to listen, learn and act, with young people at the centre of conversations about the future of our communities, Country and climate.

**Many voices.
Many connections.
One shared future.**



Foreword

We experience, and see others experiencing, bushfires, floods, bleached reefs and communities confronting rising seas. Yet the connection between these visible impacts and the technical world of climate policy is often left unexplained or unaddressed.

While eco-anxiety describes part of the experience, it does not capture the full weight young people are carrying. Our overwhelm also comes from uncertainty, misinformation, inaccessible systems and the difficulty of knowing which systems to trust. It comes from hearing that climate change is an existential threat while struggling to identify what governments are doing and whether proposed solutions are sufficient.

Despite this, young people continue to seek opportunities to participate, learn, connect and act. Many young people who joined these consultations are also already responding in their communities: restoring habitats, planting trees, collecting seagrass, cleaning beaches, preparing for extreme weather, educating their peers and advocating for locally relevant solutions.

Young people recognise the work being done by people and communities, while expressing considerably less confidence in the responses of governments and businesses.

The Australian Local Conference of Youth provides a clear opportunity to inform climate discussions, but importantly is a space to bring different youth voices and experiences together, identify shared priorities and connect those priorities with spaces where young people are often scarce.

Young people already care about what happens next and they aren't waiting. But they should not be expected to carry the responsibility for responding to climate change.

As Australia leads the COP31 negotiations, **the National Child and Youth Statement offers a clear account of the future young people are asking institutions to help build.**

It is an invitation and an expectation to include and work alongside young people as real stakeholders to demonstrate how their involvement has influenced what happens next.

- **Grace Harkins**

She/Her, 23

Chief Youth Representation Officer,
UN Youth Australia

Our generation is united by the shared reality that the world is changing. This is the reality that this statement carries – the reality that the world is getting hotter, that brings floods and fires into our communities and that makes our homes increasingly unliveable.

But young people still have hope. Hope that we can protect this country, build a sustainable future in which no community is left behind and that we can preserve the environment for generations to come. We have a duty to this place, and to protecting the sacred lands, seas and skies that First Nations people have cared for, for tens of thousands of years.

This year, as Australia serves as the President of Negotiations at COP31, we ask the public and private sectors to set a strong example by upholding the conventions on the Rights of the Child through hearing our voices and considering our future. Within the National Youth Statement, young Australians have created a pathway for securing a fair, resilient and sustainable future. Work with us, because we are the leaders of tomorrow and today, and now is the time to act.

- **Esther Klerck,**

She/Her, 18

UNICEF Australia Young Ambassador



This Statement contains the hopes, fears, demands and most of all determination from an Australian generation which has grown up surrounded by the climate crisis. We want a just transition with Indigenous leadership and Pacific partnership, a transition that does not take any of our beautiful land, sea or sky for granted. More than wanting, we deserve it.

In the Local Conferences of Youth from the cities, suburbs, bush and everywhere in-between, young people separated by time and distance spoke with different voices, but saw the same vision.

Ten-year olds in Stanwell Park talked about 'hotter and hotter' summers while Melbourne university students analysed international law and mitigation targets. But, they smiled the same when thinking of how beautiful our country is and frowned the same when they thought of the danger it was in.

With deep gratitude for all the Australian voices that confided in us their brilliant ideas and insights, we hope that this Statement does their vision justice.

Young Australians see in our near future a country that tackles climate change with ambition, integrity and thoughtfulness. After reading this Statement, we hope you see it too.

- **Shreya Maknoor,**

She/Her, 20

Australian Youth for International
Climate Engagement (AYFICE)



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Executive Summary

The 2026 National Child and Youth Statement on Climate Change is a youth-led mandate for action, developed through Australia's Local Conference of Youth (LCOY) process. It reflects the experiences, priorities and solutions of children and young people across every state and territory, face to face and online consultations, involving 905 participants and a further 261 online survey responses. By reaching beyond the small number of young people able to attend international climate forums, the process provides a broader evidence base for Australia's domestic climate policy and engagement with the COP31 Presidency, Australian negotiators and the Presidency Youth Climate Champion.

The Australian LCOY was designed and led by young volunteers from UN Youth Australia and the Australian Youth for International Climate Engagement (AYFICE), with support from youth ambassadors and staff at UNICEF Australia. Consultations were delivered in partnership with organisations across the country, including Climate Writers, Global Shapers Canberra, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), Monash International Affairs Society, Brimbank Council, University of Western Australia, Pacific Youth Voice Australia, Oceania Youth Climate Negotiation Network (OYCNN), TAFE South Australia, and other youth and community partners. Together, these organisations helped create opportunities for children and young people from diverse backgrounds and communities to contribute meaningfully to the climate decisions that will shape their future.

Children and young people undertook this consultation because climate change is already shaping the lives and futures they will inherit. They described impacts on their safety, health, education, culture, financial security and connection to nature, alongside growing concern about extreme weather, biodiversity loss, rising living costs and unequal impacts between communities. Their message is clear: climate change is not a distant environmental issue, and the scale and urgency of the challenge requires coordinated, systemic action from governments and institutions.

This Statement demonstrates that young people are not only identifying climate challenges, but also helping to solve them. Their recommendations address the key priorities shaping COP31 negotiations and Australia's climate agenda, from mitigation, adaptation and climate finance to health, education, disaster resilience, First Nations and Pacific leadership, nature protection and a just transition. Drawing on the experiences and insights of children and young people across **Australia, this report outlines practical recommendations and priority actions that can inform negotiations, government decision-making and domestic climate policy** over the coming decade.

Young people should be recognised not simply as stakeholders to be consulted, but as solution-makers and allies in climate action. They bring lived experience, new ideas, long-term perspectives and the ability to mobilise their schools, families and communities. Meaningful youth participation can strengthen public trust, improve the relevance and fairness of policy, and help build the broad social support needed to deliver lasting climate action.

We call on the Australian Government to respond to this Statement through visible, accountable action. This means engaging young people throughout policy design, implementation and evaluation, reporting back on how their recommendations have been considered, and progressing the most urgent and achievable priorities this year. Acting on these recommendations would not only protect children and future generations. It would support healthier, safer, fairer and more resilient communities for all Australians.

LCOY consultations were structured around the key issues shaping COP31 negotiations and Australia's climate agenda. This approach enabled young people's experiences and ideas to be translated into practical recommendations for negotiators and policymakers. While participants identified a broad range of actions across each theme, this report highlights the recommendations and priority actions that governments, civil society, businesses and institutions can take now to deliver meaningful and immediate progress.



Recommendations

1. Embed climate justice and equity in all climate decision-making through ambitious action, environmental rights, and inclusive just transition policies

Priority actions

- Act on and formally respond to the International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion
- Support the Climate Change Amendment (Duty of Care and Intergenerational Climate Equity) Bill 2023 and Wellbeing of Future Generations Bill 2025 campaigns
- Embed intergenerational equity and climate justice across climate policy, decision-making and investment
- Recognise the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment in Australian law
- Strengthen Australia's climate ambition by aligning emissions reduction targets with the best available science
- Allocate climate finance based on magnitude of need, rather than population size
- Ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are central to climate decision-making at all levels
- Expand conceptualisation of, and funding for 'Loss and Damage' to include non-economic climate harms, and establish a National Loss and Damage Fund for Climate

2. Improve disaster preparedness through resilient infrastructure, culturally appropriate, community-led warning systems, and accessible mental health support

Priority actions

- Strengthen hazard preparedness and emergency response systems, so communities are better prepared before, during and after emergencies
- Invest in disaster-resilient infrastructure to reduce community vulnerability to climate-related hazards
- Invest in climate hazard education, communication and information access
- Extend disaster recovery services to include long-term mental health and wellbeing support so that survivors of climate hazards can access ongoing, affordable care

3. Accelerate equitable climate adaptation through resilient communities, coordinated planning and child and youth participation

Priority actions

- Accelerate the transition to a clean, sustainable and resilient economy
- Invest in climate resilient infrastructure, housing and communities to better prepare for future climate impacts
- Strengthen and safeguard the National Adaptation Plan to ensure long-term implementation across governments and election cycles
- Embed child and youth participation in climate adaptation policy
- Improve energy resilience through sustainable energy systems, distributed energy generation and more climate resilient homes

4. Accelerate an equitable transition from fossil fuels to a clean, affordable and resilient low-emissions future

Priority actions

- Ensure children and young people are meaningfully consulted and supported through the energy transition
- Phase out fossil fuels and accelerate renewable energy investment
- Ensure decarbonisation does not have unintended consequences of further ecological harm
- Strengthen emissions reduction policies and carbon market integrity
- Deliver a fair and inclusive energy transition for communities and workers
- Manage emerging energy demands in line with climate objectives
- Improve access to low-emissions transport and energy-efficient homes
- Strengthen international cooperation to accelerate Australia's clean energy transition and support the development and deployment of low-emissions technologies

5. Strengthen investment in accessible mental health care and integrate climate-related impacts on young people and First Nations communities into health policy, and planning

Priority actions

- Expand and improve accessibility of child and youth mental health support
- Integrate climate impacts into health policy and planning
- Invest in culturally appropriate resilient housing and community resilience
- Strengthen food security through First Nations leadership
- Reduce environmental pressures that undermine health and wellbeing

6. Strengthen climate education and meaningful child and youth participation equitably across Australia

Priority actions

- Develop a nationally consistent and action oriented climate education framework across Australian schools
- Federal and state governments invest in long-term funding and institutional support for youth-led climate organisations, school environmental programs and community partnerships
- Federal and state governments work to ensure equitable access to climate education for children and young people in marginalised and underrepresented communities
- The Federal and state governments consider creating targeted climate awareness and engagement campaigns for young people
- Expand opportunities for children and young people to connect with nature through schools, national parks and outdoor learning programs
- Create more spaces for accessible children and youth engagement in surveys and consultation events to shape federal and state climate policy

7. Centre Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership, rights and knowledge in climate action and decision-making

Priority actions

- Require cultural impact assessments alongside economic and environmental assessments in climate adaptation and disaster resilience planning
- Increase long-term adaptation funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- Fully implement and resource the National Anti-Racism Framework

- Ensure First Nations representation in Australia's COP31 negotiating delegation
- Embed UNDRIP principles, including free, prior and informed consent and shared decision-making, across climate policy and governance
- Ensure Australian universities engage with local First Nations communities in the design and delivery of climate change curricula

8. Centre Pacific leadership, sovereignty and priorities in climate action, adaptation and regional decision-making

Priority actions

- Increase investment in Pacific-led climate adaptation and resilience initiatives
- Ensure Australia's climate policies and international engagement reflect Pacific priorities, including climate ambition, coastal protection and water security
- Respect and support Pacific nations' sovereignty in decisions affecting their people, lands and waters
- Strengthen Pacific representation and leadership in Australian climate policy and regional decision-making
- Develop pathways to support Pacific communities affected by climate displacement, including expanded mobility and migration options

9. Strengthen the protection and restoration of nature and oceans through increased investment, stronger environmental safeguards, ecosystem restoration, and sustainable ocean management

Priority actions

- Increase investment in nature protection, restoration and biodiversity conservation
- Strengthen and enforce national environmental protections and standards
- Accelerate ecosystem restoration and nature repair
- Develop and implement a national strategy for ocean health and sustainable marine management
- Protect marine ecosystems by applying a precautionary approach to emerging threats, including deep seabed mining

Taken together, these recommendations set out a clear child and youth mandate for climate action: faster and fairer decarbonisation, resilient and adaptive communities, justice for those most affected by climate change, and genuine partnership with young people and First Nations peoples. As Australia prepares to preside over negotiations at COP31, young people are calling on governments, negotiators and institutions to move beyond consultation and into action, recognising children and young people not only as those most affected by climate change, but also as essential partners in building a safer, fairer and more sustainable future for all.



Introduction

Australia’s co-hosting of the 31st United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP31) presents a significant opportunity for children and young people to help shape the priorities of global climate action. As part of this, Australia also holds the Presidency Youth Climate Champion role — a position designed to give children and young people, including those in Australia, a direct pathway to inform COP31’s priorities. Australia’s LCOY process is what makes that opportunity real, translating child and youth voice into this Statement. This Statement is a structured pathway for participation and collective testimony of children and young people from across the country.

Children and young people across Australia experience climate change in different but interconnected ways, describing climate change not as a distant or isolated environmental issue, but **as something already affecting their safety, health, education, culture, financial security and confidence that they can determine the future they will inherit**. They speak about worsening extreme weather, the loss of nature and biodiversity, rising living costs, inequitable climate impacts between communities and frustration with the pace and ambition of government and corporate action, while individuals and communities are made further responsible for emergencies that demand systemic action.

Children and young people also described uncertainty about which institutions to trust, whether current responses are sufficient and how they can meaningfully contribute to decisions and action. They describe an ideal in which decision-makers act with urgency and remain accountable for the commitments they make.

