



## Australian Senate Inquiry into the Sustainable Development Goals 2018

*The United Nations Association of Australia's mission is to inform, inspire and engage all Australians about the critical work, goals and values of the United Nations to create a safer, fairer and more sustainable world. As part of implementing this mission, the UNAA conducts a national program on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).*

### Terms of Reference

This submission addresses the vital importance of Australia working with, and achieving, the SDGs as a Member State of the United Nations. The UNAA acknowledges the importance of aligning Australia's Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) Program with the SDGs and commends the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) for taking this action. DFAT, however, does not have a mandate to implement and oversee the SDGs within Australia. Accordingly, this submission addresses the following five domestic issues listed in the Terms of Reference:

- a. the understanding and awareness of the SDGs across the Australian Government and in the wider Australian community;
  - b. the potential costs, benefits and opportunities for Australia in the domestic implementation of the SDGs;
  - c. what governance structures and accountability measures are required at the national, state and local levels of government to ensure an integrated approach to implementing the SDGs that is both meaningful and achieves real outcomes;
  - d. how can performance against the SDGs be monitored and communicated in a way that engages government, businesses and the public, and allows effective review of Australia's performance by civil society; and
  - e. examples of best practice in how other countries are implementing the SDG from which Australia could learn.
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### A. The understanding and awareness of the SDGs across the Australian Government and in the wider Australian community.

- The UNAA believes that the Australian Government currently has an inadequate understanding of the SDGs and is yet to develop a coherent national implementation plan. Since committing to the SDGs in October 2015 there has been no public information campaign to fully inform both the Government and the Australian public of Australia's commitment to achieve the SDGs.

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- With the exception of DFAT,<sup>1, 2</sup> which is responsible for overseas aid and development and has limited mandate on domestic matters, the UNAA has been unable to identify influential SDG 'champions' and 'leaders' within the Australian Government - at either Cabinet, Parliamentary or Public Service levels.
  - Despite the interest and involvement of a number of Government agencies, civil society organisations, businesses and some academic institutions, the Australian community's understanding of and commitment to the SDGs is low. This is evidenced by Australia's downward slide in SDG ranking from 17 in 2015, to 20 in 2016<sup>3</sup> and, most recently, 26 in 2017.<sup>4</sup>
  - Because the SDGs followed the Millennium Development Goals [2000-2015], which focused only on developing countries - and in the absence of a public information campaign on the SDGs - the UNAA believes many Australians mistakenly believe that the SDGs do not specifically apply to Australia. There remains a lack of understanding that the SDGs agenda is **global, collaborative and universal**, and that it holds to account both developing and developed nations.
  - Unfortunately, too many Australians have not yet been informed or engaged on the importance of the SDGs even though the SDGs represent everyday problems. There is also the challenge of bringing the SDGs and their targets closer to citizens and making them sufficiently tangible enough to incentivise action.
- The UNAA considers that the Australian Government has a responsibility to take the lead in supporting a national communications and community outreach campaign to better inform all sectors of the Australian community about the importance of the SDGs and encourage participation at individual and group levels. For Australia to achieve the SDGs all Australian governments - Federal, State/Territory and Local - need to dedicate resources and efforts to 'demystify' the SDGs, and to make them more widely understood. Greater ownership by leaders on this is particularly required at the Federal level.

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<sup>1</sup> Commonwealth of Australia Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, "Creating Shared Value Through Partnership: Ministerial Statement on Engaging the Private Sector in Aid and Development", August 2015, accessed 25 February 2018, page 2, <http://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/aid/Documents/creating-shared-value-through-partnership.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Commonwealth of Australia Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, "DFAT and NGOs: Effective Development Partners", December 2015, accessed 25 February 2018, page 3, <http://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Documents/dfat-and-ngos-effective-development-partners.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> "SDG Index & Dashboards: A Global Report", *Bertelsmann Stiftung and Sustainable Development Solution Network*, July 2016, accessed 25 February 2018, [http://sdgindex.org/assets/files/sdg\\_index\\_and\\_dashboards\\_compact.pdf](http://sdgindex.org/assets/files/sdg_index_and_dashboards_compact.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> "SDG Index and Dashboards Report 2017. Global Responsibilities: International spillovers in achieving the goals. Compact Edition", *Bertelsmann Stiftung and Sustainable Development Solution Network*, July 2017, accessed 25 February 2018, <http://sdgindex.org/assets/files/2017/2017-SDG-Index-and-Dashboards-Report-compact.pdf>



