

Statement of Atticus		
Name:	Atticus	
Date of birth:	10 June 2011	
Date:	9 March 2025	

- 1. Hello, my name is Atticus and I am thirteen years old. I live on Larrakia country in Darwin, Australia and I started Year 8 at the start of 2025. Darwin is a smallish city 140,000 people. It's super remote. The nearest state capital takes days of driving to get to. Because of this we have access to incredible birds and nature all over the city and have some of the greatest sunsets in Australia. Sometimes though, the sunsets are scarred by the silhouettes of gas rigs and fossil fuel export ships and it reminds you of what is actually going on. My pronouns are he/him.
- 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. I want the Special Rapporteur to take my story into account and if she could come to Australia and see what's happening to young people who are at the frontlines of climate change, I think that would be great.





- 3. Darwin is a great place to live. I enjoy the nature, birdlife and wildlife you can see just from your house. I enjoy the arts at school. My hobbies include birdwatching, skateboarding, gaming, writing poetry and art. I would say that I draw every day and I also like to take photographs of the birds that I see. I got given a camera by a family friend that can take really good photos.
- I like to go to East Point and Lee Point in Darwin to see our local birds and to take photos of them.
   We have lots of shorebirds in Darwin too. Darwin has a third of Australia's bird species. As climate change affects Darwin, a lot of Australia's bird species are going to suffer.
- I made some of my art into postcards and have a small business that runs at festival sometimes.
   I like to draw birds and have turned some into postcards and badges.





6. I used to live in Melbourne, but we moved to Darwin about two years ago. I like living in Darwin and one of the reasons is because my respiratory illness is much easier to manage up here. My family knew that every time we travelled to tropical places, my allergies got better so that was a reason why we moved to Darwin. I would have to stay inside on windy days in Melbourne because my allergies could get so bad. Even in January this year when I went back to Melbourne, I started getting affected by my allergies almost straight away. I had to take an antihistamine every day because my skin got really dry from eczema and I was getting rashes. That does not happen because the weather is different in Darwin.

#### How climate change has directly affected me

7. I think about the devastation of the environment all the time and how climate change is linked to that. I think about the extinctions, climate change, rising waters and natural disasters. I have

always loved animals and feel a strong connection to them, even more than humans sometimes. I don't want to have to deal with this stuff but generations before me have messed it up. I hate hearing the horror stories about extinctions, like there being only two northern white rhinos left in the world. I think about the impacts of the rising waters in Australia and islands being lost. I also think about the polar bears in the Arctic.

8. I can get really pessimistic and think that if humanity never existed, this would never have happened. I feel sad because I see all these things happening and then it turns into white rage and anger because it always comes back to humans. But we are here and we need to make the world as good as we can.



The Gouldian Finch is the symbol of the "Save Lee Point" Campaign.

9. We recently went to Lee Point to see a really rare bird. We went with a friend who had not gone in a long time and they noticed that about 100m of Casuarina Forest has disappeared. In about two years, we have noticed about 20-30m disappearing as the by product of climate change. Our friend Amanda, a bird expert, told us that the mangroves will takeover where the Casuarina Forest has been washed away which is good for erosion but it will eventually takeover the mudflats which is where the shorebirds roost and feed.

## Environmental activism and art

10. As I said before, we like to go to Lee Point and we found out it was in danger in 2023. We had heard it was a really good place for bird watching, including seeing the Gouldian Finch. I had not seen the destruction firsthand but then in July 2023 the bulldozers started to push down all the old trees. Lots of people from Darwin got together to protect the forest after the Traditional Owners from the Batcho Family started a case stop the destruction.

 I started writing poetry about Lee Point. I shared my poetry at a few protest events and even read my poetry to Senator David Pocock from the Australian Parliament when he visited Darwin. I make art when I feel happy but also when I feel sad. Making art can be relieving.

	My Poetry
Lee Point Haikus	"aLEEPOINTphabet"
Cardboard signs tremble	Awful, automated army attempt to
Inked pleas for nature's refuge	Bash back big brained birders
Lee Point, we fight on	Cos cuckoos and curlews could crash for cold
	cash
Sunsets paint the sky	Dash down dozers, destroy Drongo dens
Bulldozers mar the canvas	Emphasis on evil, evergreen executioners
Lee Point's hues erased	Fun facts found flying friends filling flocks
	Greedy government grabs gerygone's ground
Angrily we stand	Hold hands, humans hasten help, hurt
A quarter of the NT Never have a say *	honeyeaters
never nuve a say	Iconic ibis, inquisitively interested in
The nightjar's hidden nests	impending injury
Would never beat the bulldozers	
If we were not here	Jokingly jousting jabiru's jabber for justice
	Kookaburra kin keep killing on the king tides
<i>If politicians</i>	Larrakia, lead us against lazy laws
Will never see nature's beauty	Major movers mow down meek mammals
We will take a stand	Now natives need new nests
	Open minded objectors organize
Birders and all others	Peaceful protests, political power
<i>Together with strong elders We will save Lee Point</i>	Pittas plead to Plibersek*
	Quick with questions, quotes, and queries
© Atticus	Regular rallys, radical rebels
	Stop the slaughter, save the small
*This line refers to the quarter	Top end trees, to tall to touch
of Northern territory's population	Tawnys tell the truth to Tanya
who are too young to vote.	Up here is unique and underrated
	Vote for vegetation value
	When I wonder will we win
	This exact excellence exists
	Young and all yell yes!
	One on a zillion, amazing zone
	© Atticus
	*Tanya Plibersek is Australia's Environment
	Minister

12. I try to fight back against this devastation of the environment, but it can get a bit much and I get tired and exhausted. Since the Lee Point protests started, I have also got around the no new gas

and fracking campaigns and also have gone to the AYCC [Australian Youth Climate Coalition] protests through some of the connections I made at Lee Point. AYCC is a great organisation because you feel like you're being heard and you've got a community of people. You feel like you're making a difference.





A painting I made to protest a big gas project in the NT called Middle Arm

A picture of me painting a "Save Lee Point" Corflute

# Future harms associated with climate change

- 13. I feel like I have a weight on my shoulders but I do not have traction as a kid and no one listens to you. It is the responsibility of government to protect the environment and stop climate change. I'm not an old guy in a suit in Parliament. But if they were to ask me, how do I want to inherit the world burning, or pretty good? In the long term it's not going to be them that deal with all the crap they created. It'll be us.
- 14. It's so hot in Darwin, you think that this couldn't be natural sometimes. You got outside and you're sweaty instantly and it just feels when you're in the sun that you are roasting. It's hot normally in Darwin but there are times when you are like "damn!". I have heard people saying Darwin is getting hotter and that is really scary. We have to stay inside when it's too hot. I can't play with my friends outside when it's too hot.
- 15. On hot days at school, we stay inside and go to places like the library. When I am at home and it is a hot day, we go to the foreshore for the nice breeze but that is usually when it starts to cool down.

- 16. I remember from living in Melbourne that the weather is different down there, it can be really random. There can be really hot days in Melbourne too. Our house used to have an evaporative cooling system, but that system didn't work so well because it became more humid down there and it requires a dry heat. Melbourne is also really windy, and the wind and seeds are a bad combination for my respiratory illness. I am worried about Darwin getting hotter. Melbourne is cooler but then I have the problems with my allergies.
- 17. I am worried there is not going to be much left when I am older. And if we keep going with this, there won't be much left. I wish I could just worry about my life like they did 100 years ago and just settle down and have a nice life, but I have to worry about the environment.

#### Australian government inaction on catastrophic climate harms

- 18. I am worried about living in a world where you can't go anywhere without seeing the effects of climate change and lots of extinctions and stuff. And bushfires and food and water shortages. I would like the government to do more. They get paid by the corporations, get tonnes of money but it's good in the short term and they get a lot of money but it wrecks everything in the long term. They are wrecking Australia.
- 19. I feel angry when I see things like new projects that destroy the environment. I have been advocating for causes that want stop to destroying the environment. We are stuck in a boom-and-bust system. The government is not thinking about anything but just money.
- 20. If the government would listen to me, I would tell them to cut emissions and have a goal to reduce them. I would ask the government to listen to the climate scientists and doctors because they are people who have studied this problem, and they know more about it then people who are swayed by money. We already know it's going to a disaster in the future. We need the government to listen to the experts and take proper action. And it is important that they listen to young people.
- 21. I think that the government is not interested in working towards a proper response to climate change because they are more interested in short-term gain. They put money first for people that are older rather than thinking about how that might impact life for younger generations in the long term.

- 22. I know for a fact that the government isn't thinking about reducing its emissions because I see gas ships from my balcony at home. When I see them, I know that the government isn't thinking about anything but making money. They aren't thinking about me, other young people or plants or animals that need to be protected these things don't have a foot in power either and they are priceless.
- 23. The government needs to actually reach out and ask young people about how we are being impacted by climate change. It is important for them to understand this because we are going to be the ones that are going to have to deal with most of climate change. I wish the government would listen more to the people that are going to be affected by climate change firsthand and really think about what's going to happen once they are dead.



A photograph of some people protesting in Sydney with that quote my poetry to take a stand.

24. Older generations didn't know much about climate change, and it hasn't affected them much at all. On the other hand, as children, we know the dangers and have the fear of what's going to happen soon because of climate change, and we are not swayed by money or power. You can't eat coal, you can't drink gas! What will me and other young people do if there's no nature left for us. They need to listen to us now.

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

Name: Atticus

Signature

Date

9/3/2025



# **Statement of Chris Black**

Name:	Christopher Black
Occupation:	Student
Date of birth:	29 March 2007
Date:	28 March 2025

- 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-convener 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.
- 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 its 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 peoples 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 <u>submitted a complaint</u> 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 governments 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 <u>Rising Tide</u>, 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

<sup>&</sup>lt;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 its 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



# Statement of Connor Wright

Name:Connor WrightDate of birth:17/03/1998Date:20 March 2025

- My name is Connor Wright and my cultural name is Djindjbad. My pronouns are he/him and I am 27 years old. I am a Larrakia man and lived in Darwin situated on Larrakia country for the first 17 years of my life. I moved to Melbourne (Wurundjeri country) at 17 on a scholarship for university studies and have been in Melbourne ever since. I am now in my final year of my Masters in Climate change and policy. My hobbies include running, hiking, reading, skiing and playing games like board games and computer games with friends and family.
- While Darwin is the capital city of the Northern Territory, it's still a smalltown community on the coast. It's tropical which is quite different to the majority of where most people live in Australia. It is heavily affected by monsoonal storms and cyclones which are exacerbated by the effects of climate change.
- 3. Growing up there, we would head to the beach, go swimming at waterfalls in Litchfield National Park and go camping with family and friends. I would spend time being out on country with my Larrakia grandmother and growing up surrounded by family. Larrakia people have the longest running land claim in Australia in history of 45 years, which was only settled in December 2024. For context a land claim refers to the legal process through which Indigenous groups seek recognition of their traditional ownership and rights to land that was taken from them during colonization. Land claims and Indigenous rights and interests to their land in Australia is known as Native Title. Native Title claims are generally made under specific legislation, the Native Title Act 1993.
- 4. Through the Land Trust Corporation, we were given a small section of land out past Coolalinga This land backs onto a river and estuary and is situated between mangroves and grasslands. With my grandmother, aunties, uncles, we would collect periwinkles, longbums, fish and mudcrabs in the mangroves and cook them up. I still have a lot of family in Darwin including my mum, grandmother and uncles.
- 5. 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.
- 6. My own knowledge and experiences are the reason I am filing this complaint with some listed below:

- i. Indigenous Australians are not well known or recognised on the world stage. Due to this, our rights can be very easily violated.
- ii. Through my analysis and experience of Australian policy both domestic and international, my country has a proven track record of promising much on climate change but delivering very little.
- iii. This issue doesn't just affect Australian youth; it affects young people all around the globe. Australia is one of the highest contributors to global CO2 and also exports a lot of fossil fuel products that in turn contribute to other countries emissions. Australia's failure to meaningfully meet their own NDC commitments affects youth on a global scale, including me.
- iv. I'm privileged to have been given such a great education and experiences and therefore it is my moral obligation to protect Indigenous people and Australian youths' human rights utilising my skills and experiences to do this complaint.

## Climate change and my studies and career

- 7. My undergrad major was in chemistry and a lot of my electives were environmental science based. I was always aware of climate change, but the impact and scale came to me later. The big turning point came when I was working as an environmental consultant.
- 8. I was an environmental consultant for two years and it's part of the reason why I wanted to do my Masters. As a consultant, I was working in sustainability and compliance auditing, and I was getting data from the oil and gas industry on how much they were polluting. I found in my checklists that they were operating within the legal frameworks, but morally I felt disgusted at the sheer levels they were allowed to pump out every quarter. That was the reason I started my Masters in Climate Change and Policy. That was the pivotal moment.

## Climate change as a secondary form of colonisation

- 9. When I first learned about climate change, I remember talking about it on the grand scale of the environment, which is quite fast, but from a human perspective can appear quite slow leading to thinking of it more in the abstract. Learning about climate change on a deeper level put these environmental changes into perspective the higher heat, the seasonal shifts (especially in a place like Darwin), changes to behaviours of animals, the monsoons becoming more intense and the periods of seasons shortening and lengthening in certain areas as well.
- 10. From an Australian perspective, the seasons in Darwin are wet season (November-April) and dry season (May-October) but we have our own cultural seasons as well. They are **Balnba** (rainy season; Balnba gulugi bigarrk big rain coming in November, December), **Dalay** (monsoon season in January, February March), **Mayilema** (speargrass, Magpie goose egg and knock 'em down season in March, April), **Damibila** (Barramundi and bush fruit time in April, May, June), **Dinidjanggama** (heavy dew time in June, July, August), **Gurrulwa guligi** (Season of 'big wind' in July, August, September) and **Dalirrgang** (Build up time in September).

- 11. Some of the impacts on culture are seen through these seasonal shifts. We have a lot of more seasons than the Western lens of Summer, Autumn, Winter, Spring. That might work for European countries, but we have a very different climate and environment here. Most Indigenous cultures I am aware of, they have at least more than 4 seasons. With more seasons there is less room for variabilities, so when you have seasonal shifts, it affects culture dramatically and affects our ability to engage in cultural timelines. For example, if the barramundi meeting and bush fruit flowering shift to later in the year, this takes everything out of sync. We use environmental indicators to know when to engage with our cultural practices. This throws everything out cascading into a whole array of new changes.
- 12. With seasonal shifts, there are new stresses on the environment and cultural practices involving plants and animals. Climate change affects Indigenous communities' ability to be effective stewards of the environment as they have been. I worry about being able to effectively engage in that in the future, that weighs pretty heavily on my mind. I am in here in Melbourne to get things moving and rolling in hopes of benefiting indigenous communities, including my own.
- 13. All of this is a secondary form of colonisation and degradation of culture. If you want to be charitable, governments of the world might not intend for this to happen, but it's still destroying culture and cultural practice with essentially no consequences. Those governments can also claim some level of deniability that they are not intending this to happen. But failure to alleviate these scenarios in any meaningful way is destroying my culture and all indigenous cultures globally.
- 14. But at the end of the day, will my land still be there? I am worried about sea levels rising and environmental degradation on my country. I have never been in a true cyclone in Darwin, but I have experienced tropical lows. Under the effects of climate change natural disasters such as cyclones are set to become more frequent. If you were to visit Darwin, you'd notice the coast brushed with mangroves. These plants are quintessential for a lot of Australian coastal landscapes, and they protect the coast from storm surges, erosion, are biodiversity hotspots and even improve water quality. With climate change impacting mangroves, it has a cascading impact on the food web, and it's very bad it's essentially destroying country. Sea level rise also affects mangroves. If you look at root systems, the whole plant can't survive underwater. Their root systems are designed for the tide coming in and out, they are sensitive to temperature extremes and with the increase in natural disasters such a cyclones, prolonged physical damage also becomes a risk. Couple this all with ocean acidification and I'll ask again, at the end of the day, will my land still be there?
- 15. The multinational oil and gas company INPEX has a site at the harbour in Darwin that in its impact statement to the Northern Territory Government said it would be only emitting 500 tons of volatile organic compounds (VOC's). A report last year found this to be a gross understatement as in 2023 it emitted 3.900 tons. Almost eight times the amount it stated to the government for approval worse yet the year before it was 11,000 tons emitted.<sup>1</sup> Yet, nothing is done. VOC's have been linked to cancer<sup>2</sup> and such high levels of pollutants can cause headaches, drowsiness, nausea and exacerbate asthma attacks. My elders, those younger than me and those with serious health

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-06-14/inpex-ichthys-lng-plant-darwin-nt-vocs-emissions-increase/103668268 <sup>2</sup> https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/38320440/

conditions will be the most heavily affected here. So, I ask an even more harrowing question, will my air still be there?

