

Statement of Ruby Fox

Name: Ruby Fox

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1. My name is Ruby (she/her). I grew up in Western Australia, but currently live on the lands of the Muwinina people in Nipaluna, Hobart.
2. I am making this statement in support of my joint complaint to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Climate Change detailing how Australia is violating mine, and other young people's human rights. In preparing this statement, I hope that the Special Rapporteur writes to the Australian government about their inaction on climate change. I also hope that the Special Rapporteur visits Australia to meet with me and other young people so that she can understand how climate change is impacting our lives.
3. I am 21 years old and currently in my final semester at the University of Tasmania, studying a Bachelor of Marine and Antarctic Science, majoring in Marine Biology and Marine and Antarctic Governance. After I finish my final semester, I will go into my Honours year, investigating the habitat sensitivities of Australian Sea Lions on the Great Southern Reef. The Great Southern Reef is the temperate reef that extends from Brisbane in the east and to Kalbarri on the West Coast. In my spare time, I love to go for cold water swims, freedive through kelp forests, hike Tasmanian mountains, and surf pristine, empty waves.
4. Tasmania is the southernmost capital city in Australia. I always like to think of it as a big country town. We get warm wet summers and brisk dry, cold winters. In winter, when you're lucky you can catch an Aurora Australis at night - pink, green and yellow bars dancing across the sky. I was drawn to Tasmania because of its proximity to the Southern Ocean, and its wild nature and landscape. Tasmanians are incredibly passionate about the environment, recognising how special it is to live in a place that feels so untouched.
5. I grew up in Margaret River in Western Australia. 'Margs' is a classic Australian coastal town, very laid back and full of surfers. In the winter, huge swells come through and land on the coast.

Growing up I was always out in the water surfing with my twin brother on a chilly morning. Sometimes, if we were lucky, dolphins would swim past and I'd dive off my board and swim alongside them for as long as possible.

6. When I was 15, my family moved to Perth, the capital city of Western Australia. For the last few years of high school, I tried to cling on to nature by filling my week with early morning rowing sessions on the Swan River. But it wasn't the same, and I really missed that feeling of going on adventures in the wilderness. This is when I realised that I had an obligation to protect and conserve the ocean to the best of my ability, to ensure that future generations have the same connection, and access to the awe-inspiring natural world.
7. In my first year of studying Marine Biology, I realised quickly, no matter how much incredible research takes place, change happens at the political level. So, I changed tact, adding a Governance major on to my studies. This was the first time I had engaged in political discourse. In talking to my friends about what I was learning, I realised how detached young people are from politics and environmental management.
8. In the last few years, I've gained confidence in inspiring political conversations amongst my peers. Now, I have a sense of duty to use that knowledge for the better. Part of writing to the Special Rapporteur is representing the beliefs of all the people that I know – young and old, who have been affected by climate change. I'm privileged to take on the weight of their stories, struggles and challenges alongside my own.
9. My mum tells this story about the first time I ever went snorkelling. I was about 3 years old with a mask on and floaties on. She was holding my hand. I looked underwater, and up at her, down, and back again, and said to her in amazement, "mummy, mummy, there's a whole world under there!" I think this sets the scene as to how close to my heart the issue of climate change and the ocean is.

A bleached reef is a graveyard: My experiences of growing up with climate change and my life now

10. Growing up in a rural community, I regularly saw the impacts of extreme weather and fire. Western Australia consistently has some of the hottest temperatures in Australia, always bringing the risk of bushfires. Ever since I was little, I have always been hyperaware of the existential risk that living in the bush can bring during summer. I think that this is a universal experience for Australians living in the bush. You always have it in the back of your mind to have a plan about what to leave behind, what to do if the

dog is stuck at the house, where do we stay, where do we go, if we are stuck in the fires, what room is safest to go into.

