



EDMUND RICE EDUCATION
AUSTRALIA



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Climate Crisis Response

Ask the Earth and it will teach you

Climate Crisis Response Statement

Edmund Rice Education Australia

“We want our children to be able to see the stars in the sky from wherever they are in the world.” - EREA young person

Change is essential. The status quo has led us to this place: a place where all life is increasingly threatened. The way we are living is unsustainable. Our world, all creation, “Our Common Home” (Laudato si’, 2015) is in need of healing and stewardship. In solidarity with those who disproportionately bear the consequences of the unsustainable actions of others, our commitment is one of love and justice.

We are called to be this change - now.

For Catholic schools inspired by the life of Edmund Rice, the Justice and Solidarity Touchstone states that:

“We are committed to *justice and peace for all*, grounded in a *spirituality of action and reflection* that calls us to *stand in solidarity* with those who are marginalised and *the earth itself*.”

(EREA, Charter for Catholic Schools in the Edmund Rice Tradition 2016)

On 1 June 2017, Principals and Ecological Educators from across EREA made a commitment to “life in

solidarity with all life on this fragile planet” (EREA, Principals' Ecological Sustainability Statement 2018). A number of initiatives has since been undertaken in our schools to reduce the ecological impact and to develop a greater awareness of the interconnectedness of life. The journey has begun but there are many steps yet to take. The urgency of the current state of our planet requires action that is more significant and transformational than any that has come before.

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic brought home to us, in tragic reality, the results of human activity when divorced from an understanding of the interconnectedness of all life. The EREA Climate Change Interim Message (May 2020) also reminded us that, “The same people who are most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic are those who are most affected by the climate crisis.” As Australia is a country blessed with abundance, we have a responsibility to reduce the harm our ecological footprint has on the world and to seek creative changes to live in more sustainable ways. That is the responsibility we hold.

Our sacred scripture (Genesis 1) reminds us that every part of creation is “good” and worthy of God’s loving attention.

“Our insistence that each human being is an image of God should not make us overlook the fact that each creature has its own purpose. None is superfluous. The entire material universe speaks of God’s love, his boundless affection for us. Soil, water, mountains: everything is, as it were, a caress of God.”
(Laudato si’, n. 84)

As members of a learning community committed to ecological justice, we all work together to foster a deep and abiding knowledge of our one common home so that we can advocate for ecological care and for justice for the next generations. We seek to unlearn the patterns of disconnection and domination, and to fall back in love with our planet.

The wisdom of First Nations Peoples reminds us that we do not own Country but Country owns us. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have a deep respect for, understanding of, and sense of belonging to this planet we share. Alternatively, the attitude that says “business as usual” towards the suffering Earth accepts the loss of sacred sites, even though they are a part of the living systems that create the narrative of our history. Given the current climate of destruction and permanent damage to our natural environment, EREA learning communities are called to walk with Traditional Owners towards ecological care and justice.

We share in the confidence of Pope Francis in knowing that things can change and we are inspired by his exhortation: “This is the time to take prophetic actions” (Francis, 2019). The world is our agenda. It is for the world that we take action, in a spirit of global solidarity, embodying and enabling right relationships. We pledge this commitment and express our obligation, grounded in a Gospel Spirituality thus:

“If the simple fact of being human moves people to care for the environment of which they are a part, Christians in their turn realise that their responsibility within creation, and their duty towards nature and the Creator, are an essential part of their faith.”

(Laudato si’, n. 64)

As people living and working in the Edmund Rice Tradition, blessed to share life on a continent graced by the oldest living, surviving cultures in the world, we hear the urgent “cry of the earth and the cry of the poor” (Laudato si’, n. 49), and we will not turn away.

We are seeking a shift in attitudes and actions, to address the climate crisis and to restore harmony to God’s creation. We need to repair and heal our earth.

The voices of the world’s young people are calling out, challenging nations to prioritise the plight of the Earth. As a national community committed to an education for justice, EREA has and will continue to take leadership for the ecological future of our common home, listening to the young people, to the elders and to the earth itself.



“I worry that the world will become uninhabitable in my lifetime or in future generations because of our actions.”

- EREA young person



The Impact of the Climate Crisis: “the Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor”

If left unchecked, climate change resulting from rising temperatures will have a considerable impact on weather and ecosystems on which all life depends. Climate change projections indicate:

- **rising sea levels and more frequent sea level extremes**, placing coastal areas under greater risk of inundation;
- **higher temperatures** with both maximum and minimum temperatures rising;
- **more intense rainfall events** increasing the likelihood of more flooding, and
- **more drought**, for longer periods will be experienced (CoastAdapt 2018).

A CSIRO study quantifying extinction risk for Australia estimated that climate change would increase the rate of losses about five-fold, with 10 birds and seven mammals becoming extinct in the next 20 years "without purposeful intervention" (Foley 2020). In 2019, experts from 50 countries argued that up to one million species are threatened with extinction, more than any other time in human history (Bhardwaj 2019).

