Harsh lessons of climate change

Kaya and happy new year. As we enter the Bunuru season here in the southwest, the hottest time of the year, it certainly feels as though the sweltering conditions are getting worse every year, with more extreme weather patterns becoming a regular occurrence.

Our First Nations people have been warning us for years about the detrimental impact of climate crisis on the land. The recent devastating floods in the Kimberley region, which caused record levels of damage to homes and infrastructure, highlight the urgency to combat climate change.

The SSTUWA sympathises with members in the region who have been impacted by floods and continues to render whatever assistance to them that we can.

At the same time, we need to start thinking about what we are doing to address the climate change crisis and put in sustainable practices in our workplace.

You may recall that last year the SSTUWA submitted recommendations towards the Inquiry into the Response of Western Australian Schools to Climate Change.

The Making Hope Practical Report tabled 24 recommendations to the government from its findings of the submissions.

The government's response supported six, noted 13 and did not support five. A summary of the recommendations supported follows below.

Note that the report was delivered before the Education and Training ministerial portfolios were separated, hence the wording "Minister for Education and Training".

Recommendation 1

That the Minister for Education and Training ensures that the wide range of co-benefits of climate action in schools is promoted in the Department of Education's frameworks, policies and initiatives, and that these co-benefits are given recognition by commensurate funding for sustainability initiatives.

Government's response

Supported in principle - The Department of Education's Caring for Country Together - Our Sustainability Framework provides a whole-of-agency approach to sustainability and emphasises the co-benefits of sustainability across three focus areas – curriculum, infrastructure and operations. Sustainability initiatives are funded in Western Australian Schools in a number of ways.

Schools are provided with a one-line budget and can choose to allocate funding to sustainability initiatives if this is a school priority. Additionally, the School Clean Energy Technology Fund, a McGowan Government election commitment, is providing funding for schools to undertake a range of sustainability initiatives.

The $44.6 million fund will provide rooftop solar panels at 28 schools in the Kimberley and Pilbara regions and seven new virtual power plants at schools in Kalgoorlie, Geraldton and the mid-west region, with the remaining funding available for schools to apply for to implement clean energy solutions.

Recommendation 5

That the Minister for Education and Training ensures that the rollout of the sustainability framework is supported by clear and ongoing communication to schools about its priority, and comprehensive professional development for school staff.

Government's response

Supported - The Department of Education is currently implementing a communications plan to support and promote the rollout of the Sustainability Framework across the organisation and reinforce sustainability as a priority for the Department and schools. Actions already in progress include:

- Regular email communications to all principals, schools and the Department promoting sustainability activities and initiatives linked to the Framework.
- Dedicated Department intranet content, including the Framework's "roadmap" for schools and central services staff to assess current sustainability initiatives, understand where they currently are on the sustainability continuum and identify what they can do to move further along the continuum.
- Online case studies and a video to demonstrate how our schools are "Caring for Country" together.
- Dedicated pages on the Department's public website to promote the Sustainability Framework.
- Social media posts on the Department's Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram channels to promote sustainability initiatives.

The second phase of the communications plan is currently in development. This will further socialise the Framework, highlight its priority and promote professional development opportunities for school staff including administrators, teachers, education assistants and support staff such as gardeners and cleaners.

Recommendation 11

The Minister for Education and Training ensures that the Department's Sustainability Unit and internal reference group formulate a plan to promote the benefits of climate action to school corporate services managers and facilitate training.

Government's response

Supported - The Department of Education will work with the Sustainability Reference Group to develop a plan to promote the benefits of climate action to school managers corporate services (MCSs) and facilitate training.

Recommendation 13

That the Minister for Education and Training ensures that the Department's strategic approach to climate-friendly infrastructure and operations prioritises communities that are particularly vulnerable to climate change.

Government's response

Supported - The Government supports the recommendation and notes the Department of Education has commenced planning for a review of the Primary School Brief and Secondary School Planning Guide. This review will address themes such as climate change adaptation and mitigation. The Department is currently undertaking a Building Condition Assessment program across all public schools that will inform future upgrade, replacement and maintenance programs.

Recommendation 14

That the Minister for Education and Training ensures that the Department of Education incorporates benchmarks for resource consumption in schools and provides funding for schools to be audited to assist them to achieve these benchmarks.

Government's response

Supported in principle - The Department of Education recognises the value of benchmarking and target-setting for resource consumption in schools and is investigating ways to measure, monitor and evaluate the emissions avoided due to the implementation of sustainability initiatives/programs.

Recommendation 20

That the Minister for Education and Training ensures that waste management services and infrastructure are improved at a departmental level to support a reduction in waste to landfill. This should include funding for infrastructure and guidance to schools on implementing systems appropriate to their context.

Government's response

Supported in principle - The Department of Education is focused on ensuring that waste management services and infrastructure are improved to support a reduction in waste to landfill, in support of the Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Strategy 2030. The Department will continue with the following initiatives to encourage broader roll-out across the system.

Of the recommendations not supported, the government has provided alternative approaches on how to incorporate the intent of some of the recommendations.

In particular, in regards to Recommendation 24 (The Minister for Education and Training advocates at a national level, through the Education Ministers Meeting, for incorporating competencies for sustainability and climate change in national teaching standards), the approach will be to raise *"sustainability with the Deans of WA Universities to explore opportunities to strengthen competencies in university teaching qualifications. The Minister for Education and Training will raise this with the Vice Chancellors of the WA Universities at the next Western Australian Higher Education Council."*

Not surprisingly, funding at the school level seems to be why some of the recommendations were noted or not supported.

It is particularly disappointing that there is no FTE allocation for a sustainability coordinator in all schools (Recommendation 10).

The Department of Education's view is that in order to create a "culture of best practice, sustainability should be embedded across curriculum, infrastructure and operations".

While in theory this is true, we know how time poor teachers and school administrators are.

Creating an allocated role will mean that sustainable practices can be properly implemented and resourced.

The department will create a centralised position to assist those school who choose to employ a sustainability coordinator.

Our concern with this is whether the constraints of the one-line budget may impede the effectiveness of this plan.

The SSTUWA will continue to work on improving the sustainable practices in our education settings and we look forward to working with our Climate Action Working Group to improve sustainable measures at all workplaces.

To read the government's response in full to the Making Hope Practical report visit bit.ly/3xf4atL



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