



 A call to climate action

# Charter for change

[womensclimatecongress.com](https://womensclimatecongress.com) | Draft August 2022



## The Women's Climate Congress vision

We share a vision to create climate security by 2030. In this future, women's leadership has helped turn the tide of political culture from polarised discord to collaboration and cooperation. Nurture of life and care for the Earth are at the centre of every government decision.<sup>1</sup>

### Our values and commitment

We, a web of women, seek and support wisdom for the common good.

We acknowledge the ancestral wisdom of First Peoples and accept our responsibility as custodians of a precious world that must be nurtured as it nurtures us.

Sharing a great desire to look after the young, we raise our voices, confident in the potential of women to help positive change for all future life.

As beneficiaries of the industrial age, we acknowledge our responsibility for the present climate and environmental situations with grateful hearts and with lament.

Weary of conflict and polarisation, we resist judgment and blame, embrace uncertainty and encourage mediation and collaboration for a safe passage from climate chaos to climate security.

Listening deeply to the science, we recognise the interconnectedness of all Earth's systems and human influences within those systems. With this in mind, we bring our collective imagination to uncover innovative, equitable and sustainable ways forward. Artistic vision and creativity are at the heart of imagining the necessary transformations.

Connecting head, heart and hands, we will collaborate across all genders to restore nurture of life and care for the Earth to the centre of every decision made at every level, local to national and international.

Qualities of the heart (including compassion, love, empathy, forgiveness) are the basis for true strength, and are necessary for our survival.

Following in the footsteps of our foremothers we seize this moment, charged with a realisation of our responsibility to respond to Earth's call and our shared aspirations.

<sup>1</sup> We define 'climate security' in our [WCC position paper #1 'What do we mean by climate security?'](#).

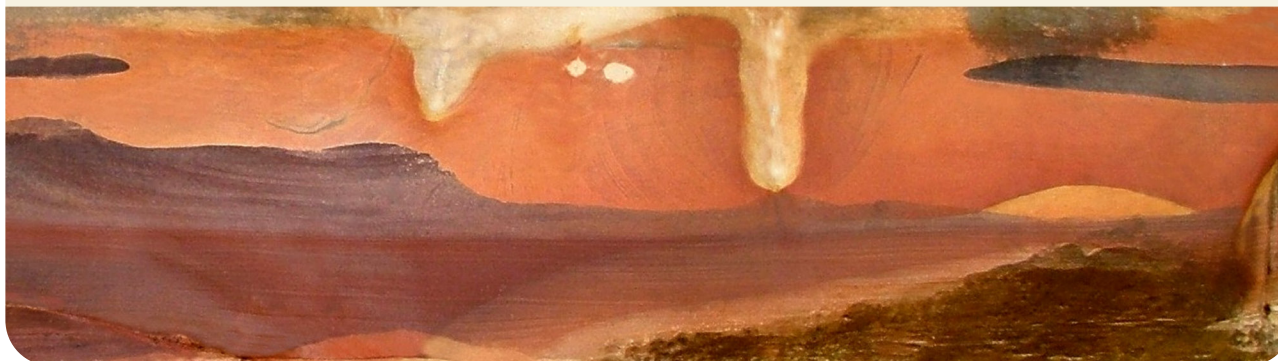


# Opening statements

*We women of the Women's Climate Congress and others despair that Earth is hurtling towards catastrophic climate change that humanity is failing to mitigate.*

*We grieve the unfolding potentially irreversible impacts on all current and future life unless immediate and effective action is taken.*

This Charter is a call to action from the hearts of women, *in all our diversity*, to urgently secure the climate and build ongoing human and planetary wellbeing. To this end, we urge collaboration and cooperation in governance to build inclusive, fair and united policy approaches.



## The Charter as a call to action

Impelled by the Black Summer bushfires of 2019–20, women came together in grief to find a new way forward for action on climate change. The Women's Climate Congress (WCC) was born. We drew inspiration from the 1915 International Congress of Women and their resolutions to bring a peaceful end to World War 1 and to create the conditions for a lasting and sustainable peace.