## 'It's a prison of knowledge': climate change impacts and their cost

- 16. Even just in Melbourne, I can talk about longer summers and shorter winters. Our ski seasons and degradation of ski fields in Australia nearing a total collapse of the sport. We are seeing less intense winters and more intense summers, with shorter winters and longer summers. Melbourne is more temperamental now. Living in Melbourne for nine years, I've seen how it's changed, it has only gotten more chaotic and unpredictable.
- 17. Climate change has changed how I live my life, with the high variability in winter and summer, preparing for the day is difficult in Melbourne. Some days it is 40 degrees and then it is 20 degrees in about two seconds. How do you plan your day around that? For people with chronic health conditions, how is this going to affect them?
- 18. Another serious issue here in Australia is that our building codes are not up to scratch for the weather we experience. Every single rental I have lived in for the last 9 years has been like that. For summer, if you are lucky enough, you can choose to run the air con to cool down, but that comes with the stress of: affecting the grid, high power bills, and if you use a non-renewable energy source then you are then you still contribute to the problem. If you don't have air con, then you might have to vacate your house and, in a heatwave, you'd have to leave for days on end.
- 19. There have been times I have to leave home because you can't stay there. I am privileged and am able to access places where I can go when it's too extreme at home, but I know a lot of people don't have that.
- 20. During the Black Summer Bushfires in 2019-2020, my asthma was going crazy. I was in Melbourne and the sky was lit up like an orange a sunset for the whole day. There was smoke in the air, and the thing about bushfire smoke is that it's not just carbon, there are other harmful toxic chemicals in the air too. So, this smoke heavily affects people with illnesses.<sup>3</sup> My symptoms during that time include shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, coughing, and just living off my inhaler. At that time, I didn't know I could get a mask to help. There are mental health impacts and stress of having asthma too. There has only been one time in my life that I have had to go to hospital for asthma. So, through the bushfires I was thinking, 'do I have to go to hospital?' 'will there be long term damage?', 'is this going to affect my whole day, week, month, life?'.
- 21. I try not to think about the future, and I try not to think about how climate change will affect my asthma too. I am not currently planning on purchasing respiratory systems or not being able to leave the house. But it could be a possibility for me in the future, if these climate change impacts get worse.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> https://grattan.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Grattan-Institute-submission-Victorian-Inquiry.pdf

- 22. My sister was living in Brisbane during the 2022 Brisbane floods. This had a direct impact on me as my mental health was impacted due to concerns for a family member. Luckily, she was unharmed but events such as that will only become more frequent as climate change progresses.<sup>4</sup>
- 23. Climate change gives me a pessimistic attitude, and it stops me from making any long-term plans. I consider myself very lucky to be able to understand what future scenarios can happen and can access certain resources. For example, Climate Central have a website where you can get a map about future sea level rise. Success in Australia often looks like buying a house. There is a benefit in having equity and stake in a financial market by buying one, and for something like that, I can look up sea levels rise. So, when other young people are planning on buying a future house, prospective areas could be impacted by climate change, and they don't know about it.
- 24. It's a bit of prison having the knowledge about climate change. You can't not think about it. When you are aware of systems and systems thinking, you cannot think about just one thing, it will cascade into another, and then another. This comes up for things like government policy decisions. It's not great for mental health. It's a spiral and the impacts are not even immediate. Being a young person, I am seeing older politicians making these decisions about things that will maybe happen in 30 years' time. So, the final consequence will come, and they won't even be there for it. It's frustrating and makes me angry. I know the Australian Government can do more on climate change.
- 25. The prison of knowledge is formed from the effect that there is climate change inaction from the Australian Government. It's not just punishment for me; it's for young people of every age around the globe. We have politicians that are pushing 70 to 80 who don't have to think about these risks. This isn't something that has to pass their mind. Punishment for what? Punishment for being young and having a future.

## Australian Government and climate change

26. While the Australian government has committed to cut emissions by 43% (of 2005 levels) by 2030. Despite this the government is continuing to approve more and more oil and gas projects. The reality where these projects come to fruition and Australia still meets its NDC targets seems to rely upon offsetting from LULUFC . Australia has been able to use the manipulation of a historical baseline (first 1990 then 2005, both years with high levels of land clearance) to continue to claim significant emission reductions. Australia's reporting and transparency is less rigorous. For instance, LULUFC in the EU must be subjected to independent review by the UNFCCC while this is not the case in Australia. This reliance on LULUFC to meet its targets while also being able to manipulate through a "baseline and credit system" and lack of independent review and transparency is extremely concerning especially to youth that will believe the government is on track to reducing its carbon emissions. I would call upon the Special Rapporteur to pressure Australia to adhere to similar rules and regulations when it comes to LULUFC reporting and do away with the baseline of 2005. This is also without considering all the secondary emission the Australian government allows with being a major global exporter in coal and gas.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup>https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-02-28/brisbane-floods-anniversary-buyback-scheme-retrofit-building/102029134

- 27. In approving so many new coal and gas projects and on paper manipulating its CO<sub>2</sub> reduction the Australian government is actively ignoring and violating the human rights of not only its own citizens but that of other countries as well.
- 28. I'm equally very disappointed in Australia's lack of inclusion of indigenous voices in the formation of climate policy. Especially with indigenous Australians being one of the most vulnerable groups to climate change and one of the most heavily affected. I wrote a Policy Paper on this that calls for the formation of Indigenous and Torres Strait lander climate change council with veto power. You can read it here: <a href="https://www.globalvoices.org.au/post/enhancing-indigenous-engagement-in-australian-climate-policy">https://www.globalvoices.org.au/post/enhancing-indigenous-engagement-in-australian-climate-policy</a>.
- 29. This was also in response to Australia's love of advisory committees that have virtually zero influence or power in our decision-making practices. For example, the Queensland Police First Nations Advisory Board. After its formation in 2022 every member of the board was dismissed in February 2024 after Queensland police repeatedly refused to meet and enact recommendations.
- 30. Currently Indigenous groups in Australia also have no say on whether or not oil and gas projects happen on native title land as outlined in the *Native Title Act* 1993. We also have no say here; in an act we fought so hard for we are still choked out of our land and rights.
- 31. With a federal election coming up I am worried for the future of Australia's climate commitments Especially with the opposition leader Peter Dutton been seen attending a talk with Australia biggest mining moguls and Australia's richest woman Gina Rinehart and shouting slogan "make our bank accounts great again".<sup>5</sup>
- 32. Australia is contributing to the violation of many articles under UN declarations (that they are signatories to) due to their continued inaction on climate change. For the reasons that I have outlined in my statement above, they are violating my right to life, my right to culture and they are failing to prevent the continued destruction of my culture.

Another question to pose after all this is why is Australia a signatory on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights yet without its own domestic human rights charter?

The Australian Government not only has a moral obligation but also a legal one to remedy these violations by contributing much more than it already is to fight the increase in global climate change.

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

Connor Wright

Name:

20/03/2025

Signature

Date

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> https://thenightly.com.au/business/mining/make-our-bank-accounts-great-again-gina-rinehart-declares-as-she-calls-on-liberals-to-stepup-c-16848696



# **Statement of Eliza Evers**

Name:Eliza EversDate of birth:12 September 2003

Date: 24 March 2025

- 1. My name is Eliza and my pronouns are she/her. I live on Ngunnawal land in Canberra.
- 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.
- 3. I am 21 years old. When I was 16, I became sick with a sinus infection and it was treated with antibiotics. After I had recovered, my symptoms like major fatigue, headaches and nausea stayed and started to massively impact my day-to-day life. I stopped being able to work and stopped being able to go to school because I was too unwell. At the time, I was diagnosed with New Daily Persistent Headache disorder (NDPH) and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS) and most recently I was diagnosed with Postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome (POTS). I currently receive the Disability Support Pension and I am on the waitlist to get access to public housing.
- 4. Because of my disabilities, climate change and, particularly, extreme heat, really impact my day to day activities and the choices that I am able to make about my life. So that you can get a bit of an understanding about how my disabilities impact my day to day life, I describe them more below.
- 5. In my heart, I have always been an environmental advocate. Because of my disabilities, I haven't been able to protest but I try to do other things. I remember seeing the first school strike for climate when I was 16 and in Year 11 at school. I remember thinking that I would really love to go but I couldn't because I was too sick. I have felt guilty and sad about not being able to participate in protests about climate action which is why I am grateful to be able to share my story with the Special Rapporteur.
- 6. I'm also making this statement because I know if there isn't proper action on climate change now, my life as well as the lives of other people who live with disabilities, will be much worse as the temperatures rise. Just this summer, it has been so hot in Canberra that I've barely been able to get out of bed, do daily activities or see my friends and family. It's been months of feeling incapacitated because of the rise in temperatures.
- 7. I would like the Special Rapporteur to write to the Australian government and ask them to take stronger action on climate change as people like me are already feeling the impacts of the climate crisis. I would like the Special Rapporteur to come to Australia to see the impacts of climate change firsthand and to meet with me, so I can tell her my story.

## About me

8. When I was little, I lived in Hong Kong for six years, in Kowloon. It is a big city and massively populated and there wasn't much nature around. Where we lived, I would look outside my window and just see hundreds of buildings. I remember the only trees were these massive 100-year-old trees in a park. I used to just crave to see nature when I lived in Hong Kong.





Pictures 1 & 2: 100 year old banyan trees on the street of Kowloon - the only source of nature found on the busy Hong Kong streets

- 9. When I was 12, my family moved back to Australia and we moved to Canberra. Now, I can look out my window and see mountain ranges and be in nature all of the time. The contrast in Australia's environment to Hong Kong is huge and makes me appreciate just how beautiful and precious nature is at home.
- 10. I have lived in Canberra for 8 years now. Canberra is the capital of Australia but it doesn't feel like a capital, it's quite suburban. It's not a city, it's not a town it's a beautiful in-between. There are mountain ranges that surround Canberra and lots of nature parks like Cooleman Ridge which is 10 minutes' drive from me. From the windows in my home, I can see beautiful eucalypt trees. There are so many beautiful sounds outside my home, birds. The whole environment in Australia is totally different. You just hear chirping of insects and birds near my house. It wasn't like that in Hong Kong.
- 11. Canberra sits in a valley and usually has lots of extreme weather. For example, the coldest day in Winter in Australia for 2024 was in Canberra. In summer, it also gets really hot during the days and at night it gets much cooler. When it cools down, I will usually throw the windows open so I can get a nice breeze in and relax from the heat. I love Spring in Canberra. There is a Japanese ornamental plum in my garden and its bare in Winter but in Spring there are beautiful pink petals that grow. I always feel cured of Winter as soon as I see the petals.

Picture 3: the National Arboretum Canberra which is about an 8 minute drive away from my house which is absolutely beautiful



- 12. Being in nature is really important to me but being disabled makes it a whole challenge in itself to get into nature. I have so many houseplants and I love to see some of my plants sprouting. When I can, I also like to get into my native garden. It's really cool to see which native plants can thrive and which ones don't so much. I particularly love seeing billy button plants, they are so cute and I love wondering to myself why nature makes things that are so adorable.
- 13. Gardening really helps with my mental health. Even if I can't get out to nature, like Cooleman Ridge, it's nearby and I can be surrounded by nature. Having my garden close to me also means that even when I'm not well, I can still enjoy my garden. This past summer, gardening has even become a big challenge for me. It has been so hot that I've barely been able to leave my house or get out of bed even to walk a few steps to my garden.





Pictures 4 & 5: Japanese plum tree in my garden taken in September when the flowers finally come back after winter

# Living with my disabilities

14. I feel that people in my everyday life don't understand what it's like being in chronic pain all the time. I don't want people to understand by being in my shoes because it's devastating and sad to feel this way but I do wish that there was a bit more understanding. I often feel that you only get that acknowledgement through the experience of living with a disability.

- 15. My disability is my full-time job, I'm on call 24/7. I don't get a choice if these symptoms affect me or not and therefore it makes me think about how my body is going to react to the weather, the future of living in my house, my day-to-day temperature of the house, as examples. Because my disability is invisible, perhaps not well understood and also how my symptoms manifest are unique to me, I will explain what they are.
- 16. New Daily Persistent Headaches (NDPH): I was diagnosed with NDPH when I first got sick. NDPH is a rare chronic headache disorder which means I experience I have a constant headache. For me, I basically got a headache in 2020 and it's never stopped. I hate the name "new daily persistent headaches" because I don't think it captures my experience I don't get daily headaches; I've had one long headache since 2020. I experience high pain from my headache which makes me quite nauseous.
- 17. Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS): I was diagnosed with CFS as well around the time I first got sick. CFS is pretty self-explanatory - I am chronically fatigued - it's an extreme of being tired. I sometimes use a walking cane because I am chronically fatigued. That does terrify me because of the judgement that comes with a cane. I haven't ever used a wheelchair but maybe that's because I don't move around too much to need it.
- 18. Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome (POTS): In November 2024, I was diagnosed with POTS. POTS is a nervous system disorder which makes me really sensitive to any change in positions of my body and to changes in the environment, like temperature rise. It was quite empowering to get my diagnosis as it felt like my previous diagnoses did not cover everything I was experiencing.
- 19. With POTS, when I go from sitting to standing up, my heart rate spikes and it causes so many problems. I feel like I'm going to faint, and my vision blacks out. It also impacts my ability to stand up. If I'm standing up for a long time, my heart rate increases and I feel dizzy and like I'm about to faint. I have to be careful, even if I'm standing for 10 minutes. This is a daily occurrence for me where I often black out or faint for a second because of my POTS.
- 20. With both my CFS and POTS, I experience fatigue where I cannot move or speak and sometimes I can't even get up to go to the toilet, get food or even move my arms. It often feels like I'm in a pool and I just don't have the muscle strength and I feel too weak to move.
- 21. Unfortunately, because there are no treatment options for POTS, or for CFS or NDPH, all I can do is manage my symptoms. This is made even harder when I'm not able to regulate my temperature because it makes my symptoms even worse. Extreme temperature changes make my POTS symptoms even worse and it affects everything in my life. With POTS, I don't sweat as much so when it is extremely hot, I experience sweating problems because my body can't cool down properly and I get flushed and feel like I'm about to faint. On these days, it can also spike my heart rate and cause chest pain and I sometimes have to gasp for breath to be able to get air. To fix this, I sometimes have to lie on the floor and get my legs higher than my heart to get things back to normal.
- 22. I was 16 when all of these symptoms started. Having all these symptoms at 16, meant that I couldn't go to school. Now I'm 21 and it impacts every single little thing I do in a day from waking up to walking from my bed to the kitchen. If I feel well enough to go outside, I always have to think about how long I will be outside, whether I will need to stand for long periods and what the temperature will be like. It makes it hard to function properly.