The Black Summer of 2020 in Australia dramatically increased the scale of immediate environmental risk with nearly 10 million hectares of the eastern states burned by bushfires after years of prolonged drought (Foley 2020). An estimated three billion animals were killed or displaced across Australia (van Eeden LM 2020). Western Australia experienced similarly devastating bushfires at the beginning of 2021.

Estimates indicate that by 2030 more than 100 million people globally could fall into extreme poverty due to climate change, while over 200 million people could be displaced due to more frequent and severe climatic disasters (Khoday 2018).


If left unchecked, climate change is predicted to reduce Australia's economic growth by 3% per year and cost around 310,000 jobs per year over the next 50 years. Australia's climate has warmed since national records began in 1910, with most warming occurring since 1950 (Philip 2020). Australia's mean surface air temperature

has increased by more than 1.4° Celsius since 1910. Since 1950, every decade has been warmer than its predecessor. The seven years from 2013 to 2019 all rank in the nine warmest years on record (The Bureau of Meteorology and CSIRO 2020).

The Deloitte Access Economics November 2020 Climate Change report makes it clear, based on the scientific evidence available, that “the choices we make in the next one-three years will affect the next 10-20 years” (Philip 2020). Doing nothing is a costly choice and is not an option. By 2070, Australia will experience a \$3.4 trillion reduction in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in present value terms and over 880,000 job losses will be attributable to climate change (Philip 2020).

A number of countries have made significant commitments to address climate change. Sweden is aiming to become the first fossil fuel free country by 2040, ramping up their investment in solar energy, wind energy, energy storage, smart grids and clean transport. They have set targets for 100% renewable electricity generation by 2040, net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2045, and negative emissions thereafter (Swedish Ministry of Infrastructure 2020). The world achieving net zero by 2050 is at least a decade too late and carries a strong risk of irreversible global climate disruption at levels inconsistent with maintaining well-functioning human societies (Climate Council of Australia Ltd 2021). Sweden is challenging other countries to join them in the aspiration to become a 100% renewable country.

Local governments and institutions around the world increasingly recognise the imperative to act to combat the climate crisis. According to the Climate Emergency Declaration campaign, Climate emergency declarations have been made in 1,868 jurisdictions and local governments covering 820 million citizens. A growing number of other institutions and organisations have also declared a climate emergency (Climate Emergency Declaration 2021). In making these declarations, these governments and institutions are committing to establish and implement policies, programs and campaigns in response to the reality of a climate emergency.



“I hope my generation can overcome the various social disagreements that plague our discourse to come together to address one of the most influential and immediate problems of our lifetimes.”

- EREA young person

Positional Statements

Inspired by the charism of Edmund Rice, the four Touchstones challenge the EREA network to commit to the following positional statements in response to the climate crisis:

1. Acting to protect the earth is central to our

Catholic identity: “Living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience.” (Laudato si’, 2015, n. 217)

2. We have much to learn: We listen to and uphold the wisdom of First Nations Peoples as we learn to live on the lands for which they have cared, for tens of thousands of years. Genuine connections and partnership made with Traditional Owners of the Country/s where each school and office reside will foster respect, opportunity and recognition, as well as greater understanding of Caring for Country.

3. The climate crisis is a justice issue: The climate crisis is one of the greatest injustices of our time. The people who have done the least to cause it are suffering the most. It is the single biggest challenge to reducing poverty and ensuring a sustainable future for all. (Caritas Australia 2015, 2016 & 2019)

4. We believe the science: The overwhelming consensus is that current human impact on the environment is unsustainable and must change – we are now certain of this, we have finished debating the need for action. While we know acting to protect the environment fulfils our identity as Catholic schools, we will use the scientific data on matters such as carbon, waste, recycling and pollution to inform, guide and inspire our strategies.

5. The status quo has caused the problem: Change is essential and urgently required. We cannot continue with any ‘business as usual’ when it comes to how we live. This includes disconnection from place, unlimited consumption and our throwaway culture. We are called to minimise harm and maximise healing.

6. This will not be free – it will be worth it: Every EREA community will need to allocate resources to a range of new strategies. These costs are in fact the belated acceptance of the true cost of operating in a sustainable way. Strategies with little or no net cost alone will not suffice.


7. Activism and advocacy for change: We will find creative ways to draw attention to unmet needs and unmet rights. We will listen to those who will be affected most by the decisions taken and those who hold different opinions. We will speak out publicly to engage with people and groups that have the power to make the changes we seek.

8. Everyone must be involved: This cannot be left to a few people or to a few designated roles. Every single person within the EREA network will need to make changes and to play their part – Advisory Councils, School Leadership teams, staff, young people and parents. Collaboration within and across the community is key.

9. Leadership must be creative, bold and strategic: Such leadership is required that looks beyond the current processes and mandates changes in practices and allocation of resources through strategic planning processes.

10. Better is better than best: Our earth needs everyone to do their part, however imperfect that may be. Across our global Edmund Rice movement, we will all be implementing new strategies and practices. We will work together to do whatever we can.