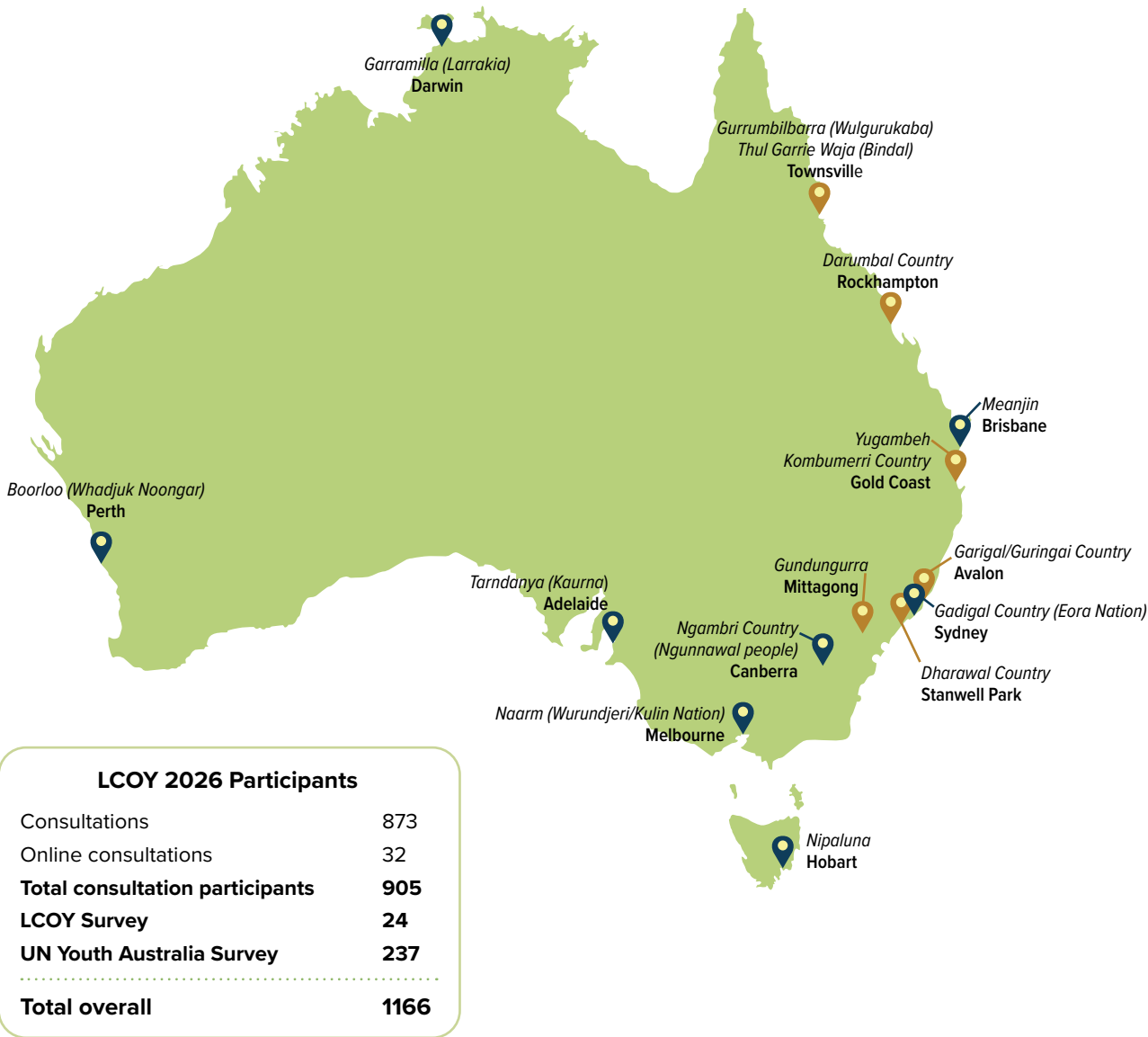
The 2026 Australian Local Conference of Youth (LCOY) is a youth-led process that enables children and young people to contribute to national and international climate discussions. Held in 112 countries, LCOYs are endorsed under the umbrella of YOUNGO, the official

child and youth constituency of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

The Australian LCOY is an opportunity to ensure that child and youth participation extends beyond the presence of a select number of young people at COP31 and associated climate events, providing a pathway for more voices to be heard in international climate conversations and negotiations. **The 2026 National Child and Youth Statement on Climate Change (‘the Statement’) is developed from contributions by children and young people and drafted through a youth-led process.** It records the priorities and experiences and translates these into recommendations for domestic and international climate policy.

The Statement is more than a summary of consultations and survey inputs, it is a youth-led mandate for advocacy and action. The Statement provides an evidence base for engagement with the COP31 Presidency, Australian negotiators, government departments, local and state governments and particularly the Presidency Youth Climate Champion, identifying shared concerns, different experiences and practical expectations for climate action. Australia’s LCOY process provides a pathway for young people who may not otherwise have access to international climate forums to influence the priorities carried into COP31.

In 2026, the Australian LCOY reached young people across every state and territory through 1,166 interactions, combining consultations and online surveys. This included 905 children and young people engaged through 30 consultations, alongside two online survey pathways: a survey delivered by LCOY partner organisations (24 responses) and a climate survey supported by the UN Youth Australia Australian Youth Representative to the United Nations Program (237 responses).



The Australian LCOY was designed and led by volunteers from UN Youth Australia and Australian Youth for International Climate Engagement (AYFICE), with support from youth ambassadors and staff at UNICEF Australia.

Several partner organisations also hosted LCOYs, including Climate Writers, Global Shapers Canberra, the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), Monash International Affairs Society, Brimbank Council, University of Western Australia, Pacific Youth Voice Australia, Oceania Youth Climate Negotiation Network (OYCNN), TAFE South Australia, and other youth and community partners.

We thank every child and young person who shared their experiences and ideas, supported

LCOY consultations across Australia, helped make sense of what was heard, and shaped this Statement through their contributions and writing.

The value of the LCOY process also extends beyond this Statement. **Consultations created spaces for young people to speak openly about climate change, listen to different experiences, build their understanding and feel connected to others who share their concerns.** Young people should not need to hold a representative, advisory or advocacy role, or consider themselves climate experts, to participate in decisions that affect them. However, meaningful participation must also extend beyond being heard. **Decision-makers must respond to the priorities raised by taking strong, collaborative and immediate action.**

What Young People Told Us: Concern, confidence and trust

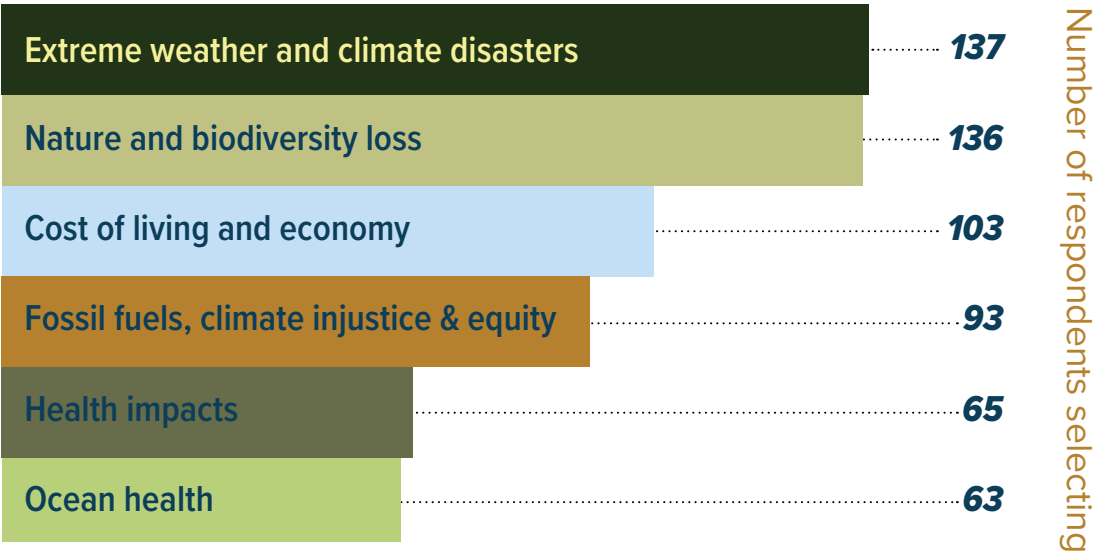
The survey datasets analysed contained 237 responses to the UN Youth Australia Australian Youth Representative to the United Nations Program Survey and 24 responses to the LCOY Core Partner survey.

Together with the 30 consultations, the surveys ask: *What aspects of climate change concern young people most? How concerned are they about climate change affecting themselves and their communities? How do they assess the response, and who do they trust to act?*

From environmental impacts to everyday concerns

Reflected in the structure of the Statement is the understanding that young people’s climate concerns require looking across several areas of life, rather than treating climate change as an isolated environmental concern. Climate change connects and intersects environmental concerns with many aspects of how young people think about the future of our safety, health, energy, biodiversity and economic security.

Note: Multiple choice question: Based on 242 answered records across both surveys. Respondents could select up to three concerns.

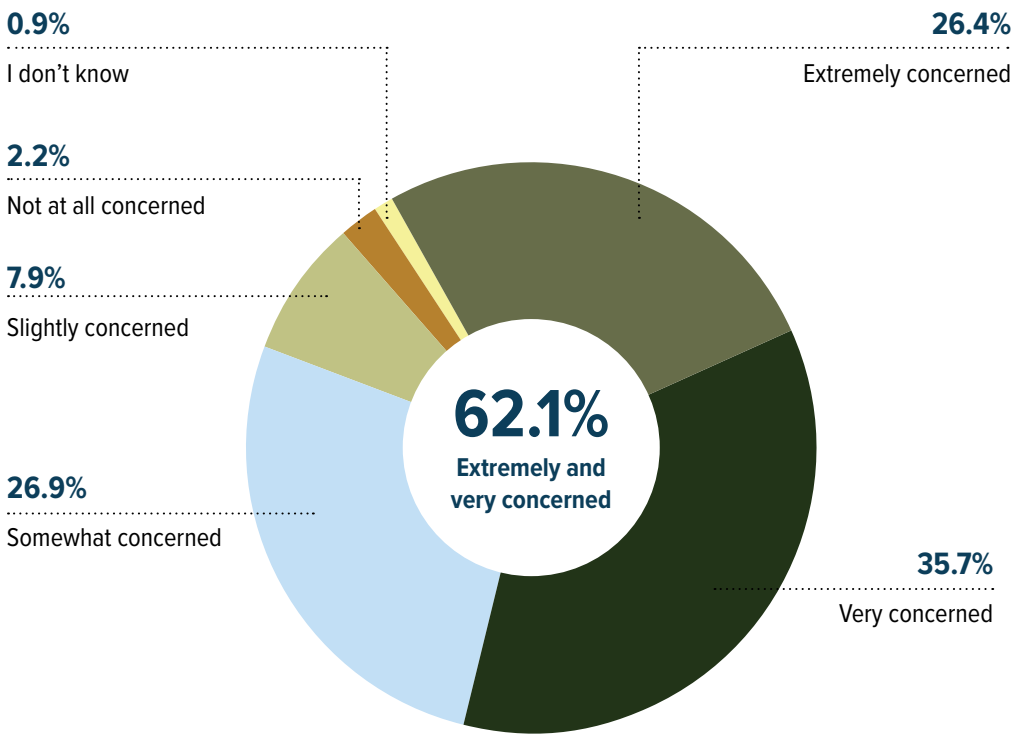


The six issues shown above were the most frequently selected in the surveys. Other significant concerns included renewable energy and technology, loss and damage, adaptation and resilience, and Indigenous rights and knowledge.

The survey findings should be read alongside the consultation outcomes throughout the Statement, which provides further context and captures priorities that may not be fully reflected through survey rankings alone.

Concern

Concern was common, but not uniform. Alongside identifying the climate issues that concerned them most, respondents to the UN Youth Australia Survey were asked: *“How concerned are you about Climate Change affecting you and your community?”* Nearly two-thirds were very or extremely concerned about climate change affecting themselves and their communities.

