

Building feminist climate realities through just transitions

November 2026

IWDA INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

“In every vote, every voice, every door we open wide, there’s a different kind of wealth waiting on the other side.”

Participant submission

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Read the full research findings at iwda.org.au/feminist-solutions-to-climate-change.



What matters to you in Australia's transition to a greener economy?

This is the question we set out to answer ahead of COP31.

Over 200 of you answered our call, sharing what priorities you think should guide the Australian government's transition to a low-carbon, climate resilient economy.

Together, your responses paint a bold, caring and courageous picture of what our economy and communities could be. They also make one thing clear - Australians want more meaningful, equitable and ambitious climate action that builds communities where people and planet can thrive.



But first, what is just transition?

The idea of just transitions first emerged in the labour movements of the 1970s. They argued workers should not have to bear the costs of the changes that were happening at the time to the industries and economies they were part of, particularly in response to new environmental regulations.

Since then, the concept has grown beyond perspectives that focus primarily on the energy sector to approaches that encompass broader changes to energy systems, transport, manufacturing, housing, land use, public services and household costs.

This is where feminist just transition comes in.

A feminist perspective asks us to think about how societies and economies as a whole can be transformed. In doing so, feminist approaches place gender justice, human rights and care at the centre of how transitions are planned and delivered, with a particular focus on how the structures that reproduce inequality (even in climate action) can be transformed.

A feminist approach asks not only how workers can move into new jobs, but also how existing inequalities shape who participates in those decisions, who benefits from these investment, whose work is recognised within them and who carries the costs of these transitions. Crucially, it also asks how gender and other factors like indigeneity, class, disability and age intersect to shape these conditions.

What does this all mean for Australia?

The climate crisis is fundamentally reshaping our world.

From devastating floods in Asia to deadly summer heat in Europe and warnings of a super El Nino event bringing even more extreme conditions to Australia and the Pacific this summer, we are seeing climate impacts play out in our communities every day. Impacts that we know are hitting women, girls and gender-diverse people differently, and often harder, because of how power is shared in our communities.

As one of the world's highest per-capita emitters and a major fossil fuel exporter, transitioning Australia's economy away from the extraction, consumption and export of fossil fuel towards a low-carbon, climate resilient economy is a both a moral responsibility and an urgent priority.

With more than a third of Australia's total exports in 2024 made up from fossil fuels, our economy is highly dependent on, and vulnerable to changes in, revenue from fossil fuels. As the world continues to shift towards greener economies – reshaping global trade, investment and energy markets – failing to plan for these changes now will only leave us worse off.

Australia ranks in the top 10 countries for domestic per capita carbon emissions.

But Australia is the world's third largest exporter of fossil fuels.

In 2024, fossil fuel exports made up one-third of Australia's total exports.

If we take export emissions into consideration, Australia is the second largest carbon emitting country in the world.

As this global transition towards renewable energy continues to shape our communities, we need to ensure that the people who live and work in them have a say in deciding what comes next. That means looking beyond the energy sector to more broadly think about how our societies function to better protect workers, communities and those most affected by climate change and structural inequalities.

In practice, this would look like:

- Giving people and communities impacted by climate change a genuine say in decisions – and ensuring they benefit equitably from this transition.
- Recognising the paid and unpaid care work largely done by women as central to a community's resilience and success in this transition – and having this reflected in government policies and funding.
- Integrating and resourcing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's knowledge and leadership in just transition policies and programs – and ensuring climate action strengthens First Nations' rights and self-determination.
- Caring just as much about the kind of world we leave to future generations as we do about the society we build today.

We have ahead of us an opportunity to not just be on forefront these changes, but to decide for ourselves what to rebuild.

Now is the time to ask: what becomes possible once we move away from a fossil fuel-based economy built on exploiting people and the planet?



The opportunity before us: COP31 & the Belém-Antalya Mechanism

At last year's COP30 in Belém, Brazil, world leaders made the historic agreement to develop a mechanism that would support countries to undertake just transitions, also known as the Belém-Antalya Mechanism (or BAM). The mechanism aims to enable fairer transitions for workers, communities and economies, and increase international cooperation.

