

# UNAA Climate Policy Statement

August 2026

## 1. PREAMBLE

The UNAA believes protecting the environment, the world's oceans and combating climate change is vital to creating a safer, fairer, more resilient and sustainable world. Following advice from the International Court of Justice the UN General Assembly has endorsed the duty for climate action. Many nations are driving their energy transition to protect their economies, communities and shared environment. Despite obstruction from vested interests, parallel multilateralism is growing, including the Santa Marta Transition Away from Fossil Fuels Roadmap, action by the G77, and coalitions of the willing.

Australia's climate commitment is clear. We must:

- protect and restore our natural environment and cut emissions fast to secure a safe, resilient future
- empower communities, workers and First Nations for a fair and just transition
- align our policies, finance and governance with real accountability to deliver on our climate promises.

Together these environmental, social and governance pillars ensure we tackle the climate crisis with integrity, fairness and decisive action.

Australia was one of 50 countries to sign the fossil fuel phase-out declaration in April 2026 and voted in support of the UN General Assembly Resolution endorsing the International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion on the Obligations of States in respect of Climate Change, backing the young people and Pacific countries who led that initiative and are taking action to preserve their future.

UNAA acknowledges the Federal Government has met its United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) commitments, including Australia's 2035 Nationally Determined Contribution (2025), its Long-Term Emissions Reduction Plan targeting net zero by 2050 (2021), its National Adaptation Plan (2025) and Biennial Transparency Report (2024). State Governments have established policy frameworks, and some have gone beyond the Commonwealth in ambition.

UNAA applauds the work of Federal Government agencies, the Climate Change Authority, ARENA, the CEFC and the Net Zero Economy Authority for co-investing in decarbonisation and transitioning heavy industry regions and workforces and welcomes the Net Zero clause in the National Reconstruction Fund's future \$15 billion investment programme.



## 2. CALL TO ACTION

As Australia prepares to chair the Conference of the Parties 31 as President of Negotiations, we recognise the International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion and the related UN General Assembly Resolution: effective climate action is a legal duty under international law, not just a political choice. UNAA seeks a broad-based commitment, across government, industry and civil society, to lift our national ambition and secure the Paris Agreement.

## 3. VISION

In our vision for the future, Australia meets the climate challenge by going further, faster and together, towards a low carbon, resilient and sustainable economy. We urgently transition away from fossil fuels and implement effective adaptive measures across Australia and the Pacific. Data centres are net zero, water recycling and microclimate safe, and AI, applied in a pro-social way, helps us build a nature-positive, socially shared future. Business leaders, investors, cities, charities, scientists and innovators already delivering real climate solutions are enabled, connected and scaled, with inclusive leadership engaging women, First Nations Australians, Pacific communities and young people so everyone experiences safety, fairness and sustainability.

## 4. FRAMEWORK PRINCIPLES

We need to aim higher and secure a national climate plan that aligns with science and positions Australia as a world-leading clean, adapting economy. Both mitigation and adaptation are needed to deliver the resilience that today's geopolitics demands. Drawing on the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change Nationally Determined Contributions reporting framework, our five guiding principles are:

1. Positioning Australia to be competitive and innovative in a Net-Zero Economy by 2040, transitioning away from fossil fuels and replacing fossil fuel subsidies with carbon pricing and electrification incentives.
2. Aligning public and private investment to urgent, necessary adaptive action, including an ambitious, funded adaptation goal.
3. Supporting Global Climate Justice and a Just Transition, in gender-balanced governance with our Pacific neighbours and First Nations Australians.
4. Undertaking Global Climate Leadership and Solidarity, with ambition and integrity as hallmarks of our COP31 leadership.
5. Ensuring the transition to prosocial, pro-nature artificial intelligence, through policy, investment and action that enables a low carbon, adaptive economy.

## 5. IMPLEMENTATION POLICIES

### 5.1 Net-Zero Economy by 2040

Australia's Long Term Low Emission Development Strategy is widely considered inadequate. It needs higher rigour and ambition, sectoral implementation pathways tied to real investment, and public, private and blended finance mechanisms. Backed by a revised Nationally Determined Contribution, the plan must:

- pledge net-zero emissions no later than 2040, with 100% renewable energy by 2035 and fossil fuels phased out of our energy systems by 2040
- end new fossil fuel exploration and subsidies immediately, and redirect budget and infrastructure incentives to low and zero carbon solutions
- introduce effective carbon pricing that holds polluters accountable and drives investment into clean technology
- accelerate a green transformation for industry: electrification, energy efficiency, green hydrogen and carbon capture where feasible, and a genuinely circular economy.

