

FUTURE EARTH AUSTRALIA YEAR IN REVIEW: 2023



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AUSTRALIA



Australian
Academy of
Science



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Future Earth Australia acknowledges and pays respects to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Nations People, Traditional Owners of the Country on which we all reside, and who hold enduring connections to land, waters, seas, and culture. We also acknowledge and pay our respects to Elders past and present, who hold the memories, traditions, cultures and hopes of the Indigenous Peoples of Australia. We celebrate the world's oldest continuous culture and their ongoing contributions to Australian life, identity, and culture.

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INTRODUCTION



2023 was a pivotal year for the international sustainability agenda, and so too for Future Earth Australia. At the global level, we saw critical conversations about justice, equity, and climate adaptation take centre stage at COP28, where the international community also marked the 'beginning of the end' of the fossil fuel era. Despite this incremental progress, earth's life support system remains under multiple and compounding pressures, and we cannot relent on any progress made during this 'critical decade'.

In our own backyard, Future Earth Australia continued to advocate that the answers to these greatest sustainability challenges are found in many places, disciplines, and communities. We continued to galvanise our wide network of expertise to provide advice on key policy issues and took steps to implement the three national strategies developed across the Future Earth Australia lifespan.

The Future Earth Australia Secretariat and Steering Committee achieved this whilst navigating considerable structural change. In 2023 the network embedded itself within the National Committees for Science, recognising our role as knowledge brokers with the international Future Earth community and as trusted advisors within the Australian Academy of Science.

Future Earth Australia's focus continues on climate adaptation, sustainable cities and regions, and oceans and coasts to be at the forefront of local, national and global sustainability discourse and policy change. Despite this progress, the rejection of an Indigenous Voice to Parliament reminds us that there is work to be done. We will continue to reiterate that Indigenous sovereignty and knowledges are critical to developing truly transformative and regenerative futures, both for Australia and the world.

I am grateful to Grander's Trust beginning our year with a generous donation. We finished the year with great momentum and a renewed sense of purpose. This Year in Review is a reminder of the essential role Future Earth Australia plays in the journey towards a sustainable and equitable future. I hope you enjoy reading about our activities and impact across 2023.

In 2024, I am excited to expand the reach and impact of the network, including through negotiating exclusive access to the Belmont Forum for our members. I am thrilled to build on our positive vision and all our good work throughout the coming year.

Kate Nairn
Program Manager, Future Earth Australia

FROM THE CO-CHAIRS

Future Earth Australia occupies a singular space in the Australian sustainability landscape. This is a critical decade for action on climate change and there is no comparable network, organisation, or research centre in this country which pursues sustainable, just, and regenerative futures in the manner of Future Earth Australia. The need to address 'wicked' sustainability challenges through convening multiple institutions, knowledge systems and disciplines is growing, and there is no better executor of this approach than Future Earth Australia. This includes a commitment to learning from and integrating the practices and knowledge of Indigenous and First Nations people.

2023 was a decisive year for the Future Earth Australia program. FEA joined the National Committees for Science, placing transdisciplinary approaches alongside representatives of the Australian scientific community. Through the expansion of its early career researcher and professionals (ECRP) program, Future Earth Australia sought to equip the next generation of sustainability leaders with the tools to navigate increasingly complex and contested environmental challenges. We thank the Future Earth Australia members and the Australian Academy of Science for their trust and belief in the FEA Program and look forward to scaling up its impact in 2024.