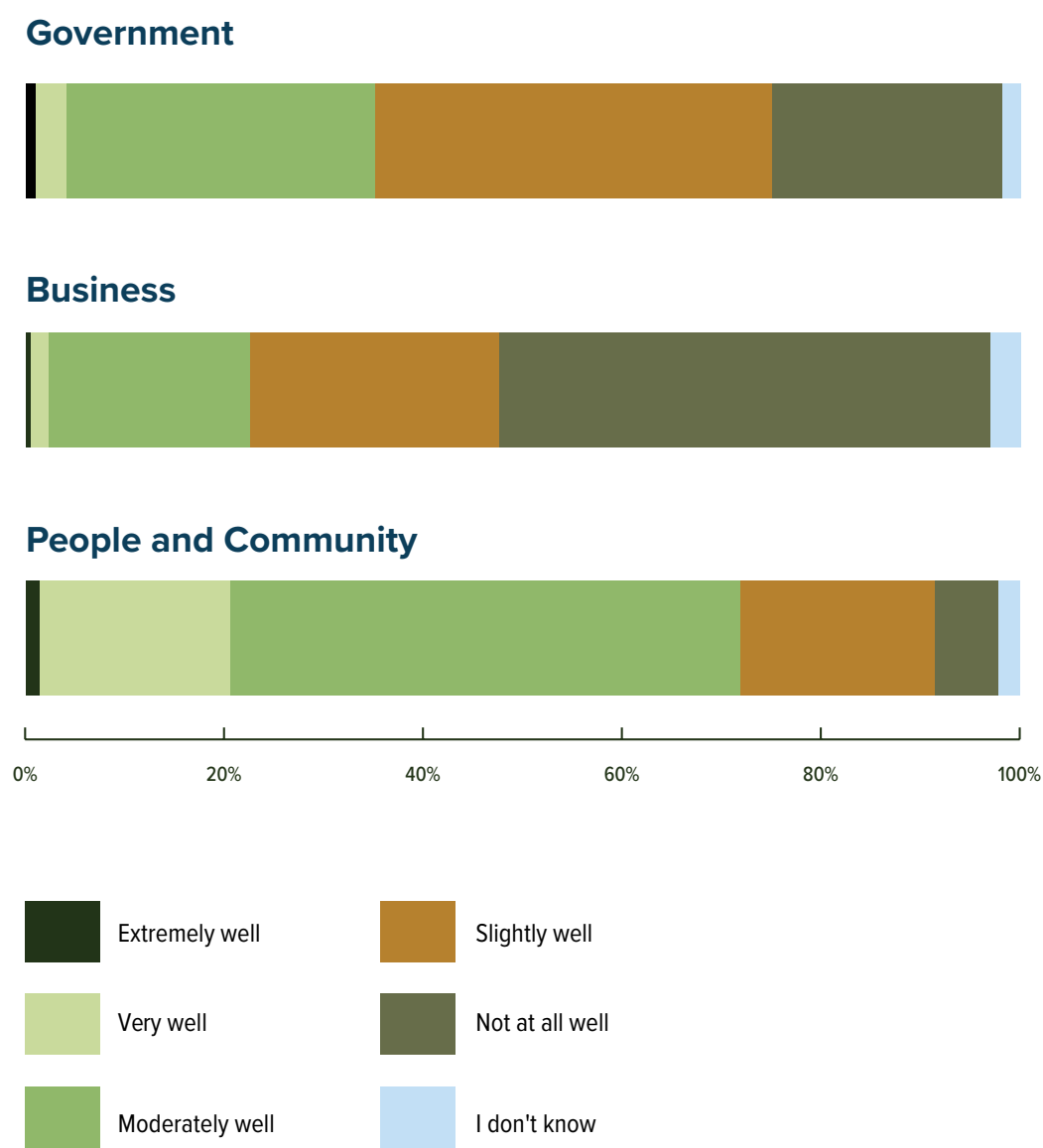


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Moving from concern to assessments of action, who is responding across community, business and Government?

The most common answer differed for each group. For the government, it was “slightly well”, selected by 39.9% of those who answered. For businesses, it was “not at all well”, at 49.3%. For people and communities, it was “moderately well”, at 51.3%.

People and communities received more positive ratings than governments and businesses for responding to climate change.



Comparing the answers given by the same person shows a clear pattern. Most young people selected a higher rating for people and communities than the Australian governments (61.5%), and an even larger share rated them above businesses and corporations (73.6%).

The LCOY Core Partner Survey approached the action question from another angle by asking which Australian institutions did respondents trust most to genuinely act on climate? Youth-led and community organisations were jointly the most selected.

Youth-led and community organisations, independent climate bodies and Indigenous-led groups and First Nations organisations are the most trusted institutions to act on climate change.



Climate Justice

Context

Climate justice must be underpinned by the recognition that the climate crisis is not solely an environmental problem - rather, it is a crisis which also has social, cultural, ethical and intergenerational implications. It is widely acknowledged that the burden of climate harm is most heavily borne by the people, communities and countries which have contributed the least to climate change.¹ In this way, climate change is a threat multiplier - its consequences exacerbate and compound existing inequality and disadvantage, disproportionately impacting the most vulnerable members of the population, including children and young people, First Nations peoples, those living in regional and rural areas, women (who may face, for example, increased gender-based violence), people living with disability and future generations.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) highlights three key facets of climate justice: (1) structural inequalities; (2) socioeconomic inequalities; and (3) intergenerational inequity. A climate-just future is one in which climate action is responsive to these facets, and seeks not only to address the environmental consequences of climate change but also the social, cultural, economic and intergenerational impacts.

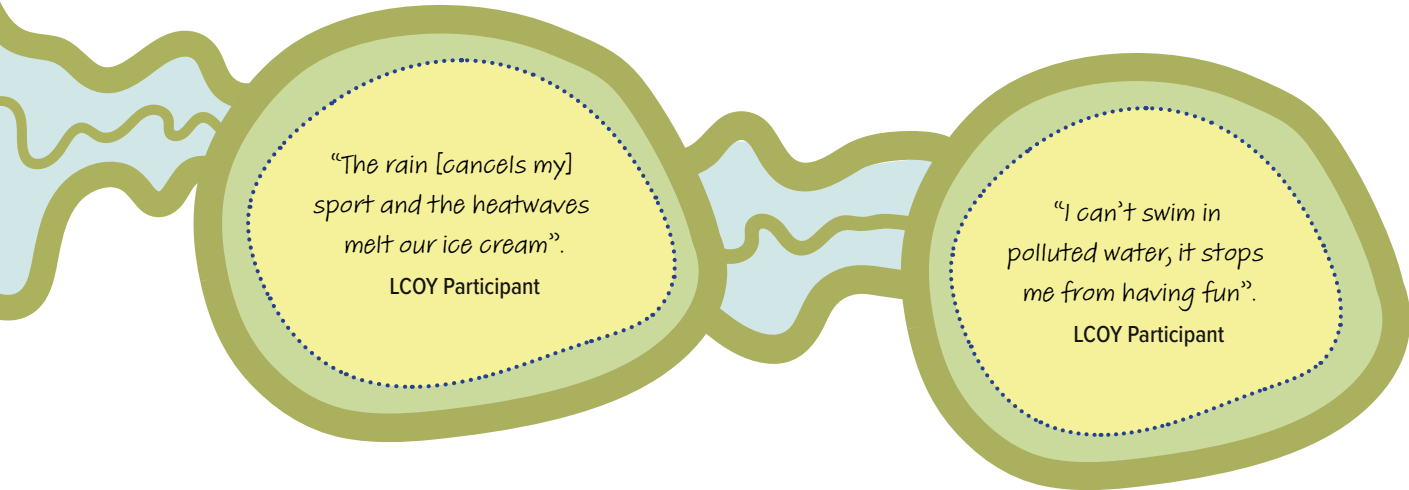
Central to the idea of climate justice is the need for an intersectional, human-rights-based approach to tackling climate change.²

As was evident in Australia’s 2025 National Climate Risk Assessment, the increasing severity of climate change poses “extreme and escalating risks...to our lives, our health, our economy, our housing, our food systems and more”.³ These impacts all threaten people’s human rights and dignity, including the right to life, health and water. In the Australian context specifically, climate justice necessitates that the self-determination, sovereignty and human rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are recognised, and that First Nations knowledge, and leadership are centred in Australia’s response to climate change.

When young Australians across the country were asked what kind of society and environment they wanted to live in by 2035 in the LCOY Core Partner and UN Youth Australia surveys, they spoke about no one being left behind, living in harmony and reciprocity with nature, and sharing resources across generations. They described their hope that people will be able to enjoy a healthy environment without fearing for their safety or their future. They shared that they want all people and communities to be supported, for climate action to be fair and inclusive, and for young people to have power to genuinely shape the decisions affecting their future. These are visions for a climate-just future – one where our policies and systems prioritise sustainability, equity and a high quality of life for all.

Key insights

- Climate justice means children being able to have childhoods. According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, youth have the right to rest, leisure, play and recreation (Article 31), and yet climate change is increasingly interfering with young people’s ability to experience and enjoy the natural environment (the environment was described as “too hot”, “too cold”, “very wet”, “big storms”, “too smoky”, “trees falling down” etc.). LCOY participants shared how their sports, time with friends and leisure activities are frequently cancelled due to the impacts of climate change.
- Climate change must be understood, and responded to, as an intersectional wicked problem. It is not just an environmental issue for children and young people, it affects their education, mental health, future careers and sense of security (e.g., physical, financial and job security). The compounding pressures of climate change are of particular concern for children and young people in regional and rural Australia, with participants emphasising how natural disasters and other climate events place undue strain on community infrastructure, food security and the cost of living.
- Children and young people are worried that they, and future generations, will inherit the burden of climate change and climate harm. They want state and federal governments to develop more effective, inclusive and sustainable climate solutions that address systemic inequality and “leave no one behind.”
- Addressing the entrenched inequity faced by First Nations peoples must be a priority if Australia is going to uphold the moral and ethical principle of climate justice. Climate policy should not perpetuate ‘green colonialism’ by using First Nations land and knowledge without consent.
- Children and young people are actively re-thinking their futures in the context of climate change, including whether to have kids, where to live.



1. All-Earth Citizens Foundation. n.d. *Climate Justice Global Alliance*. United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Partnership Platform. Available at: <https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships/climate-justice-global-alliance>.

2. de Kretser, H. 2025. *For the Common Good: Climate Justice Begins with Human Rights*. Australian Human Rights Commission. Available at: <https://humanrights.gov.au/about-us/media-centre/opinion-pieces/president-hugh-de-kretser/for-the-common-good-climate-justice-begins-with-human-rights>.

3. Ibid.

Policy recommendation:

1. Embed climate justice and equity in all climate decision-making through ambitious action, environmental rights, First Nations leadership, and inclusive just transition policies

Priority actions:

1. **Act on and formally respond to the International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion'**
2. **Embed intergenerational equity and climate justice across climate policy, decision-making and investment.** Children, young people and future generations will be the most impacted by climate change, and yet have the least political power to shape the future they will inherit. Australian children and youth support the Climate Change Amendment (Duty of Care and Intergenerational Climate Equity) Bill 2023 and the Wellbeing of Future Generations Bill 2025.
3. **Recognise the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment (RTHE) by creating a federal Human Rights Act that can then be implemented by all state and territory governments.** The RTHE was recognised as a human right in 2022 by the UN General Assembly. In 2025, the Australian Capital Territory amended the Human Rights Act 2004 to enshrine the RTHE in legislation. Young Australians want climate change to be addressed as the human rights threat that it is, both nationally and by the states and territories.
4. **Strengthen Australia's climate ambition by aligning emissions reduction targets with the best available science.** Under the Paris Agreement, Australia has an obligation to set Nationally Determined Contributions which align with the best available science. Australia's current 2035 target of a 62-70% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions compared to 2005 levels is inconsistent with a 1.5°C future.⁴ Four independent analyses indicate that a 2035 target of 75-77% is possible for Australia: Climate Analytics⁵ (>77% reduction); Climate Council⁶ (75% reduction); CSIRO⁷ (75% reduction); and Climateworks⁸ (> 75% reduction). There is widespread support for a more ambitious NDC, with two-thirds of the Australian public, including young people, in favour of a target of 75% or above.⁹
5. **Allocate climate finance based on magnitude of need, rather than population size.** Increase funding for regional, rural and remote communities to prepare for, and adapt to, climate change and build climate resilience. The allocation of funding should be informed by a recognition that these regions are disproportionately vulnerable to climate harm and yet are often under-funded and under-resourced due to geographic isolation and small population sizes.

4. Climate Action Tracker. 2025. Australia: 2035 NDC. Available at: <https://climateactiontracker.org/countries/australia/2035-ndc/>.

