## Australia, 2023 Local Conference of Youth

# National Child and Youth Statement on Climate Change.

Curious, compassionate, and deeply concerned



### Introduction

Curious, compassionate, and deeply concerned – this statement encompasses the voices of children and young people from around Australia and their perspectives on climate change.

The National Child and Youth Statement (henceforth the 'Statement') was prepared after five consultations as part of the 'Local Conference of Youth Australia 2023 (LCOY Australia)'. This process was led by an LCOY Leadership group of eight youth climate leaders and advocates from around Australia, and supported by UNICEF Australia and the Monash Sustainable Development Institute (MSDI). It involved four face to face consultations in Western Australia, South Australia, Victoria, and New South Wales, as well as an online consultation open to youth nation-wide. It summarises their opinions, perspectives, realities and lists of actions they see as necessary for achieving a just and sustainable future for all. (See Appendix 1 for an explanation of the LCOY process).

Children and young people are disproportionately impacted by the effects of climate change. We are more at risk of physical and mental health issues - having a <u>higher chance</u> of being directly impacted by environmental hazards and are more likely to be <u>experiencing climate anxiety</u> compared to other Australians. Children and young people living in regional and rural areas of Australia are facing a particularly hard time, experiencing more extreme weather events and watching their way of life change rapidly. Far too often we **feel powerless** about creating positive change as the challenges we face feel overwhelming.

Despite this, we are fighting for change. We have educated ourselves on climate change and are standing up for what we believe in - taking matters into our own hands. We are passionate about making change and educating others on change which they can also be a part of. Our approach to climate action is one of **inclusivity** and centres **First Nations knowledge and practices** in attempts to create a relationship of mutual-care with the lands we call home.

Throughout this statement we explore the topics of what accessible climate education looks like and how it can best support children and young people for the future; we consider adaptation and mitigation goals which are ambitious and have a localised focus; we discuss the financing of climate action and how that could potentially look; we want to look at a just climate transition to ensure that no one is left behind; we want to support the Asia and Pacific regions further, recognising that Australia could have a bigger role to play in this; and we want to ensure that children and young people now and into the future have a voice in the decisions which impact them.

We want to highlight the importance of collaboration across different levels of governments, businesses, NGOs, experts, and communities. Climate action is not something which anyone can tackle alone. Rather, we need to support each other to achieve positive outcomes - with children and youth involved and considered by all stakeholders. Hence, we urge all stakeholders to take every one of our 'asks' seriously.

This National Child and Youth Climate Change Statement is grounded in passion and urgency. It highlights the importance of not just hearing about the changes we *know* are necessary, but it underscores how urgently we need action.

"We have the opportunity to write the plot of the future - together let's cast ourselves as the protagonists driving change, rather than extras passing by" - 17 years old (NSW).



## **Key observations and recommendations**

### 1. Accessible climate education for all

#### Key observations:

- The young Australians we spoke to expressed disappointment that climate science was only taught to them in the upper levels of secondary school. They felt that not receiving foundational climate education in primary school was a missed opportunity, and that receiving that education would have helped them fully engage with the climate education delivered in upper levels of schools.
- Climate education throughout school, VET and university is important because:
  - It ensures children and young people have the skills and knowledge to properly navigate the impacts of climate change, contribute to solutions and be the leaders of the future.
  - It allows children and young people to adequately talk about climate change, express their feelings about their future, and find a community to better cope with eco-anxiety, climate distress and climate-related grief.

#### As young Australians, we call for:

- 1. Federal and State and Territory Governments to provide extensive resources and training to educators to be able to deliver comprehensive climate education to inspire climate action and justice, including:
  - a. Mandatory climate change education in the national curriculum for school at every year level, ensuring age appropriateness and inclusion of local contexts;
  - b. Pathways for greater education on First Nations practices and impact of First Nation Australians;
  - c. The organisation of education sessions for people in climate impacted, regional and rural areas so they can better understand what is happening to them;
  - d. Training and resources for University and Vocational Education and Training staff and providers.
- 2. Relevant stakeholders to create accessible, mainstream educational resources on climate change for all people in Australia including by the following means:
  - Government departments responsible for sharing public information on climate change should invest in a greater, more accessible, and age-appropriate A greater social media presence;
  - b. Media outlets should invest in training and resources for journalists to be able to share climate change information accurately and in ways that are accessible to all;
  - c. Relevant stakeholders should invest in language translation, accessible and inclusive methods to ensure everyone has appropriate access to climate change resources;
  - d. Relevant stakeholders ensure that all resources are grounded in the latest available climate science, are unbiased, and are inclusive of diverse lived experiences and systems-thinking.
- 3. The Federal Government to provide HECS support and subsidies for tertiary education courses and units that pertain to climate change across *all* disciplines, including humanities and STEM.