Professor Wendy Steele



Dr Jemma Purandare



2023 HIGHLIGHTS | AT A GLANCE

\$50,000

DONATION FROM
GRANDER'S
TRUST



2 NEW STEERING
COMMITTEE CO-
CHAIRS



LAUNCH OF
THE FEA
OPPORTUNITIES
FUND



DELIVERY OF **2**
EARLY CAREER
CO-LABS



30 ECRPS
REACHED
THROUGH THE FEA
CO-LABS



4 COLLABORATIVE
ECR
TRANSDISCIPLINARY
PROJECTS FUNDED



STEERING COMMITTEE AND MEMBERSHIP

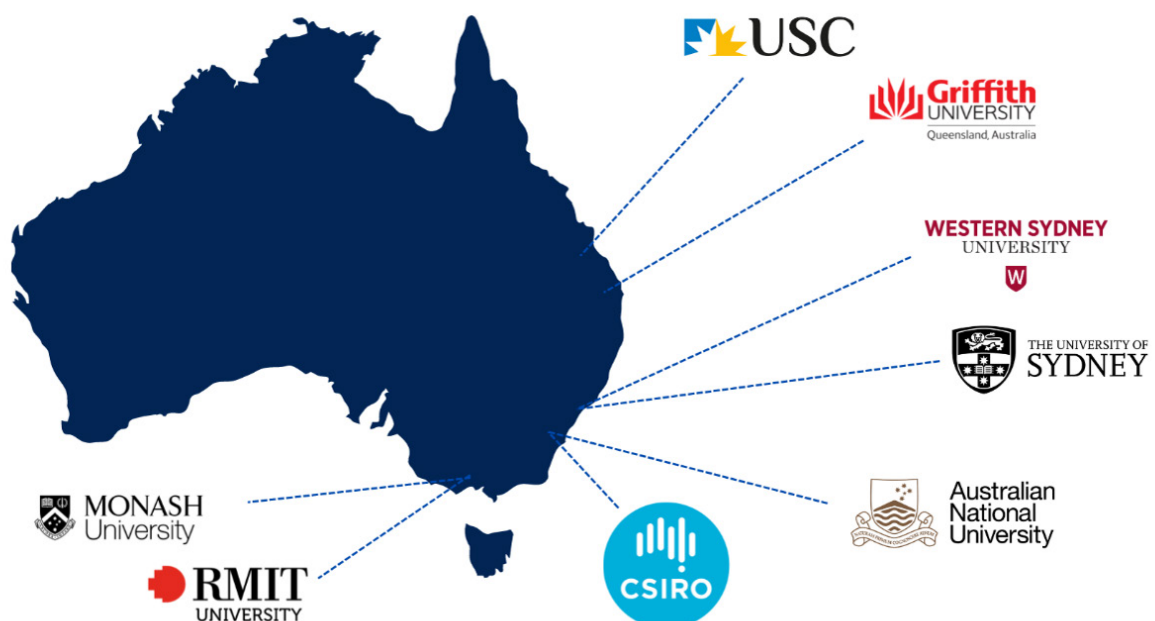
Future Earth Australia welcomed several new Steering Committee Members in 2023 and farewelled some longstanding advocates of the FEA mission. We thank Professor Tim Smith for his careful stewardship of the Future Earth Australia Steering Committee throughout his time as Co-Chair. We also thank Professor Juan Francisco Salazar for his service as Committee Co-Chair.

A NEW HOME IN THE NATIONAL COMMITTEES FOR SCIENCE

In 2023, Future Earth Australia amplified its role as transdisciplinary knowledge brokers alongside the Australian scientific community, through its strengthened relationship with the National Committees for Science. Coordinated by the Australian Academy of Science, Future Earth Australia works alongside the National Committees, elevating the importance of both the transdisciplinary and sustainability sciences within the wider research community.

Future Earth Australia Steering Committee

Professor Wendy Steele (Co-chair)	RMIT University
Dr Jemma Purandare (Co-chair)	Griffith University, ECRP Representative
Professor Stuart Bunn	Griffith University
Professor Tony Capon	Monash University
Dr Steven Lade	Australian National University
Dr Peat Leith	CSIRO
Dr Anna Lintern	Monash University, ECRP Representative
Professor Juan Francisco Salazar	Western Sydney University
Professor David Schoeman	University of the Sunshine Coast
Professor David Schlosberg	University of Sydney