5. Climate Analytics. 2025. A Blueprint for Climate Leadership: 1.5°C-Aligned Targets for Australia. Available at: [\[https://climateanalytics.org/publications/a-blueprint-for-climate-leadership-1-5-aligned-targets-for-australia\]](https://climateanalytics.org/publications/a-blueprint-for-climate-leadership-1-5-aligned-targets-for-australia)

6. Climate Council. 2024. Seize the Decade. Available at: [\[https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/resources/seize-the-decade/\]](https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/resources/seize-the-decade/)

7. CSIRO. 2024. Modelling sectoral pathways to net zero emissions. Available at: [\[https://www.csiro.au/en/research/environmental-impacts/decarbonisation/sectoral-pathways-modelling\]](https://www.csiro.au/en/research/environmental-impacts/decarbonisation/sectoral-pathways-modelling)

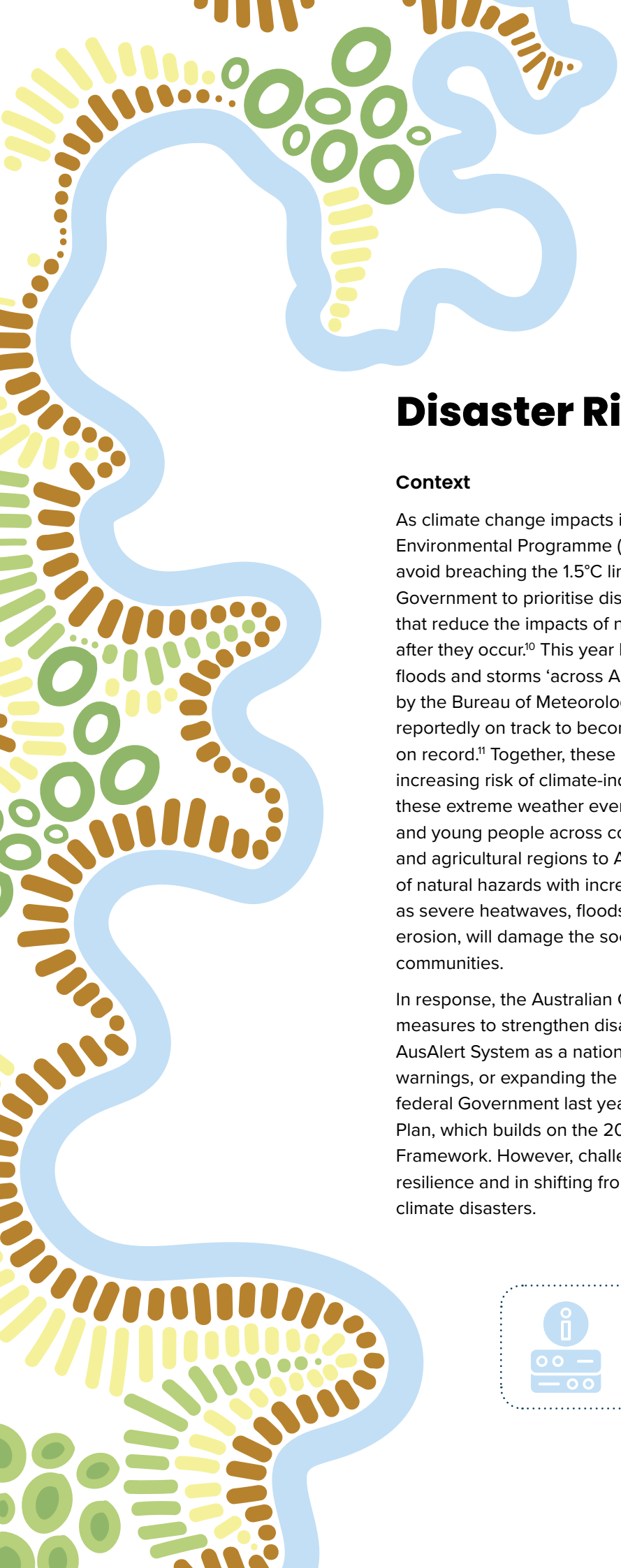
8. Climateworks Centre. 2023. Decarbonisation Scenarios 2023: Australia Can Still Meet the Paris Agreement. Available at: [\[https://www.climateworkscentre.org/resource/climateworks-centre-decarbonisation-scenarios-2023-australia-can-still-meet-the-paris-agreement/resources\]](https://www.climateworkscentre.org/resource/climateworks-centre-decarbonisation-scenarios-2023-australia-can-still-meet-the-paris-agreement/resources)

9. Climate Council. 2025. Everything You Need to Know About Australia's 2035 Climate Target. Available at: [\[https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/resources/australias-2035-climate-target-is-one-of-the-most-critical-decisions-were-making/\]](https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/resources/australias-2035-climate-target-is-one-of-the-most-critical-decisions-were-making/)

"Young people must live with the decisions you make. We are disproportionately impacted by climate change and our voices deserve to be heard over the lobbyists and fossil fuel companies seeking only profit."
LCOY Participant

6. **Ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are central to climate decision-making at all levels.** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people from regional, rural and remote communities, children and young people must be meaningfully represented and engaged in the design, implementation and evaluation of climate policies. This could include embedding fixed-term, paid advisory positions within relevant government departments for underrepresented voices, as well as providing accessible, remunerated opportunities for disproportionately impacted populations to be directly involved and consulted.
7. **Expand conceptualisation of, and funding for, 'Loss and Damage' to include non-economic climate harms, and establish a National Loss and Damage Fund for Climate.** Current categories of loss and damage do not adequately account for non-economic climate harm, including loss of culture, language and connection to Country; loss of irreplaceable biodiversity and ecosystems; and loss of belonging and community associated with forced displacement, disaster and permanent ecological change. Establish a dedicated National Loss and Damage Fund which recognises that climate change harms not only physical infrastructure and safety, but also the emotional, social and cultural wellbeing of individuals and communities.





Disaster Risk Reduction

Context

As climate change impacts intensify and the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) reports that the world can not avoid breaching the 1.5°C limit, it is important for the Australian Government to prioritise disaster risk reduction – that is, actions that reduce the impacts of natural hazards, before, during and after they occur.¹⁰ This year has already seen bushfires as well as floods and storms ‘across Australia, alongside an official declaration by the Bureau of Meteorology (BoM) of El Niño in June, which is reportedly on track to become one of the strongest such events on record.¹¹ Together, these events signal that Australia faces an increasing risk of climate-induced natural hazards. Going forward, these extreme weather events are likely to severely impact children and young people across communities, ranging from First Nations and agricultural regions to Australia’s capital cities. The occurrence of natural hazards with increasing severity and frequency, such as severe heatwaves, floods, wildfires, algal blooms or coastal erosion, will damage the social, economic and cultural fabric of these communities.

In response, the Australian Government has worked to build new measures to strengthen disaster resilience, such as implementing the AusAlert System as a national cell broadcast for mobile emergency warnings, or expanding the national aerial firefighting capacity. The federal Government last year also released the National Adaptation Plan, which builds on the 2019 National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework. However, challenges remain in funding disaster resilience and in shifting from a reactive to a proactive approach to climate disasters.



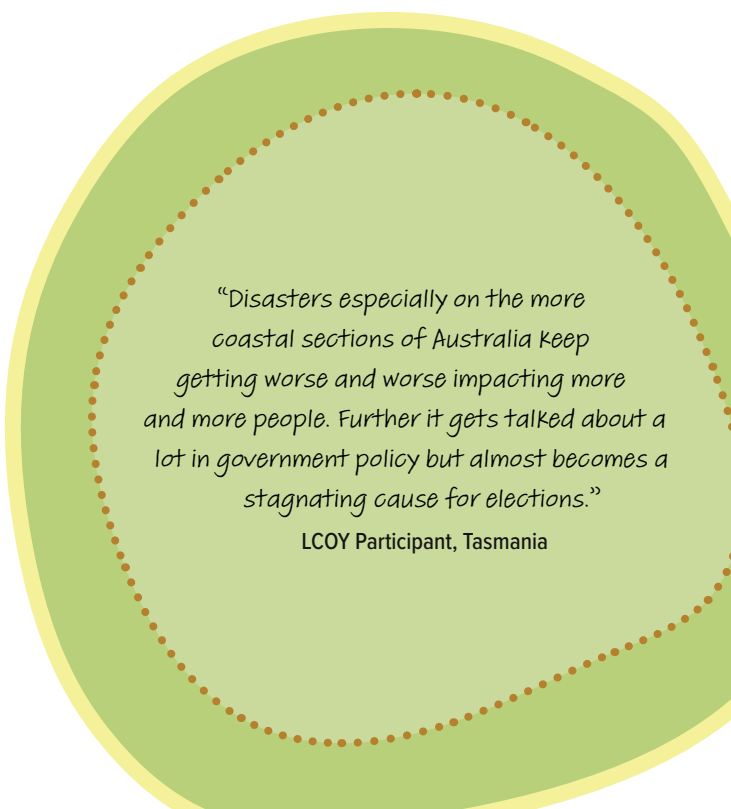
Extreme weather and climate disasters were the most frequently selected concern, identified by 56.6% of respondents to the LCOY surveys.

Key insights

- Climate disasters are becoming more frequent and destructive, causing immediate harm and prolonged disruption. Floods, bushfires, cyclones and storms over the past twelve months have destroyed homes, damaged schools, made roads and transit routes inaccessible, and caused the immediate loss of electricity, clean drinking water, and essential utility services. These impacts can be prolonged in severe cases, with boil water alerts in some regions remaining constant over multiple months after severe flooding events. Climate hazards also cause casualties, injuries, trauma and displacement.
- First Nations, remote and frontline communities experience disproportionate climate hazard impacts. For First Nations people, this includes the destruction of sacred sites, disruption of land management and cultural practices, and displacement from Country, compounded, in many remote frontline communities, by geographic isolation, limited infrastructure and inadequate emergency services that restrict relief and recovery. Emergency response protocols should therefore prioritise funding and protecting First Nations cultural and economic activities as part of recovery.
- Disaster preparedness and response are undermined by insufficient resources, fragmented government responsibilities and limited public awareness. Emergency management is often underfunded, under-resourced and constrained by a lack of consistent action across election cycles and jurisdictions. Funding for rebuilding costs suffers due to this inconsistency, straining national, state and local budgets, leaving communities vulnerable to insufficient disaster recovery funding. Responses also often struggle in dense urban layouts, remote areas, and places where there is a lack of public understanding regarding emergency risks.
- Australia’s approach remains too reactive, increasing the social and financial costs of climate hazards. Australia is often forced to repeatedly direct resources towards emergency relief, cleanup and rebuilding. This diverts funding from long-term risk reduction and resilient infrastructure that is able to withstand climate impacts. Climate hazards also strain healthcare systems and budgets at the local, state and national levels, while in vulnerable communities, rising insurance costs and inadequate coverage can leave households without support.

10. Schipper, L. (2009). Meeting at the crossroads? Exploring the linkages between climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction. *Climate and Development*, 1(1), 16–30.

11. ABC News. 2026. *El Niño Declared by BOM and It Could Become the Strongest on Record*. Available at: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2026-06-16/nsw-bureau-of-meteorology-declares-el-nino-weather/106776598>.



“Disasters especially on the more coastal sections of Australia keep getting worse and worse impacting more and more people. Further it gets talked about a lot in government policy but almost becomes a stagnating cause for elections.”

LCOY Participant, Tasmania

Policy recommendation



2. Improve disaster preparedness through resilient infrastructure, culturally appropriate, community-led warning systems, and accessible mental health support

Priority actions:

1. Strengthen hazard preparedness and emergency response systems, so communities are better prepared before, during and after emergencies, including by:

- a. Introducing emergency planning offices in vulnerable areas to develop local response and evacuation plans. These offices will:
 - i. Provide residents with climate emergency kits to improve evacuation times;
 - ii. Consult with First Nations people, scientists and researchers to develop emergency response plans;
 - iii. Allocate economic aid to those impacted by climate hazards; and
 - iv. Use learnings from, and provide funding for, existing initiatives that work in communities to provide support after natural hazards, such as the Fire to Flourish program implemented by Monash University.
- b. Invest in early warning systems.

2. Invest in disaster-resilient infrastructure to reduce community vulnerability to climate-related hazards, by:

- a. Improving infrastructure standards so that new buildings are specifically designed to withstand natural hazards; and
- b. Prioritising funding for retrofitting existing infrastructure to improve disaster resilience.

3. Invest in climate hazard education, communication and information access, including by:

- a. Creating culturally safe, accessible information about what to do during natural hazards;
 - i. Running multi-media and multi-language campaigns on what to do during natural hazards; and
 - ii. Improving communication between local services and community members on local safety plans.
- b. Educating people on climate insurance to ensure that people have adequate protection.
- c. Making evacuation plans publicly available online:
 - i. Plans should be made available in multiple languages; and
 - ii. Plans should be compatible with assistive technology such as screen readers.

4. Extend disaster recovery services to include long-term mental health and wellbeing support so that survivors of climate hazards can access ongoing, affordable care.



"My community has changed a lot... There are more severe and catastrophic fire days and the fire season is longer. But the community still comes together and learns about what they can do"

LCOY Participant, South Australia



Adaptation and Resilience

Context

Climate adaptation and resilience are becoming increasingly urgent as Australia experiences the intensifying impacts of climate change. Adaptation refers to actions that reduce or compensate for the actual or expected impacts of climate hazards by changing communities, infrastructure and systems in response to changes in climate.¹² Resilience describes the capacity of social, economic and ecological systems to withstand and recover from these impacts.¹³ Unlike mitigation, adaptation responds to current and future climate impacts rather than seeking to limit avoidable consequences.

These impacts are also not experienced equally. Remote, regional, rural and First Nations communities face heightened risks from extreme heat, water insecurity, natural disasters and limited access to social services.

Housing, particularly in remote Northern Territory, is a significant concern. Research by Tangentyere Council and the CSIRO found that indoor temperatures in social housing in Alice Springs often reflected or exceeded outdoor temperatures.¹⁴ This risk is often compounded by the use of prepayment energy meters in social housing across Australia, which cause

frequent energy disconnections. Across Australia, 65,000 First Nations people are affected by this system, with 73% of surveyed residents identifying that it prevented them from keeping their homes safe during extreme temperature events.¹⁵

The Australian Government is responding to some of these challenges through initiatives including the *2025 National Adaptation Plan*,¹⁶ the *National Climate Risk Assessment*¹⁷ and the *Social Housing Energy Performance Initiative*.¹⁸ The National Adaptation Plan outlines the Government's strategy for addressing climate impacts through a cycle of assessment, planning, adaptation, response, and monitoring of further change. However, responsibility for adaptation is divided across the local, state, territory and federal governments, so the existence of a national framework does not guarantee consistent implementation or outcomes across all regions. The Social Housing Energy Performance scheme demonstrates this challenge, as Commonwealth investment varies between jurisdictions, leaving communities disproportionately exposed to climate impacts without adequate adaptation measures.