The calls to action in this Charter have emerged through community conversations, monthly online events and other forums with women from all over Australia over the past two years. We have also drawn on values expressed in other national and international frameworks.<sup>2</sup>

The Charter is aimed at government, business, nongovernment organisations, communities and individuals. By working together across diverse interests and following scientific advice we are better prepared for the existential challenges we face.

We acknowledge and celebrate that 'women' are a diverse group. Intersecting identities within the group and individuals lead to unique experiences and responses to climate change and other issues, which we seek to recognise and address.

Our proposed actions are offered as a starting point for waves of action that can be supported by women everywhere through individual, collective, organisational and government activities. They will also form the basis of the ongoing advocacy work of the WCC. They are underpinned by more detailed WCC position papers available on our website.<sup>3</sup>

Like the women of 1915, we seek two levels of action: immediate and urgent actions to secure the climate; and more profound, transformative actions for lasting human and planetary health and wellbeing.

<sup>2</sup> Such as the Earth Charter, UN Sustainable Development Goals and UN Commission on the Status of Women, and the national vision for Australia developed by Australia Remade (see Further reading).

<sup>3</sup> See Further reading



## Immediate actions to secure the climate

- Embrace gender-balanced, inclusive governance
- Take responsibility
- Create a unified national plan



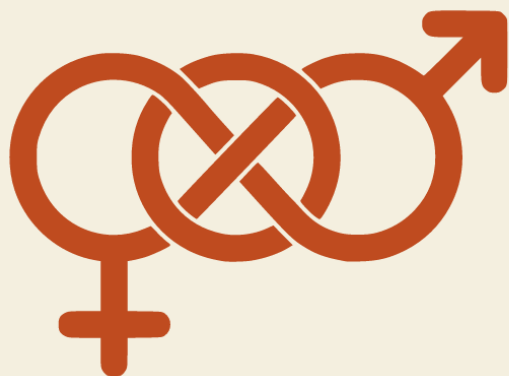
## Principles for human and planetary wellbeing

- Listen and learn from First Nations knowledge
- Commit to intergenerational equity and rights of all Earth life
- Create paths and policies for tolerance, nonviolence and peace
- Adopt new economic models and values
- Encourage citizen participation in governance
- Elevate compassion and kindness in government
- Support imagination and creative thinking at the centre
- Design education fit for purpose into the future

**ACTION 01****To secure the climate****Embrace gender-balanced, inclusive governance**

We claim full, equal and meaningful participation in decision making and action towards a climate-secure, peaceful and compassionate future.

In this future, all human lives are valued, and the diversity of life experiences (such as age, culture, sexuality, ability) are seen as vital for good decision making.



Our current government and organisational systems are based on a colonial and patriarchal past, which reflect a predominantly male worldview and attitude to wellbeing. Women, *in all their diversity*, bring different voices and attitudes that are crucial to create balance in policy priorities and evaluations for decisions relating to the future sustenance of life and custodianship of the planet.

**We call for:**

- Quotas and other structural processes to allow women of diverse backgrounds to have equal access to, and full participation in, policy development and decision making at all levels.
- Women to have shared and equal counsel in all national and international forums for developing action on climate change, environmental protection, and to create lasting planetary wellbeing.
- A multiparty women's group ('Women's Caucus') in all federal state and territory parliaments to encourage women to work together on issues of common concern among women.
- A formal process of review for all proposed legislation to assess potential impacts on women, children and the environment.

## ACTION 02

### To secure the climate

# Take responsibility

We take collective responsibility for our role in the current climate emergency through the privileges of modern lifestyles. We acknowledge that these benefits have not been shared by all.

Climate change is intertwined with global patterns of inequality. The most vulnerable people bear the brunt of climate change impacts yet contribute the least to the crisis. It follows that societies like Australia, which have materially benefitted most from population expansion, land use, lifestyle demands for fossil fuels, transport, excessive consumption and other privileges, have a greater level of responsibility for restorations.