### 5.2 Adaptive Investment

The National Adaptation Plan is well structured but, like the Long-Term Low Emission Development Strategy, needs sectoral implementation pathways tied to real, funded investment. It must:

- recognise agriculture, land use and forestry as central to both emissions reduction and sequestration, with investment in regenerative farming
- support reforestation and rewilding that restore ecosystems and biodiversity
- prioritise nature-based solutions in economic activity and infrastructure
- pledge to protect at least 30% of our land and oceans by 2030.

### 5.3 Global Climate Justice and a Just Transition

The Santa Marta Roadmap for the Transition Away from Fossil Fuels reminds us the transition must be equitable and leave no one behind, addressing fossil fuel dependence, transforming energy markets, and advancing climate diplomacy. Our transition must:

- provide targeted support, retraining and new green jobs for workers and communities affected by the shift away from fossil fuels
- deliver climate justice, empowering vulnerable and frontline communities to shape solutions



- amplify First Nations, Pacific and youth voices, drawing on First Nations knowledge and more than 60,000 years of custodianship
- advance gender equality in climate leadership under SDG5, backing the Australian Women's Climate Congress and the women and young people already driving grassroots climate action
- urgently determine and resource the most effective mechanisms to support developing economies with Just Transition and Loss and Damage.

#### 5.4 Global Climate Leadership and Solidarity

Australia must recognise the climate crisis knows no borders. While cutting our own emissions, we stand in solidarity with developing economies, ensuring they have the financial, technical and logistical support to pursue sustainable development. Australian leaders must:

- scale up climate finance and press for the global \$300 billion annual commitment to developing countries climate action by 2035 to be met and exceeded
- share technology, best practice and clean energy expertise to accelerate a 1.5°C aligned transition
- engage proactively at the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the UN General Assembly, and lead implementation of the Transition Away from Fossil Fuels Roadmap
- promote leadership level participation of women, First Nations peoples and young people most affected by climate change.

As President of Negotiations, Australia carries a responsibility to protect COP31 from undue influence. UNAA supports Transparency International's three integrity avenues: conflict-of-interest policies for delegates, transparent procurement with an open lobbying register, and independent ethics oversight.

UNAA also backs the Australian Women's Climate Congress and urges gender balance across all delegations.

The Pacific Pre-Conference Leaders' meeting, scheduled for 5-8 October 2026, is building regional solidarity ahead of COP31. True leadership means listening to Pacific nations, most vulnerable to the crisis, and centring Pacific and First Nations voices to help make COP31 a turning point for our region.

#### 5.5 Prosocial Artificial Intelligence

Climate change and AI are now deeply interconnected. AI is a force multiplier: it can accelerate emissions and inequality, or improve our ability to mitigate, adapt and deliver the Paris Agreement. Climate and AI governance must evolve together.



On 15 July 2026 the Prime Minister's University of Sydney address, "AI in Australia's Interests," announced mandatory Australian Standards for AI, a new Office of AI within the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, and a legal obligation for large data centres to underwrite new power supply, become net generators of energy, and minimise water use. UNAA welcomes this shift from voluntary expectations towards an enforceable framework, expected to be legislated in 2027.

UNAA urges Government to:

- legislate binding, not voluntary, climate, water and nature-positive requirements for all large-scale data centres, requiring new data centres to reach net zero by 2030, underwriting renewable generation and grid and water upgrades rather than passing costs to households, and condition approvals on a grid-positive test
- establish a certified green sovereign compute standard so government, universities and companies and community organisations can procure Paris Agreement aligned AI services with confidence
- set policy, funding, partnerships and finance incentives to deploy AI to accelerate innovation and implementation to accelerate transition, funded through ARENA, CEFC, CSIRO and the National Reconstruction Fund.
- Ensure we manage the transition to prosocial artificial intelligences through deliberate policy, investment and action that enables transition to a low carbon, adaptive economy and reserves AI infrastructure capacity for First Nations, community and startup use.

## 6. UNAA INITIATIVES

UNAA pursues this policy position through our membership of Climate Ready Australia at Griffith University and the Climate Change Collaboration Network; leadership of the UN & Multilateralism Alliance; the UN Youth-UNICEF partnership; UNAA Young Professionals; our state and territory Divisions; the Status of Women Network; our UN Alumni Network; joint events with the Australian Parliamentary Friends of the UN; and recognition of Dynamic Australians in the UN System, including those working within the UN Environment Programme on climate-related issues.

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