ENGAGEMENT: GLOBAL CONNECTIONS

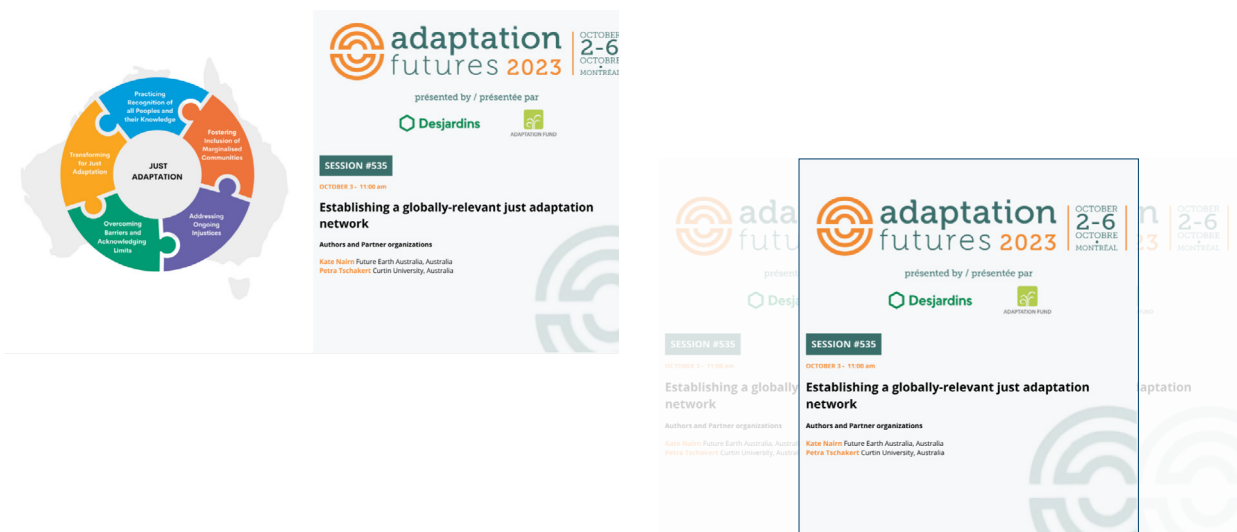
GLOBAL JUST ADAPTATION NETWORK - LAUNCHED IN MONTREAL, CANADA

In 2023, Future Earth Australia broadened its reach across the global Future Earth network and beyond. It made a concerted effort to bring the transformative ideas in its *National Strategy for Just Adaptation* (launched in September 2022) to a global audience at the 2023 Adaptation Futures Conference in Montreal, Canada.

Coordinated with the Strategy Co-Chair Professor Petra Tschakert, FEA established the 'Global Just Adaptation Network' at the 2023 Conference, with Program Manager Kate Nairn chairing a session how adaptation researchers across the world can better support one another. The conference itself brought together over 2000 delegates and had over 165 sessions centred around themes including: Indigenous Knowledge, Multiple Risks, Adaptation Choices, Limits to Adaptation, Equity and Justice, Nature-based solutions, Teaching and Learning, and Governance and Finance. There was an overwhelming recognition that collaboration is critical to the advancement of just adaptation futures.



Figure 1 Professor Petra Tschakert and Kate Nairn at Adaptation Futures 2023, Montreal