- 23. With my disabilities, the only way people can know about them is if I tell them. People often make assumptions that I am a normal able-bodied person. My disabilities are dynamic disabilities, I can appear to function normally, but it might just be a good day. One day I might be okay, and the next I can be 'crashed out'. From what I know, about 80-90% disabilities are invisible. I wear a sunflower lanyard when I go out to share to others that I have a hidden disability. The Sunflower symbol in Australia is used by people to share that they have a hidden disability.
- 24. But even though I wear a sunflower lanyard, I still feel afraid to use mobility aids in public. I only recently got a disabled parking permit. When I go out, I sometimes feel afraid of what people might say about me and their judgement. I know when people don't understand, it is because they might just not have the knowledge but it is also exhausting explaining it to everyone all the time.
- 25. Unfortunately, this is the reality of being a minority, and to a point I think that you have to accept that the world isn't going to accommodate you in every single way. The world is not built for disabled people. Disabled people have always found ways to cope but it is unfair. To a point I can't expect people to change but in a dream world, I would want everything to change so that my experiences are accounted for. At the moment, nothing has shown me that anything is going to change to make the world more accessible for people living with disabilities. But I don't spend my time dwelling on this as it's not good for my mental health.
- 26. I've never met another person in real life who has NDPH but I have met people on Tik Tok and YouTube who are experiencing the same things as me. I try to make Tik Toks about what it is like to be in daily pain and I try to explain what NDPH and POTS are. It has been really great to connect with people online who are disabled. If we don't talk about our disabilities, then no one is going to understand what it is like. That's why I want to explain how climate change impacts me because how else would anyone find out about it?

## My experiences with climate change and how I am impacted by climate change

- 27. Before I got sick, I worked as a pharmacy assistant during the 2019-2020 bushfires, one of Australia's most intense and devastating fire seasons on record. I remember people were coming in for air purifiers and masks, before we were used to seeing masks through covid. Those fires were so scary. My partner's brother had just been born while the bushfires were happening and they were so worried about the air quality for this baby. The bushfires were so extreme, we knew it had to be related to climate change.
- 28. Since falling sick and having disabilities, the biggest thing that I've been thinking about recently, is how much I have to regulate my temperature. I've always been sensitive to temperature and always had heat intolerance but with my disabilities now, extreme heat just smashes everything out of me.
- 29. At the beginning, when I was diagnosed with NDPH, I always kept an ice pack in the freezer to regulate my temperature regardless of whether it was winter or summer. With my POTS, because my body can't regulate my temperature, my intolerance of extreme temperature is even harder. Having an ice pack available to me now rules what I do with my life. Like, if I want to go outside, I need to have an ice pack to manage my symptoms. The weather extremes are terrible for me and I am exploring other ways to make sure I can regulate my body temperature.
- 30. I feel for everyone when it comes to climate change. I am at the front lines with my body unable to regulate itself in response to extreme temperatures. Right now, it's not impacting the normal able bodied person but it will happen eventually. It will happen to everyone. It happens to me

now and I will have to deal with this in extreme ways. I'm thinking about it already because everyone needs to think about it.

- 31. Maybe that I'm paying more attention to the weather now that I have a garden in my own place but particularly this year, it feels so extreme. I don't think paid attention to the weather when I living at home with my parents when I was younger. But previously, I don't think it impacted me so much. I moved out of home after the 2019/2020 bushfires, and Canberra was okay but the fires were still on the horizon.
- 32. The weather in Canberra has been flip-floppy recently. This summer we have had really hot unbearable days but that has followed 2-3 days of heavy downpours and thunder. The heat has been completely unmanageable for me it's been extremely hot in January, February and March. I haven't been able to do basic activities like get out of my bed or leave my house to go for a walk. My symptoms have been so bad, I've just had to focus on feeling better in the moment and that has taken a big toll on me.
- 33. But then there was also huge rains in January, and people around me had their homes flooded. It all happened in about 30 minutes of rain. We tried to help and get the water out of my friend's house but the drain was blocked so we had to put the water down a different drain. This involved filling up buckets to scoop out the water. This movement has lots of standing up and down which triggers my POTS and also fatigue. We tried to help but my friend's whole house still flooded and she can't live there anymore.
- 34. It makes me wonder how would people get through floods who are more disabled than me. It makes me feel for people going through these kinds of natural disasters. I wouldn't have the physical ability to protect my home and get myself to safety if this flooding was happening to me and I was alone. If my POTS was worse, I could faint as soon as I try to get water out of the house. What would happen then? It was a crazy amount of water to see in Canberra, it was scary. Why is Canberra flash flooding? My brain can't comprehend it. However, after a few days you look outside and it's a beautiful although very hot day.
- 35. I don't remember experiencing crazy rain in Canberra during summer before. I have been living here for 3 years in the house I am in currently. It just buckets with rain, but why does it? We are not in the tropics, but it seems like it with this recent weather.

## My current housing situation

- 36. As I mentioned above, I am not able to work and I currently receive the Disability Support Pension (DSP) and I am on the waitlist to get access to public housing. In order to access any welfare payments in Australia, you must past income and asset tests.
- 37. I currently have housing where I don't have to pay rent, but I am conscious that this situation could change. I think and worry about my finances regularly, especially when it comes to paying my electricity bills. I recognise that I am privileged compared to other people on this earth but the money I receive from the DSP is not a lot to live off. This means that I often think about energy usage in the house. Even though my partner helps with bills, in winter, we didn't turn the heater on until we really needed to because we didn't want to spend money on that. Even at the start of Summer I don't turn the air conditioning on even though it is boiling hot. I should be able to prioritise my health over worrying about how much it might cost but sometimes I feel like it's really unfair that I have to put that aside because of my finances.

- 38. I also worry about my future financial position. If I didn't have access to affordable housing, my DSP payments would not be enough to live on.
- 39. I am conscious that my current housing situation could change, and that I am not a priority on the public housing waitlist so I might not get access to public housing for a very long time. Because of this, I have been renovating a campervan to live in. I've renovated it all up so that I could move into it and live in it if I need to. When I was renovating the van, I wanted to make it as sustainable as possible, and it has solar panels, and I have put insulation in it to make sure that it can survive any change in temperature.



Pictures 6 & 7: my van featuring the solar panel I installed on the roof and the earth wool insulation

## Thinking about the future and me and other young people living through climate change

- 40. If nothing changes, I don't feel positive about the future. I am currently dealing with crazy symptoms with my environment. If rising temperatures stays on this path, and unless somehow I get a bunch of money and can have air con all the time, I don't see my symptoms being managed well. If something extreme happened to my house, like if I was flooded, I don't have finances or housing security to be able to take care of myself. I'm sure even people who aren't disabled would be stressed about it. There are some things you just can't control, like bushfires or flooding. There's only so much homeowners can adapt but can't stop something like flooding.
- 41. Fingers crossed I have many more years to live, but as a young person I inevitably think about the future and how do we create an environment that is enjoyable to live in if my heat intolerance gets worse in hotter and hotter environments. I absolutely think that young people are thinking about the future in a way that older generations aren't. If you are 60 or 80 years old, you don't have to care about the environment, you're not going to be there. I will be experiencing the impacts of climate change regardless. My symptoms are incurable and I will continue to have these issues. I want to find a way to make the world more habitable for me but also make it more habitable for others. It makes sense that young people are out here talking about climate change, because it's going to impact us. My generation is also thinking about the two generations below me. How are they going to deal with it? Let's do something now about climate change.

#### What I would ask the Australian Government to do

42. Ultimately, the first step for me to be taken seriously by the Australian Government. I don't want to be ignored because climate change is not impacting 'you' yet. We need to address that there is an issue and a very serious one. I would like to see that able-bodied people can agree that something is going wrong for people with disabilities in terms of climate change. I want young

people to be taken seriously regardless of whether they are minority or not. As young people, we want change and you, the Government, have the ability to make that change or take steps to make those changes. The quality of our life is in your hands and we hope and pray that you take us seriously.

- 43. I wish the Government could understand my perspective. Not just the emotions, but also the physical inability to function and regulate body temperature. I feel like me and other people who have heat intolerances and other disabilities have been suffering with this for ages. At some point, people with power will think about it and it will be too late. When able-bodied people become impacted, will that be the time we think about it? Why is it only when it's a problem for people without pre-existing problems, will we do something about it? While we have a chance, we can do something about it and it's already affected people with disabilities. I don't understand why the Government doesn't accommodate people and I don't know what is stopping them.
- 44. A dream world for me is an accessible world and tackling climate change to stop extreme weather changes. This would help me so much. I am already at the frontline. Please do it now take action on climate. The normal person has to deal with heat or cold issues, but I am dealing with the extremes. It may be a hot day for 'you' but it's hotter for me because my body can't cool down. What am I supposed to do about something like temperature changes? Why is a 21 year old telling these people in the workforce? Why do I have to be ill to know these things? It makes me feel really sad that ill people have to come and fight because we are not being taken care of. Our life experience makes a difference, but it is a bit sad.
- 45. The Australian Government hasn't shown anything to me that they are taking things seriously. They've seen some impacts of the extreme weather changes and I hope that stuff is happening behind the scenes but we haven't seen it. I feel that nothing has been done.
- 46. I could write a whole list of things to do for example, let's stop coal mines and build more solar panels but where they must begin is acknowledging us and taking us seriously. This acknowledgment is not an empty promise but a commitment they will actually fulfil.
- 47. Even though I am disappointed by the lack of action by Government on anything, I don't think it's too late. I don't think we are a lost cause and excited to see what the Government can come up with.
- 48. It's not too late to love the earth and to put that into action. I feel so much love for this earth and I hope other people can see that and want to make that change as well. I feel excited to be around to other people who are passionate about taking care of our earth and overcoming climate change.

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

\_\_\_\_\_

Name: Eliza Evers

EEVED

24/03/2025

-----

Signature

Date



# **Statement of Madeline McShane**

Date of birth: 2 April 2001

Date: 22 February 2025

1. My name is Maddie, my pronouns for all relevant uses are she/her.



- 2. I grew up in country South Australia, the driest state on the driest continent in the world. South Australia is a very hot and dry place. My childhood was spent in rural agricultural communities and that has made me very familiar with the way climate change is inextricably linked with agriculture and water and how we live and eat.
- 3. I recently completed my undergraduate degrees in Law and Environmental Policy and Management at the University of Adelaide, in tarndanya/Adelaide in South Australia. After finishing my degrees, I moved to nipaluna/Hobart in Tasmania, which is on the lands of the Muwinina people, who did not survive colonisation. I am now working as an environmental campaign coordinator.
- 4. My hobbies include bushwalking, camping, swimming (both laps in the pool, and deep diving in the ocean), cycling, and spending time with my friends. I spend a lot of my spare time building community with grassroots activism networks of lutruwita/Tasmania. This looks like all sorts of things, such as planning wonderfully chaotic events, organising and supporting protests and

actions which seek to further environmental and social justice, cooking for far more people than I know how to, rescuing and redistributing food, and getting my hands dirty in the community garden.

- 5. I am making this statement in support if 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.
- 6. I feel drawn to make a statement to the UN Special Rapporteur because it feels like as a young Australian, there aren't many readily available avenues where we can advocate for our rights and our future. I am grateful for the collective Australian rights to participate in the electoral system, but unfortunately, our elected governments have continuously failed to act on the environmental crises we face. So, I turn to international law as a means of holding our government accountable for their failures.
- 7. 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.
- 8. The Australian government's unwillingness to take the necessary action on climate change makes me feel like I've been deprived of my right for a safe future. I won't be having children because I don't consider this world to be a climate safe environment to bring them into. I know that I'm not alone; I'm just one member of a cohort of young people who are all feeling the same thing. In making this complaint, I want to try to represent some of the voices of the incredible communities of young people across Southern Australia who have also been deprived of their rights to life.

#### Growing up and my career in environmental and climate advocacy

9. I grew up in a small town called Keith until I was 12 years old. The town had just over 1000 people, many of whom were involved with growing lucerne, a rather water intensive crop. From a young age I remember being pretty involved in conversations with family about agriculture and water management. I remember most of these around the time of the Millenium drought, a prolonged period of dryness from 2001-2009, in Southern Australia when there was low rainfall and inflows into the Murray River, Australia's longest river and one of our most vital for agriculture.

- 10. Of course, as a country highly prone to drought, Australia stored more water per head of population than any other country, and so in the early years of the drought, authorities were prepared. But as the drought went on to break records as the longest and most severe drought on record, it brought on dry conditions which no one was equipped to deal with. Crops suffered, water restrictions were implemented, and the local capital city of Adelaide had it's drinking water supply threatened. As a child growing up in this drought, of course I didn't understand the complexities of water policy, but what I did understand was that we weren't equipped to deal with the water shortages of drought, and that things seemed to be getting worse.
- 11. When I was 11, I moved to Port Lincoln, a small fishing and farming city on the Eyre Peninsula of South Australia, with my family. Living in Port Lincoln became my avenue into climate and environmental advocacy. When I was 16 years old, the fossil fuel company Equinor was proposing to start a massive oil drilling project in the Great Australian Bight, the massive bay off the coast of Southern Australia which is home to many iconic marine species, 85% of which are found nowhere else in the world. I got involved in a local "Fight for the Bight" community group which was connected with a broader network of environmental organisations including the Great Australian Bight Alliance and the Wilderness Society. The missions of these organisations were to see the Bight protected from dangerous operations like offshore oil drilling, and push for marine protections to be implemented.
- 12. Everyone in the community was aware that the drilling project threatened aquaculture, tourism and everything that the coast around Port Lincoln had to offer. Of course, there was also a growing awareness of the threat posed to the climate crisis by expanding offshore oil production. Together, we garnered strong community and eventually council support to officially oppose drilling. We were local part of a broader movement which finally pressured Equinor to pull out from their drilling plans in 2020. That movement continues to fight for a better protected marine environment.
- 13. It was really empowering and amazing to see a widely coordinated campaign like that which was working to protect the environment. It was great, it was my first time being part of an active community group. I was giving speeches, on the radio and organising with many different groups at 16 years old. It showed me the power of united communities.

- 14. After I graduated from high school, I moved to Adelaide, which is the capital of South Australia, to start University. I studied a double degree of environmental management and policy with law at the University of Adelaide. My studies in some ways felt eye opening but in other ways just felt disheartening realising that despite so much knowledge of our earth systems, so few avenues exist for real changemaking. I was diving into IPCC reports and understanding that if we were to have any hope at meeting our international emissions reductions targets, we needed to rapidly transition away from fossil fuels. Yet, simultaneously, I saw the Federal government be captured by fossil fuel interests, and a continuous agenda of expansion.
- 15. During my time at University, I was involved in a number of community based environmental campaigns and worked for small environmental NGOs which tried to push for climate and biodiversity justice. I also went to protests, but it took me many years to find my place in the big, fragmented world of changemaking.
- 16. One of my first professional jobs was at the University as an environmental intern in their infrastructure services. My job involved the restructure of the University's environmental programs and as a young person it was really disappointing to see how much states like South Australia and Universities profited from fossil fuels like gas and mining for minerals like uranium.
- 17. South Australia is heavily invested in gas and mining, and this fact was very prevalent at the University I went to. I was involved in running a campaign on campus which was trying to get the University to divest from fossil fuels. This was met with quite a lot of resistance from the University, especially because many of my university's programs like Engineering, were intertwined with funding from fossil fuel companies or defence. The campaign for the University to divest from fossil fuels was semi-successful. We got an agreement from them which promised to divest over a number of years, but it wasn't at the pace we wanted it. The South Australian government, like many governments, was invested in profiting from new renewable energy projects, but seemed to use such projects as an excuse for inaction on other climate fronts; like real divestment and resilience building.
- 18. Watching climate change coming to prominence in the media cycle more and more made me feel a sense of urgency and panic as I realised climate collapse was a current reality. It also made me angry, as despite its increased prominence, there was little response and action from any of the supposed institutional bodies of leadership in Australia. Instead, the country continued to be one of the leading exporters of fossil fuels, for which it took little responsibility. This created conditions

for a sense of hopelessness to emerge at the fact that our governments and authorities are captured by the interests of the industries that are destroying us.

