

POLICY PAPER

ON FEMINIST CLIMATE JUSTICE

NOVEMBER 2025

Executive Summary

Climate change is accelerating social, environmental, and economic instability. Women, girls, and gender-diverse people bear the brunt of its impacts, shaped by systemic inequalities in power, resources, and decision-making. These gendered dimensions of climate change are often made invisible in policy and planning, limiting the fairness and effectiveness of global responses.

Feminist climate justice goes beyond inclusion; it demands transformation. As a feminist organization, IWDA calls for replacing extractive, profit-driven systems with economies centered on care, equality, and sustainability.

Australia, as one of the world's highest per-capita emitters and a major fossil fuel exporter, has both a moral and strategic responsibility to lead and is itself experiencing the escalating effects of climate change, which are only set to grow.

This paper outlines IWDA's position on how Australia can deliver feminist climate justice through domestic and regional actions on four priorities:

- 1. Take necessary action to ensure a 1.5°C aligned transition.**
- 2. Commit Australia's fair share of climate finance to resource feminist climate action.**
- 3. Ensure inclusive and gender-responsive climate governance.**
- 4. Strengthen accountability, intersectional data, and evidence.**

Framing Feminist Climate Justice

Power, People, and Planet

Climate change refers to long-term shifts in temperatures, weather patterns, and ecosystems caused by human activity. It is not only an environmental crisis but also a social, political, and economic one compounding inequality, driving displacement, and threatening livelihoods, health, and human rights.

Climate change is not gender neutral¹. While its effects reach everyone, women and gender-diverse people already marginalized by structural inequalities face the greatest risks. These risks are further compounded by intersecting identities such as Indigeneity, race, disability, class, sexuality, and geography, which shape how individuals experience vulnerability, resilience, and access to recovery.

Unequal access to power, resources, and decision-making means they carry out the heaviest burdens of both the immediate and long-term consequences of climate-related disasters. These risks are further compounded by intersecting forms of marginalization which shape how people experience and respond to the impacts of climate change.

While participation and leadership of women in all their diversity within the existing power structures that govern our world is a critical first step, feminist climate justice demands more than just participation within existing systems – it seeks to transform those systems altogether. The current global economic model — extractive capitalism — is itself a key driver of both climate change and gender inequality. As the dominant system, it is built on three interlinked principles fundamentally at odds with climate and gender justice: growth, consumption, and labor. Since the 1980s, late-stage capitalism has demanded levels of growth and consumption that exceed planetary boundaries, directly fueling environmental degradation and climate instability². At the same time, it depends on entrenched gender norms that render women's unpaid care work invisible, yet essential estimated by Oxfam to be worth at least USD 10.8 trillion annually. Capitalism's ability to sustain itself is therefore premised on gender inequality to the same extent that it

¹ Women's Environmental Leadership Australia (WELA) (2023), *Gender, Climate and Environmental Justice in Australia* <https://wela.org.au/gender-climate-report/>

² <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2542519624003103>

relies on unsustainable exploitation of people and the planet³. Transforming this economic system into one rooted in care, equality, and regeneration is central to achieving both climate and gender justice.

In practice, this “care economy”⁴ approach prioritizes sectors that sustain life, healthcare, education, sustainable food systems, care work, and community energy over those that exploit. It also means redefining progress through measures of wellbeing: reduction in gender-based violence, a more equitable distribution of unpaid care work, access to clean energy, stronger community connectedness, and greater climate resilience in frontline communities.

IWDA's Commitment to Climate and Gender Justice

Using Locational Power for Regional Feminist Advocacy

Climate change is a global threat that transcends borders but is felt unevenly. Geography, gender, and access to resources determine who experiences its impacts most severely and who has the power to shape policy and access funding to respond. For the Pacific and Asia, two of the most climate vulnerable regions, adaptation and mitigation are inseparable from the pursuit of gender equality.