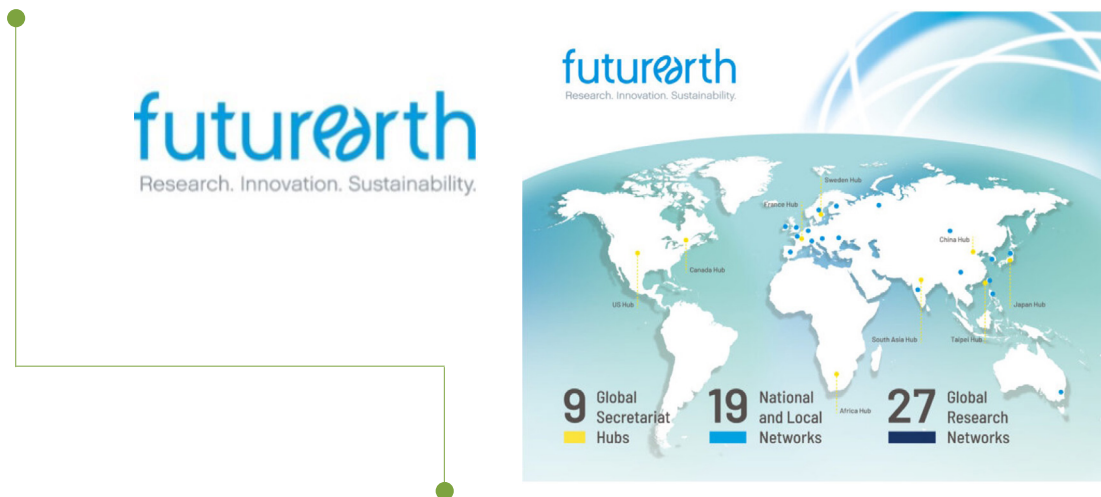


FUTURE EARTH AUSTRALIA ADDRESSES THE BANGLADESH ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

In October 2023, Future Earth Australia Program Manager Kate Nairn was invited to deliver an address to the Bangladesh Academy of Sciences on sustainable development. In her speech she reinforced the message that systems of development are intertwined with the health and wellbeing of earth's ecological systems. Read an excerpt of the address below:

GROWING CONNECTIONS WITH FUTURE EARTH

2023 saw the establishment of the Future Earth Asia Regional Committee, a coordinated effort from Future Earth Global to strengthen ties across the region and better facilitate collaboration with Future Earth chapters around the world. Through this membership, Future Earth Australia remains committed to working closely with its neighbours to expand opportunities for Australian sustainability researchers to engage with the region.



ADDRESS TO THE BANGLADESH ACADEMY OF SCIENCES EXCERPT:

Sustainable Development means reframing our notion of what development is - from a linear growth model to a qualitative and equitable model. It means transforming our economic, social, and governance systems at all levels. It means circular economies, increased protection of wilderness, degrowth, climate justice, holistic health systems, regenerative agriculture, clean energy, and more. We must cultivate these positive visions to focus our innovation, galvanise the public, and motivate political will.

While we reach for these sometimes lofty goals we must not lose sight of the foundations. And I mean that literally, referring to our fundamental reliance on the Earth. We rely on healthy soils to feed our bodies, clean water to replenish our bodily fluids, and clean air to breathe. Healthy land, waters, and skies are non-negotiables for human beings.

We must remember that we ourselves are biological beings, creatures dependent on the earth, and as we compromise the biosphere we compromise ourselves.

We can see how exploitation of this fundamental principle is playing out. As we over extract these systems, we deplete their ability to replenish and thus sustain the living planet, and all its myriad lifeforms. We see how impacts are felt unequally across time and space.

We need global transformation to a nature positive world – and fast.

Watch the full address to the Bangladesh Academy of Science [here](#).

ENGAGEMENT: LOCAL CONNECTIONS

TRANSFORMATIONS CONFERENCE 2023

– SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA

In mid-2023, Future Earth Australia presented at the Transformations Conference in Sydney, the sixth iteration of the global sustainability conference. Under the broad conference theme of 'Transformative partnerships for a better world', Future Earth Australia Program Manager Kate Nairn delivered a presentation on 'Just decision-making in local climate change adaptation'. In this session she explored how the National Strategy for Just Adaptation invites us to think differently about how justice and equity could be embedded in climate action and ensure that adaptation to climate change does not reinforce existing inequalities.



Figure 2 Kate Nairn presenting at Transformations 2023



BUILDING CAPACITY

ENHANCING THE EARLY CAREER EXPERIENCE

The Future Earth Australia Early Career Researcher and Professionals program is designed to build the capacity of the ECRP sustainability community. Over the years it has provided a platform for ECRPs to connect and network with other scholars and professionals across their fields. The program evolved throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, and now features a stronger focus on transdisciplinarity and collaboration at the early career level.

FUTURE EARTH AUSTRALIA OPPORTUNITIES FUND

In 2023, Future Earth Australia launched its flagship small grants program – the FEA Opportunities Fund. The program is designed to help higher degree research students, researchers, and professionals collaborate on Australia’s most pressing sustainability challenges. The Future Earth Australia Opportunities Fund aims to support early career skills development and collaboration across the sustainability and environment sector. The Fund awards individual bursaries to early career researchers and professionals working and researching in the environmental and sustainability sciences through the 'Seizing Opportunities' grant. Funding is also dedicated to projects which promote transdisciplinary and collaborative approaches to core sustainability problems through the 'Creating Opportunities' grant.

A series of projects and individuals were awarded funds in the inaugural round of the Opportunities Fund. Projects supported by the Opportunities Fund in 2023 will address Australia’s biodiversity, aquaculture, and climate adaptation challenges, as well as elevate Indigenous knowledges and storytelling in the broader sustainability landscape.



