



Committee Secretariat  
Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee  
Department of the Senate  
PO Box 6100 Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Committee

### **Western Sydney University Senate Inquiry Submission**

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission to the Australian Foreign Affairs, Defense and Trade References Committee inquiry regarding the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Western Sydney University is a member of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network Australia/Pacific and a signatory to the SDSN Australia/Pacific University Commitment. The University also hosts the secretariat of the [United Nations University Regional Centre of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development Greater Western Sydney](#) (UNU RCE GWS) a multi stakeholder network committed to delivering and operationalizing the SDGs at a local level. There are 168 RCE's globally that form a global learning space for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). The UNU RCE network is also aligned to the UNESCO Global Action Plan on Education for Sustainable Development which has five key priorities for ESD: advancing policy, transforming learning and training environments, building capacities of educators and trainers, empowering and mobilizing youth, and accelerating sustainable solutions at local level. We would like to make the following comments addressing five points of the terms of reference.

**a. the understanding and awareness of the SDGs across the Australian Government and in the wider Australian community:**

There is opportunity to substantially increase the the understanding and awareness of the SDGs at all levels of government and in the wider community via education. Anecdotally we see little understanding and awareness of the SDGs in Greater Western Sydney outside of those institutions, networks and alliances already committed - although this does vary by

demographic and age. In the HE sector, universities are in a unique position to drive further awareness through teaching, learning and engagement by reaching over 1 million enrolled students, over 100,000 staff and their local communities (Universities Australia, 2018).

In the school system in NSW the [NSW Education Standards Authority \(NESA\)](#) sets and monitors quality teaching, learning, assessment and school standards across all NSW Public, Catholic and Independent schools including curricula for Kindergarten to Year 12. Directives for this work are set by the [Australian Curriculum Reporting and Assessment Authority \(ACARA\)](#) which has positioned Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia and sustainability as the three cross curriculum priorities. At this stage in NSW the Millennium Development Goals and subsequently the SDGs are formally situated only in the Geography (Mandatory) Stage 4 learning outcomes - however this is taught across public, independent and catholic systems across the whole state. In the education system there has been excellent work undertaken as a response to the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD 2004 -2014) with Australia seen as a world leader in setting national policy frameworks for this agenda. We recommend that similar frameworks and strategies for the SDGs be reinvigorated which would drive not only understanding and awareness but also on-ground action and implementation.

**b. the potential costs, benefits and opportunities for Australia in the domestic implementation of the SDGs:**

Education is Australia's largest service export and third overall behind iron ore and coal. The Australian University Higher Education (HE) sector is clearly aligned to SDG 4 Quality Education to 'ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning' however we maintain that this is a cross-cutting SDG enabler that supports the delivery of all other SDGs through transformative education and innovative research. Consequently, we see the HE sector as a key partner in collaborating with all levels of government, industry and civil society in driving successful initiatives and programs to deliver these ambitious goals. As nation states grapple with the complexity of the SDG agenda and the potential for social, economic and ecological transformation at all levels, the HE sector in Australia is well situated to offer above world standard ESD teaching and research specialising in this area.

**c. what governance structures and accountability measures are required at the national, state and local levels of government to ensure an integrated approach to implementing the SDG that is both meaningful and achieves real outcomes;**

Effective federal government leadership with appropriate strategies and frameworks for SDG engagement and implementation - similar to the response to the DESD - is critical to achieving SDG outcomes. Acknowledging the importance of local community and local and state government responses federal government leadership and coordination will manage these complex multi sectoral contributions. This should clearly articulate state and local government sectoral accountability coupled with policy coherence to support interlinkages and integration. Coordination across each sector needs to be clarified with clear reporting objectives and current baseline information which can be measured and reported against.

- d. how can performance against the SDGs be monitored and communicated in a way that engages government, businesses and the public, and allows effective review of Australia's performance by civil society;**

No Comment.

- e. what SDGs are currently being addressed by Australia's Official Development Assistance (ODA) program;**

No Comment – please refer to DFAT.

- f. which of the SDG is Australia best suited to achieving through our ODA program, and should Australia's ODA be consolidated to focus on achieving core SDGs;**

Different agencies and institutions will have their preferences for individual SDG delivery through which Australia's ODA should focus. The University and indeed the international UNU RCE community strongly endorse the position that the SDGs are a set of interlinked and interconnected activities that require holistic consideration of the systemic interactions and should not be viewed as singular and separate SDGs. For example, in terms of Australia's ODA program and our experience with our research programs in India - SDG 6 Clean Water and Sanitation has clear linkages to and implications for health and wellbeing, gender equity, poverty, hunger, quality education, food production, climate change, infrastructure, urban and rural development and innovation. Similarly, food and food systems interact with all the SDGs. The United Nations has done work clustering the SDGs into thematics and we encourage this Senate Inquiry to adopt a systems model to support core clusters of SDG delivery that can increase uptake for maximum impact.

One program that the Committee may consider recommending is a research funding pool reserved for knowledge exchange between researchers focused on an SDG or cluster of SDGs in

which the Australian tertiary sector has a particular strength. This should be focused on the exchange of researchers to encourage strong and lasting person-to-person collaborations. An SDG Scholars program might usefully complement the soft diplomacy aims of the New Colombo Plan program.

- g. how countries in the Indo-Pacific are responding to implementing the SDGs and which of the SDGs have been prioritised by countries receiving Australia's ODA, and how these priorities could be incorporated into Australia's ODA program;**

Note above - no other comment.

- h. examples of best practice in how other countries are implementing the SDG from which Australia could learn.**

This inquiry could consider the Republic of Indonesia as a case study for how government frameworks at all levels can be assembled to coordinate SDG action and delivery. In 2016 the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) worked with five Member States – Albania, Indonesia, Rwanda, Tunisia and, at a later stage, the United Kingdom (UK) – to consider relevant approaches to implement and monitor relevant national goals, with associated targets and indicators. The pilot project aimed to enhance the readiness of participating countries. The Indonesian Government has been working to develop a whole of government approach to the SDGs coordinated through the [Minister of National Development Planning](#) and Indonesia took part in the 2017 Voluntary National Reporting.

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