

25th July 2022

To,
Minister for Education, Hon Jason Clare MP
Minister for the Environment and Water, The Hon Tanya Plibersek MP

Subject: Education for Sustainability and the Australian Sustainable Schools Initiative (AuSSI) - enabling all Australian students to participate in actively addressing the climate change imperative and transition to a sustainable society through education and training.

Dear Ministers,

On behalf of the Australian Association for Environmental Education (AAEE) please accept our congratulations on your respective appointments as Minister for Environment and Water and Minister for Education. Minister Plibersek drawing on your previous role as Education shadow Minister, you will have a deep appreciation of the education portfolio. We believe this gives you unique insights and understandings about the positive and achievable outcomes offered by the well-proven AuSSI model and an 'Education for Sustainability' (EfS) approach to education.

From 2002 – 2010, the AuSSI model operated across all national jurisdictions and education systems in what was recognized as a highly collegial, respectful and effective manner. Over the last 10 years, the Commonwealth has rebuffed requests to acknowledge the AuSSI model's role in assisting the nation to address climate change and environmental problems. The ongoing development of critical, creative and analytical thinking skills and deep connections with nature by students of all ages remains substantially unaddressed.

Younger Australians are increasingly disturbed by the onset of climate change impacts and an uncertain future for themselves and the planet. The Sustainability Cross Curriculum Priority remains in the Australian Curriculum; but is aspirational at best. We argue it has substantially been ignored due to gaps in teacher training, ineffective resourcing, teacher workload and a lack of leadership. If our young people are to be equipped to constructively participate in the transition to sustainability and finding solutions to climate change, we must educate them accordingly.

AAEE has a 43-year history as the peak association for environmental education in Australia. AAEE is monitoring all jurisdictions to maintain the various iterations of school sustainability programs through quarterly meetings, Australian Sustainable Schools Alliance (AuSSA). We are confident that a high level of goodwill and intention exists to support a reinvention of a similar program for supporting schools and communities to continue building resilience and adjust to the many issues that climate change presents.

A major national research project was undertaken in 2012 – 14 by the Australian Education for Sustainability Alliance (AESA) funded by the Federal Education department. The AAEE worked in partnership with all educational organizations involved, see report attached. The findings have not changed significantly in a decade for the school sector.

In addition, AAEE participated in the recent WA Parliamentary Education and Health Standing Committee Inquiry 2021, the response of Western Australian schools to climate change. The WA Parliamentary report tabled in June 2022, [Making Hope Practical](#), has recommendations that include the reinstatement of the AuSSI model to achieve significant climate change outcomes. The AAEE commends the considerable efforts of this inquiry to examine the range of issues for educators and make realistic and achievable recommendations applicable to the national imperatives of climate change education. This report is the most current examination of the 'why and how' and addresses both parent and student calls to engage in climate change education.

We also alert you to the international context relevant to our proposal. The recent COP26 in Glasgow highlighted the urgency for government leadership in EfS when [Professor Daniella Tilbury](#) chaired an inaugural combined session of international education and environment ministers. This session secured

minister pledges and a permanent place for Education for Sustainability in the UN Climate Change Conference processes. As Australia resumes a globally leading role in addressing climate change, prioritising education for sustainability is critical for generations to come.

Funding proposal to re-invigorate AuSSI and EfS in Schools nationally.

The initial and indicative proposals are to:

1. Renew the Commonwealth funding commitment to maintain the core infrastructure of AuSSI. AAEE estimates that **\$8m per year for 4 years**, is required as part of a renewed national partnership agreement with State and Territory environmental and education authorities; and,
2. Commit an additional **\$2m per year for 4 years** to enhance the accessibility and integration of existing investments in Commonwealth materials and programs on sustainability and the development of new resources to support an effective national education focus on sustainability.

These proposals would build on the success of the AuSSI model documented in evaluations by the former Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (SEWPaC) and state jurisdictions. This success has been reinforced by the findings of the former Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations funded research project conducted by AESA with teachers on the delivery of education for sustainability in schools. The findings identified that AuSSI had been a significant vehicle for supporting teachers to deliver education for sustainability in Australian schools and provides:

- a unifying framework across Australia for education for sustainability, which has been adapted by each State and Territory to their circumstances; and,
- a whole-of-school approach including support of the school leadership and engagement with parents and the wider community.

A renewed Commonwealth investment of \$8m per year for 4 years would provide the certainty needed to make this successful program model accessible to all Australian schools over time, and would incorporate:

1. A national coordinating structure to guide best practice in the use of existing environmental education and education for sustainability resources – avoiding the risk of duplication and ad hoc investments across different jurisdictions;
2. Enhanced access to useful tools to inform school sustainability plans, adapted to each state/territory and local region and aligned with best practice EfS resources;
3. Coordination of mentoring and professional learning programs for teachers to address sector gaps; and,
4. Partnerships with community groups and local businesses for leveraging considerable additional in kind contributions.