11. We will make a difference: We are optimistic that our efforts will not only significantly reduce the ecological footprint of the EREA network, we are also confident our endeavours will light the way for others who share our care for our common home.



*“I hope that humanity can rise-up as one and
work in unity to help save our common home from
the mistakes of our predecessors.”*

- EREA young person



Recommendations: What now?

It is recommended that bold action be taken in response to the climate crisis, action that is **strategic and embedded across the various aspects of school life**. By inviting parents and community members to be partners in this work, schools can seek to influence and empower others to take action for change also.

The EREA *Educating for Justice and Peace Framework* provides a powerful and comprehensive framework for this action: **Head, Heart, Hands and Feet** (EREA, *Educating for Justice and Peace Framework* 2016):

Head: Reading the Signs of the Times	Educational (intra and extra curriculum integration)
Heart: Nurturing Gospel Compassion	Spiritual (prayer, celebrations and rituals, advocacy and activism)
Hands: Undertaking Prophetic Action	Operational (financial stewardship, master planning and capital works, human and other resource and system management)
Feet: The Movement to Solidarity	Evaluation, Reflection, Renewal

The incorporation of actions into the strategic planning process should include **measurable targets, implementation strategies and tracking of progress** in ways that can be shared with the school community and the EREA network. Targets should be inspiringly ambitious.

The following table outlines a variety of actionable ways in which the EREA Climate Crisis Response Statement can be implemented, based upon the dimensions listed above. This list, which is not exhaustive or exclusive, can be used for reflection and future planning.

1.0 Head: Educational (intra and extra curricula)	
1.1	Embed the Australian Curriculum Sustainability Cross Curricular Priority throughout the formal and informal curricula.
1.2	Incorporate the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals into relevant curriculum areas.
1.3	Utilise and contribute to the ongoing development of EREA Sustainability resources.
1.4	Participate in the EREA Integral Ecology Project and EChO across EREA Communities of Practice.
1.5	Use the data collected from sustainability resources (resourceSMART, Climatedclever or other) to develop specific educational material that relates to issues affecting each local community.
1.6	Provide professional development for all teachers to support the embedding of the Sustainability Cross Curriculum Priority within their subject areas.
1.7	Embed the explicit development of advocacy/peace building skills into relevant curriculum topics including sustainability i.e. social analysis and critical thinking, resilience, active listening, effective communication, conflict handling, self-reflection and self-awareness.
1.8	Incorporate global conversations into relevant curriculum topics, in particular around the impact of climate change, exploring how our consumption habits affect others globally.

2.0 Heart: Spiritual (Contemplation & Action)

2.1	Present opportunities for prayer, reflection and ritual that encourage and enable connection in and with nature, and which deepen an understanding of integral ecology.
2.2	Support young people and staff to participate in advocacy and activism for ecological sustainability, including in-school and public events such as School Strike for Climate and #FridaysForFuture.
2.3	Participate in the ERA for Change Climate campaigns.
2.4	Utilise school social media and other forms of communication to increase awareness of Climate Justice advocacy.
2.5	Support students to host a climate justice event that engages with local stakeholders including parents, community members and policy makers.
2.6	Provide opportunities for young people to learn advocacy/peace building skills.
2.7	Through formation experiences, explore the concepts of climate justice, integral ecology and Caring for Country with staff.
2.8	Engage in Global conversations exploring the ways in which young people around the world are responding to the Climate Crisis.

3.0 Hands: Operational Processes/Policies/Perspectives

3.1	Adopt a sustainable use of resource consumption and demand policy to improve product utilisation, efficiency and financial sustainability.
3.2	Consider ways in which a position of responsibility for sustainability coordination/ecological education can be explored.
3.3	Adopt an external sustainability monitoring program that tracks changes and progress towards goals set to established standards in environmental policies, e.g. resourceSMART, Climateclever.
3.4	Plan and implement celebrations and events with the impact on the world in mind, making decisions to minimise the ecological impact and increase the social impact e.g. use of re-useable crockery and utensils, BYO water bottles, vegetarian food, waste minimised and then re-used/ recycled when possible, catering provided by social enterprises etc.
3.5	Develop an environment management plan for the school site, inclusive of local community needs.
3.6	Develop a waste management plan involving a commitment to minimising landfill waste and, whenever possible, diverting waste from landfill to resource recovery in recyclables and soft plastics.
3.7	Include sustainability goals in strategic planning for multiple domains, i.e. energy, waste, water and biodiversity.
3.8	Implement the EREA Principals' Ecological Sustainability Statement (2017)


4.0 Feet: Evaluation, Reflection, Renewal

4.1	Invite the active involvement of young people in all reflection and review processes.
4.2	Undertake collaborative reflection and review processes with community stakeholders.
4.3	Include discussion of this area of our work as a regular agenda item in Leadership Team meetings.
4.4	Apply an ecological lens to annual review and action planning processes.

“I believe that the beginning of a new era has already begun and it is now up to my generation to continue the work of the people who seek change.” - EREA young person

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