- 19. I completed my undergraduate studies midway through 2024, the year which Australia officially tipped over its 1.5 degree warming target.
- 20. After university, it was to my surprise that I was offered the role of Campaign Coordinator for the Lake Pedder Restoration campaign in Tasmania—a movement focused on inspiring hope in future generations by undertaking one of Australia's largest restoration projects. This role was a significant new challenge, but, recognizing it as an invaluable opportunity to develop changemaking skills, I took the leap and relocated to Hobart, Tasmania—at the bottom of the world—in July 2024.

## My personal experiences with climate change

#### Drought, food and water security

- 21. Food has always stood out as a priority for me when it comes to climate change. It's central to all cultures and without secure food systems, our societies would collapse. From living in agricultural communities I have come to understand that an increasingly unstable climate puts many stressors on our agricultural systems, especially as our climate is now headed on a trajectory completely beyond what our food production methods have been set up to withstand.
- 22. South Australia is a predominantly arid state incredibly prone to drought. This risk is exacerbated by water mismanagement of shared waterways which have put great strain on many of the natural water sources South Australians depend on. In high school, I conducted a year-long research project into the way that local water overextraction had led to the salinisation and decline in our city's local groundwater ecosystem an underground reservoir at a place called Lake Pillie. As I have grown up, I have seen similar stories of decline and ecosystem denudation across water sources like the Murray River, its connecting waterways, estuaries, lagoons and reservoirs- putting great stress on local biodiversity. When freshwater ecosystems like this decline and collapse, so does the whole region's ability to respond to drought. With all climate analyses indicating a clear pattern of South Australia headed towards longer and more severe droughts, especially around the state's major catchments and most populated areas, this spells disaster.

- 23. With climate change, mega droughts will become a reality in South Australia and unless something is radically changed. What was most concerning to me was how despite the data on this being so clear, there seemed to be little attention from authorities into drought resilience and prevention. Whilst there were some preparatory measures, these were so meagre and underinvested in compared to the scale of the threat.
- 24. This has been a major source of anxiety for me and many of my cohort. How are we to invest in any sense of a future, when there is no guarantee it will be liveable? The looming threat of climate collapse has proliferated a sense of existential distress.
- 25. As I've grown up, it's been painful to drive down country roads I know and watch land I know, and love degrade in quality just over my short lifetime. Whilst the weather varies year to year, and of course not all years are dry, there are increasingly landmarks showing signs of cumulative signs of drying out. The land gets drier, soil salinity rises, erosion takes hold, native plants die, and crops become more reliant on fertiliser to continue.
- 26. This last Christmas, I was supposed to spend Christmas at my Aunt's house in the Clare Valley in South Australia. The Clare Valley region had the driest summer on record in the lead up to Christmas and my Aunt ended up running out of water because the local bore had dried up. The Clare Valley is a big wine region and a lot of the natural resources, like its water, are controlled and dominated by the wine industry. My Aunt ran out of water because the vineyard largely overdrew because they were having a dry year. Luckily, we were OK because we had other family with other water sources, but it is scary to think this might not always be the case. I worry thinking about how people will keep themselves fed and watered when mega-droughts take hold.
- 27. Water is life, and it has been a major determiner in my life decisions. I joke about having migrated to Tasmania because I'm a climate refugee but it's the truth. A lot of people that have moved to Tasmania young people like me who feel that South Australia cannot provide them a climate safe future. I I grew up loving the Flinders Ranges and arid areas in South Australia and wanted to settle there and live long term but it's not viable with the increasingly erratic and declining rainfall, as well as projected significant increase in heat events. Things are becoming very dire. There are more droughts, which mean we aren't able to depend on growing food or having access to a water supply. With the additional stress of the

housing crisis, it's nearly impossible for young people like myself to afford to buy land or property in arable areas which are climate safe.

## **Heatwaves**

- 28. Heatwaves are also a big experience in my life. In early 2024, there was a late summer-autumn heatwave in South Australia which saw five days above 37 degrees Celsius. The prolonged heat really devastated a lot of people, especially those that had poor health conditions. I heard many stories of increased hospitalisations, and my friends working in the health sector reported a lot of pressure in this time. I was living in a share house at the time, and it didn't have any cooling facilities or technologies we could afford. I had to leave my home for about a week during the heatwave and go and stay at a friend's house who lived in a valley with water nearby. I simply could not live in the share house during that time, it was uninhabitable.
- 29. When the climate is hot and dry, it's especially hard because the urban centres in South Australia are largely deforested and not designed for people to take refuge in a heatwave. We saw a great influx of people taking refuge where they could in community centres, libraries, their places of work, study or worship. But sometimes that is not viable cars fail in the heat, public transport cancels their services, and people simply aren't able to make it out of the house.
- 30. Whilst I no longer live in South Australia, my friends and family report that heatwaves this summer are similarly unbearable and record breaking, with multiple, closely interspersed days of over 40 degrees Celsius, many people are suffering.

#### **Bushfires**

- 31. As is the case with probably most Australians, an awareness of bushfire risk has been a very normal part of my life for as long as I can remember. But it is more in recent years that I remember particular devastation.
- 32. I was a close bystander to much of the loss of the 2019-2020 Black summer bushfires, that damaged and shattered many landscapes and places, including places like Kangaroo Island in South Australia and Southwest Tasmania.
- 33. In my environmental work in Tasmania, I have been coordinating research into a large ecological restoration project in part of Tasmania's Southwest wilderness. Fire is a natural part of these landscapes, but the Black summer bushfires burned hotter and faster than anything had before

and left a permanent scar on the landscape. When we looked at restoration in this area, we found that many plants, animals and seedbanks suffered damage which would take them generations to recover, making the prospect of restoration much more difficult. I've also worked with ecologists which predict that in places like Southwest Tasmania we may be teetering over climactic tipping points which mean we will enter a feedback loop of more fires promoting more fire risk. This is another difficult risk to navigate in the prospect of restoration, one of the rare beacons of hope in our changing world.

- 34. Tasmania burned again in 2022, and I came the closest I ever had to fire. I was staying in a tiny little town on Tasmania's west coast, involved in forest defence activism at a nearby logging coup. I had been staying there alone and without a car as I was in covid isolation, depending on friends and fellow activists for carpooling and supply drops. It was a hotter than usual summer and bushfire took hold in the mountains surrounding the town. Smoke clouded over the entire sky and wind whipped ash into my eyes. I could see the fire getting closer, it was only a few hundred metres away. I was reliant on a ride from a stranger to get me out of danger.
- 35. This year in 2025, we have seen intense bushfires return to the same areas in Tasmania, burning around 90,000 hectares of the state's north west. Much of the wildlife in the state's wilderness areas has been lost, and communities are still consolidating their damages. It is scary to see fire in these areas returning with such frequency and intensity.

#### My health

- 36. From a health perspective, I would not class myself as particularly vulnerable, I come from a very privileged background, I am able bodied and relatively healthy.
- 37. I do, however, like the majority of Australians, have a number of somewhat minor health issues, which will no doubt worsen, in their symptoms and ability to be treated, as climate change intensifies and put a bottleneck on the healthcare system.
- 38. These include: asthma, psoriasis, anaemia, mild hearing loss, adenomyosis, and some complications with my reproductive organs. I also have a mild foot disfiguration which will require surgery to enable me to walk with comfort. These conditions are all such that I consider them manageable, but again, I note that climate change will make these conditions less so.

- 39. My Psoriasis and asthma are particularly impacted by climate change. I experience worsening of symptoms during heatwaves and when air quality is low, I have difficulties with my asthma.
- 40. Regarding mental health, I will note that climate related anxiety has brought on a state of distress which substantially impairs my overall psychological outlook on life.
- 41. Regarding mental health, I note that climate distress substantially impairs my overall psychological, mental, emotional and hence physical wellbeing.
- 42. The inability, and unwillingness, of our institutions of leadership to take the required action on climate change to secure a liveable future, has perpetuated a growing sense of hopelessness, amongst me personally, and amongst my social surroundings to which I am inextricably connected. I believe hopelessness to be experienced with pronounced pertinence amongst the younger generations of today, who, unlike their parents, are not able to look forward to the end of their life cycle with any certainty they will have the necessary conditions to survive. Yes- survive, not just thrive, or continue their current way of life. I think it is reasonable to say that many people with a proper comprehension of the deep existential threat which climate change poses, fear for their lives. In my case, I fear especially for the lives of the vulnerable in the communities around me, and the way that escalating climate threats will deepen social austerities. These fears are deep and real in me, and many young people today. They are exacerbated by a lack of adequate support services and acknowledgement around them, especially by our leading governmental institutions.
- 43. The presence of such acute fear, in addition to a culture of hopelessness, creates an environment where many symptoms typically associated with mental health conditions like depression take hold. Whilst it is difficult to quantify where climate distress starts and ends, because I have never known anything else, I know that it is the primary factor at the root of my psychological struggles.
- 44. Climate distress has caused me to struggle to engage with all of the behaviours required of me to be healthy. It has caused me, at times, to be socially withdrawn, struggle to sleep, to eat, to exercise, and to participate in society in a way necessary for me to get by. Without hope for a safe future, how can one be expected to be motivated to continue? In such an environment, it is easy to imagine submitting to a life of hopelessness, and despair or immersion in a life of subdued distraction. I have seen many of my peers move into this life.
- 45. Hence, it has been a necessary requirement for my survival that I busy myself with organising with social movements that push for change.

## Future harms associated with climate change

- 46. When I think about the future that climate change will bring, I am worried about so many things. I suppose firstly, generally, that climate change will disrupt agricultural structures and our ability to access safe food and water. If a population does not have safe food and water, it does not have peace and political stability.
- 47. I want to emphasize that climate distress should not be pathologized as an individual issue but understood as a natural human response to the profound and devastating changes occurring in our world. It is a very real and shared experience. In my community, climate distress, anxiety, and depression weigh heavily on many young people, including myself. We are part of a generation with unprecedented access to information about the crisis, yet we often feel powerless to drive meaningful change. This distress can consume mental and emotional energy, sometimes leaving people paralyzed and unable to feel empowered to take control of their own lives.
- 48. I am worried about the impact of extreme climate events, and our government's alarming lack of preparedness to effectively respond and adapt to them.
- 49. My concerns about climate change means that I have decided that I will not have children. I have also radically changed the way I interact with every aspect of my life. I did not pursue a career for love or interest, but for survivals sake. The largely unnamed cultural symptoms of late-stage capitalism and colonialism mean many of the threats of climate change or nature crises are unidentified or pacified. This makes it more difficult to unify for disaster response and it leads to fragmentation and fracturing of our systems and our cultures. I invest most actively in community because community resilience is the only thing that will save us.
- 50. Whilst I am lucky enough to have a liveable income, I am still well within the expanding demographic of young people who are locked out of Australia's housing market due to the housing crisis, a symptom of rampant late-stage capitalism driving up housing prices. Increasing insurance prices due to growing climate risks are also driving up housing prices and making them increasingly unaffordable.
- 51. This leaves me, like so many young people, without access to secure, long-term, and climate-safe housing amidst an escalating climate crisis. The implications of this are deeply troubling. Everyone deserves the right to adequate housing—homes that are not only affordable but also resilient to

the impacts of a changing climate. Yet, this fundamental right is far from being realized in Australia. Our current building codes fail to adequately address the realities of climate resilience. Many homes are ill-equipped to withstand extreme weather conditions, with insufficient insulation, poor energy efficiency, and, in many cases, not even basic amenities like air conditioning.

- 52. I worry deeply for those living in arid, and emerging arid, regions, where intensifying heatwaves and prolonged dry spells will push existing vulnerabilities to their limits. Without access to safe, climate-resilient housing, these communities will face unbearable conditions with little relief. This is not just a failure of infrastructure but a failure to protect human rights and dignity in the face of a crisis we know is only going to worsen. If we don't prioritize climate-resilient housing as a matter of urgency, we are condemning millions of people to live in homes that offer no refuge from the growing threats of climate change
- 53. Lutruwita/Tasmania is more climate resilient than many parts of the mainland for many reasons, largely because of lower baseline temperatures, more secure water sources and much of its native biodiversity still intact. Still, there are changes radically reshaping the Country. Many parts of the state are drying out, including swathes of rainforests like takayna which have stood healthily for thousands of years. Climate cycles are tipping over their stable threshold, and we are seeing cycles like increased bushfires proliferate in intensity and frequency. This puts many already fragile species, like the fire-sensitive pencil pine, at risk. Ocean temperatures are quickly warming, and with the majority of the state's population being situated on the coast, this is devastating for local ecosystems and livelihoods which depend on healthy oceans. The list of climate risks is too long to name, and it is ever expanding as climate threats worsen and change.
- 54. These efforts to work for a better planet in my personal professional emotional life. They consume every part of me. The considerations and the fears and anxieties about the world which we might not have or the breakdown of our earths systems which we are witnessing are all consuming. They make it hard to focus on normal things that our parents might expect that we are able to enjoy with less care because everything is sort of like related to more of an existential threat. I think that there has never been a generation that's had to experience climate change like my generation.

## Australian government inaction on catastrophic climate harms

- 55. I have found the Australian government's inaction on the catastrophic harms of climate change has been deeply disappointing. Despite the clear and mounting evidence of the risks we face, their response remains timid—stuck in a cycle of "business as usual" with little willingness to challenge the systems causing so much harm.
- 56. Climate change isn't just another issue; it underpins every facet of our lives. Without addressing it, we jeopardize the very foundation of human wellbeing, especially young people like me. While the *Climate Change Act 2022* has positioned Australia among the 27 nations with legislated net zero targets—43% emissions reduction from 2005 levels by 2030 and net zero by 2050—these commitments have too often been used as a shield. Instead of driving meaningful action, they've served as justification for continued investment in systems that accelerate destruction. It feels as if the government is pressing down on the accelerator with one foot while pretending the other is on the brake—or perhaps the brake is just a mirage, a promise to act "soon."
- 57. What's missing is real scrutiny. There's insufficient detail, oversight, or investment to ensure these targets are achieved. We lack a clear and enforceable climate taxonomy, leaving room for the misuse of funds on measures that are far from the most effective solutions. This gap is costing us precious time and resources.

#### Ending fossil fuel projects with urgency

- 58. In my experience, its so clear to me as a young person that the most important thing that the government needs to do with priority is to stop approving and funding new fossil fuel projects immediately. Through my studies in environmental policy, I read and understood multiple IPCC reports and saw with great clarity that we had to turn around our trajectory of expanding fossil fuels. I think a lot of young people like me have felt great frustration that the Australian government has absolutely failed to even recognise this imperative. In the last couple of years, I have been involved with the Climate group Rising Tide an east coast based movement for climate action which has a large youth cohort and some of their calls are for the Australian government is to stop expanding fossil fuels, implement a 78% tax on fossil fuel export profits to fund the community and industrial transition, as well as remediation efforts and prioritize phasing out fossil fuel exports in a strategic and equitable manner.
- 59. These demands make a lot of sense when I look at the rural communities where I come from where there are a lot of jobs in fossil fuels but people aren't married to those industries they just want to work in jobs that they can provide for their families.

60. As an activist, I was involved with Rising Tide in the Flotilla to lock coal ships coming out of the worlds largest coal port which is Newcastle, Australia in 2023. I did this because I believe in these demands that they are calling for. We need a transition, and we need the Australian government to take us seriously.