*"I believe that by enhancing my understanding of climate issues and solutions, I can make a more informed and impactful contribution to overcoming climate change in my community and beyond." - 15 years old (NSW)* 



## 2. Fair and far-reaching adaptation to climate change

#### Key observations:

- Adaptation efforts are essential to safeguard the livelihoods, health and wellbeing of Australians, especially children and young people who are being disproportionately affected by climate change now.
- Climate adaptation currently has an overwhelmingly top-down approach, with finance and project implementation mostly led by governments and international nongovernmental organisations. This approach often excludes frontline communities and leads to potential maladaptation.
- There is increasing evidence showing that adaptation efforts that are co-led, designed, and implemented with local communities fusing **First Nations practice and knowledge, lived experience and modern science** are more likely to provide long-term sustainable solutions.

#### As young Australians, we call for:

- 1. State and Territory governments to provide adaptation education and develop and share context specific knowledge, information and skills. By creating opportunities of education, it will strengthen community co-led processes and empower communities.
- 2. Australia's approach to adaptation policy-making to be risk-informed, taking into account the unique exposures and vulnerabilities of communities across the country. **Climate risk assessments must be co-led with communities** and champion those disproportionately affected by climate change. These risk assessments should form the basis of context specific adaptation plans at all levels.
- 3. Donors to provide flexible<sup>1</sup> and quality funding to community-led organisations working on climate adaptation. This allows for communities, including children and young people, to be able to discuss the best use of funding to fit the needs of the community.
- 4. Governments to include locally-led adaptation and youth-led adaptation must be included as both targeted and cross-cutting themes, with key guidance on 'Means on Implementation and Enabling Environments' in the 'Global Goal on Adaptation' text to be finalised at COP28.

#### Positive example for change:

An exceptional example of meaningful youth inclusion in adaptation initiatives is the Loddon Mallee ADAPT program which is funded by the Victorian State Government. The program is focused on place-based adaptation initiatives and provides meaningful and inclusive opportunities for youth engagement in the region's Climate Ready Plan. Following a retreat where young people came together to engage in climate adaptation education and capacity building they together developed a Youth Advisory Network, with 'codesign and collaboration at its heart' to develop youth guidelines for climate adaptation. (Loddon Mallee ADAPT, 2023).

"Especially for First Nations people, the concurrent recognition and learning about land management and sustainability is crucial to my view of appropriately making positive change" - 18 years old (VIC)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>Grants should be provided with considerable autonomy to recipients to utilise, in the ways they deem most effective.



## 3. Greater action and ambition on climate change mitigation

#### **Key observations:**

- It is vitally important that governments and corporations listen to and act on advice from experts. There are already solutions to mitigation challenges proposed by experts in science, social science and Indigenous knowledge that should be respected.
- We urge that no one be left behind during mitigation and that the **transition to net zero is proportionally and fairly implemented**. Everyone should be benefiting from the transition to renewables.

#### As young Australians, we call for:

- 1. Governments to enable large scale investment into **nature-based** solutions for mitigation.
- 2. Governments and private actors to intensify simultaneous efforts towards the electrification of the nation and the decarbonisation of the national energy grid. This should include greater investment in the research and development of energy storage.
- 3. All levels of government to support and invest in increasing the energy efficiency of existing technologies and infrastructure.
- 4. All relevant stakeholders to reduce non-energy emissions with particular attention to waste, agriculture and mining.
- 5. Governors and private actors to create more ambitious emissions reduction goals and targets and publish them widely to galvanise support. This should include media, social media, and other online and in-person engagement.
- 6. Governments to completely restrict the ability of fossil fuel companies to lobby at state, territory and federal governments.
- 7. Governments and other relevant stakeholders to implement policies and practices to ensure the economy-wide energy transition is just.
  - a. Those who work in fossil fuels, their communities, and those who work in other related industries must have support to be able to cope with the transition. This should include income support, up-skilling and similar jobs in other industries.
  - b. The cost of energy should be protected to ensure affordability as we transition away from fossil fuel use.
  - c. Governments should offer financial support for enrolment and completion of academic and VET courses that support reskilling for jobs of the future. Australia's mitigation ambitions must include the spillover effects of our production and consumption activities.

