



**Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee  
United Nations Sustainable Development Goals**

14 September 2018

Response to the question on notice

*Question: Can you on notice, if you choose to, give us as a committee what you think should happen? The submissions of both your organisations have gone into what is happening, and you both say you want to plan. Can you give some thought into: if you had your way, what should happen with the SDG agenda from now on?*

Building on the UNAA's Senate submission on the SDGs and evidence provided to the Committee on 24 August 2018, the UNAA would like to see a National Plan on the SDGs, led by the Prime Minister and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. Many of the countries performing well on the SDGs have a National Plan, led by the Prime Minister or Head of State, strengthened by a national communications plan. These countries have consulted with civil society, business, schools, universities and communities to give rise to a coordinated effort and positive change.

In 2015, Australia, along with 192 other UN member states, adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 SDGs, which build on the success of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). But unlike the eight MDGs, the 17 SDGs call for action by all countries to promote prosperity and fight inequalities while protecting the planet. The UNAA seeks to work alongside government, business, academia and other civil society organisations towards the achievement of the SDGs.

According to the SDG Index published in July 2018, Australia is ranked 37<sup>th</sup> in the world, down from 26<sup>th</sup> in 2017, 20<sup>th</sup> in 2016 and 17<sup>th</sup> in 2015, when the 2030 Agenda was adopted. The UNAA therefore urges the Australian Government to engage with the SDGs using a more public and integrated approach. The Australian Government is the key policy-making body in areas which relate directly to all 17 SDGs, including climate action, economic growth, education and gender equality. In particular, the UNAA calls for the establishment of a National Plan which would outline a coordinated approach across federal, state and local governments. At present, the Australian Government's work towards achievement of the SDGs has been led mainly by DFAT, despite DFAT having no domestic mandate, and PM&C, which has not been present in conversation or promotion. Leadership and coordination on the SDGs in domestic policy is currently lacking and it is difficult to identify positive SDGs leadership within the government or the bureaucracy.

**United Nations Association of Australia**

National Patron: His Excellency General the Honourable Sir Peter Cosgrove AK MC (Ret'd)

National President: Major General Michael G Smith AO (Ret'd)

Office 206, Griffin Centre, 20 Genge St, Canberra City, ACT 2601

E: [admin@unaa.org.au](mailto:admin@unaa.org.au) | [www.unaa.org.au](http://www.unaa.org.au)



In addition, despite the existence of an Inter-Departmental Committee and a published list of particular departments' responsibility for each of the SDGs, there is neither a clear reporting mechanism on SDG developments nor a contact list for staff responsible for SDG coordination. This makes interdepartmental collaboration challenging within government, and even more difficult for non-government actors. A National Plan, with clear government leadership and including a comprehensive communications strategy to build national support, is considered essential if Australia is to achieve the SDGs. Moreover, the SDGs are cross-cutting and interlinked, thereby requiring central leadership and coordination: for example, SDG 4 *Quality Education* cannot be achieved without complementary action towards SDG 5 *Gender Equality* and SDG 10 *Reduced Inequalities*.

To date, there has been no public awareness campaign about the SDGs in Australia, meaning knowledge of, and engagement with, the SDGs remains limited, both within government and wider society. Ideally, a public campaign would highlight areas in which Australia is performing well and those areas where we are underperforming and require more attention. In the latter category, for example, Australia is the lowest ranked country in the world for SDG 13 *Climate Action*. Greater awareness would better allow the UNAA to engage Australians in work towards the SDGs and to partner with the government in a meaningful way.

The UNAA advocates for clear leadership by the Australian Government, and the creation of a National Plan supported by a national communications strategy. The National Plan should be developed urgently and in consultation with civil society. As the peak body for promoting the United Nations in Australia the UNAA is well placed to work with the Australian Government in delivering a public awareness campaign on the SDGs.

The UNAA suggests a meaningful National Plan would be comprised of a public awareness campaign, a collaborative whole of government, interdepartmental approach, provision of funding set aside and budget lines for SDG implementation, and a reporting mechanism to ensure consistent progress is being tracked. The SDGs are a framework for improving outcomes across the 17 goals, which are achieved together, rather than in isolation. Working on achieving the goals is not a matter of additional structures, but requires better coordination of efforts to ensure targeted outcomes. Clear national plans have already proved successful in guiding federal government efforts towards attainment of the SDGs in other countries. Australia should follow these examples to ensure achievement of the 17 SDGs by 2030.

**Lachlan Hunter**  
**National Executive Director**  
**United Nations Association of Australia**

**United Nations Association of Australia**

National Patron: His Excellency General the Honourable Sir Peter Cosgrove AK MC (Ret'd)

National President: Major General Michael G Smith AO (Ret'd)

Office 206, Griffin Centre, 20 Genge St, Canberra City, ACT 2601

E: [admin@unaa.org.au](mailto:admin@unaa.org.au) | [www.unaa.org.au](http://www.unaa.org.au)