Key insights

- **Young people are increasingly impacted by poor housing and community infrastructure; which is insufficient in the face of severe heatwaves.** In Central Australia, children and young people described families being forced to sleep outside because indoor temperatures often match or exceed outside conditions. This is exacerbated by frequent power outages, grid instability and reduced access to clean water, fresh food and essential resources. This is further compounded by high energy costs, prepayment meter systems for electricity, and floods which have made boil water alerts far more frequent. Additionally, housing providers lack the resources to enable the adaptation of social housing stock to increased climate challenges.
- **Poor resilience in communities and more extreme weather are leading to increased displacement and isolation.** In many remote areas, low resilience leads to displacement, with individuals being forced to move to larger population centres. In some regions, this has been associated with conflicts and violence due to family rivalries and overcrowding. Broadly, extreme weather events and high temperatures lower the accessibility of outdoor areas, increasing community isolation and worsening wellbeing outcomes.
- **Children and young people fear the future impacts of extreme heat, water scarcity and changing climate patterns on job stability, agriculture and socio-economic stability.** Already, extreme heat and water scarcity are disrupting farming and job stability, reducing crop output, driving up the cost of living and creating widespread financial hardship within farming communities. Additionally, changing climate patterns (ENSO, IOD) disrupt power grids, agricultural yields, damage or disrupt critical transport routes and worsen national food insecurity.
- **The politicisation of climate responses makes adaptation difficult, as decision-making lacks the forward-looking planning, diverse representation and funding needed.** Children and young people have found that consultation and planning are often tokenistic and directly exclude children and young people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the scientific community. Additionally, widespread climate anxiety, youth disengagement and the weaponisation of climate change prevent unified action.

"[Climate change] makes the house super hot in the summer and it affects our sleep and school... it makes me tired and harder to focus and learn."
LCOY Participant, New South Wales

12. *Contribution to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*. Cambridge University Press. Available at: <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/>.

13. *Ibid.*

14. Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation, Chelberg, G., Wright-Pedersen, S., Law, H., Klerck, M., Davis, V., Foster, D., Smallbon, V., Lu, W. and Mahoney, R. 2024. *Tangentyere Council Residential Thermal Comfort Project*. [online] csiro.au. Available at: <https://research.csiro.au/ihp/wp-content/uploads/sites/534/2024/12/Tang-Thermal-Comfort-Phase1-short-report-1.pdf> [Accessed 23 Aug. 2026].

15. Original Power. 2025. *The Right to Power*. [online] originalpower.org.au. Available at: https://assets.nationbuilder.com/originalpower/pages/1861/attachments/original/1762227077/The_Right_to_Power_-_Full_report_-_final.pdf [Accessed 23 Aug. 2026].

16. Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW). 2022. *Climate Adaptation in Australia*. [online] dcceew.gov.au. Available at: <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/climate-change/policy/adaptation> [Accessed 23 Aug. 2026].

17. The Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (2025). *National Climate Risk Assessment*. [online] CSIRO.au. Available at: <https://www.csiro.au/en/research/environmental-impacts/climate-change/National-Climate-Risk-Assessment> [Accessed 23 Aug. 2026].

18. Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water. 2024. *Social housing energy performance - DCCEEW*. [online] Dcceew.gov.au. Available at: <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/energy/programs/social-housing> [Accessed 23 Aug. 2026].

Policy recommendation:



3. Accelerate equitable climate adaptation through resilient communities, coordinated planning and child and youth participation

Priority actions:

1. Invest in climate-resilient infrastructure, housing and communities to better prepare for future climate impacts, including by:

- a. Designing infrastructure for predicted trends over the next 50 years with a minimum energy efficiency standard determined by researchers in the climate, health and housing space.
 - i. Retrofitting existing public housing and government-owned infrastructure to meet energy requirements; and
 - ii. Promoting passive heating and cooling mechanisms, to ensure housing remains liveable in extreme conditions without high energy costs.
- b. Ensuring every Australian resident has access to cheap, sustainable power sources.
 - i. Reforming the use of prepayment meters in public housing so that customers have the same guaranteed service levels, consumer protections and hardship provisions as post-pay customers; and
 - ii. Subsidising power in areas facing severe thermal stress, particularly in remote regions.

2. Strengthen and safeguard the National Adaptation Plan to ensure long-term implementation across governments and election cycles by:

- a. Providing all councils with needs-based funding and the authority to develop grassroots-level climate adaptation plans. This recognises that climate impacts differ across regions and require solutions to be developed at the local level. Some regions have existing climate adaptation plans; however, other regional councils are responsible for vast regions and do not have adequate funding to respond to the needs across their regions.
 - i. Ensuring that councils directly consult with communities to identify risks and priorities in the implementation of adaptation strategies; and
 - ii. Increasing oversight to ensure that all regions use funding responsibly and effectively.
- b. Embed child and youth participation in climate adaptation policy, including by:
 - i. Encouraging safe, non-extractive consultation at the local, state and national levels on climate adaptation;
 - ii. Increasing funding for youth-led organisations in the climate space;
 - iii. Recognising children and young people as key stakeholders in climate adaptation and resilience; and
 - iv. Embedding a more comprehensive youth voice mechanism within the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water for young people in regional and remote areas.



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3. Improve energy resilience through sustainable energy systems, distributed energy generation and more climate-resilient homes by:

- a. Treating household embedded energy generation as health hardware within public housing.
 - i. Ensuring that all new public housing is constructed with rooftop solar;
 - ii. Providing state and local governments with funding to adapt existing public housing to include solar energy generation; and
 - iii. Enforcing a high national thermal performance rating within social housing.
- b. Supporting privately owned homes and rentals to embed renewable energy generation.
 - i. Funding national programs to help households access solar power, solar heating and passive thermal regulation technologies; and
 - ii. Enforcing a national thermal performance rating for all new buildings, including public services and private dwellings.

"Infrastructure and housing are not resilient due to energy prepayment meters... Public housing is extremely hot over summer and families are forced to sleep outside to escape the heat."

LCOY Participant, Central Australia

Mitigation and a Just Transition

Context

Australia's 2035 Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) – a 62 to 70% reduction in emissions below 2005 levels – improves on its previous 2030 NDC, but still falls short of the emissions reductions required to meet the Paris Agreement's 1.5 °C target.¹⁹ Reaching even this interim milestone on the path to net-zero will require faster, coordinated decarbonisation action across every sector of the economy.

Australia's energy transition is advancing, though not without setbacks. Renewables reached 43% of national electricity generation in 2025, up from 39% the previous year, and for the first time generated more electricity than fossil fuels in the final quarter of the year.²⁰ Yet investment in new large-scale renewables fell 46% over the same period (a decade low), raising questions about whether momentum will be sustained.²¹ These decarbonisation priorities are playing out against an increasingly uncertain geopolitical and economic backdrop.

The decarbonisation of industrial emissions is central to Australia's climate goals. The Safeguard Mechanism, Australia's primary policy lever for reducing industrial emissions, covers around one-third of our greenhouse gas emissions, and is now under review in 2026-27, a decade after it was introduced. To date, the policy has resulted in modest emissions reductions, making this review an important opportunity to sharpen its effectiveness.

Renewable energy is essential for decarbonisation, but its development is not without cost. The growing demand for the minerals needed for wind turbines, solar panels and batteries places increasing pressure on the ecosystems and communities from which they are extracted. As Australia designs and implements the next phase of climate policy, this environmental cost needs to be actively considered and managed.²²

Key insights

- As well as a climate solution, renewable energy is also a form of industrial development. While carbon reduction is an important goal for climate change mitigation, it should not be the only metric of success, with biodiversity and cultural values treated as secondary.
- The growth of AI and data centres is placing additional demands on Australia's power grid, driven by the rapid rise in internet and cloud usage.
- If emissions reduction policies make domestic production uncompetitive (manufacturing in Australia becomes too expensive), companies may shift production to countries with less stringent emissions standards, resulting in carbon leakage while weakening Australia's supply chain security and sovereign industrial capability.
- Australia's continued reliance on land-based carbon removal and offset credits risks masking a lack of genuine emissions reductions. Strengthening transparency and integrity measures – both in the Safeguard Mechanism's use of ACCUs and in voluntary carbon markets is needed to ensure that genuine progress on emissions reductions is occurring.

19. Climate Action Tracker. 2025. *Australia: 2035 NDC*. Available at: <https://climateactiontracker.org/countries/australia/2035-ndc/>.

20. Clean Energy Council. 2026. *Clean Energy Australia Report 2026*. Available at: <https://cleanenergycouncil.org.au/getmedia/f1cb75ef-dfb4-4978-af60-79da65651e19/Clean-Energy-Australia-Report-2026.pdf>.

21. *Ibid.*

22. Burgess, K. 2026. "Modest Year-on-Year Drop from Flagship Emissions Policy." *The Energy*, 15 April. Available at: <https://theenergy.co/articles/modest-year-on-year-drop-from-flagship-emissions-policy>.

Policy recommendations:



4. Accelerate an equitable transition from fossil fuels to a clean, affordable and resilient low-emissions future

Priority actions:

1. Ensure children and young people are meaningfully consulted and supported through the transition, including by:

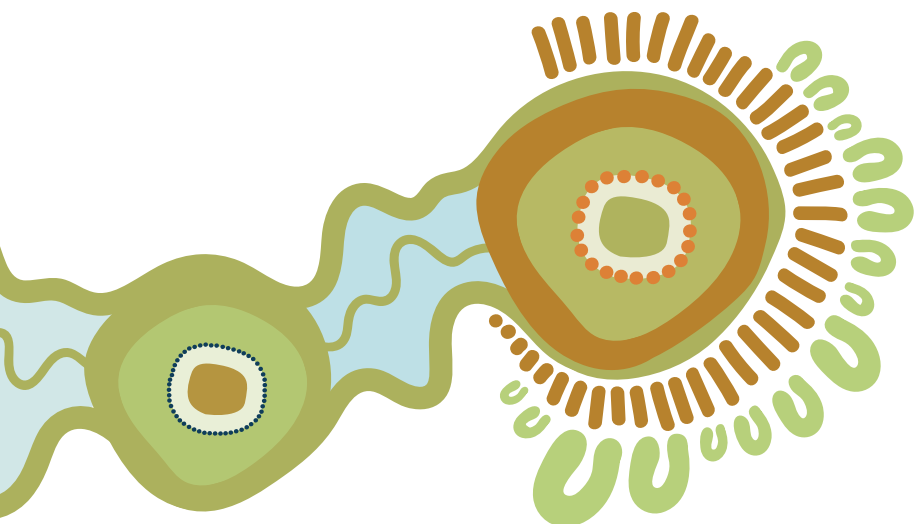
- a. Developing dedicated education and career pathway initiatives, including green skills training, apprenticeships, and climate/clean-energy curriculum content, to ensure young people are equipped to participate in and benefit from the transition.
- b. Embedding children's and young people's rights and interests into climate and energy policy impact assessments, in recognition that they will live with the transition's long-term consequences for longer than any other generation.
- c. Providing accessible, age-appropriate information about transition plans and timelines, to build trust and a sense of agency among children and young people affected by decisions made now.

1. Phase out fossil fuels and accelerate renewable energy investment by:

- a. Establish national benchmarks and guidance to support a coordinated and accountable transition to net zero across all jurisdictions by:
 - i) Monitoring progress towards Australia's climate commitments through nationally consistent benchmarks and reporting frameworks; and
 - ii) Introducing clear emissions performance indicators for jurisdictions and major emitters, supported by transparent reporting and evaluation.
- b. Phase out the Fuel Tax Credit scheme and redirect savings towards clean energy investment, support for affected workers and communities, and initiatives that accelerate Australia's transition to a low-emissions economy.
- c. End approval of new fossil fuel developments, including modification applications that extend a project's lifespan and emissions. This applies to both Federal and State governments across Australia.
- d. Increase investment in sustainable alternatives for hard-to-decarbonise industries, including but not limited to aviation, shipping, metallurgy and cement.
- e. Support offshore wind auctions and provide subsidies or other initiatives to scale up renewable technologies (such as green hydrogen) that facilitate private investment, without creating over-reliance on the private sector to fund and drive clean energy innovation.
- f. Ensure this increased investment translates directly into an expansion of renewable energy projects that puts Australia on track to meet the Paris Agreement's 1.5°C target.



From the UN Youth Australia Survey, 58.3% of young people who were 'extremely concerned' about climate change rated business responses 'not at all well'. Additionally among those who were 'very concerned', 55.6% gave the same rating.



2. Strengthen federal oversight to ensure uniformity across all Australian states and territories' transition to net zero, including by:

- Recognising that the pace of each state's renewable energy transition is heavily dependent on state government priorities, and applying pressure to ensure state actions align with international climate obligations, such as those under the Paris Agreement.
- Implementing strong carbon emission KPIs for state authorities and emitters, to strengthen the current Australian Energy Market Operator regime.

3. Ensure decarbonisation does not have unintended consequences of further ecological harm by:

- Ensuring the expansion of large-scale wind, solar and critical minerals projects does not come at the cost of biodiversity conservation or cultural heritage protection.
- Requiring environmental assessments for renewable energy projects to consider opportunities to integrate and actively improve environmental wellbeing, not just minimise harm.
- Prioritising the assessment process for renewable energy infrastructure to streamline the process and protect the environment.
- Providing financial incentives for renewable energy technologies that are shown to be environmentally beneficial across their full lifecycle, from development through to manufacturing.