*"I feel inclined to explore alternate ways to stop the detrimental impacts of climate change for a hopeful future that I feel secure living in"-* 16 year old (NSW)

'I am committed to promoting sustainability and renewable energy solutions, as they hold the key to mitigating climate change. Ensuring a cleaner, healthier planet is not just a responsibility but also an opportunity for innovation and positive global collaboration.' – 26 year old (VIC)



## 4. Changing climate financing for a safe and fair future

#### Key observations:

- We support a Global Loss and Damage Fund that supports those nations most affected and a similar fund implemented domestically.
- Given the dire state of the climate crisis, more stringent measures to stop the financial advantages afforded to fossil fuel companies should be enacted.
- Greater financial support should be given to those organisations that are demonstrably creating solutions to the climate crisis. These organisations should be focused on community needs and have support to create localised solutions.
- We advocate for the redesign of current financial systems (or even the development of new ones) to be able to effectively fund mitigation and adaptation programs.

#### As young Australians, we call for:

- 1. Governments to stop fossil fuel subsidies.
- 2. Public and private sector partnerships created in the name of addressing climate change, to be meaningful and done in good faith. These partnerships must be transparent and accessible to the general public.
- 3. Wealthy countries, including Australia, to invest in and support the creation of the Loss and Damage fund.
  - a. More should be done to accelerate the implementation of this fund.
  - b. When the fund is established, Australia should be contributing significantly to the fund and urge its fellow developed countries to do the same.
  - c. Establishment of a domestic climate justice fund.
- 4. Federal government to invest in a fair carbon pricing system or a **green tax** for private companies.
- 5. Governments, the private sector and other relevant stakeholders to promote circular economies.
- 6. Governments to ensure that costs of green transition do not burden consumers. Expansion of subsidies to encourage the use of these products.

"Climate change has a disruptive effect on the way we live our lives and will continue to increase the margin between the privileged and the impoverished. This ongoing cycle of inequity will be exacerbated and is dependent on holistic global cooperation for effective mechanisms to be implemented" - 21 years old (NSW).



## 5. Centering justice in climate action

#### Key observations:

- We are very conscious of Australia's historically disproportionate impacts on the climate and are deeply concerned that our historic emissions (1850-2021) rank the <u>13th highest in the</u> <u>world</u>. Hence, it is *fair* for Australia to intensify efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change.
- We know that climate change exacerbates issues such as segregation, poverty, and population movements, and disproportionately affects the most socially and economically disadvantaged groups in society.
- In Australia, the issue of climate justice also intimately intersects with our colonial history. First Nations people are more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, and less likely to be heard or included in solutions.
- Intergenerational inequity lies at the centre of most climate negotiations. Older, wealthier, and more privileged negotiators and bureaucrats make decisions which have ramifications for the rest of the world. We believe that as we are disproportionately affected by climate change, children and young people's views *need* to be taken into consideration.
- Climate decision making is affected by gender imbalances. Many top level decisions are made by men, whilst grassroots efforts are often led by women.

#### As young Australians, we call for:

- 1. Wealthy countries with large historical emissions to 'shoulder the burden' of reducing emissions and provide increased aid to developing countries to adapt to the changing climate. Australia should be an active advocate for this.
- 2. Governments and other relevant stakeholders to ensure a just transition to a climate-friendly economy, protecting the livelihoods of Australians who work in emissions heavy industries.
- 3. Governments and other decision-makers to engage with Australians in climate policy making, including by:
  - a. Co-leading with First Nations people.
  - b. Continuing the work of the **Australian Youth Advisory Groups** and include the voices of children and young people in age-appropriate manners.
  - c. Making a particular effort to consult people of marginalised genders and sexual orientations, different abilities, those in poverty and recent migrants.
  - d. *Going beyond* consultation and into action, with increased transparency and publicity of actions taken.
- 4. We urge for the passing of 'Duty of Care' legislation to ensure that the health and wellbeing of children and young people remains at the forefront of decision-makers' minds. This will place intergenerational equity at the heart of climate action.

