

Statement of Maya Farmer

Name: Maya Farmer

Date of birth: 18 June 2005

Date: 12 March 2025

1. My name is Maya, and I use she/her pronouns. I am nineteen years old, and I live and study on Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung country in Melbourne. I am currently studying at the University of Melbourne, but grew up in Sawtell, which is on Gumbaynggirr country.
2. This year, 2025, I am in my second year of the Bachelor of Science degree. I'm planning on majoring in psychology and neuroscience. I love studying science, but I'm also passionate about human rights and climate justice. In the future, I'm considering pursuing further study in medicine, law or policy.
3. I enjoy volunteering; I volunteered at the National Science Youth Forum in January 2024 and 2025 after attending as a student in 2023. At university, I have been involved in the musical theatre and debating societies. One of my highlights last year was performing at the Melbourne Fringe with the University of Melbourne Music Theatre Association in October. In Sawtell, I used to do ballet at my local studio, and so the dance component of musical theatre has been a nice way of continuing that in Melbourne.
4. I have been involved in doing climate advocacy since I was 16. When I think about my future, I can't really envision doing anything where I'm not involved in climate advocacy to some extent. Part of this is due to how stressful and scary thinking about climate change is for me; knowing that not only is climate change going to harm us in the future, but that it's already harming us now. Part of my anxiety surrounding this is rooted in the constant disappointment that my government's inaction is contributing to climate change, which is directly impacting Australians here and now.
5. I see numbers and statistics about climate change and how it is affecting people's lives every day, and it contributes to a lot of my stress about the climate. People of all ages and from all different places are already being impacted by climate change, including me. But people aren't just numbers and statistics when it comes to climate change. I'm not just a number or a statistic.
6. To me, it doesn't make sense not to act on climate change. If there is no proper climate action, everything will worsen. The Australian government continues to emit greenhouse gases and approve fossil fuel projects, which we know facilitates climate change. How is that contributing to a safer Australia? What extremes must Australia undergo before meaningful, ambitious action is taken? And will this be after the point of no return? That is the most terrifying aspect - and why I've made this personal statement.

7. 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 writing this statement I would like to urgently request that the Special Rapporteur:
 - a. Write to the Australian Government with regards to the contents of this Complaint
 - b. Visit Australia to witness the impacts of climate change firsthand
 - c. Visit Australia to meet with diverse young Australians, including me, to directly hear from us about our experiences of climate change.

My experiences of climate change

8. I grew up in Sawtell, a small beachside town in New South Wales. It's a place where you can walk down the street and recognise half a dozen people. My family lives 5 minutes away from the beach, so we spend a lot of time there together. We would go to the beach at least every Sunday, if not more while I was growing up. When I'm home over summer, I go to the beach nearly every day; it is a big part of life in Sawtell.
9. Murray's Beach in Sawtell is my favourite of the local beaches. It's a sandy beach, with a coastline constantly shifting with the tides. Whilst home in Sawtell this summer, the water has been so blue and glassy. It's beautiful to swim in. I have been trying to improve at surfing, and Sawtell Beach is perfect as there are good, clean waves to practice on. There is a lot of bush around the beaches and our local area. Bongil Bongil National Park is near Sawtell, and it is a lovely place to go to hike or cycle. Bush and national parks surround the Mid North Coast. There are so many scenic areas so close by, and lots of nature photography opportunities!
10. Along the main street of Sawtell there are massive fig trees, which were originally planted to stop the sand dunes from encroaching on the town. They are over 70 years old now, and massive. The fig trees are amazing for climbing, and when I was little, my friends and I would always scramble up their tough trunks and sit among their thick branches.
11. Growing up in a regional area, I have seen how rural communities are disproportionately impacted by climate change compared to metropolitan areas. Outside the city, the impacts of climate change are more obvious because of our proximity to and dependence on nature and nature-based activities. The most obvious impacts are local natural disasters, but more generally, another key consequence is the way summers have become hotter. Bushfire season is also longer and starts earlier now than it used to. Since the impacts of climate change are more apparent in rural regions, that can create a lot of motivation for young rural people to get involved in climate advocacy – including me.
12. My experience of the impacts of climate change began whilst I was in primary school, in 2016, although I didn't truly understand what was happening then. Whilst driving from Sydney to Sawtell with my family on the way back from a school excursion in November, the 2016 Sydney and Cessnock fires caused the Pacific Highway to be closed. I remember seeing the smoke and orange tinge to the sky out of the car window as our car became caught up in a traffic jam and feeling scared and nervous. Firefighters and police were turning cars around due to the closure of the highway. We had been planning on camping in Forster that night, but because of the bushfires

were unable to get there. In the end, we managed to camp at Nelson Bay before driving home via Gloucester – a route that added hours to our drive home, already normally 6 hours long.

