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Joint statement on the Australian Government and the Sustainable Development Goals

April 2019

In this joint statement we, as a group of organisations representing civil society, business, and academia, call on all political parties to support the advancement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the Australian Government. The SDGs provide an unprecedented opportunity to tackle issues that matter to all Australians, and we have been pleased to see their importance recognised by the recommendations of the recent Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee's report "United Nations Sustainable Development Goals". We broadly support the Senate Committee's recommendations, and, building on these, we here highlight what we consider to be the five most important actions the Australian Government needs to take to advance the SDGs.

The 17 SDGs – also referred to as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development or the Global Goals – were signed on to by all 193 UN Member States, including Australia, in September 2015. The SDGs seek to mobilise efforts to end extreme poverty, promote prosperity and wellbeing, reduce inequality and injustice, and protect the environment for all countries and all people by 2030.

Our organisations have played a key role in supporting the take up of the SDGs and in coordinating the Australian response to the SDGs to date. We have co-organised the Australian SDG Summits in 2016 and 2018, and supported the Australian Government in its preparation of the 2018 Voluntary National Review on SDG implementation. We support the SDGs because they provide an ambitious and transformative framework to bring us together as a nation and create a better future for Australia and the world.

The SDGs can help Australia create a unifying long-term vision, because they reflect the issues that matter to all of us, like a strong safety net, affordable access to good healthcare and education, reducing inequalities, jobs, good places to live, safety, tackling climate change, and a clean environment.

The targets and indicators that are part of the SDG framework can help us assess how well Australia is progressing in reaching the future we want. While our country is one of the leading economies in the world, we still face many difficult challenges as a nation, such as persistent poverty and disadvantage, uncertain future jobs, climate change, environmental degradation, increased inequality, and decline of trust in government and business. By tracking our progress on the SDGs we can identify areas where we are not doing well and need to increase efforts and resources, as well as areas where we are doing well and can showcase and celebrate.

The SDGs are universal, and can guide Australia in how it can help address the challenges being faced by our neighbours and the world. Along with the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, which aligns finance and policy priorities, the SDGs form the 2030 Agenda, which recognises that to finally address poverty, the world must address the growing inequality within and between countries, the increasing strain on the world's resources and the global environment, and the burgeoning threats to peace and stability. This is something we should do as a leading nation in our region, and as we live in a highly interconnected world, where challenges faced by other countries increasingly affect our own environmental and economic future.

Finally, more than any initiative we have seen, the SDGs provide a common framework that inspires and motivates stakeholders from different sectors to come together to collaborate, innovate and solve the challenges facing our country and the world.

Action by all sectors and actors is needed in order to achieve the SDGs. This includes Federal, state and territory and local governments, business, civil society, academia and the community. Many organisations and state and local governments are already embracing the potential of the SDGs and leading the way in integrating them in their work.

However the leadership and support of the Australian Government are also essential to enable and ensure greater and more effective action. The Government is in the best position to coordinate and resource action on the SDGs across different sectors,



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regions, and levels of government; to support monitoring and reporting; and to raise awareness of the SDGs across all sectors and the community.

We therefore urge the Australian Government to implement the following key actions, which we believe will go a long way to set Australia up to achieve the SDGs' promise of sustainable development for all:

- 1. Develop a national implementation plan for the SDGs, outlining how Australia will achieve the goals, both in Australia and through our international development assistance.** The plan should focus particularly on concrete strategies to address the areas where Australia is performing poorly on the SDGs and to deliver on our commitment to "leave no one behind".
- 2. Report to Parliament at least every two years on how Australia is tracking against each of the SDGs.** The report should be indicator-based and with sufficient level of disaggregation to reveal groups or regions that are being left behind. It would benefit from drawing on the expertise of independent bodies with a focus on sustainable development, such as the National Sustainable Development Council.
- 3. Establish a secretariat to provide ongoing support for effective and coherent implementation of the SDGs within the Government and to help leverage and coordinate action across all sectors.** One of the key functions of this secretariat would be to develop and deliver a national public awareness campaign that demonstrates the value of the SDGs for Australia and increases understanding, engagement and commitment to the SDGs.
- 4. Establish a representative, multi-sectoral reference group to advise the existing interdepartmental committee on the implementation of the SDGs.** The group should include representatives from civil society, the private sector, state and territory and local governments, and the academic sector.
- 5. Establish direct and indirect funding mechanisms to support the implementation of the SDGs by the Australian Government and by other sectors.** These could include allocating funding to addressing priority SDG issues that require direct government investment; establishing a small grants scheme that aims to spur greater levels of engagement and investment by the private sector and civil society into the SDGs; setting up mission-driven funding to spur research and innovation into complex challenges; adopting innovative blended finance approaches that allow Australia to leverage investment from multiple sources to achieve the SDGs; and removing perverse incentives to increase the potential for impact.

We call on all political parties to support the Australian Government to undertake these actions.

About us

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