IWDA's Strategic Framework (2025-2035)⁵ commits to advancing gendered climate justice because the systems of power that are driving climate harm are the same ones that are underpinning ongoing gender inequality. The strategy recognizes that climate change amplifies gender inequality, and that feminist responses are essential to achieving sustainable development and justice.

IWDA leverages its locational power to advocate for climate action in Australia and connect local advocacy to regional and global movements. We stand with feminist movements and organizations across Australia, the Pacific, and Asia to amplify their voices through advocacy, media and communications, and ensure that lived experiences shape global climate agendas.

The Climate Crisis in the Pacific and Asia: Frontline Feminist Realities

Unequal Impacts and Gendered Vulnerabilities

Pacific Islands nations and many Asian countries are on the frontlines of the climate crisis. Despite contributing least to global greenhouse gas emissions, they face the most severe and immediate consequences. People in the Asia-Pacific are five times more likely to experience a natural disaster than those elsewhere, with over 2 million lives lost since 1970⁶.

Low-lying states such as Kiribati, Tuvalu, Fiji, Solomon Islands face existential threats: rising seas, saltwater intrusions, stronger cyclones, and coral reef collapse⁷. Across Asia, erratic monsoons and intensifying typhoons undermine agriculture, driving food insecurity, economic instability, and displacement.

- As resources become scarcer, women and girls spend more hours collecting water and fuel, increasing their exposure to violence, and reducing time for education or paid work. During

³ <https://www.oxfam.org/en/not-all-gaps-are-created-equal-true-value-care-work>

⁴ *Economic Security for Women (eS4W) (2023)*, “The Australian Care Economy.” <https://www.security4women.org.au/overarching-focus-womens-lifelong-economic-sustainability/the-australian-care-economy/>

⁵ *International Women's Development Agency (IWDA) (2024)*, *IWDA Strategic Plan 2025–2035*. <https://iwda.org.au/what-we-do/iwda-strategic-plan-2025-2035/>

⁶ [1] *Global Campus of Human Rights (2023)*, “Climate-Related Emergencies on the Rise in Asia and the Pacific: Are We Prepared?” <https://www.gchumanrights.org/preparedness/climate-related-emergencies-on-the-rise-in-asia-and-the-pacific-are-we-prepared/>

⁷ *United Nations Information Centre (UNIC) for the Pacific (2023)*, “Q&A with Mozaharul Alam, UNEP Coordinator for Climate Action in Asia.” <https://www.un.org/en/information-center-pacific-unic/qa-unic-canberra-mozaharul-alam-unep-coordinator-climate-action-asia>

periods of scarcity, women and girls often eat less or last, and may go hungry to ensure others in their households are fed.⁸

- Extreme events lead to spikes in gender-based violence, including domestic abuse and sexual exploitation during displacement. They also dramatically increase women's unpaid care work, as women take on greater responsibilities for caring for children, the elderly, and the sick, while managing disrupted livelihoods.
- Disaster disrupts sexual and reproductive health services, leading to higher maternal mortality and unmet contraception needs.
- Women farmers, who form the majority of smallholder agricultural labor, face declining yields, limited access to credit, and exclusion from adaptation finance.

Feminist Leadership and Local Agency in Action

Despite these challenges, Pacific and Asian feminists are leading solutions. Through networks such as the Pacific Feminist Forums⁹ and Pacific Island Feminist Alliance for Climate Justice¹⁰, women's rights organizations are demanding accountability from high-emission countries and mobilizing for gender-responsive disaster management. These movements demonstrate that frontline communities are leaders of resilience and justice.

Australia's Role and Responsibility

From rhetoric to Responsibility: Aligning with a 1.5°C Pathway

As one of the world's highest per-capita emitters¹¹ and a major fossil fuel exporter¹², Australia bears both a moral and practical responsibility to act. Moral, because its economic prosperity has been built on industries driving global climate harm; and practical, because its own communities and neighbours are already experiencing the escalating impacts of climate change. Under the Paris Agreement's principle of Common but Differential Responsibilities¹³ countries are required to drastically reduce emissions. While Australia's legislated targets to cut emissions by 62-70 per cent below 2005 levels by 2035-mark progress¹⁴, they remain inconsistent with a 1.5°C pathway, which requires at least 76 per cent reduction by 2030¹⁵. The Australian Government's ongoing subsidization of fossil fuels, estimated at AUD 11 billion annually, further undermines this commitment and weaken regional trust¹⁶.