13. My high school life was punctuated by a series of natural disasters, starting with the Black Summer bushfires in Year 8 in 2019. They managed to spread so close to us, and it was really stressful for a while. Luckily, most of Coffs Harbour's surrounds ended up relatively unharmed, but we still had to prepare for the worst. My family had to pack a bag to prepare for the event that we did have to evacuate our home because of the bushfires. The plan had been to drive down to the beach if the bushfires came too close. I remember putting my photo album in my black suitcase, just in case. I have a memory of being in class with my friends, all of us on the NSW Rural Fire Service website 'Fires Near Me', watching the fires creep closer and closer. The smoke darkened the sky for so long; one day the smoke was so bad that the sun looked like a livid red spot. While Sawtell fortunately managed to evade the bushfires, this experience made things feel very real, especially as some of my classmates who lived more inland did have to evacuate. Now, I know what bushfires can do, and I feel worried and anxious whenever I hear that there is one in NSW. I always check the 'Fires Near Me' website to see how close they are to my family home.
14. A few years later in Year 10 in 2021, a supercell hailstorm swept through my community. In the past, Sawtell didn't really experience hailstorms, and never of the magnitude of the October 2021 hailstorm. Lots of communities in my area were affected by the 2021 hailstorm, including Toormina, Sawtell and Coffs Harbour. So many houses were badly damaged by the hail. Some still had tarps on them from the hail damage even a year later due to stagnation in insurance claim processes. My family was lucky; we were on the outskirts of the storm, and our house managed to escape the devastating hail damage that affected so many others in my community. One of my friends had to move out of her home because it had been flooded. The local shopping centre was flooded, and the ceiling collapsed. It took months for the centre to be fully repaired, and some shops never managed to reopen.
15. At the time, I was working two part-time jobs. One of my jobs was at the chemist in the shopping centre. All their stock was destroyed and the shop flooded by the storm, forcing the chemist to move into a tiny building offsite for the first half of 2022 while the shop was repaired. The next closest chemist isn't far away, but as our area has quite a large elderly population, this was nevertheless disruptive. This highlighted to me the inseparable nature of climate change and human rights. Climate change disproportionately affects the most vulnerable, like the elderly and the sick whose medicine access was disrupted because of the Toormina-Sawtell 2021 hailstorm.

Climate advocacy and diplomacy

Motivation to be a part of the climate movement

16. It's impossible to separate the 2019 Black Summer bushfires from climate change. However, the immediacy and realness of the climate crisis didn't truly click for me until the 2021 hailstorm. It wasn't just the accelerated greenhouse effect being taught to us at school – it was happening here, and it was happening now. The hailstorm turned the climate crisis into something concrete and tangible; something that I needed to take action to change. That was my lightbulb moment that resulted in me getting involved in the climate change movement.

17. There is a lot of stress and anxiety surrounding climate change, and this plays into my passion and motivation for climate advocacy. Thinking about climate change always evokes a lot of frustration for me due to the lack of action taken by the Government. There are so many young people who are passionate about climate change and the people it's impacting. It's not a future problem. It's affecting people right now, and yet we are seeing so little being done by the government. In 2024, instead of meaningful climate action, we saw projects including approvals for coal mine expansions and fracking for gas in the Beetaloo Basin in the Northern Territory, to name a few. It's disillusioning and disheartening how little our voices are taken into serious consideration.
18. Part of me is confused by this inaction; how can we think this is okay? The climate science is clear about the mechanisms underlying climate change, and has already given us the answers we need to address the climate crisis. And yet, there is another part of me which is not surprised. We've known about climate change for almost 90 years, and yet no substantial or genuine action has ever been taken. This mix of frustration and disbelief also fuels my passion for climate advocacy and activism.
19. We can't lose hope – of that, I am certain. Losing hope is not an option. That is how I find the motivation to continue advocating for climate justice, even at my most anxious, frustrated or disillusioned. It's a cliché, but we genuinely do only have one planet. Not taking action against climate change is simply not an option. We still have time, and we can't waste that time by pursuing fossil fuels and procrastinating renewable energies. And yet, our window is narrowing, which is why we must take ambitious action now. Not only pledge to, but actually achieve real zero greenhouse gas emissions. This is why the youth climate movement is so essential; we are inherently optimistic and hopeful for our future, and it is this optimism and hope that enables the ambition needed to address the climate crisis.