### We call for:

- Australian governments to take leadership in international efforts to secure the climate, in line with scientific findings, analysis and advice.
- Governments, climate agencies, and industry to cooperate in taking climate action, in the interests of young people, future generations and survival of life on Earth.
- Serious and respectful consultation with First Nations peoples about land and water understanding and management.
- Incorporation of climate risk into corporate law to reflect all relevant duties of care.
- Policies and programs that support and encourage Australians from all walks of life to make the changes needed to secure the climate.



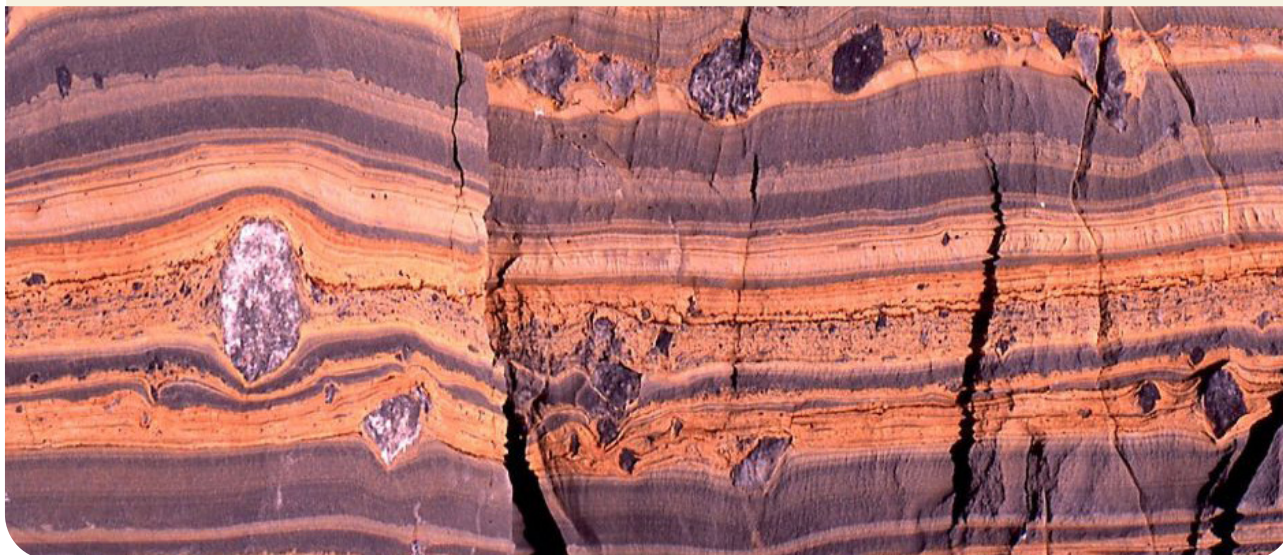


## ACTION 03

### To secure the climate

# Create a unified national plan

We call on political parties, industry and community leaders to work together to comply with scientific advice to secure the climate, and to transition our economy and lifestyles sustainably and justly.



To reach a scientifically informed consensus, the diverse stakeholders need to consider the issues together respectfully. A well-designed, mediated roundtable process would offer an opportunity for different interests to collaborate in finding just and sustainable ways to secure the climate and a safe future for all.<sup>4</sup>



### We call for:

- Multiparty commitment to develop a National Plan for action to address climate risks with:
  - an independent process for mediation of stakeholder issues (including agriculture, mining, energy, manufacturing, First Nations peoples, community, governments)
  - protocols to avoid conflicts of interest.
- The National Plan to include actions to:
  - phase out fossil fuels in line with IPCC recommendations and international commitments
  - plan immediate transition from fossil fuels to renewable fuel industries, ensuring extensive community participation and planning, and with close attention to community values and regional vulnerabilities.
  - plan for adaptation of other carbon intensive activities (such as transport, manufacturing, mining, forestry, agriculture) to regenerative and carbon neutral approaches.
  - address risks from extreme weather and climate impacts already under way to ensure wellbeing for affected communities.