#### There is no net zero without nature

- 61. My home, South Australia, has seen so many of its ecosystems entirely desecrated. On average, 80% of native vegetation has been cleared in the agricultural regions I grew up in. This figure is even higher in the Mount Lofty Ranges where I lived for six years as a young adult- where only 10% of native vegetation remains in tact. The landscape destruction is plan to see.
- 62. In my experience as a campaigner at the small environmental science organisation, the Nature Conservation Society in South Australia, I was involved in a lot of research about the impacts of developments which involve land clearing and lead to the loss of native vegetation. Watching the government steamroll along with new developments without proper consideration of how this impacts biodiversity made me realise that in Australia, new projects come at the expense of the Earth.
- 63. This realisation was consolidated through my work with Lake Pedder Restoration and the Bob Brown Foundation, which are organisations based in Tasmania focused on defending ecosystems from destruction. It has made it really clear to me that we can't have net zero without nature. This is a truth that I think that the federal government needs to take seriously. I have seen again and again that Australia, unlike many EU nations, have deviated from their international obligations to protect nature like those set under the *Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework* and their domestic commitments. This includes the failed promises made by the Minister for Environment to not reach any new extinctions by 2030 or expand our protected area reserves by 2030. I've seen failure upon failure upon failure. To me, it shows a lack of understanding that the biodiversity and climate crisis are inextricably intertwined and need to be tacked concurrently.
- 64. I have seen in my research, that other countries do things different. The EU has a better incorporation hierarchy with its biodiversity protection policies married to their climate objectives. The Australian Government has taken no such strategy. If we continue on this trajectory, we are only going to worsen our status as an extinction hotspot which is not going to help our climate resilience as we enter climate collapse and cross more tipping points.

- 65. If the Australian government was serious about navigating these dual crises, then we would be investing in addressing them. We know that we can invest in them. We are an incredibly wealthy nation. In 2023-2024, budget, we spent \$52.6 billion defence budget for the same period, which represents approximately 2% of GDP and is projected to double by 2033-34. But compared to climate related commitments, we only spent 4.6 billion for climate spending in that budget and that number is not projected to rise and we have not seen commitments for that to be meaningfully increased. If we can justify massive investments in long-range missiles, nuclear submarines, and autonomous technologies in the name of national security, surely we must treat climate change—a far greater and more immediate threat to our security—with even greater urgency.
- 66. From working in grassroots community spaces and doing a lot of mutual aid in my community, I've learnt and been really inspired how easy it is to support each other and support communities when we have good resources in place and good structures in place for supporting each other. It showed me that investing in climate resilience in our communities can look really simple in a lot of ways. It can look like things like establishing and supporting community centres to serve as hubs during crises; funding the recovery and regeneration of agricultural systems, which are critical for food security; strengthening health services to prepare for climate-related health challenges; designing urban spaces to withstand extreme weather events and reduce emissions; and providing adequate resources to emergency services, ensuring they can respond effectively to disasters.
- 67. It looks like really simple things that parts of our community are doing for free already. I have lots of friends who volunteer for free in the fire service, work in soup kitchens in communities when they are hit by disaster, supporting people who are homeless and are pushed out of the housing market or hit by disaster. Work in sustainable food systems, working in permaculture to grow food in gardens that are now climate resilient than our modern agricultural systems. These things, these climate adaptation strategies are really so simply and there is a myriad of ways like these that the government could be investing in better climate adaptation and we've seen almost nothing.
- 68. I find it devastating and disheartening that our elected institutions have completely failed to recognise the profound existential threat posed to younger generations by climate change, nor take appropriate action to respond to it.

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

Name: Madeline McShane

he

22/02/2025

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature

Date



# **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 to 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 its 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 Brelsford 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 <u>here</u>, and a link to a video of part of my speech is <u>here</u>. Our local newspaper ran a story about the climate concert I organised <u>here</u>, 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 <u>here</u>. 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 <u>here</u>.
- 25. There is an article about my story <u>here</u> 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. <u>It is time for the Australian government to step up and take accountability.</u> 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

12 March 2025

Signature

Date



# **Statement of Ruby Fox**

Name:Ruby FoxDate of birth:12 October 2003Date:28 February 2025

- 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 be 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 Kunyani 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, familiy 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 cant 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 if 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 advise 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. Its our life, its 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:

P

28/02/2025

Signature

Date



# Statement of Yehansa Dahanayake

Name: Yehansa Dahanayake

Date of birth: 22/05/2008

Date: 17<sup>th</sup> February 2025

1. My name is Yehansa and I am 16 years old. I use she/her pronouns. I live on the lands of the Wallumedegal people of the Dharug nation which is in the Ryde area of Sydney.



©Yehansa Dahanayake

- 2. I am in Year 12, my final year at High School. I love school, I love learning. I'm naturally a very curious person, sometimes my parents have to force me to stop studying. I also love to paint and draw, creativity is something that I'm super invested in. I'm definitely a hobby hoarder I always want to do everything: radio, singing, dancing, baking and more. I'm so interested in creating a life that is full of experiences! When I grow up I want to go into climate science or environmental law or human rights law. I'm very passionate about these matters, and I believe it's vital that we harness and consider many diverse and passionate perspectives as we work in this area.
- 3. I have a really strong sense of justice, I always have since I was little. When I see something is wrong, I go to hell and back to fix it. I remember back when I was in primary school, I learned about racism and I wrote this whole speech and presented it at the assembly because I thought it was so wrong. So, I remember as a young teenager I was so disheartened when the Sussan Ley decision came out (the decision in *Minister for the Environment v Sharma* (No 2) [2022] FCAFC 65)

– it shocked me that it was decided that Australia's Minister for Environment did not have a duty of care to protect young people from the climate crisis.

4. Climate change is undoubtedly the single greatest challenge facing our planet moving forward. As a young person, I am already experiencing the consequences of that inaction. I know that climate change will have dire consequences for my future, and my family's, friends' and other young people's futures. I think that it's important to frame climate change as a child rights issue – climate change is and will continue to change childhoods, and we owe protection and responsibility to my generation and the generations to come.

## My life and how climate change is impacting me

I was born in Sri Lanka, and I came to Australia when I was a baby. In Australia, I grew up in Ryde in Sydney. Ryde is a really nice area, it's semi suburban, lots of nature and lots of trees, the community is really strong, and I really enjoy where I live and the schools around us are really nice. Ryde has a lot of nature and bushes surrounding it, you get the coastal breeze. We are close to Parramatta River and some of the beaches and we are relatively close to the city. Parramatta River is quite polluted, you wouldn't swim in it. I have learnt that when the Parramatta River first started to become polluted, a lot of the native animals drastically declined including the totem of the Wallumedegal people.

5. I live on the border of Western Sydney. Western Sydney is on the other side of Ryde which is a bit of a different area. Western Sydney is more urban and there is a new Western Sydney city which replicates Sydney city. A lot of the Sri Lankan community live in the Western Suburbs and I travel out to Western Sydney a lot with my family. Western Sydney experiences what's called the "urban heat island effect" meaning at most times Western Sydney is 6-10 degrees hotter than the eastern suburbs of Sydney<sup>1</sup>. That is for a couple of reasons including the topography of Western Sydney and that heat can be more intensely captured in those areas because of vast amounts of concrete. Concrete landscapes absorb heat, becoming a boiling pot for extreme heat and weather events<sup>2</sup>. Additionally, there is not much grass or trees in that area to offset all of the concrete or much coastal breeze, meaning temperatures rise high, and stay high as nighttime residue – which can

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Untouchable playgrounds: Urban heat and the future of Western Sydney | Climate Council

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> <u>Urban heat | Planning</u>

cause health and safety risks, especially in these often overpopulated, lower income vulnerable communities, who may not be equipped to handle it.<sup>3</sup>

- 6. Whenever I travel out to Western Sydney, I can feel the difference in the heat. I think other people can feel these impacts more severely, but I know that my stress levels increase and I get headaches in the heat.
- 7. In terms of my eco-anxiety and my mental health, I've struggled a little. I'm very future focused and I love dreaming up new ideas and things we could do in the future I do bucket lists all the time. It's not productive to stress about things out of your control, and something like climate change is so far out of our control is hard to grapple with. It's confronting and quite terrifying. When I'm not stressed about school or assignments, I'm stressed just about climate change. I don't think it's healthy for a 16-year-old to think this much about climate change because it feels like such as big thing to solve, I constantly want to be a "fixer". This is something that I know a lot of climate activists and students are prone to as well because its such a big thing and we feel the need to fix it right now. I have experienced burn out before. But I try to remind myself that it's a marathon not a sprint, we must sustain ourselves for decades if we want to build a successful movement.
- 8. I babysit a lot of kids and when I am looking after then I often look at them and think about what's going to happen to them when they grow up. They are just full of energy and optimistic and so cute and I wonder, what is your life going to look like? That's just from a babysitter's perspective too, I wonder what the parents think about this.
- 9. I know some people who are university age who are thinking about not having kids because they don't want to put a child through climate change impacts. I think about my graduating class, beautiful people I grew up with, and wonder what's going to happen to us and how our careers are going to be changed by climate change. It's terrifying that the future is uncertain because of all this but I also try to remember that there can be beauty and optimism in what we don't know. The fact that we don't know gives us the space to explore, in letting go of "not'-knowing" we can risk everything for the person we are capable of becoming.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Extreme heat is getting worse in the west | University of Technology Sydney

## Climate change and its global impact

- 10. Since moving to Australia, we go back to Sri Lanka to visit family when we can. The UN states Sri Lanka is highly vulnerable to climate change, being placed as one of the top 10 countries at risk of extreme weather events<sup>4</sup>. Growing up, it's always interesting to see the impacts of climate change in Sri Lanka before I see them in Australia.
- 11. I remember going on a road trip with my dad's friend who is a historian, and she was talking about how the area we were in had changed in recent years because of climate change and had caused intense heat in the area. Sri Lanka



relies quite heavily on rice harvesting and the agriculture industry<sup>5</sup>. Impacts of climate change on extreme weather events in the past 20-30 years, such as increased rainfall, onset monsoon delays, and early withdrawals<sup>6</sup>, and the exemplification of these events due to El-Nino/La-Nina and the Madden- Julian weather oscillation can cause drastic effects on the vital industry. This impact can have a drastic effect on the countries' economies, thus having flow-on human rights impacts such as food insecurity<sup>7</sup>.

12. I'm a person of colour so when I talk about climate change and its impact, I tend to think of the disproportionate impacts in the Global South in comparison to the Global North. When I think about my family in Sri Lanka, I'm worried about how climate change will impact them and older family members who are more prone to heat-related illnesses. I also think about my cousins too who are much older than me (almost 3 years older) and haven't graduated high school (whilst I am about too), due to school disruptions, and how that may become worse moving forward. Seeing first-hand how climate change impacts my family overseas, it makes me worry. It's a worry that lots of people of colour in the climate advocacy space have. It is that fear which drives us all forward.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Fact Sheet: Climate Impact in Sri Lanka | United Nations in Sri Lanka

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Paddy Cultivation in Sri Lanka | Traditional Agriculture Practices of Sri Lanka

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> 87aa74d9-6774-4981-a0f2-447bb1d9623b.pdf

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> https://srilanka.un.org/sites/default/files/2023

- 13. When I think about Australia, we are one of the world's biggest coal exporters. This is not something Australia should be proud of, I think it is a basic ask to the government to reduce their export quantities. Australia needs to make climate change decisions that recognises that its not just Australian kids who are suffering under the brunt of climate change. Australia's role as a global exporter has consequences for the international world.
- 14. I am disappointed in the Australian government and the fossil fuel industry for being derelict in their duty to care for the planet. They are supposed to be responsible for leading climate action and should take urgent and decisive action to halt and reverse climate change. But it doesn't seem like they're doing that.

## My climate advocacy work

- 15. I've always been naturally conscious of the environment because my family is. During primary school as well, I remember always being very aware of being sustainable and recycling and was naturally conscious of food waste and how much stuff you use and throw out. Actually, I think my parents are sometimes better climate leaders than me they call me out when I've been in the shower for too long!
- 16. I also remember being aware of climate change from a young age too. In classes, we would often watch David Attenborough documentaries at school and my school friends and I would always get sad watching them. I remember in my early teenage years at around 13 years old, I loved the K-pop group, Blackpink. One year, Blackpink went to COP26 in Glasgow and had a video speaking about COP and a media campaign talking about climate change. I know that celebrities talking about climate change is questionable, surrounding greenwashing claims. Still, seeing that, I thought it was fascinating and that made me want to learn more.
- 17. This was happening around the same time that the Sussan Ley decision came out. Sussan Ley was Australia's Minister for the Environment at the time and she has the job of deciding whether to approve new fossil fuel projects. I remember when that case was decided, I thought "What do you mean that the Minister doesn't think that children need to be protected from climate change?". I really looked up to the youth litigants on that case, and many leaders in the climate sphere. That's when I started getting into understanding more about climate change as a whole. I love science, so I started researching into those areas. And I started to think about climate change as 3D

interlocking, intersecting issue that is not limited to science, but can overflow and effect various aspect of society. I think it was the justice elements of climate justice that really peaked my interest. At that time I joined the AYCC (the Australian Youth Climate Coalition) and started up the AYCC group in my local area, I joined School Strike 4 Climate<sup>8</sup> and Amnesty International and started to get involved with other students and do petitions and working on grassroot campaigns for climate action.

18. I did all of my work for AYCC in my spare time and while balancing my schoolwork too, I'm always really busy. During the day, I was a normal school student and then after school, I go speak at panels and sit in meetings. It made me feel like Hannah Montana –you know student by day, cool climate advocate by night! I think I enjoyed having that double life.



19. I have a couple of teachers at school who like seeing the work I'm doing on climate change and my teachers let me do climate change-related work where I can. They are really supportive. Now I am in my senior year, I haven't been able to do as much. As much as I love grassroots advocacy, it takes a lot out of you sometimes. It's a lot of meetings, organisation and sometimes it doesn't feel like you get anywhere. I've sat in so many meetings with politicians who work at the Local, State and Federal level, and it can be disheartening to feel like we're not achieving success fast enough.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> School Strike 4 Climate was formed in 2018 and is part of a global movement of student strikers committed to ending fossil fuel extraction and securing a safe and liveable future.

- 20. In 2023, I started working as a youth co-researcher with the University of Western Sydney 'Young & Resilient Research Centre' and UNICEF Australia, on a project called "We all deserve to live in a thriving world: child-centred indicators for climate change."<sup>9</sup> I've **attached** a copy of the Report to my personal statement and I would like to draw the Special Rapporteur's attention to the Aspirational Statement on p 67, which I wrote. As one of the first reports that centred around an integrated youth experience, the Special Rapporteur should look to read this report as a message from young people directly about how they are being impacted by climate change and the solutions that they want to see. The Youth Aspirational Statement in this Report outlines a compiled vision on climate change solution making spoken directly from young people to key decision makers. I believe that its pivotal that our decision makers and Special Rapporteur read this and implement the wants, needs and believes outlined by these young people in the statement.
- 21. In this project, we talked to 49 young people from all across New South Wales (NSW) to create a world-first set of indicators on climate change. These indicators use directly from NSW youth to understand how climate change impacts us, and to track the impacts of climate change and whether climate action efforts are reducing these impacts. The framework centres young people's diverse needs, concerns and aspirations and seeks to initiate intergenerational conversations about how to best safeguard their present and build climate resilient futures. It's mapped alongside current human rights legislation, it measures factors pre and post the pivotal year 2030 and covers over 4 domains and 10 ideal states. This comprehensive tool provides governments, industries and citizens a direct and clear roadmap to designing a better world it's up to them to work with us to use it. Together we can make this vision a reality, and I believe it is up to the government and industries to use it!
- 22. From this research, we can conclude through evidence-based methods that young people feel a disproportionate burden of responsibility when it comes to climate change, similar to of the psychological feeling of being abandoned. Personally, my family and my school is super supportive, and I don't feel this same sense of abandonment as much as other youth did, especially as many came from disaster-affected and coal communities like Muswellbrook and Lismore.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup>Third, A., Chowdhury, F., Dahanayake, Y., Hannah, S., Kennedy, U., Lala, G., & Moody, L. (2024), 'We deserve to live in a thriving world': child-centred indicators for climate change, Young and Resilient Research Centre, Western Sydney University and UNICEF Australia. DOI: https://doi.org/10.26183/t5bc-mk38

- 23. It's exciting to see academia to start to consider youth voice as this has been a space that we have historically been excluded from. Young people conversational ideas and solutions are being officially recognised and I think that its so important that these youth voices are brought up and elevated as equal to other adult academic spaces. I think the Australian government has a lot to learn from centres like the one I work for at WSU, understanding that young people do have an intellectual and participatory expertise especially on climate change and this should be a priority moving forward.
- 24. I do think climate advocacy has undoubtedly shaped the way I grew up. I think it's almost disappointing that I don't think I've had a super normal high school teenage experience. Like even when I'm on school camps, I still bring a computer so I can respond to emails in my cabin, or during my school holidays I'm always working. In my school holidays, I will often go to an AYCC leaders retreat or be doing meetings and organization for a climate campaign. I'm not sure if I've had that average high school experience which is a little disappointing.