"I want to enjoy a healthy, thriving world and see future generations do the same. We can't afford to ignore this crisis. Every action counts, and we need urgent, collective efforts to secure a sustainable, fair future for us and the generations to come." – 15 years old (WA)



## 6. Supporting the Asia and the Pacific regions

#### Key observations:

- The Asia-Pacific region is highly vulnerable to human-induced climate change impacts.
- Australia has increased its climate action commitments to support Pacific partners facing climate change. This commitment to listening and working with the 'Pacific family' should be strong, genuine, and long-term.
- Australia is often seen as a reliable ally to Pacific Island countries, providing assistance during climate and weather related disasters. This work must continue to further expand its endeavour to promote resilience, climate science, and renewable energy in the Pacific.

#### As young Australians, we call for:

- 1. Short-term Support including:
  - a. The Australian Federal Government to provide technical assistance to Global South Nations from Asia-Pacific for climate change adaptation.
  - b. The Australian Federal Government, INGOs, and other relevant stakeholders to support capacity building in the Asia Pacific region, especially for youth working on grassroot communities, policy sectors and advancing science and research to address climate change challenges within this region.
  - c. The Australian Federal Government to collaborate annually with the Asia Pacific region at UNFCCC Conferences to address key climate agenda items.
  - d. Governments, INGOs, and the private sector to increase funding, partnerships and programs for young people to foster regional knowledge exchange.
- 2. Medium-term Support including:
  - a. Governments to ensure an open and inclusive stakeholder consultation process to facilitate discussion on climate change impacts in the region and progressive solutions to adapt to climate impacts.
  - b. Governments, private sector, INGOs, and climate financing institutions to prioritise projects and funding for vulnerable communities in least developed countries.
- 3. Long-term Support including:
  - a. Australia to rebuild trust with Pacific Island countries to address the climate crisis effectively by continuing equal partnership, respect and acting more assertively/urgently on climate change.
  - b. Governments and other relevant stakeholders to support Pacific leaders, youths and organisations in addressing climate emergencies
  - c. Governments and other relevant stakeholders to prepare for climate refugees from the region that are vulnerable to sea level rise, loss of landmass and climate induced risks.
- 4. These asks should be implemented with constant consultation with communities in the Asia-Pacific prioritising place-based solutions and equal partnership.

"I think that it is impossible to not care about climate change, as it will not only affect every facet of our lives, but it will greatly harm both Australian and Pacific wellbeing" - 20 years old (NSW)



## 7. Listening to and including child and youth voices

#### Key observations:

- We need to be included in all decisions which impact children and young people.
- We need more quality education on climate change to make informed decisions about our futures. Young people want more knowledge on the topic so that we can contribute equally to the conversation and have a stronger voice.
- While listening to us is important, we want to also be heard. Policy makers and governments can be dismissive of our perspectives and recommendations which:
  - Makes us feel marginalised and it diminishes trust which we have in governments,
  - Makes us feel like what we say isn't being implemented. We want the government to prove that they are acting on youth perspectives and have better accountability towards us.

#### As young Australians, we call for:

- 1. Governments and other relevant stakeholders to *actually* include children and youth in climate change-related policy making in ways that are meaningful, not tokenistic and age appropriate, including by:
  - a. Working with us respectfully, hearing our voices and lived experience, and supporting us to be a part of informed decision-making processes;
  - b. Ensuring that the work of the climate **Youth Advisory Group (YAG)** recommences and becomes more inclusive, accessible, and transparent.
- 2. Governments and other relevant stakeholders to make resources and consultations processes more accessible and decentralised, including by:
  - a. Making them available in a variety of languages and accessibility levels;
  - b. Reducing physical and financial barriers for people to access consultations;
  - c. **Ensuring age-appropriate resources** and tools to ensure that people of any age can participate in an appropriate manner;
  - d. Provide payment for taking part in consultations.
- 3. Relevant stakeholders to enable greater collection of qualitative and quantitative data to better understand the youth experience of the impacts of climate change.
- 4. Relevant stakeholders to create feedback loops to give progress updates to consulted youth, and find other ways that young Australians can be updated by what is happening nationally and internationally, whether through social media, email or another creative way.
- 5. Governments to create opportunities for children and young people to **learn more about how the government processes.**