OPPORTUNITIES FUND - SEIZING OPPORTUNITIES PROFILE: BRIANNA GORDON

My project is an interdisciplinary Ph.D research project that will be applying a Two-Way methodology approach to investigating the potential metal contamination from legacy gold mining in the former Tambaroora and Turon River Gold Mining District on Wiradjuri Country. This research will partner with Wiradjuri Traditional Owners of the research area to not only determine the quantity of metal contamination, how this contamination may be impacted by climate change but also the impact that this potential contamination might have on Wiradjuri Country and culture. This research combines analytical environmental chemistry, alongside yarning on Country with Wiradjuri research partners, and creative artistic works to produce culturally informed research that meets the priorities of Wiradjuri research partners.

The Seizing Opportunities Grant is contributing to this work by primarily supporting the creative elements of this research through funding the purchase of art supplies and other costs associated with producing the artwork. This artwork will visually communicate the research project in an accessible and culturally informed way.

- Brianna Gordon, Wiradjuri Gundungurra woman and PhD Student, Australian National University

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES: SEA COUNTRY PLANNING TOOLKIT

Across ocean and coastal spaces, Indigenous rights have been ignored and denied to the detriment of the health and wellbeing of Australia's marine and coastal ecosystems. Supported by the Future Earth Australia Opportunities Fund, this project will develop a Sea Country Planning Toolkit for the Finnis River region in the Northern Territory. Sea Country Planning is a culturally-centred planning tool which allows Traditional Owners to drive the management and safeguarding of their coastal and marine spaces.

The Toolkit, which is rooted in justice principles of acknowledgement and equitable decision making, will pursue shared benefits for Indigenous communities. It will be a symbol of empowerment, sovereignty, and the profound legacy of caring for Country, and a product of collaboration between the Northern Land Council, Griffith University, CSIRO, the Blue Economy Cooperative Research Centre and the Northern Territory Government Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade.

This project embodies social equity and empowerment, cultural heritage preservation, environmental stewardship, and sustainable economic development. It marks a step toward a future where equity and justice are tangible realities, etched into the fabric of Australia's Blue Economy.

The project brings together elements of marine, urban and environmental planning, environmental science, finance, critical human geography, and spatial politics, interwoven seamlessly to address the project's multifaceted challenges. In essence, this project exemplifies the power of collaboration and transdisciplinary research—where diverse voices converge, ideas interweave, and collective efforts pave the way for a future where equity, respect, and justice prevail. Through this collaborative endeavour, a transformative ripple effect is created, fostering a more inclusive and empowering Blue Economy for all.

- Jillian Conrad – Griffith University – PhD Student and ECR Project Lead

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES AWARDEES - 2023

ECRP Lead	Project Description	Host Institution
Jillian Conrad	<p>This project will develop a Sea Country Planning Toolkit for the Finniss River region in the Northern Territory. Sea Country Planning is a culturally-centred planning tool which allows Traditional Owners to drive the management and safeguarding of their coastal and marine spaces.</p>	Griffith University
Marina Christofidis	<p>This project aims to collate data and information on the potential impacts of climate change on Australian aquaculture (terrestrial and marine) and use decision support tools to identify optimal areas for aquaculture expansion that meet production requirements while minimising risk from a changing climate and potential impacts on biodiversity. The project builds on previous spatial planning work in Tasmania, but will be the first, to our knowledge, to incorporate climate change into aquaculture planning.</p>	Griffith University
Dr Holly Kirk	<p>Superb City Wrens (SCW) is a collaborative research project between the City of Melbourne, BirdLife Australia, RMIT University, and the University of Melbourne. Its primary aim is to deepen our understanding of urban bird behaviour, movement, and habitat colonisation following strategic urban revegetation. The focal species is the Superb Fairy-wren (<i>Malurus cyaneus</i>), an iconic native bird threatened by urbanisation.</p>	RMIT University

GRAND GESTURE OF SUPPORT FOR FUTURE EARTH AUSTRALIA

In 2023, Future Earth Australia received a philanthropic donation of \$50,000 courtesy of Grander's Trust. Grander's Trust is a legacy trust, acknowledging Mr Richard Stevens who became lovingly known as 'Grander' by his grandchildren.

