

**ARISE
AND ACT:
OUR FUTURE
IS ON FIRE**

BY AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE



**Save the
PLANET**



ARISE and act: Our future is on fire

The climate crisis is profoundly affecting the world we all live in and already having dire consequences. No one is more affected than us, children and young people. Climate change is a crisis compromising our rights – globally and in Australia.

We, Australia's children and young people, are the centre of our communities today and we are the future. Our best interests must be paramount in all decisions about climate change. This is not just a moral obligation, but a legal one.

Yet overwhelmingly we are not being listened to on the climate crisis by leaders in government. We are raising our voices and rising to act, yet we are being dismissed. We can't vote in elections, and we are overlooked in decision-making. The people elected to represent us and protect our interests are putting short term profit over a liveable future. They are not protecting our interests and this is doing great harm.

This is why we have felt the obligation to step up and lead in calling for action on the climate crisis. We should not need to be doing this, but faced with inaction from leaders, we have had no choice.

Our ideas are clear, and clearly backed by science.

A reckoning is coming. In fact, the climate crisis has already hit home. Natural disasters are getting worse – under inadequate Paris Agreement pledges, a child born in Australia today can expect to experience four times as many heatwaves, 3.4 times as many droughts, 1.4 times as many river floods and 1.3 times as many bushfires as their grandparents.

We, children and young people, are being impacted in so many ways, more severely than adults. We are especially vulnerable to smoke and heat-induced hospitalisations. When trapped in the house by heatwaves and bushfires, we're exposed to particular harm. We see local businesses and entire industries shutting down and our communities dwindling around us, and we can't help but wonder what kind of future we will be graduating into. What will become of our communities? Will there be jobs for us? Do we even have a future? Our future is on fire. We feel an overwhelming – and justified – sense of existential dread and hopelessness, fed by our leaders' lack of response to the climate crisis and their indifference to our calls for action.

And we clearly see the inequality that's occurring, with some groups of children and young people – especially Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, regional and rural communities and communities of colour – being disproportionately exposed to these far-reaching ill effects.

The science is clear: unless Australia acts now, things will just keep getting worse.

Those in power today will be judged on what they do. We will remember. History will not look kindly on those who have the power to make change but do nothing.

We, Australia's children and young people, are rising to meet this moment. We are calling on our leaders to do the same, and to use their power to act.

Governments and other decision-makers and leaders need to be accountable to us for their actions – or inaction – in response to the climate crisis.

Accountability starts with listening to us and taking our views seriously. There are practical ways that Australia's leaders can do this, from the global arena down to the local level. In this declaration, we describe how.

Our voices need to be heard, and acted on, before it's too late. ■

WE DEMAND THAT AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENTS LISTEN TO US,
AUSTRALIA'S CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE,
ON THE CLIMATE CRISIS.

WE MUST ARISE AND ACT, TOGETHER.

THIS MEANS:

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ACCOUNTABILITY – governments must acknowledge they have a duty of care to us on climate change, and take all necessary steps to protect us

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REPRESENTATION – the Federal Government must create a Youth Ambassador for the Environment who represents and promotes our interests in international discussions

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INCLUSION – the Federal Government must ratify the Third Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, so that our rights are included and we have direct access to the United Nations to uphold those rights

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STANDARDS – governments, leaders and communities must implement minimum standards for consulting with us about climate change policy and legislation, to ensure we are always consulted and provide clear guidance about when and how this happens

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EMPOWERMENT – governments must invest in programs for our participation in disaster preparedness, response, recovery and resilience-building activities in our communities, so that we are involved and our voices heard and taken seriously by local decision-makers

ARISE in action

– the detail

1. ACCOUNTABILITY: Acknowledge a duty of care to us on climate change

Governments have a social and moral duty to prevent harm to us arising from climate change.

Australian governments must acknowledge their duty to prevent harm to us from climate change. They should do this by publicly recognising this duty and taking all necessary steps to protect us and ensure that no decisions are made that put us in harm's way due to climate change. This must include doing everything that is called for to mitigate and address the harm that we are already suffering from the climate crisis – such as to our health, wellbeing and natural and built environments.

At a minimum, this should include ensuring that potential harm to us is rigorously and transparently considered, and given all due weight, in all relevant decisions – rather than being ignored or glossed over as currently happens. ■

2. REPRESENTATION: Appoint a Youth Ambassador for the Environment

The environment and climate change are of particular interest and importance to us, children and young people. We should be represented in Australia's international discussions about these matters. This could be done by appointing a Youth Ambassador for the Environment who is themselves a young person.