11. Particularly, during summer, when it's over 30 degrees and windy, many Australians exist in a state of constant anxiety, knowing the inevitability of a bushfire developing nearby. It's pretty scary but it's something that I have an automatic reaction to now. When that kind of weather comes on, the anxiety just kicks in, and you know that someone is going to lose their home today and it could possibly be you. You must exist in a state of constant preparation, with a plan in place to make sure you and your family are safe.
12. I have been evacuated twice during bushfires. One of those times was when I was staying with my extended family on Kangaroo Island in South Australia. We had to be evacuated down to the beach for the day. I was quite young and didn't quite know what was happening but could clearly see the fire on the horizon and understand the gravity of the situation. My dad left that day, to go and give a helping hand to defend the family farm. It was terrifying to know that all that history could be gone in an instant.
13. Over my relatively short lifetime, I believe I experienced significant changes in weather patterns, directly correlated with climate change. In 21 years, I've watched every summer in Western Australia get longer, hotter, and windier, with some areas getting too hot for humans to tolerate (50 degrees Celsius).
14. Growing up in Western Australia my family participated in the annual migration northward. For 10 years, we were lucky enough to spend the month of July on the Ningaloo Coast, surfing and diving on one of the most untouched reefs in the world. When I was in Year 10, I grovelled my way from my city school to work experience on a whaleshark ecotourism boat in this beautiful place. Seeing boatloads of people, and especially little kids, putting their goggles and flippers on every day and experiencing joy and delight at existing harmlessly alongside prehistoric whalesharks was nothing short of awe-inspiring. It made me realise how much I had to give back to the reef, and everything it had to offer.
15. However, visiting the Ningaloo reef years later, it was with horror that I observed widespread coral destruction caused by cyclones and sustained bleaching events. Every summer I would watch the weather report closely, to see what the effects would be. These reefs take hundreds of years to grow, yet within 10 years I have watched humans decimated them to points beyond repair.

16. When a reef is alive it palpably vibrates with life. A bleached reef is a ghost town, with no fish or organisms to be seen, it's like looking at a graveyard. After visiting my favourite spot on the reef after cyclones had been through, and human activity had increased, I got out of the water and cried to my mum. That area will never bounce back.

Without agriculture, Australia can't operate: How climate change threatens farmers, like my family

17. I grew up in a family of farmers. My ancestors have been farming in Victoria and Western Australia since European settlement first occurred. Growing up, I was definitely aware of the disparity of climate impacts between rural communities and cities, with the effects felt by farmers exceeding all else. Year after year, I've seen my friends and family giving up their farms, as it's unsustainable. Extreme weather such as drought, heat and cyclones give them no other choice. Yet, without agriculture, Australia ceases to operate. Without farms, sustainable food sources do not exist. It's heart wrenching to see the farms that people are so connected to, and love so much, become unrecognisable because of climate change. Its forcing people to give up their homes and history once and for all.

18. As part of my studies, I have a scholarship from Agrifutures Australia. With this scholarship, I attended a conference last year and it became apparent to me that farmers are some of the most passionate people working to address climate change. Farmers are now the ones with wind farms on their farms and they are realising they must create change and make practises sustainable otherwise they won't survive the changing climate and the increasing insurance premiums. They realise what the change needs to be.

Vanishing snow: My growing anxiety as the climate changes before my eyes

19. Since moving to Hobart 3 years ago, major changes in climate, particularly the impacts on snowfall, have really stood out to me. In my first year of moving here, I experienced the coldest, longest winter I'd ever felt. It was so cold that there was snow on the mountain for months. It was a certainty that you would look out the window and see Kunanyi (Mount Wellington) covered in a thick white blanket.
20. The next year, we all told the new students to prepare themselves for the cold winter. But it never came. Snowfall was sparse and infrequent, with Kunanyi remaining mostly clear throughout June and July.
21. When I think about climate change, snow makes for easy notice of the change. When it doesn't fall, you begin to realise that even in a tiny city in the farthest part of the world, we are already feeling the effects of climate change. Seeing and experiencing an extreme weather event like the loss of snow, an intense bushfire, or dangerous storm is shocking. It really creates a sense of urgency and anxiety. I think a lot

about what I can do to make sure it doesn't happen so that my children and their children can experience all that we have. I like to think that I have put myself in a place where I can throw myself into my studies as a way of tackling the climate anxiety and coping with those existential climate thoughts.

22. It is extremely interesting to have discussions with my peers around this – to see my experience reflected in their own. I've had countless conversations with my friends about our hesitation to bring children into the world. Not only are we uncertain about the horrors they may experience in time due to the weather impacts of climate change, but we are unsure of the scale that political instability and global anarchy, exacerbated due to climate change effects, will reach during their lifetime.
23. In terms of this overwhelming climate anxiety, I've seen first-hand the burnout of friends, and senior academics who are so invested in environmental advocacy, that constantly experience their hard work brushed under the rug and ignored under the pretence of politics and economic good. Every day, I remind myself that it's the small steps that count. Feeling overwhelmed just means that you're taking action, and self-doubt exists to remind you that you are human, that you care.
24. I definitely feel the intense burden of climate change. As I get older and get more drawn into my career, family life and all the problems of the world, I hope I don't lose this interest and hope for action to make change. I hope that somehow, I and others, can encourage people to not let the climate anxiety to takeover and dissociate. It's hard when we are looking to leaders, who continue to fail to act on climate. If they can't set an example, how is anyone going to feel inspired enough to implement change. The leaders of this country have a responsibility to use their positions of power to set an example for us, and the rest of the world.