Experience in the climate advocacy and diplomacy movement

20. Following the 2021 hailstorm, I was able to channel my fear and motivation into action thanks to one of my friends, who had been involved in the Coffs Harbour School Strike 4 Climate (SS4C) group. Through her, in late 2021, I joined the Coffs Harbour SS4C group, which included attending climate strikes and protests. The first climate strike I went to was at Brelford Park in Coffs Harbour, which is about 20 minutes away. I missed school that day to go to the strike. I am a studious person, and I take my studies seriously and work my hardest to achieve the best grades I can. Because of this, missing any school is not ideal. However, I felt that the luxury of not needing to catch up on a day of classes could not outweigh contributing to the youth climate movement; climate change is too important of an issue. My parents have been so supportive of my involvement in advocacy, letting me decide on my own beliefs without their influence. They even drove me to protests in Coffs Harbour before I got my drivers' licence!
21. I started to volunteer to contribute to the logistics and organisational aspect of the Coffs Harbour SS4C group, and this led to me getting put in touch with some of the members of the national SS4C. This felt like a massive step for me; going from organising strikes and protests in the small Coffs Harbour group to helping out in the national space. With the national SS4C, I was involved in the recruitment and onboarding of strikers, and I also created some content for social media.

22. SS4C taught me a lot about facilitation and organisational skills, which I was able to apply to the local group to organise protests in Coffs Harbour. Being an organiser with SS4C – not just someone who attended strikes – felt really empowering. Through my involvement with SS4C, I also got involved with the Australian Youth Climate Coalition (AYCC). Over the years, I have spoken on panels, podcasts, organised a climate concert, and lobbied both local and Federal Government to demand that they take ambitious action on climate change. At that time, it felt like there was so much going on whilst I was doing my climate advocacy, especially going into my senior years of high school. It was almost like I was either “study Maya” or “climate Maya”, with no time to just be “teenager Maya”. My life as a young person has been driven by the fear and worry about climate change and what it would do to my future, and being involved in activism felt like all I could do to change that outcome.
23. One of the Coffs Harbour local youth climate group wins that I am really proud of is our campaign to support the motion to declare a climate emergency for the Coffs Harbour Local Council. We spoke to the Council at the meeting considering the motion in December 2022, and the motion to declare a climate emergency ultimately passed – albeit at a five to four vote. Coffs Harbour is more of a conservative area, it felt like such a massive first step towards proper recognition of the urgency of the climate crisis.
24. A number of the climate advocacy projects, events and podcasts have been involved in are accessible online. A link to an article about a protest I organised in Coffs Harbour is [here](#), and a link to a video of part of my speech is [here](#). Our local newspaper ran a story about the climate concert I organised [here](#), where we raised over \$2000. At the start of 2023, I spoke on a podcast called Seriously Social about lowering the voting age, with the aim of discussing how it would support youth climate activism. The link to that episode is [here](#). In 2023, I also spoke on the podcast Clinically Thinking about my experience being part of a Youth Advisory Group on climate anxiety. I discuss this experience more below. The link to that episode is [here](#).
25. There is an article about my story [here](#) which I wrote for the ABC Heywire competition. Heywire is a storytelling competition for young rural people to write about their experiences in regional and remote Australia. For my entry, I wrote about the supercell hailstorm and how that inspired me to get involved in climate activism. I was one of the winners of the Heywire competition, so I was able to attend the Heywire Summit in Canberra in February 2024.
26. After the Heywire Summit, I stayed in Canberra for a few days to be part of an AYCC lobbying campaign at Parliament House. Given that it was the start of the sitting period, we met with different MPs with the aim of putting climate change at the top of the 2024 political agenda. This was my first experience meeting with MPs. The campaign felt like such a tangible way to create change; if we could change an MP’s mind, they genuinely had the power to improve policy and decisions around climate change.
27. Through AYCC, I heard about an opportunity to be a part of the COP29 youth delegate program with the organisation Australian Youth for International Climate Engagement (AYFICE). Attending COP29 was life changing. There were so many young Australians there involved in the advocacy, which highlighted the fresh and motivated perspective that young people bring to climate policy. And yet, the fast and ambitious change that youth want to see is not achieved when young people

are excluded from the decision-making rooms. From an equity perspective as well as the practical need for youthful ambition in climate policy, it makes sense for young people to be given a seat in the negotiation rooms; the decisions being made there are about our future, and we deserve to have a say in that.