At this year's COP31 in Antalya, Türkiye, world leaders will once again come together – this time to shape the process for making this mechanism a reality.

As President of Negotiations, Australia will have the opportunity to champion this outcome and help ensure countries and communities across the world have the support they need to put just transitions into practice.

Wondering what this mechanism could look like in practice?

Check out the Women and Gender Constituency's proposed implementation model for an example of how the mechanism could be operatinalised.

So, back to our main question...

Ahead of COP31, we wanted to find out what really mattered to Australians in our transition to a greener economy.

To do this, we turned to Pol.is, an open-source platform designed to support conversations across large groups around a question. Participants were given the option to 'agree', 'disagree' or 'pass' on seed statements shown to them semi-randomly. These seed statements – originally developed by us, then tested and refined in consultation with experts and organisations working in the field in Australia – were built around key principles agreed upon at COP30 for the just transition mechanism.

Sample seed statements:

- "Policies to address the climate crisis should increase wellbeing and reduce wealth inequality."
- "Making moderate sacrifices now is worth it if my children and grandchildren can live on a safer planet."
- "Our government should be building more energy-efficient social housing for those who need it."
- "Addressing gender equality will also help solve the climate crisis."

Participants also had the option to submit their own short statements to share their views on our main question. These statements were in turn voted on by later participants taking part in the Pol.is conversation.

Throughout the month of September 2026, over 200 people took part in the conversation to share what they thought should guide the Australian government's transition to a low-carbon, climate resilient economy.

Here's what they had to say...

What did people value?

Three clear themes came out of participants' voting patterns and the statements they submitted themselves: equity, participation and intergenerational justice.

Equity

99% AGREEMENT

"Sustainability and equity must go hand in hand. A greener future should benefit everyone, not just a few."

99% AGREEMENT

"A just transition means no one is left behind. Invest in people, communities and equitable opportunities."

91% AGREEMENT

"Climate policy that benefits the most marginalised will ultimately benefit everyone."

Equity was clearly valued across the board, with many participants seeing the need to ensure Australia's transition benefits the many, not just the few, as important. People's responses also showed that they cared about equity in the process itself, with many bringing up the importance of ensuring equitable participation in policy- and decision-making.



Participation of diverse groups

91% AGREEMENT

"Transitioning to a greener economy also means removing barriers that prevent marginalised groups from participating in public decision-making."

89% AGREEMENT

"In making any decision, it is important that the government meaningfully considers the voices of people directly impacted by the decision."

91% AGREEMENT

"Action is needed - consultation is important, and then we need decisions that have follow through."

Ensuring the participation of diverse groups in transition processes came up as an important principle to most people. The idea that it was "too hard to include the voices of all people affected by energy transitions" was rejected by three-quarters of people who voted on it. Meanwhile, 75% also disagreed that "governments should be able to make quick decisions about how to address the climate crisis without consulting people who might be impacted."

Despite the obvious desire for urgency to be a part of the response (more information on that later), most people did not see efficiency as a reasonable trade-off to ensuring women, young people, older people, workers, people with disabilities and people from migrant communities, have their unique needs in the energy transition considered through consultation. Instead, people believe that both participation and urgency can, and should, work together.

In particular, 86% of participants agreed that "more should be done to uphold the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People in climate policy" and 87% agreed that "the Government should do more to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the power to veto energy and mining projects on their Traditional lands", indicating strong support for greater action to ensure the rights of First Nations people in Australia's transition are protected.

Intergenerational Justice

97% AGREEMENT

"Addressing climate change now is important to safeguard the rights of future generations."

94% AGREEMENT

"Making moderate sacrifices now is worth it if my children and grandchildren can live on a safer planet."

91% AGREEMENT

"We need to make huge changes on so many levels so our young people have a world they can proudly live in."

People's votes and self-submitted statements showed a clear concern for intergenerational justice, showing the value they placed on making sure that the principle of equity extends beyond this moment in time. Many statements included a sense of responsibility towards young people and future generations, emphasising the urgency of acting on the climate crisis now in order to safeguard their rights into the future.