*"I am more worried about how our climate-affected action will impact the next generation and how to make actual change, rather than simply only being loud" - 18 years old (VIC)* 



## Conclusion

We are passionate about ensuring that the environment which we live in is taken care of **today**. Not just for our futures, but to ensure the right to a healthy environment for future generations. In recent years, we, children and youth, have risen up globally to show our passion in addressing climate action and holding leaders to account.

It is essential that children and young people, as well as others who have been disproportionately affected by climate change, are meaningfully involved in decision making when the outcomes will impact us the most in the long term. Children and young people want to know more and contribute.

We see the devastating impact climate change has had on lands, waters, animals and people. We also see the impact on our neighbouring countries and believe that Australia has an opportunity to make a significant and positive impact on the future of our planet.

#### We want a livable planet for all people. Is that too much to ask?

We want to say thank you to YOUNGO for the opportunity to contribute to the priorities of Australian youth towards the Global Youth Statement. We recognise the importance of the Global Youth Statement in presenting world leaders and climate decision-makers with the recommendations of youth and appreciate the opportunity to share our voices and knowledge for Australian children and young people.

View the Global Youth Statement on YOUNGO's website.

For more information about the statement and to contact the organisers of the Australian 2023 Local Conference of Youth, visit <u>this page</u> of the UNICEF Australia Website. Use this page to share the statement to relevant stakeholders.



YOUNGO Website



UNICEF Aus' LCOY Page.



## **Photos**

Western Australia





South Australia



Victoria



**New South Wales** 





Online









## **Quote bank**

#### The following are some other quotes from Australian youth.

"When we go on the bus or train, we don't leave our seats dirty or destroyed. Caring about climate change isn't just about us, it's about the future generation who will have to live through and experience any destruction we leave. We owe it to them to do better" - 21 years old (NSW)

"I care about climate change because I want the future generation to see, feel and live in a world with beautiful creatures and landscapes. I want to contribute to keeping nature and the earth by doing small actions but I can't do this alone. I do not want myself, other people, and future generations to live in a world with the sense of worrying and stress by facing real threats of climate change to survive on this earth. It is about now or never because there is only one planet" - 24 years old (NSW)

"I care about climate change as it is currently one of the many pressing issues in today's society. We are already seeing the effects of climate change and over the next few years, we will continue to see the effects worsen. Climate change will affect the local environment, ecosystems and future generations. It will affect those who are most vulnerable and already struggle finding secure shelter, a good supply of safe drinking water, sufficient food, and clean air. They will feel the effects of climate change the most, so it is vital that we as a community address climate change." - 17 years old (SA)

"We would be working directly with youth of similar interests meaning we can seize on opportunities to solve many issues such as poverty and flooding which stem from climate change, stay compliant with regulations and build resilience to solving this issue, since we aren't going to Mars anytime soon!" - 16 years old (WA).

"I care because it's everyone's future" - 21 years old (Vic)

"I believe that we have to share facts, information and reality on climate change in our communities to understand how severe the problem is. I think that we all have a big role to play and we have to ask our communities, leaders and businesses to play theirs and not misuse the power they hold" - 22 years old (WA).