⁸ World Food Programme USA (2023), "Women and Hunger." Available at: <https://www.wfpusa.org/hunger/issues/women/>

⁹ Pacific Feminist Forum (2019), "Pacific Feminist Charter for Change." <https://pacificfeministforum.org/>

⁷ World Pulse (2023), "Building on Decades of Pacific Activism: One Year of PIFA4CJ." <https://www.worldpulse.org/story/building-on-decades-of-pacific-activism-one-year-of-pifa4cj-55973>

¹¹ The Guardian (2023), "Australia Has Highest Per-Capita CO₂ Emissions from Coal in G20, Analysis Finds." <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/sep/05/australia-has-highest-per-capita-co2-emissions-from-coal-in-g20-analysis-finds>

¹² Climate Analytics (2023), "Dug Up in Australia, Burned Around the World: Exporting Fossil Fuels Undermines Climate Targets." <https://climateanalytics.org/comment/dug-up-in-australia-burned-around-the-world-exporting-fossil-fuels-undermines-climate-targets>

¹³ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (2023), "The Explainer: The Paris Agreement." <https://unfccc.int/news/the-explainer-the-paris-agreement>

¹⁴ Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) (2024), "Australia's Pathway to Net Zero." Australian Government <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/climate-change/emissions-reduction/net-zero>

¹⁵ Climate Analytics (2024), "Australia's Insufficient Target 'Baffling' in Light of Its Climate Risk Assessment." <https://climateanalytics.org/press-releases/australias-insufficient-target-baffling-in-light-of-its-climate-risk-assessment>

¹⁶ The Australia Institute (2023), "Australian Fossil Fuel Subsidies Surge to \$11.6 Billion in 2021–22." Available at: <https://australiainstitute.org.au/post/australian-fossil-fuel-subsidies-surge-to-11-6-billion-in-2021-22/>

Recognising Gendered Dimensions in Australian Domestic Policies

The 2019–2020 Black Summer bushfires which ravaged multiple states in Australia¹⁷ revealed that climate disasters reinforce gender inequality: women’s unpaid care work soared and SRHR services collapsed^{18,19}.²⁰ Despite bearing these disproportionate impacts, women especially First Nations, migrant, and rural women, remain under-represented in decision-making²¹.

Australia’s strategy²¹ must embed intersectional gender analysis across all sectors from energy and infrastructure to adaptation, aid, and finance recognising that climate justice and gender equality are inseparable. The Government’s *Working for Women: Australia’s Gender Equality Strategy*²² makes only limited reference to climate change, mentioning it just six times across 100 pages. A truly gender-responsive approach requires integrating climate action throughout this strategy and ensuring that all areas of domestic policy are informed by a climate-sensitive and intersectional analysis.

Feminist and First Nations Leadership: Pathways to Resilience

Across Australia, Asia and the Pacific, feminist and First Nation leaders are creating solutions that combine environmental sustainability with social justice.

Pacific Women’s Climate Leadership

Fiji Women’s Weather Watch by FemLinkPacific²³ trains women to share early warnings and gender-sensitive disaster information with remote communities, saving lives during cyclones.

In Vanuatu, women’s cooperatives lead mangroves restoration and eco-enterprises initiatives that regenerate ecosystems and provide sustainable livelihoods²⁴.