<sup>4</sup> WCC position paper #2: [Building a unified national agreement for Australia's climate response \(see Further reading\)](#)

## **ACTION 04**

**For long-term human and planetary wellbeing**

# **Uphold intergenerational equity and the rights of all Earth life**

We commit to the wellbeing of future human generations and all of Earth's biodiversity. We call for human and planetary wellbeing to be considered in the development and implementation of all policies.



The election cycle (3 years in Australia) creates a short-term imperative for policies. But securing the wellbeing of future human generations and of all Earth life needs long-term planning and a commitment to generations into the future.

In 2016, Wales was the first international jurisdiction to appoint a Future Generations Commissioner. The UN has called on other countries to follow suit and establish governance mechanisms that place future generations at the centre of decisions, ensuring their voice at the policy level.<sup>5</sup>

Other jurisdictions have introduced 'rights of nature' laws. For example, 'rights of nature' was enshrined in Ecuador's 2008 Constitution and Bolivia's 2010 'Rights of Mother Earth' Act. In New Zealand, several ecosystems now have legal rights, including the Whanganui River.



### **We call for:**

- Introduction of 'Protection of Future Generations Legislation' similar to the Welsh model, with a particular responsibility to respond to the voices of young people.
- Rigorous attention to State of Environment reports to uphold the rights of nature, restore damage and prevent further environmental loss and destruction.
- Establishment of a Commission for the Future within the Australian Government to provide planning and review of all policies impacting, or potentially impacting future generations and planetary wellbeing and to promote young people, especially girls, in leadership positions to protect Earth life.

5. Future Generations Commissioner for Wales <https://www.futuregenerations.wales>



## ACTION 05

For long-term human and planetary wellbeing

# Listen and learn from First Nations knowledge

We affirm that First Nations peoples hold a deep connection to the Earth. Their First Law teaches how to live in reciprocal relationship with the land, and describes our human duty of care for the Earth, which gives life, love and provision to all life.



This deep connection to Earth underpins the First Nations land management practices and governance structures, including the complementary roles of women and men in many aspects of decision making.

We acknowledge that the actions presented here can only flourish after a ‘coming together’ for truth-telling, justice and fairness in relationships together.



### We call for:

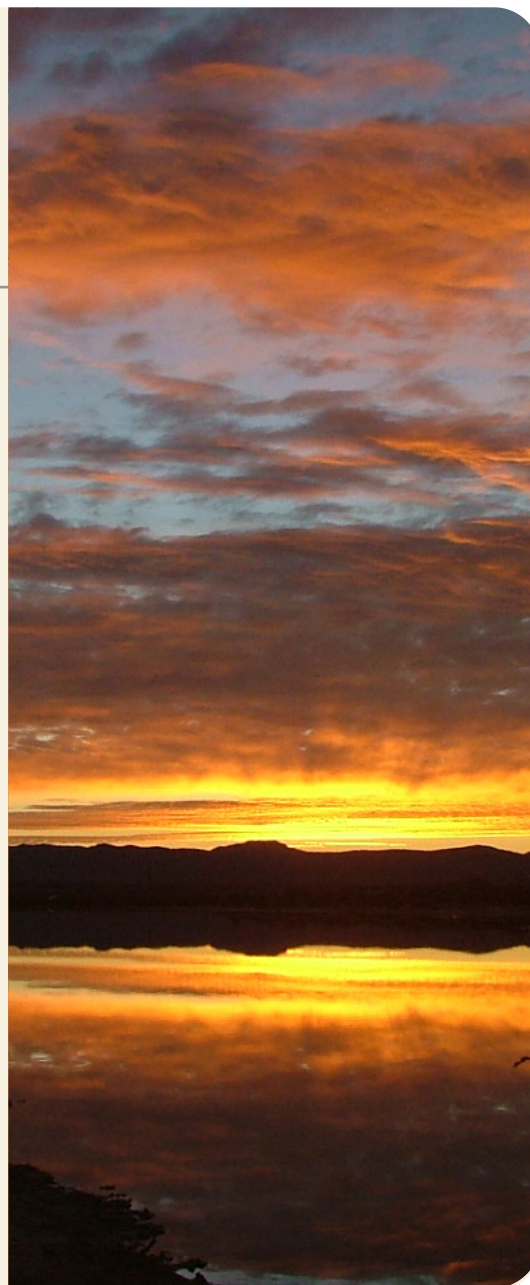
- Acknowledgement with First Nations peoples of the damage and disruptions of colonial settlement upon their traditionally managed landscape.
- Prioritising and actively seeking opportunities with First Nations peoples to learn from their historic knowledge and practices for land and water management.
- Seeking opportunities with First Nations peoples to learn from their values and inclusive processes of collaborative and gender-balanced governance.