#### My art and how I try to stay hopeful

- 25. Sometimes I don't even know what I cared about before I cared about climate change. Thinking and worrying about climate change is changing my identity. It's almost weird because if you look around my room, its all climate posters that I've got. No bands or records, just climate posters.
- 26. I like planning ahead and feeling in control and thinking about who I am and who I want to be, but with climate change sometimes I don't know what those plans look like. Sometimes I don't think of myself as a holistic person, I think of myself as different people in different spaces, like I think of myself like a school student, a climate activist or a radio host.

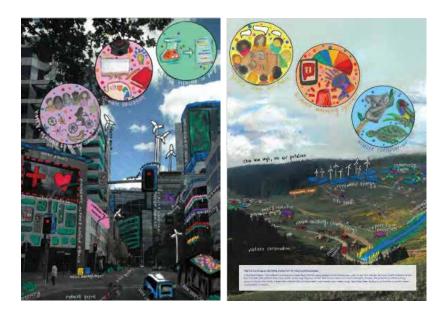


©Yehansa Dahanayake

27. I read a study from UNICEF's "climate change is changing children" campaign which states that a child turning 10 this year, has experienced the 10 hottest years on record. When I think about me, that means

that I've experienced 10 out of 16 years of my life experiencing the hottest years on record. To me, that is so scary and confronting and makes me a little angry.

- 28. When I'm feeling overwhelmed and stressed, I like to use my art as a way to get my feelings out. I love storytelling through art, theatre and music and sometimes I'll tell my climate stories as a way of hope. I also do some songwriting and I write songs to get my feelings out and to feel more hopeful. When I'm making art about climate change, it feels good and makes me feel hopeful. I think storytelling and art is such as important medium for connection and community and I think when we use it effectively, especially in climate science or research communication it can be so inspiring. I had a singing teacher who once taught me that nervousness and excitement are essentially the same emotion, and to channel nervous energy into joy and passion guiding performances. I like to utilize this analogy as we advance, that it is in the anxiety, helplessness, anger, and despair we feel facing climate threats we can channel into hopeful action, in showing up day after day to fight, passionately advocating for a different world.
- 29. When I started the AYCC Bennelong group, we made an Instagram account (@aycc\_bennelong) and we started this series called "Active Hope" to inspire hope about climate change in our group. At that time, I was really into climate psychology, the works of Per Espen Stoknes, and Rebecca Huntley looking for ways to inspire optimistic solution-making. To understand that passive optimism or naivety or denial is not productive, but "Active Hope" highlights our climate successes and our losses. It's highlighted to me that its very reasonable for young people to be stressed about climate change, and interesting conversations is happening in the Sydney space around this!



#### The Australian governments inaction on climate change

- 30. I think that if there was concrete evidence that change would be made by the Australian government to take action on climate change, that would really help my eco-anxiety and my mental health.
- 31. The Australian government's inaction is such a disappointment. How many scientists need to say something, how many records and articles do you need to read to make a change and take action on the climate crisis? We've been recording the increases in temperature for years and the first knowledge about climate change was recorded decades ago. Young people have been screaming and protesting about this for so long. It's just pure disappointment, what else does the Australian government need to hear to make a difference in climate decision making.
- 32. I think that the Australian government understands climate change, but I think there are lots of political problems, including the fact that the fossil fuel lobby has ties with major parties which means things aren't done. The fossil fuel lobby has too much power and I wish climate change was more bipartisan. I don't understand why it's a political issue. This is going to affect everyone no matter what side of the political spectrum you're on. Climate change is usually framed as a matter of left-leaning policies, but I truly don't understand why this can't be a bipartisan issue. If all sides of Parliament accepted climate science and worked together to create change that would be a dream come true.
- 33. I think that Australia as one of the world's largest coal exporters has a responsibility to immediately stop their high rates of exports to prevent future emissions and harms that climate change disproportionately causes to young people. Our exports and their emissions do have a wide global impacts. Australia as a global leader and being a multiculturally diverse country, the Australian government has a responsibility to ensure that the places that its constituents are from are also protected. I don't think they've fulfilled their responsibility, they haven't used any of their power to grapple with that responsibility. Legally, Australia doesn't have proper human rights protections on climate change either and it doesn't recognize the value of the Earth beyond what it can do for humans. I think Australia has a responsibility to holistically reduce their exports and emissions and lead the world in effective climate action.
- 34. The Australian government also needs to centre young people first when it comes to climate change. They ought to have a duty of care, under negligence law, to protect us against climate change. We don't have a vote. We don't have many ways to be involved in spaces that consider climate change. I feel like all politicians should consider young people in all their decisions especially for climate change. The Duty

of Care Bill being campaigned for by Anjali Sharma (another Australian climate activist) is legislation which would create a requirement for politicians to consider young people in their decisions about climate change. That Bill would create a requirement and open up so much opportunity for young people to hold the government accountable for their inaction on climate change.

- 35. There are currently no legal avenues that young people can take to ask the Australian government to take action on climate change. The extent to which the young people can have their voices heard is limited by the current legal system.
- 36. I like to frame climate change not as a problem, but as a puzzle and everyone has their place to come together and fix this puzzle. Whether you're a student, a teacher, a parent or carer, a doctor, a surfer, or a politician etc everyone has a role. If everyone was united, we could work together to solve it and it wouldn't be a disaster, it would be a massive opportunity. Climate change is not just science either, we'll find it creates impact on multiple broad aspects of society. If climate change is the single greatest challenge facing our planet, it is also the single greatest opportunity. It represents a change to not only fix our climate but also to address social inequality in our communities: from alleviating energy poverty to ensuring equity for climate-vulnerable communities, working with Indigenous peoples and their knowledge, and uplifting the voices of young people and communities on the frontline of climate change. This is a chance to unite the world under a common vision, a chance for all of us no matter who we are to work towards something meaningful.
- 37. If the government really wanted to protect Australian children from climate change, they would implement research like this WSU report and listen to young people. In Australia, I think there's a bit of disdain towards kids who are climate activists and who leave school to protest but there are lots of us who are very well informed, who value their education and who have articulated intelligent views about what proper climate action means. The Australian government isn't listening to us and I would really like them to listen and take proper action.
- 38. Young people are more than capable at envisioning and designing a future that is stronger, more sustainable, and more equal, one that aims to solve climate change and it's intersecting issues. I do believe it is the utmost responsibility of the Australian government to not only hear these plans but back them, and show true loyal support.

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

Name: Yehansa Dahanayake 7.E//

aignature

.

Date

17/02/2025



# Statement of Zhanāe Dodd

Name:	Zhanāe Dodd
Date of birth:	30 March 1997
Date:	18 March 2025

 My name is Zhanāe Dodd, and I use she/her pronouns. I live in Rockhampton on Darumbal country in Queensland and travel out to Woorabinda and Blackwater as often as I can (that is my matriarchal ancestral country). I am 27 years old and a first-year student in my Bachelor of Global Indigenous Studies with the University of Newcastle (online).



- 2. I am a proud Aboriginal woman coming from the Ghungalu, Wadja, Kaanju, Birri and Wiri and Wungun people belonging to the Gurubil skingroup. I live on Darumbal country in Rockhampton but my clan group on my mother's side boarders Darumbal country. Therefore, we have a very longstanding connection. I have deep ties to the Darumbal people, and I'm blessed to be able to teach culture on their country. My totem is a googoobinj (scrub turkey). The scrub turkey is a really important spiritual guide and connection to country for me. Aboriginal culture in Queensland is mostly matriarchal. You follow your mother's lines and take mother's totems. Mob have more connection to mother's country. Your country is your mum, literally. For more photos of my life and the things I write about in this statement, please see Annexure A attached to my statement.
- 3. I'm a dancer with the Burriburra Dance Troupe in Rockhampton. I also take online Tahitian dance classes (Tahiti Ora), I play guitar (self-taught), I love being outside, I have committed to learning how to surf this year as a new hobby, I like to paint/draw, I am currently learning how to weave better than I currently

do. I've started with mat weaving, and I am learning the whole process of weaving to build up skills to be able to use materials from my country. I love live music, I dabble in musical theatre when I have time (my last production was Grease the musical) and I also LOVE travelling especially when it's for fellowships or personal/professional development programs. But perhaps my fav thing to do in my spare time is see family and friends and eat good food!

- 4. 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. I have prepared this statement because I think the inaction of the Australian government on climate change is impacting the lifespan of our country, the wellbeing of our country, the longevity of our country. I can't separate myself and my country spiritually and identity wise, it is who I am as a person and what I do every day is deeply intertwined to not only the country that I am from but also where I live. Every decision I make in my life is guided by country. I talk to country, seek advice from country and when I am away, country calls me home. I have deep ties to Darumbal country, and I think it looks after me so well because I am trying to do the right thing by country.
- 5. 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.
- 6. I have seen firsthand the devastating impacts of climate change in the Pacific and on my own country and I've seen how it threatens the continuity of our cultural heritage. It makes me think about my wellbeing, communities' wellbeing and the wellbeing of my country. You can't separate First Nations people (or mob as we call it) from country, it is such a deep relationship. I also think about my friends scattered across the Pacific and I listen to how urgent it is for them now it is urgent for all of us too.
- 7. I am also deeply concerned about the degradation and destruction of cultural sites across Australia—not just due to climate change, but also due to government neglect. For example, the new Liberal National Party government in Queensland has taken Treaty negotiations with First Nations communities off the table, which would have enabled more proactive care of the land, among many other things. The fact that they no longer even consider it is frightening. There is no agenda for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander care, which makes the future uncertain.
- 8. I want the Australian government to know that you can't abuse something like the land and expect it to still give. It is the same with our human rights as young people. We have trusted the Australian government to take care of us and protect us from climate change and they have proven otherwise, time and time again, that they have no intention of doing so. I am one of many young people that will inherit this planet. But, as a young person, we aren't consulted enough when decisions (or lack of) are being made about climate change. What is my hope for the future for me and my kids and my culture if the government doesn't protect the land that we live on?

#### My DNA is tied to my country

9. I have lived in Rockhampton on Darumbal Country almost all of my life. Rockhampton is a city located in Central Queensland. I always tell people that if you want to see Australia, you should come to Rockhampton because it halfway between bush and beach – it is 30 minutes to the beach and the start

of the Great Barrier Reef and 30 minutes to the bush. The population is about 80,000 people and its very regional – everyone knows everyone. Rockhampton is the agricultural and mining hub for the region. There are cows everywhere and lots of people do fly-in fly-out work in the mines. It also has a massive river that runs down the middle of the town which is a water source for everybody that lives here.

- 10. Rockhampton was also one of the biggest port towns during colonisation. It has a massive mix of Traditional Owners who live in Rockhampton too. There are lots of Ghungalu people who live here and a lot of mob are transient between here and Woorabinda as well (Woorabinda means Kangaroo sit down in my language).
- 11. During colonisation, there were about 51 to 52 clan groups removed from their country and put onto a government-run mission in Woorabinda (which is 200km away from Rockhampton). Even more clan groups were removed from their country and sent to other government-run missions like Cherbourg (451km south of Darumbal country) and Palm Island (almost 1000km away and accessible only by boat). A lot of that mob from those clan groups have now migrated into Rockhampton and there is a massive mix of clan groups in Rockhampton now which can sometimes cause some tension. There are lots of Aboriginal people who live here too as well as people from the Torres Strait, Fiji and Papua New Guinea and lots of Melanesian people live here too.
- 12. During colonisation, my ancestors on my mum's side were moved to the Woorabinda mission. My mum's grandmother was Aboriginal from Bauhinia Downs area and her grandfather, we think was from southeast Queensland. We are currently tracing records which suggest that that her grandfather had an Aboriginal mother and a South Sea Islander father from Santos Island in Vanuatu who we think must have been blackbirded to Australia.
- 13. My mum's dad and grandparents lived on the Woorabinda mission but were then moved to Rockhampton after they were made exempt from the mission. The reason they were made exempt from the mission is because one of their sons (my Pop's (grandfathers) brother (my great uncle)) passed away while living on the Mission because he didn't receive proper healthcare. On my dad's side, my great-grandfather and great-grandmother were moved to the Palm Island mission. They originally came from the Cape York Peninsula area in Far North Queensland, around Clermont and Nebo, and they were removed to Palm Island. There were no traditional owners of Palm Island because it wasn't inhabited so they used this island that was free to put all of our mob out of the way. It's isolating because there's water all around, so it made it hard to try and escape the mission. They were kicked off Palm Island and were sent to Woorabinda to make houses and then they moved into Rockhampton and were one of the first Aboriginal families to buy a house in the area.
- 14. For the last two years, my mum and I have been trying to track our family history. But it has been really difficult, a lot of records were burnt after the Missions were decommissioned and there is lots of trauma and sadness which means that this history gets lost. This is why truth telling is important.
- 15. Colonisation took so much from us—our cultural identity, our cultural practices, and our deep connection to the land. Our generation is working tirelessly to revitalize what was lost, but the damage to the land, to the extent we're talking about, may not be repairable. In the context of climate change, we may lose the land that has been home to our people for over 60,000 years.

16. We are the oldest living culture. We have lived through climate change before but not at the helm of how we look after country now, not after colonisation. A lot of factors are out of our control now and the government doesn't consider our knowledge to deal with climate impacts. Before colonisation, we survived changes to the climate because we lived with the land, we left no trace of us being here which is why we don't have pyramids or big buildings. Our DNA is tied in these lands and losing it would be like losing a part of ourselves. This is a connection that can never be replaced.