4. Adjust the emissions coverage and scope of the Safeguard Mechanism to improve its effectiveness in accelerating decarbonisation of the industrial sector, including by:

- Lowering the Safeguard Mechanism's threshold for scope 1 emissions coverage below the current 100,000 tCO₂-e per year, to bring a larger share of Australia's industrial emissions under the same compliance framework. Many facilities emitting more than 25,000 tCO₂-e per year already report under the National Greenhouse and Energy Reporting (NGER) scheme, meaning the reporting infrastructure to support a lower threshold is already partially in place.
- Encouraging more onsite abatement (such as renewable energy uptake and energy efficiency improvements) through mechanisms that prevent facilities from relying indefinitely on offsets instead of direct emissions reductions. If a hard cap on the use of Australian Carbon Credit Units (ACCUs) is not implemented in order to preserve compliance flexibility for facilities where onsite abatement is not yet viable, additional offset governance measures should be implemented to ensure offsets (such as land-sector projects) are genuinely additional and permanent.
- Increasing the ambition of baseline decline rates (which set expectations on the pace of decarbonisation), informed by the best available science, to ensure that the rate of emission decline from 2030–2035 is sufficient such that, if declines continue at this rate, net zero by 2050 is met.

5. Improve the integrity of Australia's carbon markets and reduce reliance on land-based carbon removal, including by:

- Instituting further transparency and integrity measures across both compliance and voluntary carbon markets — including but not limited to the ACCU Scheme — to ensure market-wide confidence in the credibility of Australian carbon credits.
- Reducing reliance on reversible, potentially non-permanent land-based carbon dioxide removal, including by placing limits on the use of land-sector removals to lower national emissions, and instead prioritising absolute emissions reduction measures in Australia's NDC commitments.

6. Address Australia's scope 3 emissions from fossil fuel exports:

- For clarity that addressing exported emissions is essential to capturing Australia's full contribution to global emissions, rather than only its domestic-facing share.
- Developing a separate mechanism to account for and reduce emissions embedded in exported coal and gas, which currently sit largely outside the scope of domestic climate policy and are not well suited to the facility-level, scope 1 design of the Safeguard Mechanism. Resolve the complex accounting and jurisdictional questions this raises, including the risk of double-counting against importing countries' own inventories.

7. Deliver a fair and inclusive transition for communities and workers, including low-income households and those in regions undergoing major economic change, including by:

- Implementing new, or supporting existing, Local Energy Hubs and local environmental and renewable energy initiatives (particularly in regional areas undergoing major economic and social shifts away from fossil fuel industries and declared Renewable Energy Zones (REZ)) to improve community accessibility to, and education on, topics such as low-emissions farming practices, the green transition, and community climate resilience.
- Equipping Local Energy Hubs with resources and training to address misinformation and disinformation.
- Partnering government climate, environment, and energy departments with local industries, and other local community stakeholders (e.g. conservation groups, farmers/primary producers or First Nations communities) to share transition-related information and gather community feedback, building trust and social licence for new projects and policies.
- Recognising the distinct barriers facing communities of different social, economic, professional, cultural, and religious backgrounds in engaging with the transition, and developing locally rooted strategies to address them at each stage of development.
- Co-designing community benefit schemes for renewable energy projects with developers and community representatives, encouraging opportunities for community equity and investment to ensure mutual benefit, and in particular, facilitating First Nations co-ownership and management of projects on First Nations lands.
- Providing financial support that promotes social wellbeing such as investments in local mental health services for communities undergoing significant disruption from the green transition.

"I want to live in a country where fossil fuels are limited and renewable energy is commonplace."

LCOY Participant, Queensland

8. Manage emerging energy demands in line with climate objectives, including by:

- a. Limiting the construction of AI and data centres such that power and natural resources are not strained.
- b. Limiting the use of critical minerals in the development of AI and data centres such that those minerals are not strained in other development, including but not limited to renewable energy.
- c. Requiring construction of data centres to occur in cooperation with local councils and communities, to protect natural habitats and limit impacts on local water and natural resources.



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9. Improve access to low-emissions transport access and energy-efficient homes by:

- a. Establishing a national target and timeline for the electrification of public transport fleets, to coordinate and accelerate the fragmented state-by-state approach to increase public transport, with a focus on sustainable and low-emissions transport forms such as electric trains and buses.
- b. Increasing the affordability of public transport, to improve usage and accessibility for Australians using sustainable forms of transportation.
- c. Prioritising access to EVs and low emission public transport for low-income populations through government programs (including subsidies) and incentives to build more EV infrastructure such as charging stations at existing public transport hubs, or petrol stations.
- d. Work with the finance sector to provide financial incentives for the construction of energy-efficient homes and accommodation.
- e. Accelerate changes to mandatory building code requirements for all new housing to include solar and battery storage facilities, noting that building ministers have currently paused further residential energy code changes until at least mid-2029.
- f. Setting a clear, publicly-tracked target of 80% of households having solar panels installed by 2035, to reverse the recent decline in household solar uptake, which fell 28.5% from its 2021 peak to a 2025 low.

10. Strengthen international cooperation to accelerate Australia's clean energy transition and support the development and deployment of low-emissions technologies, including by:

- a. Building partnerships with key international partners, including the European Union and China following the recent signing of a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) that includes a commitment to respecting the Paris Agreement and zero tariffs on goods and services such as renewable energy and energy-efficient products. Australia's accession to Pillar II of Horizon Europe (the EU's research pillar covering climate change and other global challenges) gives Australian universities and researchers greater access to EU funding and opportunities for collaboration on clean energy and innovative climate technologies.
- b. Expanding opportunities for Australian researchers and institutions to participate in international climate, energy and technology initiatives.

"Renewable energy and technology should be the issue that we focus on right now, because it is the one that we can change the fastest. It will be hard, but it can make an impact."

LCOY Participant, New South Wales

Climate, Health and Wellbeing

Context

Climate change presents a major threat to public health in Australia and globally. Changing environmental conditions and extreme weather are resulting in a plethora of health impacts: increased incidence of infectious and non-communicable diseases; respiratory illness from exposure to allergens, smoke and pollutants; injury from floods and fires; and malnutrition.²³ Extreme heat causes more deaths than all other natural hazards combined.²⁴ Many young people feel climate anxiety from witnessing the impacts of a changing climate alongside governmental action that is neither timely nor sufficient, leaving them feeling largely powerless to stop its effects.²⁵ The increasing frequency of events such as bushfires may lead to higher rates of adjustment disorder, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder.²⁶ These impacts also exacerbate existing health disparities in Australia; climate change impacts are disproportionately felt by those with higher exposure to climate impacts, higher barriers to care and increased health risks. Healthcare demand is expected to intensify in the years ahead, straining facilities and provision.

In response to these mounting risks, Australia has a National Health and Climate Strategy that outlines the key priorities for developing a climate-resilient health system in Australia, but its success depends on effective implementation and adequate funding. This sits alongside Australia's National Climate Health Risk Assessment and National Adaptation Plan, which similarly identify health risks and set out Australia's broader adaptation response.

Food security is a critical, and often overlooked, dimension of this public health challenge — climate change threatens not only the availability of food, but its nutritional quality, with direct consequences for population health. Australia's food production faces pressure from land degradation, shifting rainfall patterns, and shorter growing seasons, while hotter temperatures threaten nutritional quality. Furthermore, disadvantaged groups such as First Nations peoples, rural and remote populations, and people with low socio-economic status are expected to spend a greater proportion of their income on food due to climate disruption. The Australian Government has begun to respond, through plans either finalised or in development for a more climate-friendly agriculture industry such as the National Bioenergy Feedstock Strategy, the National Statement on Climate Change and Agriculture, and Feeding Australia: A National Food Security Policy. However, young people have raised demands that these plans have yet to fully address.

Key insights

- Child and youth mental health is increasingly affected by climate change and worsened by 'climate doomist' attitudes.
- Food security is an issue in terms of climate disruptions lowering the quantity and nutritional quality of food in Australia.
- The worsening of food security by climate change is expected to especially harm disadvantaged communities' health, undermining climate justice.
- There is a community knowledge gap regarding climate-health issues; although many Australians are aware of climate change, they don't necessarily connect it to their own future health risk and underestimate their own vulnerability.
- Heatwaves and the health impacts of extreme weather conditions are increasingly straining national healthcare systems. Young people want to see organisations take steps towards providing greater resources across regions impacted by climate change to mitigate health risks and increase capacity.

Policy recommendation:



5. Strengthen investment in accessible mental health care and integrate climate-related impacts on children, young people and First Nations communities into health policy, planning, and the broader social determinants of health

Priority actions:

- 1. Work directly with young people to design responsive care strategies to expand and improve accessibility of child and youth mental health support by:**
 - a. Increasing access to, and education around, mental health services in regional and remote communities; and
 - b. Working with regional and local services to integrate mental health support into community-led emergency preparedness, response and recovery processes — including extending support beyond the immediate post-disaster period, in line with the five-year planning timeframe for mental health recovery recommended in the National Disaster Mental Health and Wellbeing Framework.
- 2. Integrate climate impacts into health policy and planning, including by:**
 - a. Running targeted, health-framed public communication campaigns that explicitly link climate change to personal health risk; and
 - b. Amplifying the effect of public health education campaigns by aligning them with climate-related events — for example, communicating the health effects of smoke inhalation during a bushfire.
- 3. Invest in culturally appropriate, resilient housing and community resilience, by investing in initiatives such as Wilya Janta,** which deliver housing informed by local knowledge and technical expertise, in recognition that culturally safe and climate-appropriate housing in remote Aboriginal communities will significantly improve First Nations health outcomes.
- 4. Reduce environmental pressures that undermine health and wellbeing,** including by implementing disincentives to discourage continued deforestation by the agriculture industry.
- 5. Strengthen food security through First Nations leadership** by explicitly involving First Nations communities in the design of food security strategies, drawing on the Traditional Knowledge that has historically underpinned successful food security management in Australia.

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Child and Youth Education and Engagement

Context

How can children and young people growing up in Australia today be equipped to navigate an unprecedented life? Exposure to heatwaves, wildfires, and other climate extremes is expected to increase as the climate changes, and young people born this decade will face a lifetime of climate change impacts with no historical precedent. **Knowledge of climate change – the science, impacts and solutions – equips current and future generations not only to make sense of policy decisions, but also to influence them, and advocate for stronger action.** This should extend beyond climate science to its intersections with other issues such as biodiversity loss, public health, and to the injustices climate change exacerbates. Further, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge of ecosystems and environmental stewardship should be foundational to understanding Australia’s landscapes.

In practice, how much climate education young Australians receive formally depends on where they go to school. The Australian Curriculum sets out at a high level what students should learn regardless of location or school, but the responsibility for implementation sits with each state and territory, which adapts the national framework into their own syllabuses. Individual schools and teachers decide how it’s translated into classroom teaching. As a result, climate change education varies substantially between states and schools, shaped largely by the weight individual schools and teachers choose to give the topic.

The federal government also plays a role in educating and engaging young people on climate change beyond the classroom. Central to this is the Engage! strategy launched in 2024, which recognises young people’s input on issues that affect them, and empowers them to engage with the government more broadly. The Youth Advisory Council on International Climate Change operates under a remit co-designed with young people to elevate youth voices in shaping Australia’s international climate work. Beyond these, a range of other mechanisms includes Youth Steering committees, child and youth consultations and targeted grants to mobilise children and youth to attend the annual UN Climate Change Conference of Parties (COP). Yet these remain formal, structured opportunities open to only a select few young people.

Key insights

- Climate education across Australia in schools often informs children and young people about climate change but does not adequately prepare them to participate in climate solutions. This leaves many children and young people feeling overwhelmed, disempowered and uncertain.
- There are few clear or accessible pathways for children and young people to influence climate decisions and contribute to the design, implementation and evaluation of climate policy.
- Child and youth-led organisations and student groups are often trusted by children and young people but lack funding, recognition and formal links with the government needed to expand their impact.
- Opportunities to engage with climate education and decision-making are not experienced equally across Australia. Children and young people from rural, remote, low socioeconomic or other marginalised communities often face additional barriers to accessing these services.

“Climate change is not just an environmental issue for young people; it affects our education, mental health, future careers, and sense of security, so we need governments to include young people in decision-making because we will live with the consequences of today’s choices”
LCOY Participant



Policy recommendation:



6. Strengthen climate education and meaningful child and youth participation equitably across Australia

Priority actions:

1. Work with states and territories to establish a nationally consistent, action-oriented climate education framework across primary and secondary education which should:

- Build on sustainability's existing status as a cross-curricular priority in the Australian Curriculum, which facilitates climate change discussions across all subject areas. However, more support is needed to help teachers effectively incorporate sustainability concepts into lesson plans;
- Incorporate practical climate action, disaster preparedness and locally relevant environmental risks;
- Provide opportunities for experiential and nature-based learning through school sustainability initiatives, vocational pathways and community partnerships;
- Ensure curriculum content is regularly updated to reflect current climate science, emerging technologies and Australia's changing climate risks; and
- Ensure education programs draw on both local First Nations and non-Indigenous knowledge systems in teaching Australia's unique biodiversity.