**ACTION 06**

For long-term human and planetary wellbeing

## Create paths and policies for tolerance, nonviolence and peace

We recognise that peace is made by building relationships of trust and understanding among peoples and cultures, and with the Earth and all living things.



Humanity faces a choice: ongoing confrontation and aggression, with its large-scale resource use, expenditure and carbon pollution; or collaboration to create a new agenda for peace, gender and social equality, climate security and avoidance of other threats.

The ‘feminist foreign policy’ movement prioritises peace, gender equality, environmental integrity and human rights for all.



**We call for:**

- Adoption of ‘feminist foreign policy’ approaches in Australia, based on those promoted by the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom.<sup>6</sup>
- Promotion of, and participation in, national and international forums (similar to Conference of Parties in relation to climate change), with government delegations, experts, civil society and academia, to bring the world together around preparation for world peace.
- Redirection of current defence and military expenditure to services for human and planetary wellbeing.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.wilpf.org.au/>

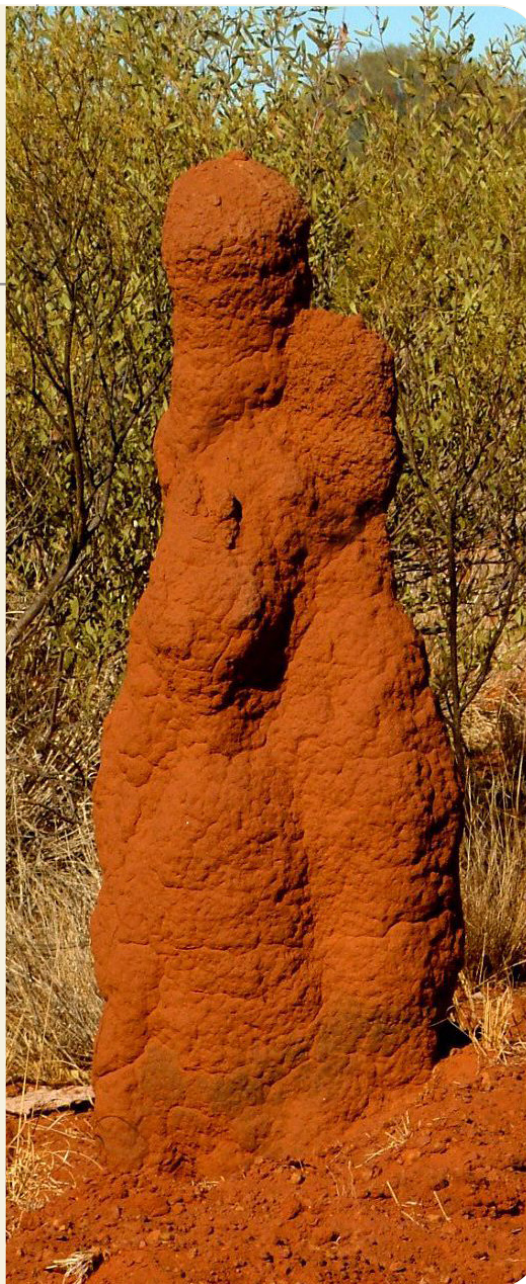


## ACTION 07

For long-term human and planetary wellbeing

# Adopt new economic models and values

We value the life-sustaining gifts of nature, and the gifts of homemaking, caring and nurture of life as having complementary economic value with industrial and commercial services.