A concern with the need to transform our current relationship to consumption and economic growth for the benefit of future generations was also present. People overwhelmingly showed a willingness to make "moderate sacrifices" and to accept a drop in their own living standards (88% agreement) in order to ensure a better life on a safer planet for future generations. While statements on intergenerational justice were more likely to include references to the need for individual-level change, many also identified the need for government and private sector action and accountability, and for a broader transformation of our economic system, indicating that their understanding of what is needed to address the climate crisis was multifaceted.

Where do people want to see action?

People's responses showed a clear desire for more accountability and action from both our government and private sector groups, who they see as closely entwined.

From the Australian Government, this looked like demanding accountability for their failure to act on the climate crisis over the past decades while looking for tangible action to redirect tax income and subsidies from fossil fuels towards sustainable energy and women-led solutions.

From the private sector, this looked like breaking the chokehold of fossil fuel companies on decision-making processes and making polluters pay for the damage they're inflicting on our climate and communities.

Underpinning all of this is a recognition that what is really needed is a whole-of-society, whole-of-economy transition aimed at changing the underlying economic models that have caused the climate crisis, alongside action driven by a sense of urgency equivalent to the real crisis we are facing.



Accountability

98% AGREEMENT

“Individual action matters, but the systemic change we need requires bold action from governments and corporations."

90% AGREEMENT

“Countries (and corporations) who have contributed most to the climate crisis must address climate impacts and support frontline communities."

80% AGREEMENT

"Sadly governments are mostly about power & must be reformed to better reflect climate change priorities & the realities of a warming planet."

Many people submitted statements that emphasised wanting more accountability from the government. Seventeen out of eighteen statements related to accountability were directly submitted by participants, ranging from disappointment and anger at the perception of Australian government failures to take action over past decades to demanding they take responsibility (in relation to both Australians and the rest of the world) to address the climate crisis. The idea of corporate capture was also present in many people's submissions and votes, with the influence of fossil fuel companies on decision-makers identified as a barrier to action.

When it comes to the private sector, people's submissions indicated a sense of frustration, and even outrage, at what some of them described as the “obscene” wealth private companies and billionaires have been allowed to build from fossil fuels. Others shared the idea that continuing to accumulate wealth at this level showed “greed” and “selfishness” on their part and called for government policy that would “make polluters pay – a lot.”

Action

97% AGREEMENT

“Taxing billionaires and oil and gas companies fairly would be a good start in getting gender and environmental issues to the fore."

92% AGREEMENT

“The government should subsidise renewable energy to make sure it is affordable for all people."

81% AGREEMENT

"Government must collaborate with and invest in grassroots women-led enterprises that contribute to a greener economy."

People want action – and they have plenty of ideas about where government and private sector groups can start. Some of the solutions submitted focused on financial reform, including several statements on the need for fairer tax systems aimed at redistributing wealth from large companies and individuals, redirecting subsidies from fossil fuels towards sustainable energy (90% agree) and linking superannuation funds to green investments (91% agree). The idea of government investment in "grassroots women-led enterprises that contribute to a greener economy" specifically received 81% agreement.

Other solutions were framed around social protection, with a strong lens on equity and affordability. For example, 92% of people agreed that "the government should subsidise renewable energy to make sure it is affordable for all people" and "our government should be building more energy-efficient social housing for those who need it". The need for government action to support workers also had strong support, with 87% of participants rejecting both the idea that “the government should keep subsidising the coal and gas sector to ensure people don’t lose their jobs” and that “workers impacted by energy transitions should be left to find new jobs on their own”.

Whole-of-society, whole-of-economy transitions

100% AGREEMENT

“We need to move away from an economic model the encourages overconsumption and waste."

99% AGREEMENT

“Our future economy needs to be green, fair and circular where we eliminate waste & pollution by design, reuse, repair & recycling."

86% AGREEMENT

"One way we could create more green jobs is by investing in the 'care economy' (e.g. healthcare, aged care, social assistance services, and early childhood education)."

People don't see the need for action as limited to fossil fuels or even the energy sector itself. Instead, people were clear in their vision for whole-of-society, whole-of-economy transitions, with 23 of the 24 statements on this theme being submitted by participants. The need to go beyond the energy sector was specifically raised, with 97% agreeing that “sustainable transition policy needs to address more than energy – we need strategies to address transition of all infrastructure systems.”

