

Environmental Sustainability

GGA Position Statement

Our vision

Girl Guides want Australia to play its role in delivering on global commitments toward a decarbonised economy where the protection of our environment is central to decision making priorities.

We want to empower young people to deliver environmental action and shape a more sustainable future for all. Girl Guides Australia speaks on behalf of its members, particularly its youth members, to call for action by governments and organisations in delivering on global commitments toward a sustainable and decarbonised economy.

Statement

Environmental sustainability is one of the most important issues currently facing our global community. This includes the urgent need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to decarbonise to meet the commitments set out in the Paris Agreement¹, better management and restoration of biodiversity and responsible production and consumption. The way in which environmental issues are addressed right now will impact the lives of all people and will shape the opportunities available to future generations.

Australia has a unique and diverse landscape that is rich in biodiversity and includes ecosystems, plants and animals found nowhere else on earth. Yet our unique landscapes and habitats face a growing threat from the impact of humans. In addition, natural disasters, including bushfires, floods, droughts, and cyclones are putting pressure on our natural environment and our communities, and climate change is making these events more intense and more frequent. We see our members and their communities increasingly impacted by these natural disasters.

The decade from 2011 to 2020 was the hottest on record, and on the current trajectory global warming will exceed the 1.5C limit identified in the Paris Agreement^{1,2}. This poses risks for both natural environments and human systems.

Meanwhile, human intervention is also damaging our fragile eco-systems through impacts including clearing native vegetation, pollution and the unsustainable generation and disposal of waste.

Girls say.

At the 2023 Australian Jamboree, girls and young women told us that action on environmental issues were at the core of how Australia could be a better place. They were passionate and concerned about issues including:

- Human induced climate change**
“Climate change is the most important issue because it’s ruining the air and the ozone layer and it’s changing the way the sun is hitting our earth and it’s messing up the weather affecting everyone. We should care because if we don’t stop it it’s going to get worse.” - Lauren, 14
- Habitat loss, clearing and threats to biodiversity**
“Invasive animals are destroying the ecosystem... they end up just destroying everything and kill native wildlife. We need to protect the native animals and control the invasive species” - Kimberly, 13
“I think that a lot of animals that are close to extinction ... We should plant more trees” - Mila, 9
- Litter, pollution and plastic waste**
“If you throw the rubbish on the floor, just pick it up quickly and put it in the bin” - Sophia, 5
“We should probably make it a law to not let plastic get to the ocean” - Phoebe, 9
- Advocacy and action**
 As well as wanting to take action themselves, Guides want to see their community, governments and the nation taking action to create a better future.
“Stop focusing on unnecessary things and actually complete the goals that were set by the government e.g. the carbon free by 2030” - Kimberly, 13

Many girls and young people experience a very real and serious anxiety about the future of the environment and the planet, and about the world they are inheriting³.

Why is Girl Guides Australia commenting?

As part of the Guide Law, Girl Guides promise to serve our communities and to make choices for a better world, including seeking to protect, enhance and restore the environment. As an organisation Girl Guides has an extensive history of engaging in meaningful actions to reduce negative environmental impacts.

We speak out in support of our Guild Guide and Girl Scout sisters, and all girls and women around the world, recognising that girls and women are disproportionately affected by climate change and environmental degradation. This impact is amplified when girls and young women live in poverty. During instability that arises with increasing natural disasters, girls and young women are more likely to experience impacts on their rights to safety, education and other basic human rights^{4,5}.

What Guides are doing now.

Girl Guides Australia is working through non-formal education to ensure all girls and young women are empowered to speak out and take action on climate change and environmental issues in their communities, as well as on a national and international stage.

In their local communities

Through Girl Guide programs, girls build their understanding and awareness of the natural environment through outdoor activities. As a result of our activities Guides build an understanding of the personal actions, they can take to reduce negative impacts, enhance positive impact, and protect the environment through environmental projects in their local communities.

Across the Country

Each year, hundreds of Girl Guides across the country take part in community and WAGGGS led initiatives such as Clean Up Australia Day, Earth Hour, Youth & United Nations Global Alliance Challenge Badges and more, working to better understand, care for and protect the environment.