- The UNAA notes that, according to the SDSN Index, the most urgent SDG-related challenges facing Australia are:
  - *SDG 2, Zero Hunger.* This SDG emphasises increased nutrition, which Australia is failing due to high obesity (over 1/4 Australian adults are obese, and Australia is the 5<sup>th</sup> most overweight OECD country).<sup>5</sup> Conversely, many Indigenous Australians suffer from malnutrition.
  - *SDG 5, Gender Equality.* The gender pay gap currently sits at 15.3%,<sup>6</sup> with far too many women engaged in low paid work and there are almost eight times as many stay-at-home mothers than stay-at-home fathers in Australia;<sup>7</sup> In terms of corporate gender equality, women, on average, currently represent only 25.2% of all board positions. Having more women in senior leadership roles is good for the economy as the case for gender equality is not only right and fair but also it is smart.
  - *SDG 7, Affordable and Clean Energy.* Although this is trending downwards, Australia’s reliance on fossil fuels and non-renewable energy already impacts achievement of the SDGs.
  - *SDG 12, Responsible Consumption and Production.* Australia suffers from high e-waste and a large reactive nitrogen production footprint. Additionally, our CO2 emissions remain too high.<sup>8</sup>
  - *SDG 13, Climate Action.* Australia’s failure at the government/policy level to take a firmer stance against non-renewable energies attributes to our low ranking;
  - *SDG 14, Life Below Water.* Continue to protect Australia’s marine parks and coral reefs and ensure a responsible balance to grow a healthy seafood stock.
  - *SDG 15, Life on Land.* Australia’s forest area is diminishing annually due to deforestation and land clearance for agriculture and timber.
- Additionally, the UNAA is concerned rising levels of homelessness throughout Australia impact adversely on *SDG 1, No Poverty*; and that strategic planning for some of our major cities currently fails to acknowledge and specifically address the SDGs, thereby limiting Australia's ability to meet *SDG 11, Sustainable Cities and Communities*.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> OECD, “Obesity Update 2017”, June 2017, accessed 09 March 2018, pages 1 – 2, <https://www.oecd.org/els/health-systems/Obesity-Update-2017.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> “What is the Gender Pay Gap?”, *Australian Government: Workplace Gender Equality Agency*, last modified 2018, accessed 09 March 2018, <https://www.wgea.gov.au/addressing-pay-equity/what-gender-pay-gap>

<sup>7</sup> “Stay-at-home dads”, *Australian Government: Australia Institute of Family Studies*, last modified 2017, accessed 25 February 2018, <https://aifs.gov.au/publications/stay-home-dads>

<sup>8</sup> ClimateWorks Australia, “Power Up: Australia’s electricity sector can and should do more to deliver on our climate commitments”, July 2017, accessed 28 February 2018, [https://climateworks.com.au/sites/default/files/documents/publications/cwa\\_power\\_up\\_report\\_final\\_12\\_jul.pdf](https://climateworks.com.au/sites/default/files/documents/publications/cwa_power_up_report_final_12_jul.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> For example, refer UNAA's Submission to the Commission for Greater Sydney.