"Dad was a quiet, modest man who enjoyed creating things. He was very generous with his resources to the benefit of everyone around him, but above all he wanted to build a strong foundation for his family. Grander's Trust believes that a strong foundation also requires a healthy environment and equitable society and is continuing his generosity in that spirit,"

- Grander's Trust

In 2023, Future Earth Australia used this funding to build on its track record of advancing Australia's sustainability agenda. This donation supported Future Earth Australia's flagship Early Career Researcher and Professionals program, which creates opportunities for early career researchers and professionals to drive exciting, transformational sustainability projects and research grounded in principles of collaboration, sustainability, and equity.

Moving forward, Future Earth Australia will continue to draw on this generous contribution from Grander's Trust, and the fund's show of faith in its programs and philosophy. Future Earth Australia thanks Grander's Trust for its gesture towards building an equitable, sustainable, and regenerative future.



CONNECT

FEA COLLABORATIVE LABS (CO-LABS)

In 2023, Future Earth Australia launched its Co-Lab initiative, bringing together transdisciplinary and cross sector cohorts of early career researchers and professionals to collaborate on key sustainability challenges. The program is part of a wider effort from FEA to strengthen collaboration across disciplines, knowledge systems, sectors and industries at the early career level, and elevate early career perspectives in current sustainability debates. The Co-Labs are jointly delivered by an FEA member institution and the FEA network. Participants of the 2023 Co-Labs have spanned the social and natural sciences, urban planning and design, disaster reduction and resilience, project management, business, and more.

SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND REGIONS CO-LAB – MAY 2023 – RMIT UNIVERSITY

In May 2023, the RMIT Urban Futures Platform hosted a workshop for 13 PhD students, early career researchers, and urban practitioners to critically engage with the Future Earth Australia Sustainable Cities and Regions strategy. The original strategy was launched in December 2019, ahead of a volatile period

for Australia's cities and regions which included the COVID-19 pandemic as well as fires, floods, and extreme weather events. Since its launch, other challenges facing Australia's cities and regions have become more pronounced, including the housing affordability and rental crisis, and broader cost of living pressures.

The day was an opportunity for ECRs from universities across Australia to collaborate on key urban sustainability challenges, work across institutional siloes and think together about the vital role cities play in the health and life of our communities. The group was asked to consider recent changes to urban living and reengage with Future Earth Australia's Sustainable Cities and Regions strategy with these transformations in mind. The group identified a series of recommendations to reset Australia's approach to urban sustainability and transformation, urging a greater focus the role of Country, biodiversity, and knowledge sharing in the resilience of our cities and regions.

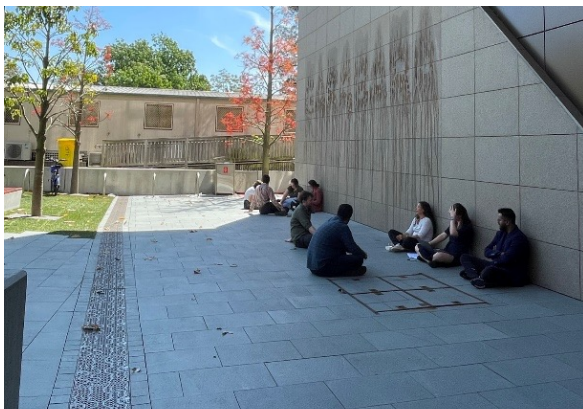
The workshop and paper are part of a wider review process currently being undertaken by Future Earth Australia as it revives its work around the sustainable cities agenda.



**JUST ADAPTATION CO-LAB
- NOVEMBER 2023 - UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY**

In November 2023, Future Earth Australia and the Sydney Environment Institute jointly delivered a day-long workshop for Early Career Researchers and Professionals broadly interested in justice and equity in climate adaptation. Participants came from a range

of different disciplinary and institutional backgrounds, and explored key ideas featured in the National Strategy for Just Adaptation. Participants were exposed to the global context of just adaptation and environmental justice, as well as local approaches to adaptive environmental management, led by Indigenous communities.