People were also united in wanting to see us move away from existing economic models based on growth and overconsumption towards a future economy that is "green, fair and circular where we eliminate waste & pollution by design, reuse, repair & recycling”.



Urgency

89% AGREEMENT

“Nepal has shown what 1° change means - the difference between melting and freezing. We MUST limit temperature rises. Stop Fossil fuels."

90% AGREEMENT

“Australia’s clean energy transition must be driven by urgency, justice, and inclusion."

96% AGREEMENT

"Protecting biodiversity, preserving ecosystems and protecting what wilderness remains must be a priority in our approach to climate justice."

Underlying people’s calls for accountability and action was an overwhelming a sense of urgency. The connection between fossil fuels and the recent flooding in Nepal – as one example of the catastrophic effects of climate-induced disasters – was clear to many.

The tone of people’s submissions also conveyed their frustration and indignation at the lack of action to date, with many putting it in existential terms, using phrases like “our house is on fire”, “[fossil fuels are] killing us” and emphasising the need to act on climate “if we are to have a future” and “before it is too late for us all”.



Where are the opportunities to learn more?

In addition to agreement around key principles of just transition, people's engagement with Pol.is also revealed gaps in terms of the issues highlighted – indicating possible opportunities to increase people's knowledge and understanding of the topic.

For example, while people overall strongly valued equity and diversity in participation, some of their responses indicated what could be different levels of understanding when it comes to how the climate crisis is felt by different groups of people. The statement "different groups of people (e.g. women, people with disabilities, migrants, young people) have different needs in the energy transition" had a relatively high pass rate of 19% and a disagree rate of 5%, showing that there is an opportunity to educate people further in this area.

Another area was around the connection between gender equality and climate change. The seed statement "addressing gender equality will also help solve the climate crisis" received 74% agreement but a 21% pass rate and 5% disagree, showing again a possible lower level of understanding of this connection – even from a group of people that we can assume is relatively supportive of progress across both issues.

The health impacts of climate change were only referenced in two participant submissions, despite being a well-documented – and gendered – issue in Australia. The link between gender-based violence and climate change was completely absent, despite evidence that gender-based violence increases in climate emergencies, and in communities undergoing economic transitions. Lastly, investment in the care economy – a key pillar of feminist solutions to the climate crisis – was largely supported by people taking part in the survey. But a higher pass rate on some statements relating to this topic again shows the need for greater discussion and awareness of it.

This is consistent with other research which shows that the gendered impacts of climate change are rarely discussed in mainstream conversations about climate change in the Australia while understanding of the connection between gender and climate remains low.

While gender-based violence does not feature in the principles of just transitions established by the COP30 decision, health and the care economy are both included several times. However, all three feature in another COP30 decision – the Belem Gender Action Plan – which invites Parties and observers to make submissions on the findings of national assessments on health, care and violence against women in the context of gender and climate change. These submissions provide an important opportunity for the Australian government, as well as feminist, women's rights and climate organisations, to increase the evidence base and public awareness of these intersections in the Australian context.



What should the Australian Government do?

Your responses make it clear – Australians value equity, participation and intergenerational justice, and want to see urgent accountability and action from our government and the private sector as part of whole-of-society, whole-of-economy transitions.

At this year's COP31, we have the opportunity to move this forward at the international level through a mechanism that can provide meaningful, practical support to governments worldwide about how to incorporate justice in their transition to greener economies and societies. And as President of Negotiations, Australia has the chance to champion the participation of diverse groups in these COP processes.

As COP31 President of Negotiations, the Australian Government could make this a reality by:

- **Demonstrating global leadership on just transitions** by stewarding agreement for operationalisation of the Belém-Antalya Mechanism for Just Transitions at COP31.

- **Use the High-Level Event on engaging all women, girls, men and boys as agents of change for socially just transitions to advance discussions on the role of gender in just transitions**, including meaningful discussion on the role of patriarchal masculinities in the climate crisis; the gendered risks of un-just transitions including gender-based violence; and the role of paid and unpaid care in building greener economies.