## **B. The potential costs, benefits and opportunities for Australia in the domestic implementation of the SDGs.**

- Australia has a strong sense of good international citizenship and considers itself a regional leader for human rights, rule of law, economic prosperity, aid and security. This is evident (amongst many other instances of support) from the contributions that Australia has made during the five occasions we have been a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, our recent successful election to the UN Human Rights Council, and our return to membership of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee.
  - The UNAA believes, however, that Australia's commitment and leadership will not be taken seriously if it cannot demonstrate its international commitments domestically. In recent years Australia has been criticised for its failure to adhere domestically to some international norms,<sup>10</sup> and Australia's decline since 2015 in meeting the SDGs<sup>11</sup> brings into question its commitment to achievement domestically.
  - Meanwhile, our close neighbour New Zealand has accelerated past Australia on the SDGs ranking.<sup>12</sup> If Australia wishes to remain prosperous, advance the rules-based international order and maintain its soft power as a good international citizen, we will need to demonstrate a more serious commitment to the SDGs than at present.
- The UNAA considers that the SDGs are central to Australia's national interests and future prosperity, and that our commitment to their achievement is a demonstration of our true national values. Furthermore, by implementing the SDGs, Australia additionally makes an important contribution to the sustainability of our planet.
  - Realising the SDGs by developing and implementing policies and programs to tackle inequality, injustice, climate change and boosting resilience to natural disasters contributes to Australia's economic prosperity, stability, accountability and sustainability.
  - Amidst concerns of energy crises and depleting fossil fuels and mineral exports, Australia's abundant solar, wind and wave capacity provide a uniquely rich source of affordable, clean and sustainable energy.
  - In addition to providing sustainable solutions for the future, the SDGs also address climactic threats to Australia such as drought and floods, and their associated economic, social and environmental costs.

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<sup>10</sup> Examples include: Australia's off-shore detention and processing procedures; Australia's decline in the global corruption index; and Australia's treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

<sup>11</sup> "SDG Index and Dashboards Report 2017", *Bertelsmann Stiftung and Sustainable Development Solution Network*, 2017

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*



- Promoting the SDGs in primary and secondary schools will be critical to prepare and empower young Australians to navigate an increasingly complex and uncertain world.
- The UNAA contends that the SDGs offer a compelling strategy that opens immense new market opportunities for Australia.
  - There is a wealth of untapped business opportunities in the SDGs sector with potential for trillions of dollars in new markets which would boost Australia's economy and increase employment. The Treasury should calculate the benefit to Australia's GDP by embracing the SDGs potential.
  - The Business and Sustainable Development Commission (BSDC) has advised that companies should align their core strategies to the SDGs, not only because it is the right thing to do but because it is economically sensible, potentially unlocking USD\$12 trillion in new business opportunities by 2030.<sup>13</sup> The SDGs should be recognized and reported by ASX listed Public and Private Companies as well as Government and non-Government Institutions to inform shareholders and stakeholders of adherence and commitment to core SDG values and targets.

**C. What governance structures and accountability measures are required at the national, state and local levels of government to ensure an integrated approach to implementing the SDGs that is both meaningful and achieves real outcomes.**

- The UNAA considers that the Australian Government needs urgently to develop a national implementation plan for the SDGs, outlining how Australia is achieving (and will achieve) the goals and how they reinforce or support current national priorities and campaigns. A specific mechanism for this is covered in response to question 'D' below.
  - Only the branding name of the SDGs is new for Australia. All 17 SDGs, and many of their 169 targets, relate to issues on which Australian governments and organisations are already working. This should make it far easier for Australia than some other countries to implement and track progress.
  - However, the challenge of implementing the SDGs requires an integrated and cross-sector approach that demands adopting collaborative structures to ensure information flows. For example, government entities and organisations need to change from working in their silo to work across sectors building linkages with the health, education, economy and environment sectors.
  - An integrated approach by governments and organisations requires a comprehensive understanding of the SDGs at all levels. Large-scale projects and

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<sup>13</sup> "Better Business, Better World", *Business and Sustainable Development Commission*, accessed 10 March 2018, <http://report.businesscommission.org>



authoritative documents, such as the 2017 Review of Climate Change Policies,<sup>14</sup> the Independent Review into the Future Security of the National Energy Market,<sup>15</sup> and the National Innovation and Science Agenda,<sup>16</sup> are consistent with SDGs 9, 11 and 13 (respectively). However, none of these Australian examples refer to the SDGs and 2030 Agenda in their working documents.