#### My experiences with climate change-fuelled disasters

- 17. When my family moved to Depot Hill, Rockhampton, in 2005, I was eight years old. Born in 1997, I grew up experiencing a series of floods in the region that were unprecedented since the 1980s. The first major one I remember was the December 2010 January 2011 floods, where the Fitzroy River reached a peak of 9.2 meters. The sight of all that water was overwhelming, and I struggled to comprehend how quickly it could arrive and the sheer power of it, I also remember how many snakes ended up in our house as our whole backyard and surrounding paddocks were flooded so they needed somewhere to go. I remember watching all the snakes swim in the water at the edge of our entertaining area at home. It made me realise how powerful mother nature is and how if we disrespect her, she retaliates. I remember thinking about how nature whispers and gives us signs and when we don't listen, she shouts which results in floods and cyclones. There were additional smaller floods, like the 2013 floods caused by ex-Tropical Cyclone Oswald, which peaked at 8.61 meters, and again in 2015, when Cyclone Marcia brought heavy rainfall and caused significant flooding in the region.
- 18. In 2015, I was 18 years old, and I was working as a journalist for the Morning Bulletin in Rockhampton. This was also the year when Cyclone Marcia hit Rockhampton. I recall the rolling coverage in the office, covering the cyclone's path and impacts across Central Queensland. It was hectic—long hours of reporting, coordinating stories, and keeping the community informed. I even ended up sleeping in the office overnight a few times because the weather was so severe, and the situation demanded constant attention. Cyclone Marcia intensified rapidly to a Category 5 system before making landfall near Shoalwater Bay, north of Rockhampton, bringing destructive winds and heavy rainfall. The cyclone caused widespread damage to homes and infrastructure in Rockhampton and surrounding areas. I took some photographs of the flooding and they were published by the Courier Mail, which can be found here.
- 19. Later, Rockhampton then experienced severe droughts for 3 years. I also covered these as a journalist between 2015 and 2018 with the Rural Weekly, I continued to witness the devastating impact on farmers and the community. An article I wrote about flooding can be found <u>here</u>. I spoke with heartbroken farmers who were forced to put down their livestock due to the lack of feed and water. I had grown men in tears talking to me on the phone telling me "I had to shoot the last of my cattle". They form attachments to their livestock too. Many shared stories of immense financial, mental, and physical strain, leading to tragic losses such as suicides. These conversations remain with me, a reminder of the harsh reality faced by those in Central and Central West Queensland during those years.
- 20. I remember the devastation of people losing so much of what they worked hard for. I remember having really deep yarns where people would just pour their hearts out to me, essentially a stranger. I remember being so well connected, information-wise, was always so helpful for my family because I could give them

an early heads up or let them know when certain things were happening. These events made me so hyper aware of the power the press had, I had access to information before anyone else did and was able to tell my family - just makes me think about the control the media have on these narratives.

#### Coal mining on my country and lack of legal recognition

- 21. When I go out on country, I like to talk to country and often I will talk to country in language. For example, when I'm on Darumbal country, I speak in Darumbal language or when I'm on my country, I will speak my language, and I like to walk barefoot in the grass and connect with country and my ancestors.
- 22. As an Indigenous woman, I feel the impact of these events and the overall lack of care for country and her sadness. It's not necessarily climate change on its own, it's natural disasters and pollution too. You walk country and she's littered, she might be dryer when she is supposed to be looking lush. When I'm on country, I feel her sadness from those events. Country is always listening and keeps score and as I see climate change take hold and seeing the damage being caused to her, it is deeply painful to me.
- 23. It's incredibly hard to care for our land when we don't have full access or rights due to the limitations of native title. Native Title recognises the traditional rights and connection to our lands as well as heritage protection (but that is limited by weak enforcement and lengthy legal processes). We don't have native title but even with it we are still limited in proving continuous connection under colonised legal frameworks and therefore we cannot override existing leases, mining interests, farming etc so we mostly still can't access country and rely on the "goodwill" of companies to work with us on land care for country. We still see sacred sites damaged or completed gone for development/mining.
- 24. Our connection to the land runs deep, but when we're prevented from practising true custodianship because of legal constraints, it feels like a constant struggle. The coal mining activities on our land, coupled with the lack of binding environmental protections due to the gaps in native title, only deepen this sense of helplessness. These industries, without proper regulation, continue to damage the land without being held accountable for restoration or reducing their carbon output.
- 25. We walk a fine line as Indigenous people in this region when it comes to mining because we need to look after our families, and we need money and some of the best economic opportunities that exist are apprenticeships and jobs in the mines. However, there are a lot of work that needs to be done in rehabilitation and cultural safety for workers in the mines and how to work in cultural safe ways and also caring for country. We have mindset that because we don't have native title you need to work with them because these companies are going to do it anyway. There are great examples from my mob for improving cultural safety in mines. There are a lot of different opinions in this region about it.
- 26. As my connection with my country and culture strengthens, I understand her (my country) pain and sadness on a much deeper level. I now take time to sit with her and yarn with her. Not just my country but also all of Queensland. There are different and better ways to do things, and you can't keep taking from our land and expect her not to retaliate. Coal is only going to last for so long. We are now seeing renewables folk come through and there's no talk about decommissioning of wind farm mines once they are done. So once again we are seeing some renewable companies take advantage of the situation. The footprint that windfarms leave after they are finished sucks too.

27. Land is part of our kinship system. Mining is so extractive and does so much damage to country. When I look at how damaged country is, it's like seeing a relative sad and sick. The older you get, the deeper you get and the more that you understand it. I believe that climate change is country fighting back. I have written poems about this. Like my poem Land Back:

# Land back

Always was, always will be We say with angry faces Our land has been stolen and people displaced For generations upon generations The lands they shake, they flood, they fire in despair of what they've lost Our mother she is grieving Land pillaged for minerals stripping earth dry at her cost Feel her strong embrace weakening She's weeping at this madness Outraged and angry she's full up on sadness She's been here for 60,000 years already Let's ensure she see's 60,000 more For we are the custodians, the keepers of the land The upholders of cultural lore

28. The power that mother earth holds - there is a reason that we live with the land and not on it. Money is good but if you have no country to live then it's worth nothing. Climate change is country speaking back, 100%. We are seeing the fires in LA and Queensland and just this month in Rockhampton, we've had extreme thunderstorms, extreme heatwaves and then pouring rain for days after that. We've even had hail – I've only ever seen hail in Rockhampton once or twice, now it is happening regularly. This weather is not normal. I think she's angry. She will be whisper and gives you hints, like the change of the seasons, but just like a child, she's going to scream if you're not listening.

© Zhanāe Doda

#### How my health is impacted by climate change

29. I have a chronic health condition called Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome or POTS as we call it. POTS is a health condition that causes dizziness and a fast heartbeat when you stand up, as well as a range of other symptoms. It can make daily activities very difficult. It is caused by a problem with your autonomic nervous system. This is the part of your nervous system that controls body functions that happen automatically, without you needing to think about them, such as your heartbeat, blood pressure, body temperature and digestion. It took me ages to get diagnosed with POTS, especially because I live in a regional area, and I had to go through the private healthcare system to get a diagnosis. The public healthcare system sent me away because they thought I was too young.

- 30. I also have asthma, and I have since I was young. Moving to Rockhampton when I was four years old was actually a decision made due to pollution in Brisbane worsening my Asthma and Croup. My asthma improved upon moving to Rockhampton and I ended up only having to really worry about my Asthma in winter (seasonal).
- 31. I have been told that one of the things that could remedy my POTS was to live in a cooler environment and avoid hot places (which is hard when you come from Central Queensland). I tried living in New Zealand and it improved my POTS so much, my quality of life was crazily different, but I missed my country and connection to my ancestors and cultural practices too much so moved home. Living back in Queensland now is taking a toll on my body but it is a sacrifice I have to make. It will only get worse as climate changes heats up our beloved spaces and places.
- 32. I have a different connection to Queensland, all my family are from clans in Queensland, compared to anywhere else. When I left to go to New Zealand, I just got really sick after a time and had back-to-back sicknesses. The doctors just said that I got unlucky and had caught one sickness after the other and I ended up having to go to hospital. I talked to my mob and friend Jordy, and they said maybe you should just come home. It's that unexplainable connection you have to country. It's in your DNA. When you get sick, you use bush medicine from your country to heal you from sickness, because it is your DNA. When we don't have access to that, what does it mean to for us. I'm not alone in that experience in that either.
- 33. As I mentioned before, my totem is a scrub turkey. My friend Jordy's totem is an eagle. When I see a rainbow, I know it's a sign from my old people and ancestors representing our creator of life the rainbow serpent. When I went home from the hospital in New Zealand, I saw an eagle and I knew it was time to go home. The googoobinj (scrub turkey) started visiting all my friends when I got home to Queensland. People said that they hadn't seen googoobinj in years. When I got home, I started seeing rainbows in our house, and I knew that I needed to be home. I get signs from my ancestors and as well as each other's ancestors. We take our instruction from nature, country, everything has a season and time to be in certain places. Things work out all in good time, and we are exactly where we are meant to be.
- 34. As temperatures rise, I know that managing my POTS will get much harder. I already struggle with the heat, and while I can do certain things to manage it, I fear that there may come a time when I'll have to leave Queensland—my ancestral home—to move somewhere colder just so I can function "normally" as a human. This is extremely stressful to me because I can feel country and my ancestors, it is always calling to me. Our land matches our frequency and that's why you feel so good when you are on your country. New Zealand was so quiet for me because they weren't my ancestors. It's different, and I don't want to lose that.
- 35. Traditionally, when you die, mob are buried in trees so we can go back to land. I think about the importance of returning bones and returning to country so spirits can rest. It worries me that I might not be able to live on and return to my country if climate change continues this way. I hear of mines that operate on sacred sites, and they get lots of spiritual activity. Are we going to get lots of unsettled ancestors because of climate change? There is power in returning to country because the old people are

there. When my grandfather was buried, he didn't want a hard cover grave site so his spirit could go free. He was so adamant. When people disrupt sacred sites, you will have unsettled spirits and ancestors causing a bit of mischief. The land holds a lot more spiritually than people give it credit for. I will never take something from someone else's land because it's not mine to take. You have to leave the place better than when you found it and only take what you need. If we have places that are so mistreated and devastated as a result of climate change, there are going to be a lot of unsettled ancestors. I would be an unsettled spirit too if this happened to me.

36. I always say that when we are born, we come from country, and when we die, we return to it. My old people and ancestors live in the country—every tree, rock, waterway, and animal holds the yuindi (the spirit) of my people and culture. They are an extension of our kinship system; we talk with the land, walk with the land, and take cues from the land for what happens in our next season of life. What happens when I no longer have my land to sit with? Where will my spirit go when it's my time? I want to rest with my mob on my land—climate change threatens that reality.

#### How climate change is impacting my life and my culture

- 37. Climate change is putting cultural practices and preservation at grave risk. For First Nations peoples, the land is our connection to identity, spirit, and knowledge. Rising sea levels, wildfires, and land degradation endanger sacred sites, disrupt traditional ecological practices, and threaten the continuity of our cultural heritage. Moving to Indigenous-led farming practices offers an opportunity to preserve land, restore ecosystems, and embed sustainable agricultural methods that have been honed over thousands of years.
- 38. I am also deeply aware of the broader effects of climate change. The intensifying frequency and severity of wildfires globally are devastating ecosystems and emitting vast amounts of carbon dioxide. Being a young person without children yet, I often wonder whether I should bring children into this world. I would love to, but the issues surrounding climate change and the uncertain future often make me doubt it.
- 39. As a young Indigenous young person, I also think about what my responsibility is to country? Is it advocacy, is it what you do everyday life and how do I honour these systems and new ways of operating? I would hate to my country be touched and hope that it remains untouched. A big climate change impact is likely to be drought for my country. A lot of river systems rely on rain.
- 40. I worry that I won't be able to live on country because of climate change. There is a heatwave in Rockhampton (Rocky for short) at the moment. We always get a heatwave but it's ridiculous this year. That standard temperature feels like it's getting hotter and hotter each year. It gets so ridiculously hot. I worry about how viable it is for mob living in remote or discrete communities too who rely on water sources from estuaries and streams which are fed by rain and but there's water allocations diverting our water away. What's the viability in 20- or 30-years' time? I have good friends from Woorabinda, which is a discrete and remote Indigenous community about 2.5 hours west of Rocky. It's got a lot of bushlands and it's really dry. The population is 1,019 people and I am related to lots of people out there and know almost everyone. The community in Woorabinda rely heavily on rain and when I go out there I see how much my friends struggle to live in town.
- 41. You need access to a car to get to Woorabinda and it's expensive to get fuel. The pressures that the country out there is facing, and I don't know what it is going to look like with worsening climate change

impacts. I don't know where our mob go if they can't live on country. What do dry seasons look like? What do wet seasons look like? Woorabinda relies on the Dawson River but then if things impact that river, then what does it look like for mob living out there? Its already, economically, hard to live out there because there is no economy out there for mob. But people want to live on country so what does that look like if climate change makes it easier to live on coastline and they choose or are forced to leave?

- 42. I worry about the water the most and it's a very dry country here. We know that no water leads to bushfires. Mob I talked to who grew up in the mission, they are so close to nature, they understand how nature works. They are seeing the creeks fill up and dry out firsthand. Suburban people don't see nature as severely day in and day out. It's such a visual thing and seeing it and you know.
- 43. What happens if there's no water? In Rocky we can get relaxed about water access, it's a massive river and it's a massive water system as it's so well connected to other river systems but it's important to take cues from the seasons and not just be reactive about water access. With Indigenous ways of living, we take cues from the world around us and act accordingly.
- 44. Because of climate change, a lot of our law is changing too and in terms of how we read country and how we navigate sky country. With light pollution we can't navigate sky country and the changing of seasons due to climate change is causing the sky and land country to not match up. The Dark Emu constellation when it's positioned in a certain way indicates what's happening with the emus here on land. As seasons change and nature adapts because of climate change, this knowledge is not reflective of what's happening anymore.
- 45. Totems are also important, it is another way is to keep the food sources balanced in nature. Depending on what clan group you come from totems are different, but on my country the totems that you are given you are not allowed to eat. I wouldn't be able to hunt googoobinj, but another clan group could. However, if you are gifted another totem from another group, then you can eat it. Having totems helps with marriage systems and kinship systems but it also ensures ecological balance so there is not overhunting of certain food sources. Totems can be animals, rivers, plants, and anything that exists in nature. So, the whole idea that our old people had is to maintain balance.
- 46. We have hunting rules too like not hunting emus when they are having babies. June-July are emu hatchling months. But other times of the year, you can hunt and cull them because the populations are so large. Currently we don't have such strong laws now, but the old ways kept everything really beautifully balanced.
- 47. My Elders always said growing up "As above so below" which means what's happening in the sky affects what's on the ground. We've always taken our guides from the sky but now down here is dictating what's happening up there. There is almost this disconnect between land and sky country. That's never happened before. These are unprecedented times.
- 48. We now don't know who has cultural authority to change our approach. We don't know which Elders have the right knowledge. This could be because of their own trauma they carry or because of disagreements between who holds what authority and what gets passed down. Sometimes only knowledge get passed down within a family group. My Elders teach my family group but what they share might not be to the whole family group or tribe.

- 49. Getting younger ones to understand all of this is hard: how to do the knowledge transfer, how the knowledge is changing, how do we make the next generation that care now when there are so many young people that care but are still acting young? These conversations aren't happening in communities. They see the changes to country but aren't making the connection to climate change so they don't understand why it's happening and what we can do to change it. It's education and the yarns, but we've stopped talking about the big things in depth.
- 50. This combination of natural disasters, climate harms, and systemic barriers to land access has had a profound impact on my culture, my people, and my ability to protect our environment. Seeing so many extreme weather events also made me observe that it was one of the only times communities rallied around one another. Indigenous people have valuable knowledge and frameworks for addressing these issues, yet we're often left out of the conversation. I have been thinking about this recently with the L.A bushfires. There are lots of eucalyptus trees planted in L.A and they explode when they catch on fire. Eucalyptus trees are native to Australia. All someone needed to do was ask an Indigenous person from Australia about these trees before they were planted, and they could have explained that they can explode when they catch fire. To me, this experience emphasises the urgent need for more Indigenous-led solutions that allow us to care for country and address climate impacts.
- 51. Seeing climate change impacts to country, it gives me the same feeling as if you know a relative is sick with cancer and you are not sure what to do. You think about the efforts of recovery or support but there's also your own physical reaction, where you think, 'I don't know what's next, when am I going to lose you, will you pull through?' It's like when you physically see someone sick or take a turn and you hold your breath. That's the closest I can explain.

