

## Statement of Chris Black

Name: Christopher Black

Occupation: Student

Date of birth: 29 March 2007

Date: 28 March 2025

1. My name is Christopher, but most of my friends call me Chris. I live on Gadigal and Guringai land in Sydney. I am 17 years old, and I just started Year 12 at school. I am doing Year 12 by remote learning to accommodate for my disabilities and pursue my climate activism.
2. My favourite subjects at school are science and legal studies. I did want to be a scientist when I was younger, but I definitely want to be a lawyer now. I think that law is interesting, and you can use it to make a change in society. I also have dreams to run for my local Council when the next elections come up in my area. I would like to run for Council because in the Northern Beaches the majority of the area is bushland or national park. It needs protecting and need a strong council to look after it.
3. 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.

### Motivations for becoming involved with climate justice

4. I have been involved with climate advocacy for a while. I have previously helped clean up beaches, and I am involved with School Strike for Climate. I am also the co-convenor of the Northern Beaches Climate Action Network. This job takes up a lot of my time and I work with over 50 people in the organisation to figure out ways to take action to protect our climate.
5. I also work with my local Council to provide advice on the struggles of young people in my area. This includes talking about climate change, mental health, mental health disorders, social media, housing affordability, human rights including protecting the environment.
6. One of the reasons I became involved with climate advocacy was because in 2021 my family and I got caught in Cyclone when we were on holidays in Kalbarri. We had to be evacuated from the

hotel and when we returned to hotel, it had been completely demolished by the cyclone. If we had stayed in our hotel I worry about what could have happened. We may not be dead, but we could definitely have been injured. We had to be evacuated out by plane to Perth because the roads were so badly damaged.

7. It was a huge cyclone and I could see the devastation it caused for the local communities. I remember reading that 70% of buildings in Kalbarri were destroyed. I know that to go on a holiday is a privileged thing to be able to do.
8. I know the cyclone happened because of climate change. The reason so many buildings were destroyed was because those buildings weren't built for cyclones as cyclones usually happen further north. It was really intense and it represents the impact of the climate crisis on rural communities. It really drove me to get involved with the climate crisis, because it's only going to get worse.
9. In 2022, I was in Year 9. In July that year, my school which is built in the bush and on a creek flooded after intense rains. I was at school when it began to flood, and we had to be evacuated out of school. They had to pull the fire alarm because there was no flood alarm. It was such a stressful experience, and I was terrified. After experiencing the cyclone in Kalbarri, the flooding here felt even more frightening. I didn't know how high it would come up and the alarms were blaring super loudly and I just kept wondering how I was going to get out and my brain was running so fast. It flooded about half a metre high, and some teachers were up to their waist in the flood waters trying to recover damaged property like musical instruments. I remember a bunch of kids at school lost their laptops and phones. I couldn't go to school the next day and we weren't able to use a lot of classrooms for a while after the floods.

### **Impacts on my mental health and disabilities**

10. I have some mental health issues and disabilities. I know that having a disability puts me at a higher risk of climate-related harm than some other people. I know that it automatically puts me at a higher level of risk when extreme weather events mean that my access to medication and to my support services can be interrupted.
11. I have ADHD, Autism and obsessive-compulsive disorder (**OCD**) and other disabilities which put me at this higher risk. For me, my OCD is more presenting in the 'O' and means I latch onto an idea. This can be climate change, for example.

12. I also have a condition which means that I don't absorb vitamins from food in the same way as other people. I take 10 to 12 tablets daily for this, to help me stay healthy and build my strength. As I explain more below, I already know that climate change hurts my mental health.
13. I also have POTS (Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome) and extreme heat makes me really dizzy and I often struggle to even stand up properly. When it's really hot, I have to stop what I'm doing, and spend a lot of times lying down and drink lots more water when it's really hot otherwise my body can't cope. Sometimes I find walking even a huge challenge and I can get ringing in my ears and blurred vision making it hard to focus and function. I am worried that if it gets hotter, I'm going to struggle even more to manage it. I get really worried about summer and how it will be and how my body will cope. It's a reminder that both my physical and mental health is impacted by climate change.
14. I have an anxiety condition which is triggered by climate change and the climate crisis and causes me harm now. My anxiety is more severe and different to what some other people may experience. Sometimes my symptoms are extreme and it can spiral. It manifests in physical symptoms and can lead to having really bad chest pains, a sore tummy or general anxiety. Sometimes I am in such serious pain that the way I deal with my symptoms is to lie down on my bed and I am not able to move.
15. My anxiety can be triggered by certain events. The Black Summer bushfires in 2019 and the consequences of it are an example of this.
16. My grandparents and other members of my family own a house in the Blue Mountains. We visit the house often and it is a very special place for our family. I know I am lucky to have this house for our family to visit and stay at.
17. During the Black Summer bushfires, this house was almost burnt down. The fire came within about 100 metres of the house. With my anxiety, I jump to the worst case scenario, and catastrophise events. At the time, I kept thinking what would have happened if the house had burnt down, and what if we had been at the house. We could have lost things that are important to us and we could have died. The thing is the catastrophe was real. People who live in the area did lose their homes. Thinking about this, and how climate will get worse, causes me a great deal of anxiety and fear regarding the climate crisis.