- The UNAA considers that all levels of Australian governments and organisations should adopt strategies, policies, plans and budgets that are consistent with the SDGs - in a similar way that the Federal Government has done with the Paris Agreement and as some local councils in Australia are already doing with SDGs.
  - For example, the Australian Government should increase its capacity for Voluntary National Reporting (VNR) by creating specific benchmarks and robust reporting mechanisms to show clear operational achievements. Adopting a whole-of-nation approach will facilitate better understanding of the SDGs throughout the Australian community and encourage greater participation at local and regional levels. This approach will encourage inter-departmental cooperation across all levels of government in Australia and better enable knowledge exchange.
  - Some foreign national governments have already displayed strong political leadership to drive national implementation of the SDGs. Not even a year after the adoption of the SDGs, 22 UN Member States sent a powerful message when they presented their VNR at the 2016 High Level Political Forum setting out how they intended to integrate the SDGs into their national strategies, policies and budget processes.
- The UNAA believes *SDG 17, Partnerships for the Goals*, is absolutely essential if Australia is to successfully implement the SDGs. To this end, the UNAA considers a much more active 'top-down' approach by all Australian governments is required in order to achieve the 'bottom-up' implementation required by business, academia and civil society organisations.
  - Partnerships are required to provide seed funding to encourage public libraries, schools, sporting bodies, tertiary institutions, and civil society groups to promote awareness-raising and implement specific SDGs locally.

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<sup>14</sup> Commonwealth of Australia Department of the Environment and Energy, "2017 Review of Climate Change Policies", December 2017, accessed 28 February 2018, <http://www.environment.gov.au/system/files/resources/18690271-59ac-43c8-ae1-92d930141f54/files/2017-review-of-climate-change-policies.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Commonwealth of Australia, "Independent Review into the Future Security of the National Electricity Market: Blueprint for the Future" June 2017, accessed 28 February 2018, <https://www.energy.gov.au/sites/g/files/net3411/f/independent-review-future-nem-blueprint-for-the-future-2017.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> "National Innovation and Science Agenda Report", *Australian Government: National Innovation and Science Agenda*, last modified December 2015, accessed 28 February 2018, <https://www.innovation.gov.au/page/national-innovation-and-science-agenda-report>



- Media information and broadcasts, similar to the successful 'Clean-up Australia' campaign, are required to promote SDG partnerships and enhance action.
  - Many Australian tertiary institutions have departments and faculties that specialise in sustainable development and climate change, but dialogue is largely internal and not systematically shared amongst the broader community. Australia needs to emphasise the synergies between policies, programs and institutions to better align actions and outcomes on the SDGs. The SDGs require that we all change the way we think about sustainable development. Innovative thinking, models, and practical mechanisms are required to generate increased action to achieve the SDGs.
  - The UNAA believes that the Federal Government and its various Departments must take a more proactive role in promoting the SDGs, providing seed funding and strengthening partnerships to achieve real SDG outcomes.
- The UNAA believes that the SDGs are secular and do not belong to any particular religious entity. However, we also acknowledge the significant positive role that religious organisations can play in advancing the SDGs in Australia, particularly through local community and school-based activities. We encourage inter-faith action to advance the SDGs and stand ready to partner with all such religious organisations who are committed to this cause.

**D. How can performance against the SDGs be monitored and communicated in a way that engages government, businesses and the public, and allows effective review of Australia's performance by civil society.**

- The UNAA contends similar to action taken by some other leading countries to progress the SDGs, the Australian Government should establish an SDGs Commission to monitor and report on the achievement of the SDGs.
  - This Commission should comprise distinguished members from civil society, business and academia and be constituted with terms of reference that enable it to work collegiately and purposefully with Federal, State/Territory and Local Governments.
- To service this SDGs Commission and breakdown current silos, the UNAA adds voice to a number of other civil society organisations which believe that the Australian Government should fund a multi-sectoral Secretariat to coordinate action on the SDGs and to input into government processes that better enable, and go beyond, the VNR.
  - The challenge of measuring and monitoring progress and performance against the SDGs raises questions for Australia that includes the data and indicators needed to follow-up on implementation and the types of institutional structures and mechanisms that will be needed to monitor progress. The UNAA supports the work



