The climate is changing and so should we

By Sharmila Nagar
Vice President

There is a growing community of support across our public schools and TAFEsto address the climate emergency anda need to embed sustainable practices across all aspects of schools and TAFEs.

Your union is ready to implement further action in relation to the climate crisis and its impact on education.

As mentioned previously, in December 2021 Executive endorsed 15 recommendations from SSTUWA's response to the Education and Health Standing Committee Inquiry into the response of Western Australian schools to climate change.

These were presented to delegates at June State Council Conference. We touched upon several of them in the April 2022 issue of Western Teacher.

Below is the full set of recommendations, which state:

1. The SSTUWA supports the framework outlined by Education International and calls on the Australian government to deliver on our commitments to Climate Change Education and Education for Sustainable Development in the Paris Agreement (article 12) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (targets 4.7, 12.8 and 13.3).

2. That a joint consultative committee with SSTUWA representation is established to develop and progress Climate Change Education (CCE) and action and sustainable practices for infrastructure and maintenance of public school and TAFE sites.

3. The SSTUWA is the key industrial body representing public school teachers, leaders and TAFE lecturers in WA. The SSTUWA seeks recognition as a stakeholder in the development of government and Department of Education (DoE) policies, procedures and guidelines on climate action and sustainability practices in public school and TAFE settings.

4. The SSTUWA seeks recognition as a key stakeholder in the development of quality Climate Change Education (CCE) and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) resources and programs with School Curriculum and Standards Authority (SCSA). There is a clear need for curriculum to include more explicit and far- reaching responses to anthropogenic climate change. The expression "climate emergency" ought to be explicitly used when referring to climate change to convey the sense of urgency around which there is scientific consensus. The SSTUWA seeks opportunities for our members to play an integral part in how climate change curriculum and action can be integrated in diverse contexts for all students.

5. That the DoE assist and support all schools and require them to include sustainability in their operational plans as an area of priority. This ought to involve the setting of targets to reduce our ecological footprint through consumption of resources, the recovery and reuse of existing resources and by encouraging more sustainable consumption and waste management across the system. This sustainability drive is to be resourced by the department so that it does not come at the expense of other priority areas.

6. That climate change and education for sustainability be embedded into course design in the development of preservice education courses at university.

7. That a directorate within the DoE is established to develop systemic practices, processes for schools to address the climate emergency and through CCE, ESD and improved sustainability practices. That recurrent funding beyond the Student-Centred Funding Model (SCFM) is provided for this and that additional workstreams involved are not added

to those already faced by overstretched and under resourced schools and TAFE institutions.

8. That recurrent funding be provided to SCSA to develop quality CCE and curriculum resources to enable diverse climate action to occur in schools and communities and to ensure that all schools are equipped to play their part in tackling the climate emergency.

9. That recurrent funding is provided for regular PD opportunities for all School Education Act staff and TAFE lecturers in WA to develop their understanding of CCE and Education for Sustainability.

10. That quality CCE and Education for Sustainability professional learning is delivered by a dedicated team of qualified and experienced lead teachers through DoE.

11. That the diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander understandings about sustainability and caring for country be actively sought and used to guide the design and implementation of local, regional and national policies and initiatives in addressing the climate emergency. That genuine and ongoing consultation is held with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and understanding of climate, climate change and sustainability is incorporated into curriculum resources and teacher education.

12. That a systemic plan is enacted by the state government and DoE to replace/upgrade school and TAFE infrastructure so that they are energy efficient and sustainable institutions.

13. That climate-proofing elements are developed in the planning of all public schools and TAFE worksites, actioned throughout the construction and maintenance stages.

14. That staff and students in WA public schools and TAFEs are provided with opportunities to engage in meaningful CCE and Education for Sustainability activities to assist in managing eco anxiety and a range of systemic supports are established to support schools, TAFEs and students in this area.

15. That the prevalence and impact of eco and climate anxiety, as reported in numerous studies, among students and school staff be acknowledged and addressed through the provision of additional Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA), Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) and Australian Counselling Association (ACA) accredited mental health professionals such as psychologists, social workers and counsellors.

The AEU adopted a public education and climate emergency policy at its annual Federal Conference in April.

It emphasises that the climate emergency facing us is the most urgent and defining challenge of our time and AEU has a responsibility to influence change by leading advocacy efforts.

A key part of the policy is the importance of First Nations knowledge to the climate crisis, it reads: “Australia has the oldest ongoing Indigenous culture on earth.

We have a unique opportunity to learn and embrace First Nations knowledge to understand and act on the climate emergency. This will only happen if First Nations voices and leadership are embraced.”

This sits alongside “the AEU’s belief that education curriculum must be transformed to catalyse the fight against the climate emergency and to support

a just transition to a more sustainable world. Students have a right to gain all the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to sustain our world for present and future generations.”

“The policy clarifies that tackling the climate emergency will only be possible through ensuring the public school system, public TAFE network and preschools are fully resourced.”

You can read the policy in more detail by visiting bit.ly/3xUlGEOt The SSTUWA will continue to provide feedback to this policy as we move forward.

Following the SSTUWA’s response to the Education and Health Standing Committee’s Inquiry into the response of Western Australian schools to climate change, a plan will be drafted to implement the union’s 15 recommendations with specific actions over the next few years.

An internal working committee has been established that meets regularly to discuss new research, professional learning and

political information to drive the 15 recommendations. We will continue to raise awareness with our members on climate change education via the union's communication channels such as the SSTUWA website, social media and Western Teacher magazine.

At June State Council Conference, we sought expressions of interest for our committee for 2023 – stay tuned for more updates in that area.

The conference also saw a guest panel convened to discuss climate education for sustainability.

SSTUWA Executive Committee member Geoff Holt was joined by WA Institute for Education Research President Dr Sonja Kuzich, Australian Youth Climate Coalition member Maddie Sarre and waste educator, author and speaker Lindsay Miles in discussing the very topics and issues covered in this article.

You can read more on page 20 of this Western Teacher about the role of educators in tackling the climate emergency in part two of Education International President Susan Hopgood's speech to AEU Federal Conference.

Authorised by Sally Dennis, General Secretary, The State School Teachers' Union of W.A.
ABN 54 478 094 635 © 2026