18. Climate change feeds into my mental health. While my understanding of the scale of the problem and knowing the science and policies is interesting and beneficial to my activism, it really affects my anxiety and knowing how serious it is and going to get. It also triggers my anxiety and my ADHD, and that makes me even more anxious.
19. I find it stressful that I could be trapped in major weather events. Recently, there was a bushfire near our house. They were doing backburning to prepare for bushfire season and it got out control and there was all this wind they didn't predict. The fire went really close to my old school and this made me anxious.

#### **Impact of climate change on my relationship**

20. I have been in a relationship with my partner, Mitch, for over a year now. He is an Aboriginal man from the Illawarra region and knowing that Mitch, his family and other Aboriginal people in his community are going to be so severely impacted by the climate crisis is something that's really stressful for me.
21. I have seen the connection that Mitch has with his family and the connection that he has with his land and people and that's something that I think is really amazing and something I want to see continue. I don't want to see this destroyed by the climate crisis and this causes me a lot of anxiety thinking about this.
22. Mitch lives in public housing and similar to me he also has ADHD and health issues. Most people who live in public housing around Mitch are Aboriginal and it's very sad to me to see that the government isn't helping them enough. Mitch and his family can't even get basic repairs to their house and that really worries me especially when I think about climate change.
23. Mitch and I talk about climate change a lot as well as the impacts that an extreme weather event would have on him and his family. There was a big bushfire close to him recently and I remember Mitch telling me about this and I was worrying so much about whether his house might burn down. Flooding and storms are the other thing I worry about. Mitch lives in a flood zone and recently there was lots of floods in his area and a tree fell down right near his house. Knowing that the government can't even fix Mitch's leaky roof for 3 months, makes me worry about what sort of conditions he might have to deal with if climate change makes flooding even more extreme. It stresses me out thinking he might have nowhere to go.

24. I love Mitch and care about him, and I want to help in any way that I can. The anxiety I feel about Mitch and his people, and seeing the conditions and disadvantage they are at is another thing that contributes to my anxiety. One day after visiting Mitch, I was thinking about all of this and had a panic attack. I was struggling to breathe, and I felt so helpless. It was important to me to bring this information to the Special Rapporteur's attention too because climate change will disproportionately impact Mitch and other Aboriginal people and, so far, the government has done nothing except accelerate the climate crisis and make things worse for Mitch and Aboriginal people.

### **My climate activism**

25. As I mentioned earlier, I am really involved in the climate activism space. It is important to me to help but there are some barriers due to my autism and ADHD. Climate change as a whole and my activism can both be really triggering for me. With my autism, I have sensory issues which makes going to protests and big meetings really difficult. Crowds, loud noises and police sirens at climate protests can make me feel distressed and overwhelmed and sometimes I get headaches and migraines to the point where I can't function and I have to sit down or leave because it's too overstimulating. I care about this a lot but it can be really stressful and overwhelming when this happens. It also upsets me that I can't do more.

26. Another barrier for me is the social aspect of organising and engaging with politicians and other protesters and community groups. My social skills aren't as good as other people's and sometimes it is not clear to me what someone is asking me to and I struggle to speak up for myself which I think makes it come off like I'm not interested. I get anxious about this. When it comes to organising with other protesters, people sometimes forget that I have autism and ADHD. My ADHD can get really bad sometimes and I just am not able to do things which is hard socially working with groups. Below, I have also included some of my experiences doing climate activism.

27. In October 2021, I [submitted a complaint](#) with 4 other young people to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment, Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous peoples, and Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities. This complaint alleged that the Australian government's inaction on climate change was breaching my human rights. We didn't receive a response to that complaint and the fact that the government has continued to approve and promote fossil fuels is what inspired me to make a further complaint to the UN Special Rapporteur on Climate Change.