28. At COP, I could see the influence of fossil fuel companies in the negotiations and the stagnation and backwards movement they caused. It was frustrating and disillusioning to see how influential these corporations are, especially when it is clear that funding fossil fuels will only accelerate the climate crisis, denying young people and future generations a healthy and safe planet. I remember thinking at COP that all the decisions about our future – decisions about climate change – are being made behind doors closed to young people. Access to these decision-making spaces is particularly difficult for youth coming from non-metropolitan, simply due to being so geographically isolated from the capital cities where climate policy is debated; in my case, over 600kms away from the room where it happens!

The mental health costs associated with climate change

29. Whilst doing work in the climate advocacy space has allowed me to meet many inspiring young people, the dual struggles of burnout and climate anxiety are ever-present. Climate anxiety is much more prevalent amongst young people, including me. Part of this prevalence can be attributed to our experiences of the impacts of climate change despite contributing the least to climate change. For many youth, including me, this can result in feeling out of control, which plays into climate anxiety.
30. This past summer, I went home to Sawtell. The temperatures were so much higher than usual, and while it might have made me appreciate cooling off at the beach even more, the knowledge that it shouldn't be that hot was always in the back of my mind. This is what climate anxiety is like; always knowing that climate change is happening here, happening now, and feeling unable to do anything about it.
31. My dad spent his 20s travelling the world, and after growing up listening to his stories of his travels, I want to be able to see the world and travel overseas. But how much of that is still going to be there for me to see? I've never seen the Great Barrier Reef, and yet the window for being able to do so is small and getting smaller everyday. I would love to travel to islands like the Maldives which sound so paradisiac and pristine – and yet, the rising sea levels mean that the day that these islands disappear is getting closer and closer. One of the most stressful aspects of climate change is its irreversible nature; knowing that once the Great Barrier Reef dies, once the Arctic melts, once the Pacific Islands sink, that's it; it will never be the same again. I try not to, but I can't help thinking about my home in Sawtell. The main street is so close to the beach, and I worry that the rising level of the sea will make me lose this beautiful place – my home – to climate change.
32. I didn't truly understand climate anxiety until I participated in a study which explored how climate anxiety impacted young people. This put into words some of the thoughts and feelings that I had experienced but been previously unable to articulate. I was on the youth advisory group as part of this research, which emphasised to me the importance of awareness of climate anxiety. This is

particularly true given that climate anxiety is impacted by the dual stigmas of climate change and mental health, meaning that increased recognition would have the crucial effect of helping to address both stigmas at once.

33. I moved to Melbourne for university at the start of 2024. Before I moved, I had travelled to Canberra for the Heywire Summit, and then I stayed there to work with AYCC for the lobbying campaign where we met with members of the Federal Government to discuss climate action. Even though being involved in advocacy through these two opportunities felt empowering, it was a hectic and stressful start to my life at university. My dad picked me up straight from Canberra to drive down to Melbourne in time for orientation (this is about an 8-10 hour drive), meaning that I couldn't return home one last time before starting university. If I didn't feel the obligation to engage in climate advocacy because of my feelings of climate anxiety, I would probably have been able to spend my last few weeks of summer holidays with my family in Sawtell. I am very close with my family, and this would have meant a lot to me, especially after experiencing homesickness during my first year at university. I feel that climate change is too big of an issue to not give up the luxury of spending time with my family for, and yet I still miss out on these things – the things important to me – because of it.
34. I decided to take a step back from activism last year due to adjusting to the workload of university. However, being less involved in climate advocacy and feeling disconnected from the movement highlighted to me how much activism has been a part of my life. Because of this, my feelings of stress around climate change didn't have much of an outlet last year. This emphasised to me how important taking action for climate justice is for me. I can't imagine a future in which I'm not involved in climate advocacy. Part of this lies in how inseparable climate change is from human rights and life as a young person; I often speak with my close friends about climate change, and we vent our frustrations and anxieties to each other.
35. For me, climate anxiety feels like a tightness in my chest and a rapidness of heartbeat, and thoughts of solastalgia and being out of control. The Government must fund research in climate anxiety and climate anxiety mental health services. It shouldn't be just up to young people to figure out climate anxiety on their own.