2. Invest in long-term funding and institutional support for youth-led climate organisations, school environmental programs and community partnerships including for:

- Student-led climate initiatives and environmental projects;
- Local child and youth climate forums and child and youth innovation grants;
- Partnerships between schools, councils, universities, researchers and community organisations;
- Opportunities for children and young people to develop, trial and showcase innovative climate solutions;
- Clear pathways for children and young people to transition from climate education into meaningful civic participation and leadership; and
- Transparent feedback outlining how child and youth recommendations have been considered and implemented.

3. Ensure equitable access to climate education for children and young people in marginalised and underrepresented communities including:

- Establish a dedicated fund for community-led climate education and action initiatives that prioritise children and young people and First Nations communities in regional and remote areas;
- Access to climate education resources can depend on individual schools' resources, priorities and communities. Governments should therefore establish minimum standards for equitable access to high-quality, age-appropriate climate education resources, including through school libraries and digital collections;
- Expanding climate education and engagement programs (such as South Australia's "Climate Ready Schools" program) beyond metropolitan areas;
- Investing in locally delivered projects that build regional climate resilience and respond to community priorities;
- Consulting rural and regional environmental or sustainability stakeholders such as local conservation groups or First Nations communities during the development and implementation of NDCs; and
- Create and support programs at the local council level, which can allow children and young people to design, and implement projects that support migration or adaptation to climate change.

4. Develop targeted climate awareness engagement campaigns for children and young people which could include:

- Simple ways to become more sustainable, building on historic success from anti-smoke and anti-drink driving advertising;
- Programs showing young people working with journalists, policymakers, and scientists to communicate climate issues in accessible ways; and
- Messaging that helps overcome negative stigma and a lack of climate knowledge among children and young people that can otherwise stop them from engaging in climate action.

5. Expand opportunities for children and young people to connect with nature through schools, national parks and outdoor learning programs including:

- Experiential learning integrated into learning modules across a range of disciplines including and beyond STEM;
- Meaningful, ecologically-centred design of school spaces and learning modules; and
- Ensuring that local community infrastructure preserves and promotes nature and ecosystem growth, thus ensuring equitable and place-based access to nature.

6 Establish consistent and meaningful mechanisms for children and young people to inform climate policy and decision-making at the federal and state levels, including:

- Consultation events and online surveys through local education institutions such as universities, TAFEs and schools;
- Child and youth-targeted panels or surveys at the state or federal level to provide feedback and contribute towards climate and environmental policy drafting;
- Child and youth consultation events and surveys where Australian youth can directly engage with COP negotiators and ensure Australia's negotiations accurately reflect young people's views on climate action and adaptation on the world stage; and
- Establish and strengthen a range of mechanisms for children and young people to formally advise Australian negotiators on child and youth priorities during future COPs, both remotely and in person — including through the National Child and Youth Statement working group, expanded participation in the Youth Advisory Council on International Climate Change, and other youth delegate or observer roles within Australia's official negotiating team.



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Climate Leadership

Context

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander climate leadership provides effective and culturally appropriate solutions to the climate crisis. For over 65,000 years, First Nations people, across hundreds of distinct nations, have cared for Country through holistic management guided by deep cultural knowledge passed down through generations — practical, locally adapted approaches including seasonal mapping, fire management, biodiversity protection and sustainable resource use.

As the Uluru Statement of the Heart²⁷ affirms, and as grounded in the continuous and surviving authority of Traditional Law, First Nations sovereignty over these lands and waters has never been ceded. Climate policy should reflect this: **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership belongs at its centre, not its margins.** Although First Nations Australians are among the least responsible for the climate crisis, they are among the most impacted. First Nations communities face harsh impacts, including damage to sacred sites, disruption of cultural life such as traditional hunting and fishing on Country, and forced relocation from their communities. These crises are met with sustained advocacy, as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continue to lead impactful community-led climate movements, native title claims, and legal action.

Key insights

- Environmental changes associated with climate change are interrupting Traditional Knowledge transfer for both communities and individuals. For example, the 2025 algal blooms in South Australia severely disrupted traditional fishing practices, ceremonies, and local means of income, blocking intergenerational knowledge transfer related to Sea Country.
- Torres Strait Islanders are facing displacement as rising sea levels threaten ancestral homelands. Moving to mainland Australia is not a solution but a second dispossession — layering the loss of Country, culture, history, tradition and home on top of colonisation.
- Non-Indigenous scientific frameworks continue to dominate climate policy and planning, resulting in the systemic underrecognition and underutilisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge systems. Where First Nations knowledge is acknowledged, it is often treated as a supplementary input to non-Indigenous science, rather than recognised as a complete system of law, governance, and relationship to Country in its own right.
- The rise of far-right extremism and the use of harmful, divisive rhetoric that promotes racist views — including by some elected representatives — poses a threat to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' ability to participate meaningfully in climate policy. Racist rhetoric can be deployed to delegitimise First Nations voices and erect further barriers to their participation in decision-making.

27. First Nations National Constitutional Convention. 2017. *Uluru Statement from the Heart*. Statement, 26 May. Available at: <https://ulurustatement.org/the-statement/view-the-statement/>.

Policy recommendation:

7. Centre Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership, rights and knowledge in climate action and decision-making

Priority actions:

1. **Require cultural impact assessments alongside economic and environmental assessments in climate adaptation and disaster resilience planning**, including following environmental events such as the South Australian algal blooms. These assessments should recognise disruption to Traditional Knowledge transfer as its own distinct category of loss. Such cultural impact assessments should be led by local Aboriginal and First Nations communities and elders.
2. **Increase long-term adaptation funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.** The Australian Government should ensure that the adaptation funding provided to communities in the Torres Strait (seawalls, infrastructure, and resilience programs informed by local communities) is sufficient, sustained and led by community priorities, so that remaining on Country stays a viable choice.
3. **Implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) into law, policy and practice, to create greater systemic integrity and accountability in support of First Nations peoples' rights to self-determination.** Embed UNDRIP principles, including free, prior and informed consent and shared decision-making, across climate policy and governance.
4. **Fully implement and resource the National Anti-Racism Framework to address racism and discrimination.**
5. **Ensure First Nations representation in Australia's COP31 negotiating delegation**, including by embedding formal First Nations representation, not observer status, within the Australian negotiating delegation and its technical advisory bodies, so that First Nations peoples help shape Australia's negotiating positions.
6. **Ensure Australian universities engage with local First Nations communities in the design and delivery of climate change curricula**, so that teaching helps students understand how climate change impacts those communities.

"[Because of the algal blooms in South Australia] My grandpa couldn't take us into the ocean. We love the beach, we are salt water people... Young men didn't get the opportunity to go spearfishing for over two years. Knowledge could pass away with elders because [the young men] didn't get to learn... climate change is impacting us in a big way — knowledge could be lost if events like this continue to happen"

LCOY Participant, South Australia

Pacific Climate Leadership, Priorities and Partnership

Context

Pacific Islander people have long been global and regional leaders in climate change advocacy and accountability, both within and outside of the UNFCCC process. Pacific Island youth have helped elevate Loss and Damage to global attention, and led the initiative that resulted in the International Court of Justice’s recent Advisory Opinion on Climate Change — a landmark ruling that declared climate change an existential threat and affirmed that states have a legal obligation not only to reduce emissions, but also to protect human rights from its impacts. These examples attest to the value of elevating Pacific child and youth voices.

Pacific leadership on climate change reflects both the urgency of the crisis and the injustice of who bears its impacts. **Although Pacific Island nations contribute only a tiny fraction (0.03%) of global greenhouse gas emissions, they are among the regions most exposed to climate impacts globally.**²⁸ Rising sea levels erode coastal areas and cause the salinisation of fresh groundwater sources, while the storms and cyclones that sweep across the Pacific intensify. Shifting ocean temperatures are driving tuna stocks that Pacific communities depend on towards cooler waters, disrupting food security and livelihoods. These are not future risks; but physical realities already reshaping daily life across the Pacific.

Rising demand for minerals critical to renewable energy technologies (such as cobalt, nickel, copper and manganese) is driving interest in deep-sea mining of these minerals in the Pacific. For Pacific Island nations, deep-sea mining presents a dividing force. Some nations have facilitated exploration licences within their exclusive economic zones.²⁹ Others have opposed the growth of this new frontier of mineral extraction, citing concerns over the limited understanding of its environmental impacts.³⁰ Deep-sea mining by Global North nations and companies in the Pacific also risks a continuation of colonial dynamics and extractivism carried out in the name of enabling an energy transition.³¹ The ocean lies at the heart of Pacific life, and its protection is essential for preserving the local identity, culture and economies.

Australia’s continued fossil fuel exports and comparatively weaker climate positions in regional and international forums are at odds with preserving the land and ecosystems on which the Pacific Islands depend. Relatively insulated from its neighbours’ existential climate threats, Australia carries an increasing responsibility to support meaningful regional climate action, particularly as a member of the Pacific Islands Forum (‘PIF’). Australia’s role as President of Negotiations and the pre-COP in the Pacific present two levers for supporting Pacific priorities at COP31. The Pre-COP in Fiji and Tuvalu should serve as an opportunity to set expectations for negotiations in Antalya.

28. UNDP. 2021. *Climate Security in the Pacific*. Available at: <https://www.undp.org/pacific/news/climate-security-pacific>.
29. See, for example, International Seabed Authority (ISA). *Exploration Contracts*. Available at: <https://isa.org/jm/exploration-contracts/>
30. Pacific Blue Line. 2023. “Pacific Parliamentarians’ Alliance on Deepsea Mining (PPADSM).” at: <https://www.pacificblueline.org/pacificparliamentarians>.
31. Titifanue, J. 2025. “Justice Washing Extractivism: Pacific Island Activist Perspectives on Just Transitions and Deep-Sea Mining.” *Global Environmental Change* 94: 103053. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0959378025000901>.

Key insights

- Pacific nations are highly vulnerable to climate change yet remain under-supported. Pasifika voices are also frequently sidelined in global climate conversations.
- Adaptation solutions should be informed by local realities; any climate solutions implemented in the Pacific will be strengthened by Indigenous knowledge, traditional practices and greater input from the people who have protected and cared for their ecosystems for generations.
- The advancement of deep-sea mining in the Pacific presents an ecological threat to the deep seabed and habitats, ignores the clear opposition from several Pacific nations, and concerns from the scientific community. Deep-sea mining also risks furthering colonial patterns of resource exploitation, whereby the Pacific is burdened as a resource supply of minerals that will be used to decarbonise the Global North.
- The Pre-COP in Fiji in October presents an opportunity to foreground Pacific priorities.

Recommendation:



8. Centre Pacific leadership, sovereignty and priorities in climate action, adaptation and regional decision-making

Priority actions:

- 1. Increase investment in Pacific-led climate adaptation and resilience initiatives by:**
 - a. Continuing support to fully capitalise and operationalise the Pacific Resilience Facility (PRF), building on Australia’s initial contribution of AUD\$100 million;
 - b. Increasing funding for youth and women-led organisations in the Pacific, and in particular for land-use issues where children, youth and women are disproportionately affected; and
 - c. Supporting capability building for child and youth and women-led organisations through access to Australian advanced technology on weather alerts.
- 2. Ensure Australia’s climate policies and international engagement reflect Pacific priorities, such as climate ambition, coastal protection and water security, including by:**
 - a. Capitalising on the opportunity to elevate Pacific priorities at the Pre-COP event in Fiji, including adaptation funding for coastal protection, water security and community resilience; and
 - b. Adopting emissions reduction policies consistent with keeping the 1.5°C target within reach, a threshold critical to Pacific nations.



3. Prioritise and support Pacific nations' sovereignty in decisions affecting their people, lands and waters, by:

- a. Facilitating a conversation with Pacific nations on deep-sea mining to build towards regional guidelines on deep-sea mining without undermining Pacific nations' sovereignty over their natural resources or Pacific nations' environmental health, so that the threats posed to Pacific regionalism by deep-sea mining are mitigated.
- b. Endorsing a pause or ban on deep-sea mining for Pacific nations that have indicated they do not wish it to occur;
- c. Providing technical or diplomatic support for countries deciding whether to prohibit deep-sea mining; underpinning sovereignty;
- d. Funding independent research on the ecological impacts of deep-sea mining; and promoting international cooperation to address knowledge gaps; and
- e. Continuing to enhance the Pacific's capacity to monitor and communicate information about its ecosystems, including through integrating Traditional Knowledge.

4. Strengthen Pacific cultural understanding and recognition in Australian climate policy and regional decision-making by:

- a. Introducing teachings on Pacific history and politics within the high-school level school curricula on global history and politics;
- b. Supporting funding towards Pacific Islander cultural institutions within Australia; and
- c. Facilitating more cultural events within Australia celebrating the Pasifika diaspora.



