

STAND WITH US

WORDS FROM CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN AUSTRALIA,
PAPUA NEW GUINEA, VANUATU AND TONGA, WHO ARE BEARING
THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE CLIMATE CRISIS.



Save the Children



CLIMATE IS CHANGING MORE, THE SUN IS VERY HOTTER THAN BEFORE, AND THE RAIN FLOODS UP THE RIVERS AND THE SUN DRIES UP THE CROPS AND FOOD GARDENS.

BERNADETH, 13, PAPUA NEW GUINEA

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**I KNOW CLIMATE
CHANGE EXISTS.**

**YOU KNOW CLIMATE
CHANGE EXISTS.**

**WE ALL KNOW
IT EXISTS.**

**WHY DO WE
CONTINUE TO ACT
AS IF IT DOESN'T?**

STELLA, 17, AUSTRALIA

DEAR PRIME MINISTER ALBANESE AND MINISTER BOWEN,

As President of Negotiations for COP31, Minister Bowen, and as the leader of a nation that will help shape the outcomes of the negotiations, Prime Minister, we are writing to you on behalf of children and young people across Australia and the Pacific. Ahead of the Pre-COP in Fiji, and following UNICEF's Pre-COP Australia Pacific Youth Climate Dialogue held last week, Save the Children asked children and young people across Australia, Papua New Guinea, Tonga and Vanuatu what they wanted you to know.

This letter is built from our own voices, our experiences, and our hopes for the future.

For us, climate change is not a future threat. It is already shaping our lives, limiting our opportunities, and putting our rights, health and futures at risk. We are the generation who will live with the consequences of decisions made today.

In Papua New Guinea, Serah, 10, told us plainly: *"The climate of today changes and makes it hard for us children when it comes to rainy season, and all the rivers are flooded. We won't be able to cross the rivers to go to school."* Jenny, 14, from Papua New Guinea, said in the wet season, the *"rain blocks the tracks we follow"* to get there.

It's a similar story across the Pacific. Uinita, 13, from Tonga, said she missed school recently due to flooding and said worsening weather patterns are the cause. Susan, 29, from Vanuatu, said the impacts of climate change are very *"noticeable"* where she lives, and are only getting worse.

These children aren't just describing weather; they're describing a threat to their rights. Hannah, 17, from Queensland, spoke of ecosystems collapsing and

species disappearing, saying *"we need to be protecting the voiceless."* Stella, 17, from Victoria, said she is noticing that summers are getting hotter and asked the question that hangs over her whole generation: *"But when will it become unbearable?"*

Climate change also affects what children eat and whether families can maintain their health and livelihoods. Haruka, 16, from Vanuatu, who attended UNICEF's Dialogue, cites Save the Children research finding that roughly one in three children in Vanuatu are stunted or anaemic. When cyclones destroy gardens, families can be pushed towards *"cheaper, overprocessed foods."*

Uinita, 13, from Tonga, described fruit bearing *"off season"* or coming out *"small and deformed"*, with households increasingly relying on rice, bread and noodles as home-grown food becomes less reliable. Nicole, 30, from one of the most isolated regions in Vanuatu, says climate change affects her *"health and wellbeing, agricultural activities to gain income and healthy food, marine ecosystems that my livelihood depends on"* and leaves her *"highly vulnerable"* as a young adult.

Bernadeth, 13, from Papua New Guinea said as the sun gets *"hotter than before"* it *"dries up the crops and food gardens"*. In Vanuatu, communities report *"longer periods of dry weather, affecting water supplies, food gardens, livestock and livelihoods"*, followed by flooding when the rain finally comes. Jenny, 14, also from Papua New Guinea, said during dry spells, there is no drinking water at school, so she is forced to stay home.

These experiences raise a question for Australia: does Australia's rhetoric on climate leadership match the action it takes?

Chloe, 26, from Vanuatu, acknowledges Australia's delivered at least \$1.3 billion in Pacific climate finance.¹² also points to reported fossil fuel subsidies of \$16.3 billion in 2025–26 and more than 30 new or expanded coal, oil and gas approvals. Her request to the Australian Government is simple: *"make it make sense."*³

Stella, 17, asked a pointed question: *"We all know it exists. Why do we continue to act as if it doesn't?"* Vepaiamele, 17, from Vanuatu, who is also attending UNICEF's Youth Dialogue, said, *"So let us act now, before we lose any more, of our culture, history, stories and lore."*

Unita, from Tonga, added, *"If this is climate change today, what will tomorrow bring? What will the future be like? For me, I dare not imagine...But what can I do? What can we do? That is a question I'd like to leave with you."*

So here is what these children and young people are asking of you, Prime Minister and Minister Bowen, ahead of COP31:

 **First, match Australia's commitments to the Pacific with ambitious action at home.** This means ensuring that new fossil fuel project approvals are consistent with efforts to limit global warming to 1.5°C, and that Australia is doing everything within its power to keep this goal within reach. It also means turning Australia's commitments under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child into action to protect children from climate harm. As Haruka, from Vanuatu, puts it, these rights are *"non-negotiable"*. Hunter, 17, from Australia, said, *"it is time to turn those commitments into action."*

 **Second, back the practical priorities Pacific communities keep asking for.** This includes providing Australia's fair share of climate finance - at least A\$11 billion annually between 2025–2030, rising to A\$14 billion annually by 2035 - with a significant portion directed specifically to Pacific communities, to help them adapt to the challenges of the climate crisis and strengthen water security, resilient agriculture, coastal protection and disaster preparedness.

 **And third, it is long past time to put children at the centre of climate decisions.** Their voices should shape the policies that affect their lives, and their rights to health, food, education and a healthy environment should be treated as obligations to uphold, not aspirations to work towards. With this in mind, we ask you to formally champion this letter at COP31 - presenting it to fellow negotiators and world leaders as evidence of what children and young people across Australia and the Pacific are asking for.

Above all, these young people want to lead, participate and be taken seriously.

Trevor, 26, from Vanuatu, said *"I see myself as a leader of climate action for young Pacific Islanders and not just as a victim of climate change."* Ma'asi, 13, from Tonga, said he has told his fellow students, *"We may be young, but we are not powerless."*

These children and young people are not asking Australia to fix the climate crisis alone. They are asking Australia, as the co-host of COP31, to act in line with the scale of the challenge, to honour its commitments, and to give them a meaningful say on the issues that affect them most.

Yours sincerely,

**On behalf of the children and young people whose voices are reflected in this letter,
Save the Children Australia**

1 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, "Counting Australia's Climate Finance," accessed 2026,
2 The Australia Institute, *Fossil fuel subsidies in Australia 2026* (March 2026)
3 Climate Council, "The Albanese Government's Fossil Fuel Approvals," accessed 2026,

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**THE CHILDREN
OF THE PACIFIC
ARE NO LONGER
PLEADING FOR
JUSTICE.**

**WE ARE
DEMANDING IT.**

HARUKA, 17, VANUATU



IF THIS IS CLIMATE CHANGE TODAY, WHAT WILL TOMORROW BRING? AND WHAT WILL THE FUTURE BE LIKE? FOR ME I DARE NOT IMAGINE... BUT WHAT CAN I DO? WHAT CAN WE DO? THAT IS A QUESTION I'D LIKE TO LEAVE WITH YOU.

UINITA, 13, TONGA