Mainstream economics does not address the critical issues of our times, including gendered and racial violence, climate change, species extinction and ecosystem destruction. The ‘fathers of economic theory’ excluded unpaid homemaking, childrearing, caring and community building activities from having economic value. Services that involve these skills are undervalued and underpaid. Similarly, the natural environment is excluded from economic consideration and value.

A new school of economics, with greater input from women, embraces new approaches designed to balance social, political, technological, generational and ecological interests to create a healthy, inclusive, socially just and gender-balanced society.<sup>7</sup>



### We call for:

- Adoption of a broader ‘Wellbeing Index’, in addition to GDP measurement, to include human and planetary wellbeing.
- Inclusion of the value of currently unpaid homemaking, caring and community building work in productivity measures.
- Inclusion in budget policy of the costs of not taking action on climate risk, as well as the costs of mitigation or remediation.
- Policy frameworks that support business opportunities for a circular economy, and other regenerative and restorative approaches.
- Sharing of economic benefits through revised and just taxation, community power-sharing and guaranteed basic incomes.

<sup>7</sup> See for example *Doughnut economics* by Kate Raworth: <https://www.kateraworth.com/doughnut/>



## ACTION 08

For long-term human and planetary wellbeing

# Encourage citizen participation in governance

We recognise that, at the heart of democracy, citizens' concerns are the basis for change. Participatory processes allow citizens to take part in decision-making and create change.

National strength is built upon strong close-knit communities. Many now live with the constant threat and actual recurrence of extreme climate events, which can ultimately break down their cohesion. Community assemblies involving local citizen participation and decision-making will increase the ability of communities to respond to changing conditions and emergencies.

There are many different participatory democracy practices that can engage citizens in local, regional, or national decision-making processes on issues that affect their daily life.



### We call for:

- Establishment of a 'Participatory Democracy Authority' to support public authorities and civil society stakeholders to engage in citizen participation.<sup>8</sup>
- Commissioning of participatory projects such as participatory budgeting, citizen's assemblies, or citizens' forums (such as The Canberra Forum being trialed in the ACT<sup>9</sup>).

<sup>8</sup> Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions: Catching the Deliberative Wave, OECD Library <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org>  
<sup>9</sup> <https://www.democracyco.com.au/canberra-forum-launch>



**ACTION 09**

For long-term human and  
planetary wellbeing

## Elevate compassion and kindness in government

We propose that qualities of the heart (such as compassion, love, kindness, empathy, forgiveness) are the basis of true strength and decision making. These qualities can be respected, elevated and applied in government.



Qualities of the heart create stronger connections between people, improve collaboration and increase trust. Such qualities are also associated with the practice of truth, transparency and integrity — putting the common good ahead of personal gain. Movements elsewhere are promoting compassion and kindness in government, and in civil society more broadly (for example the Compassion in Politics movement in the UK<sup>10</sup> and the Charter for Compassion Australia<sup>11</sup>).

In an era of fires, floods and other emergencies, citizens' mental and physical health are under stress. Compassion, kindness and empathy are particularly important at such times.



### We call for:

- Legislated measures to uphold integrity in governance at all levels.
- Integration of compassion design principles and case studies, as described in the Charter for Compassion Australia, across government business and local initiatives.
- Adoption of a 'compassion threshold' in policy similar to that being developed in the UK.
- Policies that ensure optimum and compassionate support for communities impacted by climate-related disasters.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.compassioninpolitics.com/>

<sup>11</sup> See <https://www.charterforcompassion.com.au/>

## **ACTION 10**

**For long-term human and planetary wellbeing**

# **Support imagination and creative thinking at the centre**

We recognise that the transmission of knowledge and law about ways to live in harmony with Earth is a key role of artists and storytellers. In many Indigenous cultures this remains central.



