

My name is Anjali Sharma. I'm a 19 year old first year law student at ANU and I've been leading the campaign to enshrine a duty of care within Australian law since I was 16 years old. In 2020, I was the lead litigant in the case of Sharma v Minister for the Environment, which sought a common law imposition of a duty of care to protect us from the impacts of climate change, and was successful at first instance, but unfortunately this ruling was overturned on appeal. Since then, I've been creating and running the campaign for this bill.

Climate change is both one of the biggest threats to, and one of the biggest fears of my generation. The consequences of this global crisis weigh heavily on our shoulders.

As the earth's surface temperature increases incrementally above prehistoric levels, bringing with it climate disaster of unprecedented frequency and severity, young people become more and more aware that these are the harsh realities that will shape our lives. These are no longer abstract concepts to us, nor are they far off possibilities. Midway through September, as I sit here writing this submission, Sydney has reached a scorching temperature of 34°C, and parts of Australia are already on fire, with total fire bans being declared in high-risk regions across the country. We are not even a month into Spring.

If this is the world we are living in at the ages of 16, 17, 18, 19, what will our world look like at 30? At 60? What will our children's futures look like?

A few days before I wrote this submission, the Bureau of Meteorology declared an El Nino weather event. I don't know if anyone can truly say that they have healed from the impacts of the last.

The escalating frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, which are fuelled by climate change, have direct health and education implications for our generation. We are being increasingly exposed to heat-related illnesses, to atmospheric conditions that threaten to exacerbate already existing respiratory conditions, impair our cognitive development and hinder educational progress. Extreme weather forecasts are forcing school closures and interruptions, disrupting our regular academic schedules and taking away our human right to education.

Young people have the wealth of the world's news at our fingertips. And every day, we are waking up to climate disaster in a different part of the world, which is taking lives, destroying infrastructure, stealing culture, language and history and violating universal human rights. This year we have seen floods and heatwaves devastate India, Greece, America, China, Spain, just to name a few. We have seen records broken that should never be touched, with 21 of the 30 hottest days on record taking place in July 2023. We have heard that the gulf stream could collapse as early as 2025.

This is disaster at scale, and begs for urgent mitigative action. Yet, it is being met with the opposite. Where we should see a rapid and urgent transition away from fossil fuels, we are seeing regular approvals and extensions for both coal and gas projects. Where we should be seeing our government engage in good faith with young people, we are seeing preference be

given to fossil fuel lobbyists and donors who influence and dictate our country's policy to an extent that young people could only ever wish to.

Where there should be, enshrined in law, a clear obligation in Australia's legislation for Ministers and other government decision-makers to take into account the potential impacts of the climate crisis on children's wellbeing, there is nothing. There is silence.

If the job of the government is not to hand over a safe and liveable world to the next generation, what is it?

For so many of us, our only antidote to the level of fear, frustration and cynicism that we feel is activism. The emotional climate activist trope has been used to death, but for so many of us, we are so, so scared for our future. And our advocacy is not a passion project, not an extracurricular activity, it's not a shiny heading on our LinkedIn profiles. It's hardly a choice, but a responsibility. A responsibility to our families. To our friends. To those who have lost so much at the hands of the climate crisis, and stand to lose more.

I urge you to support this bill. I urge you to separate yourselves from the embarrassment of a government that used taxpayer money to fight eight children in court, arguing that it did not owe them a duty of care. I urge you to hear the voices of young advocates who have been asking for an assurance that our basic human rights will be safeguarded in the face of climate change for years and years now.

I urge you to demonstrate your commitment to upholding your duty as elected representatives to hand over a future to my generation and those after me that is liveable and safe.