My studies and climate change

25. For me, I don't know that I can remember a time where I wasn't aware of climate change. I think even if events weren't spoken about as climate change, I was always learning about the environment, bushfires and the ocean and how it was all interconnected. Natural stewardship and living and caring for the environment every day was a concept that I grew up with. So, when I got older and started studying, the concept of climate change was understandable and easy to recognise. I started out with hope and unwavering faith that we would do the right thing and address climate change pretty quickly. Over time, and during my university studies now, I have realised that it's a lot harder than that.

26. I have a very nuanced understanding of climate change. I understand the global effects of increasing temperatures and extreme weather events and how that affects Antarctica and by connection, the rest of the world. I also understand how little we know about the driving factors behind climatic change in the Southern Ocean and how important it is to gain this knowledge that before we make decisions that we cannot reverse. This is why it is important to mitigate greed by taking a precautionary approach. I know that the geopolitical conversations behind Antarctic use and conservation are difficult to manage with competing interests on a global scale. But it needs to happen. We must reign in our greed and avoid exploiting our resources beyond their capacity for resilience. Ultimately, we will all be affected by the tiniest change happening in the Antarctic. If the ice sheet melts, humanity ceases to exist.
27. There are huge krill fisheries in the Southern Ocean that claim to be sustainably managed. However, methods of krill sampling are incredibly biased and fail to give a holistic understanding of krill biomass, generally leading to overestimates. Any catch of krill, any percentage taken from the ocean links to proportional decline in marine mammal species such as penguins, seals and whales. Under the Antarctic Treaty, states agree to preserve the continent for peace and science, yet Antarctic tourism continues to grow. The continent is meant to be preserved as the last frontier of wilderness, yet any disruption could cause significant ecological effects. For a region at the epicentre of climate change, increasing ocean temperatures and decreasing sea ice, human activities are an additional, unnecessary and dangerous pressure. Those countries that have supposedly agreed to protect Antarctica are those that may be destroying it.
28. We are already beginning to see sustained reductions in the duration and extent of sea ice. If Antarctic sea ice melts, global sea currents will cease to form. These are the overturning circulations that mediate climate in every corner of the Earth, with implications for everything from nutrient, oxygen and carbon cycling. We can only guess at the magnitude of this change. Everything is interconnected.
29. We have complete uncertainty in what the outcomes are for, but complete certainty that it is increased temperatures that are driving this change. That fact is undoubtable. Yet, these changes are out of sight, out of mind. Very few people get to experience Antarctica, so most don't care, yet, it affects all.

My concerns about the future: real action on climate change feels like a runaway train

30. It's difficult for me to imagine the future. If I do picture our worst-case scenario, I envisage a graveyard. I picture desolate, dirty, plastic polluted, tepid, warm, cloudy ocean. Due to significant flow-on effects for

the wellbeing of people in coastal areas around the world, I also envisage populations with poor health, limited social support, widespread food insecurity, and major global tensions.

31. It's really hard as a university student in this cost-of-living crisis. The cost of taking individual action against climate change - by being an ethical consumer, boycotts, allocating your time to advocacy and volunteering networks – is expensive, and comes at a cost that most people in this country can't afford. There is this build-up of shame, guilt, anxiety and regret that flows directly into the mental health of young people in this country. I am acutely aware of these feelings, in myself and in my friends. The guilt accumulates every time I make a choice that I know negatively impacts the planet; from buying fast fashion to eating cheap food. Battling consumerism every day in this environmental crisis is exhausting.
32. Real action on climate change feels like a runaway train that we are forever running towards. I try to do as much as I can to preserve this environment, but as a student, I have so many years before I can become influential enough to adequately make a difference.
33. It horrifies me that future generations might not even know what ice on Antarctica looked like, what a healthy climate and resilient ocean felt like, or the experience of a healthy global ecosystem. I have so much of myself tied to the environment, I wonder if life is worth living when we no longer have these beautiful places to go, to be connected with and grounded by? There is an ever-increasing risk that humanity in the future will live a virtual existence. But a life worth living is one of those special, true real-world moments, or 'glimmers' of happiness, connection and creativity.
34. I believe that everyone has the right to live freely and healthily, to enjoy natural environments and gain all their benefits in balance. Yet, with the inbound effects of climate change, these ecosystems, and holistic human wellbeing, are slipping away. The inaction of the Government is threatening our way of life.