→ **Protect, enable and strengthen the safety and participation of all civil society groups – especially LBGTQIA+ people, First Nations people and women environmental human rights defenders – at COP31.** As President of Negotiations, Australia should publicly commit to championing safety and rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and freedom of association for all participants before, during and after COP31 and work with the COP President and UNFCCC Secretariat to uphold this safety in practice.

To advance just transitions in Australia, the Australian Government should:

→ **Take urgent action to facilitate a just transition away from fossil fuels**, decoupling Australia's economy from the extraction, use and export of fossil fuels – all while ensuring just outcomes for communities most affected by this transition.

→ **Ensure diverse stakeholders can participate in, and meaningfully impact, decisions made about Australia's energy and economic transitions.** At minimum this should include: workers affected by transitions; informal workers; people in vulnerable situations; Indigenous Peoples; local communities; migrants and internally displaced persons; people of African descent; women; children; youth; elderly people; and persons with disabilities.

→ **Support initiatives to increase awareness and understanding of different people's needs in the energy transition**, including women, First Nations communities, people with disabilities, refugees and migrants, older and younger people.

→ **Establish a Commissioner for Future Generations and explore legislative and policy hooks to strengthen the integration of intergenerational justice across Australian policy-making.** This could include legislation on the wellbeing of future generations, a dedicated Budget Statement, and guidelines for assessment and reporting of intergenerational impacts in policy and programming processes.

→ **Redirect fossil fuel subsidies – currently $16 billion per year – towards whole-of-society just transitions.** This should include funding to support just transitions in Australia, and the tripling of Australia's climate finance to $11bn over five years, in line with the global goal. Climate finance should be grant-based and give priority to those most impacted by the transition, women's rights organisations, Indigenous organisations and grassroots communities.

→ **Establish a Climate Pollution Levy on coal, gas and oil corporations to finance the establishment of a Climate Compensation Fund.** This fund could support communities on the frontlines of the climate crisis – especially Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities – and support just transitions at the community level.

→ **Meet obligations under the Belém Gender Action Plan by undertaking a national assessment of the intersecting impacts of gender and climate change on health, Violence Against Women and care to inform reporting due in March 2027**. Australia's submission should provide a starting point to develop a comprehensive national strategy on gender equality and climate change developed through consultation with women and gender diverse people around Australia.

→ **Invest in the care economy by prioritising the sectors that sustain life** including healthcare, aged care, early childhood and ongoing education, care for older people and people with disabilities, and social protection systems.

→ **Move towards transforming the economic systems that have caused the climate crisis, starting with annual reporting on Australia's economy using measurements that go beyond GDP to capture environmental and gendered externalities.** This could draw from the existing Measure What Matters Framework and the Beyond GDP indicator dashboard developed by the UN High-Level Expert Group, which includes indicators covering current well-being, equity and inclusion, sustainability and resilience, along with foundational principles of peace, human rights and respect for the planet.

What comes next?

This year's climate talks are an important moment for our government to show leadership on just transitions on the global stage.

But the true test of their commitment will be at home. Taking urgent, equitable, and participatory action to move Australia away from fossil fuels towards a greener, care-based economy will require bold leadership and a firm commitment to the principles of justice for both those most marginalised in our society today, and for generations to come.

These are changes we know need to be made urgently - and urgency can be a weapon wielded by those who don't see, or don't care, about the need for justice. At the same time, the importance of ensuring 'justice' can be used – whether in good faith or not – to delay climate action. This was most recently illustrated by the NSW Independent Planning Commission's approval of an extended licence for the Hunter Valley Operations coalmine until 2045, with the justification that this would "provide economic stability for the Hunter region and support a more orderly transition for workers, businesses and communities as the coal industry changes over time".

When urgency and justice are played off against each other, no one wins.

A truly just transition must be implemented on a timescale that allows us to get ahead of irreversible harms and impacts on people and planet. At the same time, accounting for justice in this transition will enable greater ambition in the actions we choose by ensuring equity, creating broad community support and making sure that we all can enjoy the benefits of a greener future.

The findings of our research show that Australians believe action on climate change can create a more just society. It's time for the Australian Government to make this a reality.

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