First Nations Women’s Environmental Stewardship

First Nations are revitalizing land and fire management through cultural burning and traditional ecological knowledge²⁵. Leaders such as Vanessa Cavanagh (Bundjalung/Wonnarua) and Bianca

¹⁷ Country Fire Authority (CFA) (2024), “2019–2020 Bushfires.” <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/about-us/history-major-fires/major-fires/2019-2020-bushfires>

¹⁸ UN Women (2023), “Australia: Domestic Violence Increase During Disasters.” *Women’s Resilience to Disasters (WRD) Platform* <https://wrd.unwomen.org/explore/insights/australia-domestic-violence-increase-during-disasters>

¹⁹ Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) (2025), “General Practitioner Disaster Support: A Critical Role in Disaster Preparedness and Recovery.” *Australian Journal of General Practice*, January–February 2025 <https://www1.racgp.org.au/ajgp/2025/january-february/general-practitioner-disaster-support>

²⁰ Cullen, B., & Ankamah-Yeboah, I. (2025), “Gender-Responsive Climate Financing: Ensuring Equity in Adaptation and Mitigation Investments.” *Environmental Advances*, Volume 16, 2025, Article 100320 <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2590332225002805>

²¹ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) (2023), *Australia’s International Gender Equality Strategy*. Australian Government. <https://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/development/australias-international-gender-equality-strategy>

²² Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PMC) (2024), *Working for Women: Australia’s Gender Equality Strategy*. Australian Government. <https://www.pmc.gov.au/office-women/working-women-strategy-gender-equality>

²³ ActionAid Australia (2023), “Innovation Station: Women’s Weather Watch, Fiji.” <https://actionaid.org.au/articles/innovation-station-womens-weather-watch-fiji/>

²⁴ ActionAid Australia (2023), “Ni-Vanuatu Women Leading Solutions.” <https://actionaid.org.au/programs/ni-vanuatu-women-leading-solutions/>

²⁵ Yadav, P., & Lal, R. (2021), “Linking Climate Change and Gender Equality: Evidence from Global Studies.” *Geoforum*, Volume 121, 2021, pp. 67–78 <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0016718521000233>

McNeair (Malgana) show how women's knowledge strengthens biodiversity and resilience²⁶. The Wiyi Yani U Thangani ²⁷project calls for embedding First Nations Women's and authority in environmental governance as equal decision-makers.

These stories prove that feminist and First-Nation led initiatives are not peripheral; they are essential to effective, inclusive climate action.

Policy Directions for Feminist Climate Justice

IWDA calls on the Australian Government to act across four interconnected priorities:

Recommendation 1: Ensure a 1.5°C aligned transition

Adopt a 1.5°C consistent target of at least 75% emissions reduction by 2030 and legislate a coal and gas phase-out²⁸. End fossil fuel subsidies and redirect investments to climate finance, renewable energy, care infrastructure, and resilient public services. Ensure women, First Nation people, and gender-diverse workers have equitable access to new green jobs, training, ownership, and decision-making in the energy sector²⁹. Integrate gender-responsive transition measures that prioritise investment in feminised industries such as care, health, and education recognising that a just transition must also rebalance labour markets historically dominated by men in high-emission industries³⁰.

Recommendation 2: Commit Australia's fair share of climate finance to resource feminist climate action:

Establish a dedicated Gender and Climate Fund of at least AUD 300 million within Australia's aid program to resource feminist-led climate action, prioritizing locally led solutions. Triple grant-based climate finance to \$11 billion over 2025-2030, in line with the tripling of the global climate finance goal and commit an additional \$300m in dedicated loss and damage support, reflecting Australia's fair share based on its economic capacity, high per-capita emissions, and regional responsibility to climate-vulnerable nations³¹. Ensure this finance includes investment in First Nations-led adaptation initiatives, and direct ODA to women's rights organizations, ensuring funds reach those on the frontlines of the crisis.