Speaking Out Globally

Each year when world leaders meet to discuss climate change at Conference of the Parties, a team of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts are there to speak out on behalf of 8.8 million girls in 153 countries. GGA supports WAGGGS programs to address climate change, including girl-led actions both here and overseas.

Call to action.

We need to see action on these key issues:

- Addressing **Climate Change** urgently through **emissions reduction**, with a focus on national action, and advocacy for communities who are impacted by a changing climate.
- Supporting **Biodiversity management** with a focus on policies and programs that protect species and their habitats and restore our local ecosystems.
- Refusing, reducing, reusing, recycling, and rethinking, our relationship with **Waste**
- **Advocacy and Action** with a focus on empowering girls to take action and show leadership in their own communities, and to be the change they want to see in the world.

Girl Guides Australia calls on Decision Makers to:

- Prioritise activities in policies, grants and strategies that support decarbonisation and drive action towards net zero emissions by 2050 (or sooner).
- Work to fulfil the commitments in the Paris Agreement, including the commitment to keep global temperature rises under 1.5C
- Focus on the unique impacts of climate change and natural disasters on girls and young women, and address these impacts in climate change strategies and disaster planning,
- Make decisions and enact policies which will meaningfully address girls' concerns and the inequality caused by climate change.
- Protect threatened and native species and preserve native habitats and ecosystems balancing development with protecting natural areas and creating new greens space.
- Enhance legislation to phase out remaining single use plastics with a nationally consistent approach.
- Build community capacity through education, awareness, and access to divert waste from landfill and increase the portion of our waste which is recycled and composted.

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Girl Guides Australia will:

- Support girls and young women to participate directly in decision making on environmental issues and to speak up about their concerns and their ideas for a better world.
- Create opportunities for decision makers and governments to hear directly from young women and girls about the impact of climate change and environmental degradation and how they are being affected.
- Build capacity amongst our members and their communities through education, awareness, and access to participate in advocacy and action on environment and climate change.
- Support members in planning and undertaking taking local environmental actions, including those that protect species and their habitats, and restore our local ecosystems.
- Introduce guidelines and education materials to assist members to identify and reduce environmental impacts of their activities, for example in Guide Halls and unit meetings.
- Introduce guidelines and education materials to assist members to reduce use of single-use materials, to divert waste from landfill and increase the portion of our waste which is recycled and composted.

Girl Guides should:

- Act as agents of change in their own world – reducing the carbon footprint and negative environmental impact at home, at Girl Guides and in their community.
- Experience and connect with nature and learn about the need for environmental protection.
- Encourage family, friends, and community to enhance the natural environment, planting native and protecting habitats at a local level.
- Take the lead in advocating to governments, businesses and the wider community for climate justice and environmental action.
- Innovate and be part of the solution. Work together to identify and reduce environmental impacts of their activities, for example in Guide Halls and unit meetings.
- Think before use – identifying ways to reduce waste and to increase personal rates of recycling and composting.

Everyone should:

- Work collaboratively to seek solutions that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and provide adaptation solutions to changing climatic conditions.
- Prioritise biodiversity restoration with native solutions.
- Refuse, reduce, reuse and recycle and better manage waste.
- Support research and innovation to help address challenging environmental issues.

Supporting Research

1. Paris Agreement 2015. <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/paris-agreement>
2. Global Climate 2011-2020: A Decade of Acceleration - World Meteorological Organization – pub 2023
3. Global Warming of 1.5°C. An IPCC Special Report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways, in the context of strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development, and efforts to eradicate poverty, IPCC, 2018
4. Mission Australia (2023) *Climate Concerns and Young People's Mental Health: Findings from the 2022 Mission Australia Youth Survey*.
<https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/media-centre/media-releases/youth-survey-shows-need-for-action-on-impact-of-climate-change-concerns-on-youth-mental-health>
5. COP27: United Nations Conference on Climate Change (wagggg.org)
6. United Nations. (2022) *Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes: report of the Secretary-General*.<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3956348?v=pdf>