The unfolding climate change issue has made it abundantly clear that hard facts alone do not inspire united and effective action. The arts (including visual arts, music, dance, poetry) and storytelling can connect people and inspire a shared understanding and purpose. A sense of common purpose can empower people to imagine a better future. The independence of artists is a vital factor in their capacity to imagine new possibilities.



### **We call for:**

- Recognition and funding for artists who celebrate the wonders of the natural world, drawing attention to what we put at risk; and for artists who bring awareness of environmental and social issues through their creative, prophetic imaginations.<sup>12</sup>
- Programs that recognise artists' key role in community wellbeing, and their capacity to provide solace, inspiration and alternative narratives in challenging times.
- Policy frameworks that recognise the arts as integral to public discourse.

<sup>12</sup> For example, see Climearte|Arts for a Safe Climate. Established in 2010, Climearte works to harness the creative power of the arts to inform, engage and inspire action towards a fairer, zero emissions future. <https://climarte.org/>.



## ACTION 11

For long-term human and planetary wellbeing

# Design education fit for purpose into the future

We call for all children and citizens in Australia to be educated in the full story of colonial settlement and the subsequent impacts upon Indigenous peoples, biodiversity and environments.

It is important for us all to learn the powerful, but modest, human place within the natural world, the interconnectedness of all life, and our human responsibilities for human and planetary wellbeing.



### We call for:

- A commitment to honesty in communicating the history of the First Peoples of Australia and other historic, social and environmental truths and their implications.
- Giving equal importance to the history and creative output of women, First Nations peoples, and of the many settler peoples' multicultural contributions.
- Integration of the arts and sciences (including scientific and economic principles and methods) to promote critical thinking. This will provide a foundation for greater citizen involvement in democratic processes to reduce the effects of climate change, and create long-term human and planetary wellbeing.
- Encouraging access and encounter with natural and wild environments to promote the love and protection they need.



## Further reading

### Women's Climate Congress papers

*What we mean by climate security*, Version 3 (August 2022).

*Building a unified national agreement for Australia's climate response: Proposal for an inclusive process to address climate risks*, Version 2, August 2022.

*How the women of 1915 speak to us in the 21st century: We move forward by looking back*, by Kirsten Anker, 2020.

### Some other international and national frameworks

**The Earth Charter** provides a visionary ethical foundation for national and international governance.

**The UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)** develops global standards on gender equality and the empowerment of women. In particular, achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction are the subject of CSW66 Agreed Conclusions (March 2022)

**The UN Sustainable Development Goals** are a framework for actions to realise this vision. The issues described in this charter are reflected in the following goals:

- **SDGs 1 & 2:** Refuse to allow any child in Australia to live in poverty, or any family to face food insecurity.
- **SDG 3:** Invest in good health as well-being so that our health system can survive the stresses that will come with climate disasters.
- **SDG 4:** Every child needs inclusive and equitable access to quality education to prepare for the uncertain future of work. Lifelong learning must be available to all.
- **SDG 5&10:** Achieve equality, including gender equality and empower women and girls
- **SDGs 11,12,14,15:** Strive for sustainability in every aspect of our personal lives, our lives as citizens and our lives as fellows with other-than-human beings on the planet.
- **SDG 16:** Promote peaceful and inclusive societies, where everyone has access to justice.
- **SDG 17:** Partnerships for the goals (calls for strengthening global partnerships to achieve sustainable development).

**Australia Remade** is a collectively imagined vision of a future for Australia based on listening to hundreds of people from many walks of life.

## Artwork and photo credits

Cover; Opening statements; Actions 3–8, 8, 11 — Honey Nelson  
Vision and values statement; Actions 2,9 and 10 — Sally Blake



[womensclimatecongress.com](https://womensclimatecongress.com)  
[womensclimatecongress@gmail.com](mailto:womensclimatecongress@gmail.com)