- of the National Sustainable Development Council to prepare a baseline report on Australia’s progress in achieving the SDGs.
- New mechanisms will be required to ensure greater accountability and effective evaluation processes. Embracing complexity, recognising the inter-linkages between the SDGs, and ensuring that Australia is contributing purposefully to global challenges are key requirements for effective implementation of the SDGs. Clearly defined responsibilities, targets and deadlines are integral to any worthwhile monitoring program. Robust review mechanisms must also exist to ensure the collection, processing and dissemination of information is accurate. Timely, accurate data is crucial for accountability and targeted action.
  - The UNAA considers that special attention needs to be given to Australia's Indigenous communities.
    - Achievement of many of the SDGs have special meaning, and present formidable challenges, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. A real test of Australia's commitment to achieving the SDGs should be measured against progress on this front as a key principle of the SDGs is that they are universal with no-one left behind.
  - Australia has volunteered to participate in the 2018 VNR and will present its first national report to the United Nations in July 2018. In preparing this report the Australian Government must actively engage with all sectors of the Australian community through multi-stakeholder dialogue, ongoing engagement and initiatives that promote cross-sectoral collaboration.
    - Nationally defined goals are required to hold all national stakeholders accountable to their commitments.
    - DFAT has already published resources on engagement with the SDGs.
    - The Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) has published resources on how governments can communicate and engage the SDGs with universities.<sup>17</sup> SDSN has also published a guide on effective goal-based planning for the SDGs.<sup>18</sup>
    - Achieving the SDGs and transforming our world will depend on how each of us will respond to this call to action.

#### **E. Examples of best practice in how other countries are implementing the SDG from which Australia could learn.**

<sup>17</sup> “Getting Started with the SDGs in Universities”, *Sustainable Development Solution Network: A Global Initiative for the United Nations*, last modified 2017, accessed 25 February 2018, <http://ap-unsdsn.org/regional-initiatives/universities-sdgs/university-sdg-guide/>

<sup>18</sup> Sustainable Development Solution Network, “Getting Started with the Sustainable Development Goals: A Guide for Stakeholders”, December 2015, accessed 10 March 2018, <http://unsdsn.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/151211-getting-started-guide-FINAL-PDF-.pdf>





- The UNAA firmly believes Australia can learn from other Member States - both developed and developing countries - that are firmly committed to achieving the SDGs. Furthermore, Australia should actively seek linkages with these countries to help promote understanding and enhance implementation in Australia. Citing a few examples:
  - Australia can learn from the leading four countries on the SDG ranking: Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Norway.<sup>19</sup> Finland and Germany for instance have each established coordination secretariats at the level of Prime Minister or President's office to guide SDGs work within their respective governments. Norway has developed a plan for national follow-up to the SDGs which is linked to their budget process.
  - The Government of the Republic of Korea has encouraged educational institutions to include the SDGs as part of school curriculum and carried out nationwide campaigns for the implementation of the SDGs.
  - Australia can also learn from New Zealand, our closest ally that is politically, culturally and geographically similar to Australia, yet has overtaken Australia on the SDGs ranking in 2017 and is showing an upward trend.
  - Developed countries like Australia also have much to learn from the so-called developing nations that have been required to practise sustainable development for many years. In Australia's immediate region, for example, the SDGs have been embraced by countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia. Similarly, in our nearer Pacific region many of the small island developing states (SIDS) have ascertained their development priorities by using the SDGs framework. For example, the United Nations Pacific Strategy 2018 – 2022<sup>20</sup> now provides a regional strategic framework based on the collective responses of 14 governments and peoples to advance a localised response to the SDGs. This strategy provides valuable information to show which SDGs have been prioritised by the Pacific SIDS, including those receiving much-valued Australian aid. Through learning how the SDGs are implemented in developing countries, Australia can better implement strategies to apply domestically.

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<sup>19</sup> "SDG Index and Dashboards Report 2017", *Bertelsmann Stiftung and Sustainable Development Solution Network*, 2017

<sup>20</sup> United Nations in the Pacific, "United Nations Pacific Strategy 2018-2022: A Multi-Country Sustainable Development Framework in the Pacific Region", 2017, accessed 10 March 2018, [https://www.unicef.org/about/execboard/files/Final\\_UNPS\\_2018-2022\\_Pacific.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/about/execboard/files/Final_UNPS_2018-2022_Pacific.pdf)