Barriers for people living in regional and remote places and the burden on young people

36. For those living in rural areas in comparison to cities, there are fewer opportunities to transform any motivation for climate action – whether fuelled by a desire to protect nature, one's own experiences of climate change or climate anxiety - into meaningful action. Given that taking action can assist with feelings of climate anxiety, this increased difficulty in engaging with climate advocacy can mean that people living in non-metropolitan areas experience a disproportionate prevalence of climate anxiety.
37. Moving to Melbourne for university has highlighted to me the differences in access to opportunities between regional and metropolitan Australia. It has been a lot to adjust to; a form of culture shock. I believe that education is crucial for empowering young people to become involved in climate advocacy. Receiving a holistic education is the single most important thing supporting youth to get involved in issues that affect them and the wider world. Climate activism

is less accessible in small towns like Sawtell, as there are fewer resources that we have access to and fewer people who can support us. Additionally, the culture of regional areas can often be more conservative compared to cities, further reducing the information, support and resources that young people need access to in order to be empowered to be involved in climate activism. One of the ways this might consequently be addressed is by developing compulsory holistic climate education, focusing not just on the scientific mechanisms, but on the human perspective as well.

Australian government inaction on catastrophic climate harms

38. The Government's inaction on climate change filters down into the way I live my life and why I continue to pursue climate advocacy. Part of me wonders what I would do if I wasn't volunteering at AYCC and being involved in climate advocacy; I would probably have more time for my hobbies, hanging out with my friends and simply being a young person. I love advocacy and can't imagine a future in which I'm not pursuing that on some level, but I also know that if we weren't experiencing climate change, life would be very different.
39. It is time for the Australian government to step up and take accountability. We need the Government to acknowledge their past failings. We need actions, not pledges and speeches and press releases. We need the Government to take young people's voices and lived experiences seriously. We need a legal accountability mechanism to ensure that the Government doesn't just say they are committed to climate action, but actually takes the necessary steps to effective, ambitious climate justice. Legislative change in relation to climate change is crucial for holding governments account. We need climate action enshrined in human rights laws.
40. The government needs to stop greenhouse gas emissions; ultimately, that is the only way to truly mitigate the climate crisis. We need to have a true zero for greenhouse gas emissions, not just a net zero. As stated by climate science, this means implementing renewable energies like solar, wind and hydropower on a wide scale as soon as possible, and stopping the use of fossil fuels like coal, gas and oil.
41. We must implement stronger policies and laws to safeguard against greenwashing. The persuasiveness of fossil fuel companies' advertisements contributes to climate misinformation and disempowers Australians from taking climate action. I witnessed this at COP too; the resources and funds that fossil fuel companies possess to support their longevity through greenwashing is terrifying.
42. Many marginalised communities experience barriers to getting their voices heard. The Government needs to actively seek out rural and regional areas, frontline and marginalised communities to directly hear from the lived experiences of these people. Young people shouldn't have to make the effort themselves, and expecting them to do so puts an unfair burden on us, especially given that we aren't the ones contributing to the climate crisis.
43. The Australian government must provide support and funding to frontline communities to adapt to the climate crisis. This must include additional aid given to communities particularly vulnerable to climate change, such as regional and remote areas, First Nations communities, women and

children, people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and people with chronic illnesses and other disabilities. There must be investment in loss and damage reparations. The Government must also support action for climate empowerment for young and older people alike to empower Australians to respond to the climate crisis.

44. I am grateful to my high school for incorporating Indigenous knowledge into our education. For example, living on Gumbaynggirr country, in 2018 in Year 7, I studied Gumbaynggirr language as a language other than English subject. Students in my high school also had the opportunity to hear directly from Gumbaynggirr Elders. This First Nations knowledge is critical in any approach to climate change. We can't have climate action with First Nations justice, and the government must co-create climate solutions with First Nations people as much as possible.
45. We must apply a human rights lens to climate action. A climate action plan that doesn't consider human rights at its core will not be effective, as we will still have inequalities which cause and are exacerbated by climate change. This social justice aspect of climate action can be in part achieved by including youth at every stage of the decision-making process. An effective response to climate change involves not simply listening, but also acting upon young people's advice.
46. It is disheartening and disappointing to see the government continue to fail us on climate action by pursuing fossil fuels despite all the promises they have made. If there is no true, ambitious climate action, we know – the climate science knows – that everything will worsen. There will be more bushfires, more supercell storms, more cyclones, more heatwaves, more air pollution, more climate-sensitive diseases, and a rise in sea levels.
47. When I think about Australia's inaction, I think about those who already suffering due to climate change; the drowning Pacific islands, the devastating droughts in the Horn of Africa, the destructive floods in Pakistan, and the heatwaves in India and Europe. It's not just Australia that's suffering. Climate change is an international issue, and the government must do its part, not just for Australia, but for the Earth.
48. Despite all of this, I am still optimistic. I must be hopeful, because giving up on climate justice means giving up on my future. I hope that the Australian government listens to me and other young people and takes accountability and action.
49. I confirm the contents of this statements are a true and correct record of my evidence.

Maya Farmer

Name



Signature

12 March 2025

Date