"The Just Adaptation Co-Lab was the perfect mix of a structured and relaxed environment to hear from both leading young academics and practitioners at the forefront of research in this area. The work of the guest speakers – David Schlosberg and Oli Moraes were a highlight for me, it was a privilege to hear about their work globally with environmental justice and locally with the Dja Dja Wurrung people."

- Just Adaptation Co-Lab Participant



INFLUENCE

POLICY AND AGENDA SETTING

SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND REGIONS

Acknowledging the transformation to our cities and regions over the past four years since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Future Earth Australia embarked on a consultation and update process for updating its 10 Year Strategy for Urban Systems Transformation to take into account the vast changes to urban life and sustainability. It undertook a thorough consultation process with key stakeholders from its development in 2019, inviting input from over 400 individuals from critical urban planning and sustainability organisations across Australia.

In 2024, Future Earth Australia will publish the results of this consultation through the form of an Update to the 2019 Strategy. The consultation comes at a critical moment for Australian urban policy, with concurrent crises across social, environmental, and economic domains have sharpened the need for a cohesive national strategy for our urban and regional centres.

Future Earth Australia's consultation and subsequent update will look to inform key urban policy development and advocated for a coordinated approach to the development of Australia's urban capabilities and research.

An update to the National Strategy also comes at a critical moment for the global interest in sustainable cities and urban environments. The upcoming Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change Special Report for Cities will stress the importance of urban environments navigating environmental change, and supporting prosperous, equitable, and sustainable futures for all people and beings.

OTHER POLICY AREAS

In 2023, Future Earth Australia provided policy advice across many formats, including Parliamentary Submissions, and input at key policy workshops:

- the draft National Science and Research Priorities, and
- multiple Academy policy submissions on environmental issues
 1. Setting, tracking, and achieving Australia's emissions reduction targets submission
 2. House Inquiry into plastic pollution in Australia's oceans and waterways)
 3. Climate Change Amendment (Duty of Care and Intergenerational Climate Equity) Bill 2023















Across the year it has provided direct advice on the planning and methodology for Australia's National Health and Climate Strategy, National Climate Risk Assessment Methodology, Australia's Sustainable Oceans Plan, and Decadal Plan for Social Science Research Infrastructure 2023-32.

This showcases the breadth and impact of FEA providing robust and strategic advice where it counts.

FUTURE EARTH AUSTRALIA 2023 ACTIVITIES AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

In 2023, Future Earth Australia continued to translate the Sustainable Development Goals from research to practice through the implementation of its national

strategies, providing policy input on key issues, and through its capacity building and communications work on transdisciplinary sustainability solutions. Below is a brief summary of how Future Earth Australia's work has contributed to the globally important Sustainable Development Goals throughout 2023.

<p>Goal 11 - Sustainable Cities and Communities: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable</p>	
<p>Development of an update to Sustainable Cities and Regions: a 10-year plan for urban systems transformation (2019)</p>	 
<p>Delivery of the Sustainable Cities and Regions Co-Lab with the RMIT Urban Futures Enabling Impact Platform</p>	 
<p>Release of the Early Career Urban Research Working Group: Update to the Sustainable Cities and Regions Strategy</p>	 
<p>Goal 13 - Climate Action: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts</p>	
<p>Provided input on key parliamentary submissions on plastic pollution and ocean and coastal health, emissions reduction, intergenerational climate equity</p>	  
<p>Provided direct advice to the planning and methodology for the National Health and Climate Strategy, National Climate Risk Assessment and Australia's Sustainable Oceans Plan</p>	 
<p>Presented at Transformations 2023 (Sydney) on 'Just decision-making in local climate change adaptation'</p>	

Goal 17 – Partnerships for the Goals: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development



Connecting transdisciplinary researchers and practitioners through Future Earth Australia Steering Committee meetings

Commencing membership of the Future Earth Asia Regional Committee

Connecting with Future Earth Canada, Royal Society of Canada, US State Department Pacific Regional Unit

Engaging at key national and international platforms including the 2023 Transformations Conference (Sydney), and 2023 Adaptation Futures (Montreal), and presenting to the Bangladesh Academy of Sciences



Delivery of the Just Adaptation Co-Lab with the Sydney Environment Institute



Development of academic articles on the process of generating the National Strategy for Just Adaptation from the Strategy co-authors







www.futureearth.org.au