Recommendation 3: Ensure Inclusive and Gender-Responsive Governance

²⁶ *Women's Agenda* (2023), "First Nations Women Have the Blueprint for Climate Leadership in Australia." <https://womensagenda.com.au/latest/first-nations-women-have-the-blueprint-for-climate-leadership-in-australia/>

²⁷ *Australian Human Rights Commission* (2023), "Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices): Securing Our Rights, Securing Our Future." <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-social-justice/projects/wiyi-yanu-thangani-womens>

²⁸ *The Guardian* (2022), "Australia Urged to Adopt 75% Emissions Reduction Target by 2035 If It Is to Reach Net Zero." <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/sep/28/australia-urged-to-adopt-75-emissions-reduction-target-by-2035-if-it-is-to-reach-net-zero>

²⁹ *Clean Energy Council* (2023), "Diversity in Renewables." <https://cleanenergycouncil.org.au/working-in-clean-energy/diversity-in-renewables>

³⁰ Hemmati, M., & Denton, F. (2025), "Feminist Perspectives on Just Energy Transitions: Reimagining Equity and Participation in Climate Policy." *Energy Research & Social Science*, Volume 113, 2025, Article 103346 <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2214629625003846>

³¹ *ActionAid Australia & Climate Action Network Australia (CANA)* (2025), *Financing Survival: Australia's New Climate Finance Goal and the Global Just Transition*. Briefing Paper <https://actionaid.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/2025-Financing-Survival-Australias-new-climate-finance-goal-and-the-global-just-transition-CANA-Briefing-Paper.pdf>

Appoint a Minister for Gender and Climate to champion whole-of-government accountability. Implement gender and diversity quotas across all climate-related decision-making bodies including those responsible for disaster response, energy transition, and adaptation planning to ensure women, First Nations peoples, and gender-diverse leaders have equal representation and influence³². Embed First Nation co-design principles in line with Wiyi Yani U Thangani. As outlined in the report, ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's authority, knowledge, and decision-making are central to all climate, energy, and adaptation of governance. This includes resourcing First Nations-led representative structures and embedding free, prior, and informed consent in all climate policies.³³

Recommendation 4: Strengthen Accountability and Intersectional Evidence

Ensure all climate investments across domestic and international policy are based on intersectional gender analysis, drawing on good practice established in DFAT's International Gender Equality Strategy³⁴. Require annual DFAT reporting on gender outcomes across all climate finance including the proportion of funding reaching local women's rights and First Nation organizations³⁵. Invest in domestic and international research on gender health impacts particularly mental health, reproductive health, and gender-based violence to guide equitable adaptation policies³⁶.

The importance of intersectional data is also critical to understanding how people experience impacts differently. Individual-level measurement is needed to capture the influence of gender, disability, age, location, sociocultural background, and income on climate vulnerability and resilience. Strengthening this evidence base is essential to design policies that enable people to respond and adapt to climate shocks and advance both climate and gender justice. Continued resourcing of Australia's leadership in advancing individual-measurement methods is climate action.

Reimagining Justice: A Feminist Vision for the Future

Climate change is the defining challenge of our time and a defining test of justice. A feminist climate justice approach recognizes that addressing this crisis is not simply about reducing emissions, but also about transforming the systems that caused it. By centering care, equity and First Nations knowledge, Australia can move from an extractive model of growth towards an economy that sustain people and planet alike.

³² *Women's Environmental Leadership Australia (WELA) (2023), Gender, Climate and Environmental Justice in Australia.* Available at: <https://wela.org.au/gender-climate-report/>

³³ *Australian Human Rights Commission (2020), Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices): Securing Our Rights, Securing Our Future*, pp. 84–89 <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-social-justice/projects/wiyi-yanu-thangani-womens>

³⁴ *Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) (2023), New International Gender Equality Strategy.* Australian Government. Available at: <https://www.dfat.gov.au/international-relations/themes/gender-equality/new-international-gender-equality-strategy>

³⁵ *International Funders for Indigenous Peoples (IFIP) (2023), "Commitments in Action: Direct Funding to Empower Indigenous Women in Climate Resilience."* Available at: <https://internationalfunders.org/event/commitments-in-action-direct-funding-to-empower-indigenous-women-in-climate-resilience/>

³⁶ *National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) (2024), "\$11 Million to Build and Grow Australian Research on Climate Change and Health."* Australian Government. Available at: <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/news-centre/11-million-build-and-grow-australian-research-climate-change-and-health>