AAEE would welcome the opportunity to discuss this further with you and we anticipate reinvigorated times ahead for nationally addressing climate and sustainability education.

Sincerely,



Dr. Jennifer Pearson

President AAEE
M: 0407 983 469

30th July 2022

To,

Minister for Education, Hon Jason Clare MP

Minister for the Environment and Water, The Hon Tanya Plibersek MP

Minister for the Public Service, Senator The Hon Katy Gallagher,

Minister for Climate Change and Energy, The Hon Chris Bowen MP

Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government,

The Hon Catherine King MP

Minister for Indigenous Australians, The Hon Linda Burney MP

Minister for Industry and Science, The Hon Ed Husic MP

Minister for Early Childhood Education Minister for Youth, The Hon Dr Anne Aly MP

Minister for Skills and Training, The Hon Brendan O'Connor MP

Subject: Climate and Sustainability Education - enabling all Australians to participate in actively addressing the Climate Change imperative and transition to a sustainable society through education and training.

Dear Ministers,

As the global climate and environmental problems that we face become ever more urgent, the Australian Association for Environmental Education (AAEE) seeks to open a dialogue with the Australian Government to assist in addressing these issues. Our intent is that together we support the education of all Australians in life-long learning to facilitate their active participation in the transition to a sustainable Australian society and economy.

AAEE is the chief advocate for “Education for Sustainability” (EfS) in Australia. EfS is also known as Education for Sustainable Development by the UN. Other terms such as Climate and Sustainability Education, Climate and Environmental Literacy and Environmental Education for Sustainability are also used.

The Commonwealth Government previously initiated and supported the Australian Sustainable Schools Initiative (AuSSI). The states and territories have adopted a range of programs as a result of AuSSI whilst some local councils conduct similar community education programs on sustainability, climate and the environment.

Whilst these initiatives have garnered some public support and understanding of EfS there has been no consistent Commonwealth Government leadership to ensure that all Australians are well equipped for effectively addressing our serious climate and environmental crises. The recent COP26 in Glasgow highlighted the urgency for government leadership in EfS when [Professor Daniella Tilbury](#) chaired an inaugural combined session of international education and environment ministers. This session secured minister pledges and a permanent place for Education for Sustainability in the UN Climate Change Conference processes.

AAEE is the principal and long-standing professional advocate for EfS in Australia. AAEE has significant reach across Australia and internationally with teachers at all levels, community groups, professional associations, tertiary institutes and research academics. For example, our internationally recognised journal, The Australian Journal of Environmental Education, actively supports rigorous

research by both Australian and international researchers and we maintain partnerships with organisations in the United States of America, New Zealand and Japan. This collegial approach ensures the sharing of contemporary EfS knowledge worldwide across our sector. In addition, from a domestic perspective AAEE contributed to the 2022 Western Australian Legislative Assembly inquiry into the response of Western Australian schools to climate change. The resulting report, "[Making Hope Practical](#)", outlined in some detail the points raised in this letter and adds to the numerous reviews and reports on EfS in Australia..

As the reality of our rapidly changing world is now apparent, Australian businesses now increasingly attend to issues of sustainability, environmental impact and 'social license' in their operations. The Environmental Social and Corporate Governance (ESG) framework increasingly being adopted by the business sector will reset business plans and requires support from a workforce capable of working through and contributing to sustainability and social license imperatives. A pipeline of workers educated in the fundamentals of sustainability and climate impacts will enhance productivity and competitiveness in an era of higher community expectations of business responsibility.

There is much work to do to better equip all Australians in this regard whether it be:

- development of a coherent national plan of education and training on climate and sustainability;
- establishment of effective sustainability and climate action training and resourcing for educators across all spheres including early childhood, K-12, higher education, workplace training and community education,
- creation of a pipeline of workers with the values, skills and knowledge to develop enduring businesses and sustainable economies;
- development of support strategies for businesses to train their workforce in climate and sustainability actions to promote competitive, sustainable and responsible business practices;
- to create a leadership role for the Australian Public Service with this matter;
- development of effective and sustained responses to the growing ecoanxiety and resentment of youth who face the intergenerational inequities of climate change; and,
- recognition of the wisdoms of First Nations People's deep understandings about caring for and living with country.

Whilst AAEE supports educators in varied settings from community to school and workplaces to deliver EfS based learning, the Commonwealth Government now has an opportunity to demonstrate both national and international leadership in this EfS transformational project.

We note that previously, EfS came under the umbrella of the Environment and Education Ministries and we are now seeking urgent discussions with their ministers to secure early progress. However, there is a role for other ministries as listed above and we stand ready for discussions around broadly promoting EfS. We can provide extensive information and resources to assist as required.

Please contact Stephen Fuller our AAEE representative about this matter to arrange discussions on 0413562988 or EfSCampaign@aaee.org.au

Sincerely,



Dr. Jennifer Pearson
President AAEE