28. In March 2023, me and a group of other climate activists occupied the former Premier of New South Wales' office, Dominic Perrottet, in the lead up to the election. The Premier had approved so many fossil fuel projects and it made me disappointed that politicians don't want to listen and that they just keep accepting donations from fossil fuel companies, so I wanted to go along and explain the science and show that their donations are not much use when your house is burning and the world is collapsing.
29. I took time off school to go. We did a teach-in and set up all of these materials about climate change and I gave a speech. In my speech, I explained basic climate science and said:
- a. "Clearly the premier doesn't understand the science of climate change and why approving new coal and gas projects in 2023 is madness." "So, we've taken some time off school today to educate him about fossil fuels and the climate crisis."
30. I've also included a picture of me here giving a climate catch up lesson to the Premier.



31. After we occupied the Premier's office and did the teach in, about 40-50 police surrounded the building. The Police asked us to move on and we said no. They didn't arrest any of the under 18s but arrested all the adults who refused to move on. When the Police spoke to me, I felt very scared at the time. There were lots of Police and only about 15 of us. When we asked what we could be charged with, they didn't have any answers for us and just tried to muscle us out of there.
32. The Police asked for my parents' details. I felt intimidated by the Police and I gave them that information but I wasn't sure if I was even legally required to. When I was talking to the Police I was up against a wall and there was four of them around me. They also had guns in their pockets. Because of my autism, I was struggling to speak and respond to the Police and because I hesitated

a bit when I gave them my parents information, the Police accused me of lying about the details I had given them and asked if it was true. It was a really stressful experience.

33. After that experience, I took a bit of a break from climate activism. It was really stressful and it made me really angry that Police would treat a disabled minor in that way. They treated me in a very aggressive and intimidating way and that really annoyed me. This was especially because I had only participated in a teach-in. It was in the Premier's public office and he is meant to listen to his constituents. We were just holding him to account on his failures on climate change. My treatment by Police made me want to fight for change and fight for protesters rights. People shouldn't be prevented from being able to protest on climate action.

### **Climate protesting at home**

34. The laws in New South Wales (where I live) around protesting are so restrictive and completely insane in my opinion. I think that the NSW Supreme Court's decision in November 2024 which attempted to block [Rising Tide](#), a grassroots climate campaign group,<sup>1</sup> from protesting in Newcastle Harbour – which is the site of the world's largest coal port – is a blatant misuse of power. People should not be prevented from engaging in legal protests on climate action.
35. I would like the government to listen to the lived experience of people living with disability, rather than their fossil fuel donors. The different ways that people with disabilities express themselves puts them in more danger and without protester rights there are barriers that prevent their engagement. I would like more rights and understanding of people with disabilities. Protesters are classified as a bother rather than people that communicate about serious issues to their elected representatives. I also think for people like myself with neurodivergent disabilities, without rights to protect us it creates a mental barrier for us that means we don't want to engage with government or ask for what we need.

### **The future harms associated with climate change are extremely frightening**

36. The impacts of climate change can be predicted, but no one truly knows what is going to happen completely. We know there will be more fires, more floods, animals and plants will become

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<sup>1</sup> *Commissioner of Police v Coglin* [2024] NSWSC 1412. This was later overturned *Stuart v Minister for Transport* [2025] NSWSC 39.

extinct but we don't really know the full impact. There will be things that come up in the future that we can't predict.

37. For me, my anxiety will get worse as the climate crisis gets worse, more tummy aches, more feeling like I am not breathing. I worry I may not be as good at a job compared with someone who is not constantly worried about climate change.
38. We've already hit 1.5 degrees of warming and that was what we were told was the threshold for uncontrollable and intense climate disasters and knowing that governments aren't doing enough to stop climate change, pushing fossil fuel expansion and, in some cases, arguing that climate change is not even real, is scary to me. It is scary to think that these types of disasters are and will happen more and more.
39. When I think about my immediate future and having to deal with the more intense climate disasters from climate change, I worry about my physical and mental health and how climate change will impact me going through university and starting my life in the next few years. I also think about how I'm going to balance living my life with my climate activism and wanting to help and stop what I can see is a very clear disaster but also wanting to have my own life. It's a difficult thought and it weighs on me and affects me mentally.
40. If climate change wasn't an issue, my life would be a lot different. I would be happier, I would have less mental health issues and less physical health issues. To be honest, I seriously can't imagine what my life would look like. Since I was 14, I've been involved in climate activism and it's taken up a huge part of my life and I have no idea what path I might have gone down if I wasn't focusing my life on climate activism and trying to help not just myself but everyone to make sure that we aren't impacted by climate change – in the way that I've been and the way others have been.
41. I feel like the inaction that I've seen from the Australian government on climate change in recent years, has definitely been the main factor that has gotten in the way of me not being able to live the life I want and not be able to pursue other endeavours that I'm interested in. Their inaction and unwillingness to listen to climate experts and take proper action on climate is what's causing all these disasters and contributing to climate change and it's what is contributing to the quite severe impacts on my mental and physical health.