This Youth Ambassador could work alongside the existing adult Ambassador for the Environment to represent and promote our interests – those of Australian children and young people – on international environmental issues, including global efforts to address climate change.

The Youth Ambassador should be resourced and supported to perform their role, including being able to hear from, and represent, the full diversity of young people's perspectives and experiences across Australia. ■

3. INCLUSION: Ratify the Third Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child

We have rights, just like adults. These are the things every child should have – things like physical and mental health, safety, education, and housing, all of which are threatened by climate change.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child contains core rights of children agreed by the international community. Australia is bound by it. Yet children in Australia have no way to appeal directly to the United Nations when our rights are violated. Our rights are not being included and this means that we are not being included, as Australian and global citizens.

Unlike nearly 50 other countries, Australia has not agreed to the Convention's Third Optional Protocol, which provides the mechanism for children to communicate with the UN. There is no good reason for Australia to delay further. ■

4. STANDARDS: Implement minimum standards for consulting with us on climate change policy and legislation

We should be involved in all decision-making and activities relating to climate change and disaster risk reduction, including management of the natural environment and adapting to the effects of experiencing impacts of climate change, such as through emergency preparedness and recovery. This includes proposed new government policy decisions, legislation and other actions and decisions.

Minimum standards could clarify what this involvement and participation should look like, including the type of consultation with us that should occur in different situations.

These standards should be designed with our input, be legally binding and include publication of how our views were sought and taken into account. ■

5. EMPOWERMENT: Invest in programs for our participation in climate and disaster-related activities in our communities

The impacts of climate change are most directly felt in our own communities, and many of the decisions that affect us most are made in those same communities.

The climate crisis is making natural hazards – like drought, bushfires and floods – more frequent and worse. When it comes to local planning and preparation, and recovery after disasters strike, it is primarily local government and local community service providers who are responsible.

We should be included in all planning and communication about disaster preparedness, response, recovery and resilience-building activities. We should be actively supported to have a voice as advocates in our communities, with local decision-makers committing to listen, engage and act. We should have representatives who are themselves young people speaking and being taken seriously about the issues that matter to us. And the programs and structures needed to enable this should be in place in every community across Australia, so that access, inclusion and having a voice don't depend on where someone lives. ■



ARISE and act: – the voices

JOCELYN

Climate change is a recurring issue that our world has faced over the past few decades, the responsibility of humans to take care of our home has been mocked. This is why fighting for our home as young people, the future generation is extremely integral.

Change is overdue, we need to see children and young people's voices be heard by our leaders, we need a leader we can trust. Our future is at stake, we as young people and children need to demand change. ■



EVA

Climate action is important to me, as it will define our present and our future. As a young person, we are tired of feeling undermined and silenced by politicians who don't value youth representation and perspectives, nor acknowledge the danger we are in if we continue to act towards the climate crisis with such ignorance.

Change must happen, and one of the only ways we can do that is by utilising the ideas of youth, and diversifying the respected voices in Australian politics. ■



NATASHA

I am a young woman of colour, with lived experience of seeing how the climate crisis has directly impacted my communities in Asia and Western Sydney. It motivates my activism. I have been time and time again disappointed in Australian leaders and has felt an obligation to call out people in power.

I want to see leaders take real action to achieve climate justice instead of empty words followed with little action, leaders must listen to children and young people in climate decision making because the climate crisis is one of the defining issues for the generation of young people and they must be a part of the conversation. ■



ARISE and act: – the voices

ETHAN

Climate action is important to me because I feel an obligation to secure a future for not only myself but for all Indigenous Mob. I have seen how climate change has affected my culture and the disproportionate impacts it has had on all First Nations people and rather than sitting around waiting for politicians to do anything, I am taking action myself.

I want to see system change. It has been far too long for leaders not to take meaningful action on the climate crisis and with millions of people impact by the climate crisis. This is why I want to see system change, First Nations leading the nation, a youth advisory council leading the way on climate action and for systems of oppression to be dismantled eg. racism. ■



AIMEE

Climate justice is a central concern to my activism and I hope to speak out on the steps of Parliament.

Through learning, I hope to transfer my awareness, anger and protest as a high school student into tangible public policy and actions by our government. I believe in speaking out as young Australians until we can vote, and the power of working locally until we gain the tenure to contribute/disrupt on the global scale. ■







**Save the
PLANET**

POWERED BY SAVE THE CHILDREN AUSTRALIA