5. Develop pathways to support Pacific communities affected by climate displacement, including expanded mobility and migration options such as:

- a. Building upon the Australia-Tuvalu Falepili Union precedent to create a similar programme, which is available region-wide and facilitates mobility with dignity.
 - i. One approach could be broadening the Pacific Engagement visa to allow opportunities for a set number of people from PIF members to come to Australia annually without needing a job offer, conditional on participating PIF members maintaining robust immigration, passport, and other systems.
 - ii. The programme should be based on humanitarian needs, community consultation, and the legal right to protection for the future.
- b. Supporting the preservation of cultural knowledge for Pacific Islanders who may be forced to migrate.
- c. Recognising the mental health impacts of displacement by enshrining mental health funding support in new policy to support climate-induced migrants.
- d. Supporting Pacific Islanders' agency through consulting with Pacific and displaced communities during policy design.
- e. Providing advice to employers involved in the PALM scheme to reverse trends in the racialisation of Pacific labour within Australia, to limit the racial barriers which Pacific climate-induced migrants face in employment opportunities.





Nature, Biodiversity and the Ocean

Context

Climate change and biodiversity loss are inextricably linked. Nature is both an ally and a casualty in the fight against climate change. Climate change threatens Australian ecosystems both indirectly, by compounding other threats like land clearing and invasive species,³² as well as directly. Increased temperatures and altered rainfall patterns are increasing the intensity of climate-related disasters like bushfires and cyclones.³³ They are also shrinking important refugia for threatened ecological communities like Alpine Ash forests and Cumberland Plain Shale Woodlands.^{34, 35} **Ecosystem degradation caused by climate change is exacerbating biodiversity decline, with Australia experiencing the highest rate of mammal extinction of any country in the world.**³⁶ We have already lost 93 of our endemic species since European colonisation, with many more classed as vulnerable or endangered. Australia is also being hit hard by marine heatwaves, which have been linked to widespread coral bleaching, fish kills, and toxic algal blooms in recent years - with implications for recreation and tourism industries.³⁷ Despite the economic impacts of ecosystem degradation and

biodiversity loss on Australian industries and communities, the Federal Government currently commits less than 0.06% of the federal budget to conservation and restoration, spending more (~1.1%) on subsidies that directly or indirectly harm biodiversity.³⁸ However, there is hope! The continued stewardship of Australia's First Nations people is helping to protect and restore natural environments using Traditional Knowledge Systems built over 60,000 years of caring for Country. Over 95% of Australians want more action to protect nature,³⁹ reflecting public appetite for much-needed changes to Australian nature laws highlighted by the 2020 Samuel Review. This independent review found that Australia's key piece of legislation designed to protect nature, the *Environment Protection Biodiversity and Conservation Act 1999*, is "ineffective in achieving its objectives" and "not fit to address current or future environmental challenges". Several important reforms were passed in November 2025. However, the new National Environment Standards commenced on August 21 were found to be not strong enough to ensure the delivery of positive outcomes for nature and biodiversity, potentially

allowing space to repeat the same mistakes underlined in the Samuel Review. These reforms are critical for protecting Australia's natural resources for future generations.

Through ambitious climate action, increased federal funding, and targeted policy reforms, Australia can still act to protect its unique natural values. As a wealthy nation abundant in natural resources, Australia also has an opportunity to be a leader in nature-based solutions for climate change mitigation and community resilience. These include but are not limited to blue carbon restoration,

green infrastructure, and regenerative agriculture. Children and young people will be disproportionately affected by climate impacts on Australian nature, biodiversity and oceans, and are already losing access and connection to nature. This makes them key stakeholders and implementation partners in the delivery of Australia's Nationally Determined Contributions, 30x30 commitments and other international obligations. This section outlines Australian child and youth priorities for climate action that protects and safeguards nature and natural resources for future generations.

Key insights

- Australian children and youth are already witnessing the impacts of climate change in their local environments: natural hazards are reducing the resilience of ecosystems to environmental disturbance; local sea level rise is putting pressure on vulnerable aquatic ecosystems; culturally important species are disappearing from hunting/dive sites; and new species are moving in thanks to temperature-related range shifts.
- Nature often loses in the trade-off with "critical infrastructure" projects like housing and data centres. These types of developments are used to justify ongoing destruction of old-growth forests and often proceed without adequate consideration of future risks under climate change.
- Ocean governance remains fragmented across climate, biodiversity, trade, and maritime security sectors. The conflicting priorities of ocean users are a key barrier for integrative management approaches that can address the complex and cumulative nature of ocean challenges.
- According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child⁴⁰, children have the right to a healthy environment. Many Australian children and youth feel that intergenerational justice is threatened by anthropogenic climate change, and that Australia is not doing enough to protect its natural environment for the wellbeing of future generations.
- There is a need to upscale ecosystem conservation, restoration and repair across the country. Australian children and youth want to be part of the solution. However, capacity building, institutional support and flexible funding are needed to get child and youth-led ecosystem restoration projects off the ground.



32. Olivares-Rojas, J. P., Cook, C. N., Duncan, D. H. and Walsh, J. C. 2024. *A Synthesis of Threats Impacting Australian Threatened Ecological Communities*. Diversity and Distributions, vol. 31, no. 2. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/ddi.13929>.

33. Steffen, W. 2022. *The Nature of Climate-Related Disasters in Australia*. In *Complex Disasters*. Disaster Risk, Resilience, Reconstruction and Recovery series. Springer. Available at: https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-981-19-2428-6_4.

34. Hoffmann, A. A., Rymer, P. D., Byrne, M., Ruthrof, K. X., Whinam, J., McGeoch, M., Bergstrom, D. M., Guerin, G. R., Sparrow, B., Joseph, L., Hill, S. J., Andrew, N. R., Camac, J., Bell, N., Riegler, M., Gardner, J. L. and Williams, S. E. 2019. Impacts of Recent Climate Change on Terrestrial Flora and Fauna: Some Emerging Australian Examples. *Austral Ecology*, vol. 44, no. 1. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/aec.12674>.

35. Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW). n.d. *EPBC Act List of Threatened Ecological Communities — Species Profile and Threats Database (SPRAT)*. Available at: <https://www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/sprat/public/publiclookupcommunities.pl>

36. Woinarski, J. C. Z., Garnett, S. T. and Legge, S. M. 2025. *No More Extinctions: Recovering Australia's Biodiversity*. Annual Review of Animal Biosciences, vol. 13. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-animal-111523-102004>.

37. Hobday, A. J., Spillman, C. M., Hartog, J. R., Smith, G. A., Allnutt, J., Bailleul, F., Blamey, L. K., Brodie, S., Champion, C., Chandrapavan, A., Coleman, M. A., Doubell, M. J., Duffy, R., Grammer, G. L., Maynard, D., Plaganyi, E. E. and Thomson, D. 2026. *Turning Forecasts into Actions: Marine Heatwaves and Ecosystem-Wide Impacts in Australian Waters during Summer 2024/25*. *Oceanography*, vol. 39, no. 1. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5670/oceanog.2026.e105>.

38. Elton, P., Clement, S., Maron, M. and Ashby, L. 2026. *Biodiversity-Harmful Subsidies in Australia*. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14486563.2026.2623910>.

39. Biodiversity Council. 2025. *2025 Biodiversity Concerns Report: A Survey of Community Attitudes toward Nature Conservation*. Available at: <https://biodiversitycouncil.org.au/resources/2025-biodiversity-concerns-report>.

40. Convention on the Rights of the Child, opened for signature 20 November 1989, 1577 UNTS 3 (entered into force 2 September 1990), General Comment No. 26

Policy Recommendation

9. Strengthen the protection and restoration of nature and oceans through increased investment, stronger environmental safeguards, ecosystem restoration, and sustainable ocean management

Priority actions:

1. Increase investment in nature protection, restoration and biodiversity conservation by increasing federal nature spending from 0.06% to 1% of the federal budget.

More substantial investment in Australian nature and ecosystems is needed to meet our commitments under the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. Experts estimate that committing just 1% of the federal budget to nature would provide enough funding to prevent extinctions, recover threatened species, restore degraded landscapes and help Australia meet its commitment to protect at least 30% of land and sea ecosystems. Healthy ecosystems are more resilient to climate change.

2. Strengthen and enforce national environmental protections and standards.

Strong and legally enforceable National Environmental Standards are needed to protect ecosystems and biodiversity from development. These should be shaped by consultation with children, youth, Indigenous communities, and other stakeholders. They should explicitly consider future risks under climate change and address the shortfalls of the EPBC Act outlined in the 2020 Samuel Review.

3. Accelerate ecosystem restoration and nature repair initiatives by:

a. **Incentivising method development:** The Nature Repair Market has the potential to scale up nature repair across Australia by directing private finance into ecosystem conservation and restoration. However, its effective operation and expansion will depend on the availability of diverse, cost-effective and scientifically robust methodologies. DCCEEW should provide financial incentives (e.g., grants) for method development by independent research institutions.

b. **Improve environmental data integration across Australia:** Environment Information Australia (EIA) was established to bring together high-quality environmental data from across Australia to strengthen the evidence base underpinning environmental decision-making. Australian children and youth support the information-sharing arrangements introduced as part of the 2025 EPBC Act reforms, as well as the continued expansion of the EIA Online Portal, particularly by increasing accessibility for communities, researchers, Traditional Owners and decision-makers.

c. **Streamline permitting processes for ecological restoration:** Permitting processes for ecological restoration are complex and hard for practitioners to navigate. In coastal and marine ecosystems, legislative pathways treat restoration like a development, and streamlining is needed to facilitate community-led grassroots projects.

“Ocean health. The ocean is our planet’s largest carbon sink, but warming, acidification, and pollution are pushing it toward collapse. Coral reefs are dying, fish stocks are declining, and coastal communities are losing their protection and livelihoods. A healthy ocean is essential for a stable climate. If the ocean fails, climate action gets much harder everywhere.”

LCOY Participant

4. Develop and implement a national strategy for ocean health and sustainable marine management, including:

a. **National Blue Carbon Strategy:** Some Australian states have developed specific strategies for the conservation and restoration of blue carbon ecosystems, including South Australia (2020)⁴¹ and New South Wales (2022).⁴² These are designed to support blue carbon market development at the state level, with the aim of upscaling blue carbon projects across the country. A National Blue Carbon Strategy could coordinate efforts to protect and restore coastal wetlands nationally, and improve investor confidence in blue carbon markets as an investment strategy.

b. **An integrated national Oceans Policy that is responsive to regional contexts:** Australia has attempted integrated ocean management through initiatives including Integrated Coastal Zone Management and Australia’s Oceans Policy.⁴³ However, these frameworks were not effective because of inadequate institutional support, enforceability and consideration of regional implementation contexts. Ensuring ocean policies are enforceable across jurisdictions, reflect the lived realities of Australian communities and are contextually relevant across diverse coastal regions will be crucial for sustainable ocean management in the next iteration of Australia’s Oceans Policy.

5. Protect marine ecosystems by applying a precautionary approach to emerging threats, including deep seabed mining – In line with the Asia-Pacific Youth Environment Manifesto 2025,⁴⁴ Australian children and youth call on the Federal Government to support a complete moratorium on deep seabed mining. This has the potential to irreversibly damage ecosystems and release massive amounts of carbon into the water column, exacerbating global warming.

41. Government of South Australia, Department for Environment and Water. 2020. *Blue Carbon Strategy for South Australia 2020–2025*. Available at: <https://www.environment.sa.gov.au/topics/climate-change/government-action-on-climate-change/climate-change-blue-carbon-strategy>

42. New South Wales Department of Planning and Environment. 2022. *NSW Blue Carbon Strategy 2022–2027*. Available at: <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/topics/water/coasts/blue-carbon-strategy#nsw-blue-carbon-strategy-20222027>

43. Fullbrook, L. and Vince, J. 2026. *Policy Fit: Lessons from Ocean Governance in Australia*. Policy Sciences, vol. 59. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11077-026-09602-2>.

44. Children and Youth Major Group to UNEP (CYMG). 2025. *Asia-Pacific Youth Environment Manifesto 2025*. Available at: <https://www.cymgenv.net/news/asia-pacific-youth-environment-forum-2025>

"Protection of the environment for future generations because if we continue the path we are following there will be nothing left. If Australia continues to use dodgy tactics to meet global targets how can we expect the Australian public to trust them when the worst of it comes true. We are being reactive instead of proactive."

LCOY Participant



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Conclusion

The picture children and young people have painted through Australia's National Child and Youth Statement is clear. We want communities to be better prepared for bushfires, floods, extreme heat and other climate impacts, with the support needed to recover when disasters occur.

We called for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' rights, knowledge and leadership to be central to climate action, and for Australia to increase support and work more closely with Pacific communities.

We also called for climate justice, human rights and intergenerational equity to be embedded across climate policy, investment and decision-making.

Children and youth want more than opportunities to express their views and be heard. They want accessible pathways to participate, adequate funding to enter decision-making spaces and transparent evidence that their contributions have been recognised, supported and influenced the decisions being made.

The 2026 National Child and Youth Statement is not the end of the process. It provides a foundation for advocacy in Australia and internationally at COP31 and beyond.

AYFICE and UN Youth Australia thank every child and young person who contributed their time, ideas, experiences and hopes to this process. We also thank the volunteers, facilitators, partner organisations and communities that made these conversations possible.

This Statement belongs to everyone who contributed to it, and we hope it helps bring those voices into the decisions that will shape our shared future.





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