42. When I think more further into the future, one of the main things that comes to mind is that my kids and grandkids are going to be much more affected by this than I am. The thought of my children and my grandchildren having to live in a world more dangerous with more climate disasters and weather events is extremely scary.
43. In January 2025, we had massive storms in Sydney that caused lots of damage. At the same time there were also the fires in California. When I even just think about these two events, they are examples of just how bad climate disasters can get especially when governments aren't doing enough to mitigate the impacts of climate change and to fund all of the services that will address the impacts of these disasters. The idea that in the future, my kids and grandkids and other people could be living in a world fleeing from fires, running from floods and storms is really scary to me.

#### **Australian government inaction on catastrophic climate harms**

44. In 2024, I saw the government approve more coal expansions but they still tout themselves as these climate warriors saving the future. To me it's just very transparent, they don't care and they are just trying to delay climate action as much as possible to please fossil fuel companies who donate to them.
45. If I had the opportunity to tell the Australian government what to do about their climate inaction, I would say that they need to completely stop funding all new fossil fuel projects and immediately stop the expansion of current fossil fuel projects. I would want them to immediately start investing much more in renewable energy and get Australia to net zero as quickly as possible. Hopefully, they could also start exporting renewable energy and become a renewable energy powerhouse. Australia has so much potential in that area, we have lots of free space and creating renewable sustainable energy and I think the government will point to economic impact of stopping fossil fuels but that's one major way that could easily mitigate those economic impacts.
46. The other thing that I would want to see the government doing is to listen to young people and their concerns about climate change and the harms they are facing due to climate change. I would want them to start implementing programs to help address the concerns that young people have and the impacts they are experiencing by funding programs properly. Like, putting more money into the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) to help people like myself who have disabilities and who are impacted by climate change. They could also ensure that Medicare (which is Australia's universal health insurance scheme) includes mental health care so young people can access proper and consistent mental health care from trained professionals about

how to help with their climate stress and anxiety. More money also needs to go into better adapting to a world where climate disasters exist, so everyone has support in navigating this world.

47. First Nations people and their culture are also significantly impacted by climate change. There needs to be more investment into equalising the outcomes of First Nations people compared to others. We also need to support their culture and heritage because they are so impacted by climate change in ways that others aren't, and they aren't getting enough support from the government to support their culture, lifestyle and way of life. Things that are culturally significant to Australia are also being destroyed by climate change and fossil fuel companies. Fossil fuel companies have destroyed First Nations cultural artefacts, artwork and cultural sites and I feel that the government doesn't seem to care.
48. I would also like the government to implement stronger regulations for fossil fuel companies that are destroying the environment. If they break the law, they need to have punishments that are reasonable to the size of the company and that actually deters them from future actions that will be destructive. For example, in January 2025, the fossil fuel company Santos, was fined only \$10,000 for a massive oil spill off the Western Australian coast. The oil spill affected lots of marine wildlife, vulnerable species and the environment. Given that we know that the ocean is responsible for absorbing a large amount of carbon emissions, any destruction and damage done to the ocean is damage done the health of the planet. Santos is a company with billions of dollars and a \$10,000 fine is nothing and does nothing to deter this conduct.
49. I also want the government to look at the restrictive protest laws that exist and take steps to repeal these oppressive laws that have been implemented to silence protesters and people who are sharing their impacts that they've experienced by climate change.
50. I hope that the Special Rapporteur, when she reads this, understands that the Australian government is very clearly not taking enough action to help address the impacts of climate change. They are also oppressing the people who are trying to be a voice for climate action and who are trying to stop climate destruction. The Special Rapporteur needs to know that the Australian government is not taking any meaningful action on climate change, it is still approving fossil fuel projects and is not listening to people who are standing up and protesting about this. I hope that she reads my testimony and does everything within her power to tell the government that what they are doing is not okay and that she also considers it not only in the case of the

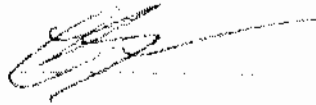
Australian government but also governments around the world to consider how young people around the world are impacted by inaction on climate change

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

Christopher Black

Name

Signature



Date: 28 March 2025