My frustration about the government's inaction

35. I grew up in a state supported almost solely by the mining industry. Andrew Forrest, the former CEO of Fortescue Metals, one of the country's biggest mining companies, lived down the road from me, and Gina Rhineheart, Australia's richest woman and mining magnate, went to my school. This is to say that I have felt the close, and far reaches of their influence. Despite living in their shadow as a young person, the actions of few in this country influence the Australian Government more than young people could ever hope and dream to. Pacifism and complacency no longer serve the Australian population. I call for

the Australian government to step up and stand out, to speak out against the far right, and to create a new world order, where environmentalism and social progress are supported, not suppressed.

36. Beyond our measured atmospheric carbon emission contributions, Australia must be held accountable for our export economy. Australian coal and oil exports, used in other countries, contribute millions of tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere every year, and yet we fail to take responsibility for these inputs. It's time for the government to take a higher level approach to our net zero targets, to account for, and be proud of our limitations and shortcomings, because how else will we recognise the change that needs to occur?
37. To me, it is with absolute frustration and dread that I look at the Australian government's inaction on climate change. It feels as though I could be shouting from the rooftops, the world could be burning around us, and the government will continue to deny, deflect, and turn a blind eye.
38. This sense of existential hopelessness has only been exacerbated recently, by the actions of the Trump administration in the USA, one of Australia's closest and most influential allies; and the rightward slip of European governance. Australia's next federal election is looming, and young people in this country are terrified that we can't trust our peers and family to vote in support of future generations. The current opposition Peter Dutton threatens to permanently reverse significant progress towards green energies, for the sake of continuing an outdated ideology about nuclear power. Meanwhile, the Prime Minister, who we elected on the promise of significant environmental reform, has continued to approve enormous oil, gas and coal projects. I, and my peers, recognise that the majority of 'climate action' taken by Australia's current government has only succeeded in greenwashing and reinterpreting previously existing projects. So, where is our choice in the matter? Do we vote for a reversal of emission reduction progress? Or a stagnation?
39. Each year the government tricks us into thinking that Australia is making progress towards our net zero climate targets. But, as an environmental governance student, I can critically recognise that this 'progress' occurs not through action, but through marketing. Recent legislation, including carbon accounting, climate risk reporting and the nature positive plan, are purpose built to include loopholes which allow non-transparency, fragmentation, and red tape in environmental management. Creating 'novel solutions' to biodiversity conservation does not work when these policies are founded on models that have been proven to fail. Creating marine protected areas that we cannot enforce in the southern ocean,

and within which drilling for oil and gas can be approved (see federal and state MPAs directly off the continent) is deceiving and dishonest.

40. But the government underestimates young Australians. As they continue to disregard our undeniable wishes, we become disappointed and disheartened. We see our leaders sucking up to Donald Trump and corporate powers to maintain a shallow reputation of popularity. They are meant to be teaching us the ways of the world, but instead make us wonder what we even bother striving for. But young Australians will fight back by being better informed, more powerful, and angrier. So this is my advice for the government. Now is the time to act, before young people lose your trust, and disengage from politics for good, in a way that cannot be reversed. This is your duty to democracy.

So, if I could yell at those in power, and if they would listen;

41. I would ask the Australian Government to **stop** approving coal mines and oil drilling. **Stop** expanding fossil fuel industry at the expense of the planet. **Stop** subsidising industries that destroy the environment. **Start** taxing large corporates that contribute extreme fossil fuel emissions. **Start** listening to young people. **Start** trusting your electorates. **Start** learning from indigenous communities. **Start** investing in the renewable energy industry. **Start** showing us that you care about our futures.
42. It will be hard, there will be backlash. So, fight it. Make Australia green again.
43. This is an emergency and you must act now. We pledged to never surpass 1.5 degrees of warming. We failed. It's time to change tact. It's our life, it's our children's lives. Do it for us.

I confirm the contents of this statements are a true and correct record of my evidence.

Ruby Fox

Name:



28/02/2025

Signature

Date