## **Appendix 1: The LCOY Process**

#### Summary of the LCOY process



When approved to host the Australian Local Conference of Youth, UNICEF Australia and Monash Sustainable Development Institute (MSDI) agreed to adhere to the <u>10 LCOY principles</u> as outlined by YOUNGO:

- 1. Capacity Building & Empowerment
- 2. Transparency
- 3. Inclusivity
- 4. Sustainability
- 5. By Youth For Youth
- 6. Community building
- 7. Preparation for UN processes
- 8. Global Action
- 9. Spirit of Cooperation
- 10. Creativity

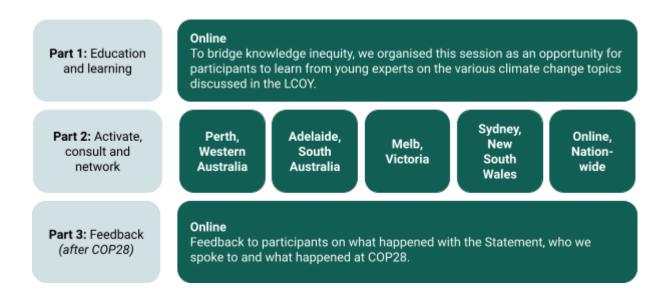
Following these core principles as well as child and youth engagement best practice (including age appropriate materials, trauma informed practices and strengths based perspectives), UA and MSDI worked together to select a group of young climate change makers who were interested in being a part of this process. UA/MSDI and the LCOY leaders each had different roles and activities which they needed to undertake.

Leaders LCOY Leadership Council	<ul> <li>Researching and drafting the National Statement</li> <li>Facilitation of the LCOY consultations</li> <li>Consolidating consultation information to create the final Statement</li> <li>Disseminating the Statement</li> <li>Representing the Statement at COP28.</li> </ul>
Supporters UA & MSDI	<ul> <li>Capacity building and support for the LCOY Leaders - including in policy &amp; advocacy advice and youth engagement</li> <li>Administrative and outreach support</li> <li>Child safeguarding support for participants and leaders</li> <li>Media support to disseminate the Statement.</li> </ul>



The LCOY Leaders consist of eight individuals who are passionate about climate change and are active within the space. With their pre-existing knowledge and connections, The Leaders determined 8 core topic areas to focus on for the Statement: education; child and youth voice; finance; mitigation; adaptation; the Asia Pacific regions; climate justice and child and youth perspective.

The group determined that the LCOY should consist of **three parts** to meet the principles set by YOUNGO as well as best practice of youth engagement (see below).



#### Part 1: Education and Learning

**Aim:** To ensure that all participants had an opportunity to learn a bit more about the topics we would be exploring, UN and global processes; and be inspired by other young people.

The session was held online to make it more accessible and inclusive for everyone. It was also recorded for those who could not make the session.

This session was run completely by young people who are working in the climate change space.

- We provided a space for participants to learn more about YOUNGO, LCOY, COP and UNFCCC;
- We heard from a young Indigenous woman about the importance of Country, how climate change is impacting country, and what First Nations communities are doing;
- We listened to the the perspectives of people working and living in the Pacific, how climate change has impacted them and how they have stood strong despite the impacts;
- We were inspired by the Duty of Care Bill and the journey to justice that young people have taken during this process;
- We heard how Australia can support South East Asia and what role we could play;
- We learned about the Loss and Damage fund as well as Global Stocktake, two topics which will be explored more at COP28;
- And given the topic, we acknowledged that climate anxiety is real and how to support ourselves and reach out while working through this topic.



#### Part 2: Activate, Consult & Network

Aim: For participants to connect and explore the topic areas together.

Throughout the research, it was discussed which areas the group would like to explore further in the consultations. These included: education; youth voice; investments; mitigation and adaptation. This was to allow for deeper discussions and to determine gaps and potential recommendations which would suit the needs of the children and young people in Australia.

These sessions were held face to face to create an opportunity where young people could network, learn together, and have strong conversations. An online session was held when some people were unable to make the face to face sessions.

With a broad age range of participants, ranging from 14 to 30, participants helped in creating a safe space together at the start of the sessions. We agreed at the start that we had to acknowledge everyone had a different level of knowledge and different experiences, but we were all here to listen and learn from each other. Through discussions, activities, and even art, we worked through these topics to have broader conversations. The LCOY Leaders facilitated the conversations and shared their knowledge.

#### Part 3: Feedback

**Aim:** Providing an opportunity to demonstrate where their voices were taken and what change has happened because of it.

Post COP28, we will host an online feedback session where LCOY Leaders will be able to share what happened with the National Statement, what happened at COP28, and where to next. We will also hear from participants about what they would like to be involved with further down the track as well. This is an opportunity to include and grow the number of young people to participate in further LCOYs in Australia.