# Dancing as a way of keeping culture alive

- 52. As I mentioned above, I'm a dancer with the Burriburra Dance Troupe in Rockhampton.<sup>1</sup> Burriburra means people of the fire in my language (Ghungalu) and Darumbal language. With my Dance Troupe, we do the traditional style of dance which is corroboree and through our dancing we tell stories of our cultural protocols and of land and landscape. The dances that we do are very specific to Ghungalu country and Darumbal country. For example, some of the songs intertwine both Darumbal and Ghungalu language and we do dances that make sure people are safe when they are walking on the countries. Our songs are new songs based in our languages. We've got a handful of dances, and we are continuously building them.
- 53. Our culture is always evolving and changing and moving to keep telling the stories that come along, you don't just tell one story over and over again, it's the same with culture. New dances come based on our

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> For videos of my dancing please see here:

https://envirojustice.sharepoint.com/:v:/s/share/EVTMuf9rTY1Kmm5I51l4tbIBReVafH0dPx7KX1StPyFGaQ?e=5 sNNys

https://envirojustice.sharepoint.com/:v:/s/share/EQXb5IMCq5ZPtyXzRjzFnWABT0IECBXuql1Qh8bOrn8h6A?e= fmPVc7

https://envirojustice.sharepoint.com/:v:/s/share/EUkcU3ZNICBNvrzdgBPmYQ4B9gRKUKgI1OCHZxIRA3XTyA?e =qfCcIV

cultural lore and processes which also change as we and society evolves. As long as our practices are rooted in our traditional ways, we are allowed to tell our modern stories. That's how we came to be the longest continuous living culture in the world. We also create our dances and stories as a collective, I am a woman so I cannot play didgeridoo and therefore we need to men to co-create with us so we as the women can sing our songlines and create our stories as a collective. Everyone has a strength and must be involved because we as people were not built to do it all or hold all the knowledge, we were built to live collectively, we need each other and that's why it takes a community, a village.

- 54. In our dance troupe, we have a dance which is a welcoming to country. We have a dance which mirrors the way Brolgas dance (Brolgas are Australia's largest water bird) to represent the landscape we live on. We also have a "medicine woman" dance which tells the story of the medicine woman who would wrap twine around the teeth of someone who was sick and bleed the gums with twine to get rid of sickness and illness and then they would be okay to continue with their life. When I think about climate change, I don't know how we could continue to create dances to share important cultural knowledge when the dances and protocols are based on our land and country. As a First Nations person, I have an unexplainable connection to country it is just in my DNA. Country knows how to heal you and fix you and when I think about the fact that climate change is threatening access to that, it makes me wonder what that means for my culture and community both physically and spiritually.
- 55. Our boys have a war cry, this is equivalent of the Haka, the traditional Māori dance. The war cry is the story about how the men would fight before you are able to come onto country. The Dance Troupe is important because you need to be a collective to share this information each person brings specific skills. For instance, playing the Didgeridoo can only be played by boys. If you don't have a boy who can do this part, then the knowledge is lost. In the dance troupe, we also try to bring tour traditional dances into contemporary settings. Recently, we did a Neon corroboree we paint ourselves in neon paint and performed under black lights. The audience who showed up to watch the corroboree was huge. These are more important than ever because we are keeping the knowledge and passing it on to the next generation.

#### My work and advocating for Indigenous-led innovation to tackle climate change

- 56. Many Indigenous communities are on the frontline of climate impacts, facing threats to their land, cultural heritage, and livelihoods, often with limited resources to adapt. I'm particularly worried for my friends in the Pacific and the Torres Strait, who are facing the real possibility of losing their homes and becoming climate refugees, as their homelands are threatened by rising seas and resource scarcity. Where will they go? Will Australia be able to support them? And, more importantly, will Australia be willing to? Historically, the treatment of refugees in Australia has been appalling, and I fear that pattern will continue.
- 57. Nuclear testing in Australia and the wider Pacific has only compounded environmental degradation, further delaying effective climate solutions and leaving a toxic legacy for future generations.
- 58. My response to these urgent issues is rooted in solutions that empower Indigenous communities and harness the wisdom of our knowledge systems. I am currently working on my startup, **Burri Energy**, which focuses on utilizing Indigenous knowledge in **Direct Air Capture (DAC)** technology. By leveraging

materials like ochre, limestone, and mining tailings, we aim to accelerate the natural carbon capture process. As Indigenous peoples always use the resources that are abundant to ensure ecosystems remain balanced and this area in Central Queensland is super limestone rich.

- 59. Burri Energy integrates these methods with solar energy and Indigenous kiln ovens to remove carbon from the atmosphere efficiently. We plan to co-locate some DAC operations in Indigenous communities, creating opportunities for economic empowerment that are not just financial but also social, environmental, spiritual, and physical. Our captured carbon will be sold to industries such as the emerging hydrogen sector in Central Queensland, ensuring that our solutions contribute to sustainable economic growth while addressing climate change. Burri Energy reflects my belief in the power of Indigenous-led innovation to tackle climate change, restore ecosystems, and ensure our cultural and environmental futures are preserved for generations to come.
- 60. My advocacy is grounded in creating equity and opportunity for Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, and Indigenous peoples worldwide. Meaningful conversations about First Nations justice, equity, and opportunity must address land back, land care, sovereignty, climate change, and the structural inequalities our communities face. My work—past and present—focuses on advancing human rights for Indigenous people and children. I've passionately worked in the Youth Justice space, championing proactive and restorative approaches over punitive systems. I advocate for better educational approaches for our kids, including embedding truth-telling into curriculums to foster understanding, respect, and cultural pride. I've also been a vocal advocate for improved Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) approaches tailored to the unique needs of our mob, as well as cultural safety training for police to ensure better outcomes for our communities. As a strong proponent of Indigenous governance and economies, I work to empower First Nations self-determination through initiatives that centre Indigenous leadership and sustainable economic development. Through my work in teaching our culture and cultural practices widely, I aim to highlight the immense power of our knowledge systems while emphasising the unbreakable connection between our people and our country.
- 61. Given my algorithm on my socials (FB, TikTok, Instagram, LinkedIn) and the advocacy work I am involved in across the Pacific, I am looking at news on climate change daily. Even if I am not actively looking it is there and in your face. I use a lot of sources for my news. I rely on sources like National Indigenous Television (NITV), National Indigenous Times and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) is a big source I use and then my friends who actually work in the climate change space fulltime. Instagram is where I get a lot of articles shared and linked to me.
- 62. I feel so annoyed a lot of the time, like why does it feel that only a handful of people care? I would absolutely LOVE to stick my head in the sand and live off grid and disconnect from the news cycle and frolic in nature but my way of living, my life, my culture, my mob, our Indigenous brothers and sisters and cousins globally are in a space where we must be tapped in, must be active, must know what is going on so we can activate community and mobilise our resources. My existence as an Indigenous person, as a woman is political and I was born into an advocacy role that I didn't get to choose because my right to exist peacefully with equity and sovereignty isn't a right that is practiced and accepted by the general public or systems yet and I want that to be the case for the next gen so I have to be tapped in.
- 63. Climate change sucks. To be honest I think the most infuriating thing is that Indigenous people globally have always held the solutions to climate change, yet they are rarely consulted, and it is not until a

disaster hits and effects mainstream people that there is push for Indigenous consultation. I always think about how we as Aboriginal people have lived with the land, walked alongside it. Look at our impact on the country over 60,000 years, we didn't impose on the environment and create grand scale architecture like the Egyptians or the Greeks or Romans, we really lived with the land – right down to burials in trees. We live with the environment.

64. I don't know who I am without my connection to country and that's something that's in my DNA that I can't change, it'll be something that's in my children's DNA (if I choose to have them). I guess sometimes this just feels really hopeless if I am being honest. It just feels like we talk about change, but it comes in such small doses that sometimes it doesn't feel worth it, but we push forward and keep going. I think that climate change affects every area of my life and the decisions I make. It affects my health on all levels, physically, mentally, spiritually and culturally. It affects my future ambitions too. For example, when Queensland took Treaty off the table, I gave up my dream spot at the New York Academy of Dramatic Arts Acting Conservatory program to lobby and advocate for treaty because that comes back to caring for country and climate change. I have had to shape my whole life around advocacy for mob and country because of the government's inaction.

#### Demanding Action: Treaty, Truth-Telling, Land Back, Indigenous Economic Models & Climate Justice

- 65. Australia is failing me, my culture and Country. The devastating impacts that I've seen from climate change represent the core of our downfall as a society in Australia. We are only as good as the people who lead us and the Australian government's failure to take action on climate change and to care for country is the reason why climate change is threatening my reality and deeply impacting mob, culture and Country.
- 66. I am concerned that we may be reaching the point of no return. Australia often operates under reactive governments, and by the time they realize something needs to be done, it's often too late. I'm scared that we will lose our coastlines and other vital parts of our environment. I want to see Indigenous burning practices implemented across the country to reduce the risk of devastating bushfires, but it often feels like no one is listening.
- 67. Australia stands at a crossroads, where the choices we make today will define our future and the legacy we leave for generations. As a proud Aboriginal woman, I call on the Australian government to take bold, meaningful action rooted in justice, respect, and environmental stewardship.

#### 1. Treaty & Sovereignty

- Genuine reconciliation starts with Treaty. Treaty is more than an agreement—it is the recognition of our sovereignty and our right to self-determination. It means embedding Indigenous governance in every level of decision-making, ensuring that our cultural practices, laws, and knowledge systems are respected and upheld. The government must recommit to Treaty processes, ensuring that First Nations people are at the helm of shaping our collective future.
- I also think it's important to give Indigenous people access to these systems to make change. Don't just consult us tokenistically, don't just invite us to sit at the table. I want a new table, new chairs and I want equal representation in those chairs. I want to see knowledge valued in proactive ways, not reactive. Treaty is the foundation underpinning all of this. The Government needs to put money

where their mouth is. They need to invest the money in Indigenous people and futures, they can't just pump us for information.

### 2. Truth-Telling

To heal and move forward, we must acknowledge the brutal realities of colonisation. This means
implementing nationwide truth-telling initiatives, embedding our history in school curriculums, and
creating platforms where Indigenous voices are heard and honoured. The truth is the foundation
upon which meaningful change can be built.

### 3. Land Back, Native Title Reform & Indigenous Land Governance

- For over 60,000 years, First Nations people have managed and nurtured this land. Yet, our right to care for Country is undermined by weak protections, exploitative industries, and restrictive Native Title processes. The government must:
  - Return decision-making power to Traditional Owners.
  - Strengthen laws protecting sacred sites and cultural heritage.
  - Enforce stringent regulations on mining and land use.
  - Adopt Indigenous-led land management practices, like cultural burning, to heal and protect Country.

#### Native Title is Failing Our People

- Native Title operates within a colonial framework that still denies First Nations people true land justice. Instead of recognising our inherent ownership, it forces us to "prove" our connection to Country under a legal system that was designed to dispossess us. Some of the key issues include.
  - The Burden of Proof Mob are forced to provide overwhelming evidence of ongoing connection to land, despite colonisation deliberately trying to erase our histories and records.
  - Limited Land Rights Even when Native Title is granted, it rarely provides full control. Mining, agriculture, and development interests still take priority, and Traditional Owners often only receive "non-exclusive" rights.
  - White Decision-Makers Even when we provide evidence, non-Indigenous judges and government officials still have the power to reject claims and approve destructive projects against our wishes.
  - **Colonial Decision-Making** Native Title locks us into Western legal frameworks that don't align with our governance systems, preventing holistic care for both land and people.

#### 4. Revitalising & Developing Indigenous Economic Models

The Australian government needs to work from an Indigenous economic model, one that focuses on yuindi (spirit and wellbeing) rather than just monetary profit. Colonisation and capitalism are so deeply intertwined that it's hard to separate them, but Indigenous economies (globally) work differently. These economies centre the wellbeing of the collective, and wealth is not measured by how much you have, but by how much flows through your hands to benefit the collective. If we reshaped the economy in this way, climate change would be addressed more effectively. Indigenous frameworks, governance, and ways of being must be embraced—not just in Australia, but globally.

- The Australian government must move away from exploitative, Western capitalist economic models and recognise the power of Indigenous economies—systems that have existed for thousands of years and prioritise collective well-being over profit.
  - Revitalising Indigenous Economies Nationally Indigenous economies are rooted in sustainability, community wealth-sharing, and reciprocity. We need government investment in Indigenous-led industries, including land care, carbon capture, renewable energy, and traditional trade networks.
  - International Indigenous Economic Development Australia should be working with First Nations people globally to strengthen Indigenous-to-Indigenous trade, governance, and knowledge-sharing.
  - Moving Beyond Capitalism True wealth is not measured by individual profit but by how much flows through the community. Indigenous economic models emphasise balance ensuring that money, resources, and opportunities benefit the collective.

### 5. Support for Indigenous Start-ups & Innovation

- Indigenous entrepreneurs are pioneering solutions to capture carbon, restore ecosystems, and create sustainable futures. However, the current funding landscape remains restrictive, inaccessible, and rooted in capitalist models that prioritise profit over community impact. The government must:
  - Invest in Indigenous start-ups focused on environmental innovation by providing accessible funding and resources to scale these initiatives. Funding should not be tied to rigid Western business models but should instead reflect Indigenous ways of working, which prioritise collective benefit, long-term sustainability, and cultural integrity.
  - Develop targeted grants and support programs that prioritise Indigenous-led enterprises, ensuring that solutions are rooted in cultural knowledge and benefit our communities. These grants should be designed in partnership with Indigenous business leaders and remove unnecessary barriers such as excessive bureaucratic reporting, unrealistic timeframes, and rigid financial structures that do not align with Indigenous economic models.
  - Create alternative funding and reporting models that move beyond capitalist frameworks. Indigenous businesses do not always operate for individual profit—they often function as community-driven initiatives where wealth is shared, reinvested into land care, and distributed for collective well-being. Funding programs must recognise and accommodate these structures rather than forcing mob into restrictive Western economic models that do not serve our people.
  - Provide long-term funding security rather than short-term, one-off grants that require constant reapplication and justification. Indigenous solutions are generational, and funding should reflect that. Indigenous entrepreneurship is about more than just business—it is about cultural, environmental, and community survival. We need funding structures that empower Indigenous-led solutions on our terms, rather than making us conform to colonial economic systems that were never built for us.

# 6. Health & Well-being: Recognising "Longing for Country" as a Critical Health Issue

- Western health systems continue to fail Indigenous people because they separate mental, physical, spiritual, and cultural well-being. We need a health system that treats Indigenous health holistically—where land, culture, and community are considered central to well-being.

- Recognising "Longing for Country" as a Mental Health Condition Tracey Westerman (Indigenous Psychologist) is advocating for "longing for Country" to be recognised as having the same psychological impacts as depression and anxiety. The separation from Country, often caused by colonisation, forced removals, and economic barriers, has direct effects on our mental and physical health.
- **Embedding Cultural Healing in Health Systems** Indigenous-led health programs must be expanded and properly funded, ensuring mob have access to culturally safe care that recognises the importance of Country in our healing.
- Health Policy Rooted in Indigenous Knowledge Governments must integrate Indigenous models of health and well-being into public health policy, recognising that Indigenous health cannot be treated separately from land justice, sovereignty, and cultural identity.

# 7. Global Environmental Advocacy

- Climate change is a global issue, but its impacts are deeply local, affecting our communities, culture, and Country. Australia must take a stronger stance on the international stage by:
  - Holding multinational corporations accountable for their environmental footprints.
  - Advocating for stringent global climate agreements that prioritise the voices and rights of Indigenous peoples.
  - Supporting climate refugees, especially our brothers and sisters in the Pacific, as their lands are threatened by rising seas.

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

Name: Zhanāe Dodd

Signature

18/03/2025

Date

Annexure A





















