



AUSTRALIAN PARENTS FOR CLIMATE ACTION

Australian Parents for Climate Action

Submission to the Education and Health Standing Committee - Inquiry into the response of Western Australian schools to climate change

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Australian Parents for Climate Action represents more than 15,000 parents, grandparents and carers from across Australia, including over 500 in Western Australia. We are Australia's leading organisation for parents advocating for a safe climate. Our supporters are from across the political spectrum, across Australian electorates, and from different socio-economic positions. We seek non-partisan responses to climate change and its impacts.

We are focused on encouraging Australian governments and businesses to take urgent action to cut Australia's carbon emissions to net zero as quickly as possible. We encourage Australia to take a leadership role on the world stage, leading by example and calling for other nations to take the necessary action to protect our children's futures.

For more information, visit www.ap4ca.org

Submission

Australian Parents for Climate Action (AP4CA) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Education and Health Standing Committee's inquiry into the response of Western Australian schools to climate change.

This submission addresses the following terms of reference:

- a. The co-benefits of climate action in schools
- b. Climate change mitigation and adaptation actions currently being undertaken in schools, and the benefits they are achieving
- d. What more can be done to support schools to respond to climate change.

a. Climate action in schools offers immediate and far-reaching benefits to students, teachers, families, communities and future generations

The benefits of climate action in schools are immediate and far-reaching, offering an opportunity to embed behaviour change in children and their families today as well as influencing the behaviour and attitudes of the citizens of tomorrow.

Climate action in schools makes good sense economically: for example, through the Solar Our Schools¹ initiative, AP4CA is calling on state and national leaders to fund solar and batteries for every school and early childhood centre in Australia (with means-tested grants for privately-owned schools and for-profit early learning centres). This would create at least 6,870 renewable energy jobs in all regions of Australia; slash school energy bills to free up more funds for learning resources - saving large schools \$114,000 in energy bills per year and small schools \$12,700 per year (as estimated by Beyond Zero Emissions) and save millions of tonnes of carbon emissions per year. This is just one example - schools have the potential to showcase community renewable energy generation and use.

Climate action in schools has positive mental health benefits for children and young people. For young people, participating in climate action, or witnessing important adults in their life, such as teachers, doing so, can be a protective strategy to guard against climate distress. A report released by the Imperial College London in May 2021, *The impact of climate change on mental health and emotional wellbeing: current evidence and implications for policy and practice*,² found that mental distress among young people was exacerbated by climate change, even among young people not directly affected by

¹ [Solar Our Schools at Australian Parents for Climate Action](#)

² [All publications | Grantham Institute – Climate Change and the Environment](#)

climate change. Importantly, the report emphasised the importance of climate action as a way of mitigating the effects of eco-anxiety among young people.

Morally, climate action in schools is the right thing to do. Many significant social changes have been enabled by moral leadership from schools coupled with equipping students with accurate information that they can then pass on to their families, contributing to wider-scale behaviour change. For example, children have influenced their families with information provided to school students on topics such as smoking and road safety. In the same way, strong climate action leadership in schools could have wide-reaching influence on household behaviours.

b. Schools are taking innovative, local action to mitigate and adapt to climate change

Many of APC4A's supporters are active in their local schools across Australia participating in climate change mitigation and adaptation activities. A few examples we have heard about from our supporters include:

- Formation of parent/teacher sustainability committees and student sustainability monitors;
- P&C support for the creation of a micro-forest on school grounds;
- Creation of rain gardens;
- Teaching students how to understand, analyse and respond to climate change data;
- Multiple initiatives to reduce waste (landfill waste is a growing source of greenhouse emissions; as is plastic and materials production) including:
 - composting,
 - general recycling,
 - fund raising via container deposit scheme collections,
 - uniform recycling (textile waste converted to useful products),
 - packaging reduction for school canteens,
 - waste free lunch boxes (where students and parents are encouraged to avoid additional food packaging), and
 - collection, cleaning and sale of unlabelled lunch boxes and drink bottles lost on school grounds.

The Ecoschools program³ provides a schools-based sustainability framework. The benefits of these activities are far reaching: beyond the results of the project itself, school-based climate mitigation and adaptation activities allow for community building and grassroots climate action.

³ [Eco-Schools Australia](#)

d. Schools need strong political leadership and a curriculum mandate to support them to respond to climate change

Clear political direction is required to support schools to respond to climate change. Unambiguous curriculum content in the revised national curriculum (in particular, acknowledging the scientifically undisputed link between human emissions from fossil fuel extraction & use, land clearing, and various chemical processes, and a rapidly heating, more extreme climate) and a decisive WA syllabus, will empower WA schools to teach students about climate change.

To bolster this, we recommend the appointment of instructional leadership roles to oversee curriculum implementation. Additionally, mandatory professional learning to all teachers regarding sustainability and climate change would ensure that teachers are equipped with the current, evidence-based scientific knowledge to adequately implement this curriculum priority.