

Review of Environmental Policies and Practices of Australian Universities

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Introduction

Universities play a vital role in advancing environmental sustainability. As centres of education, research, innovation and community engagement, they not only generate new knowledge but also shape future leaders, influence public policy and demonstrate sustainable practices through teaching, research, governance and campus operations. Consistent with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those relating to climate action and responsible stewardship of natural resources, many universities have incorporated sustainability into their institutional strategies and long-term planning.

Recognising the influence of universities in driving environmental leadership and sustainable development, HOPE Australia undertook this review to gain an overview of the environmental sustainability policies, strategies and climate-related initiatives adopted across the Australian higher education sector.

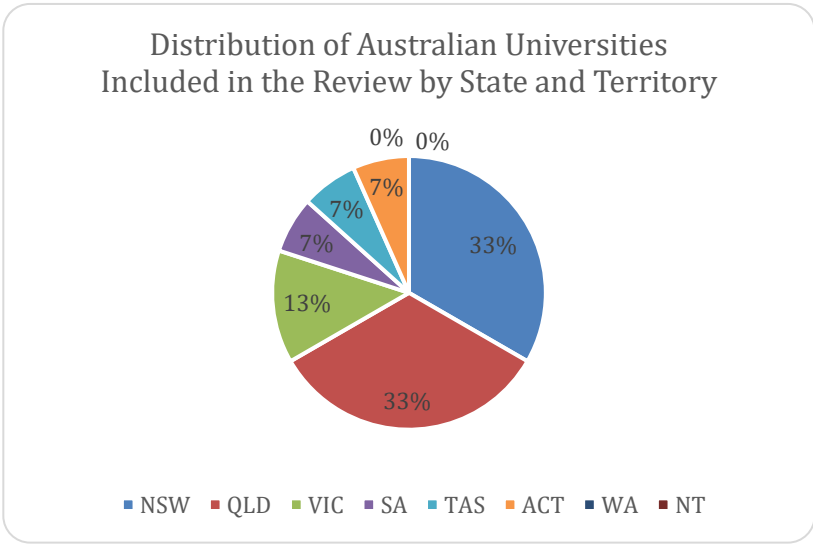
Information Collection

In early 2024, [Householders' Options to Protect the Environment \(HOPE\) Inc. \(Australia\)](#) contacted 42 Australian universities to seek information about their environmental sustainability policies, sustainability practices, climate change initiatives and related strategic documents. Universities were invited to provide relevant information directly or refer HOPE to publicly available policies, sustainability reports and other supporting resources.

Over the following 18 months, information was gathered through direct responses, follow-up correspondence and publicly available university websites, policies, sustainability reports and strategic documents. This information was compiled and analysed to provide a snapshot of the environmental sustainability policies and practices adopted across Australian universities.

This report summarises the key findings and highlights universities that have developed sustainability policies and strategies, as well as those that have adopted climate change policies, commitments or related initiatives.

The Australian universities included in this review are distributed across all Australian States and Territories, as shown in Graph 1.



Graph 1: Distribution of Australian Universities included in the review by State and Territory

Summary of Findings

The information collected demonstrates that Australian universities are adopting a wide range of approaches to environmental sustainability. While the scope and level of detail vary between institutions, many universities have developed sustainability policies, strategic plans, frameworks and action plans to guide environmental stewardship, improve campus sustainability, reduce emissions and support sustainability through teaching, research and governance.

To present the findings in a clear and consistent manner, the universities have been grouped into two broad categories based on the information collected during this review and publicly available institutional documents:

Category 1 – Universities with Sustainability Policies and Strategies

This category includes universities that have developed sustainability policies, strategies, frameworks or action plans to support environmental stewardship and sustainable campus operations. The information provided demonstrates an institutional commitment to sustainability through publicly available policies, strategic documents, sustainability reports or related initiatives.

Category 2 – Universities with Climate Change Policies and Statements

This category includes universities that have acknowledged climate change through policy statements, climate commitments or institutional initiatives. The information demonstrates that these universities recognise climate change as a significant environmental challenge and have identified actions, targets or strategies to reduce emissions, strengthen climate resilience or support broader climate action.

Table 1.1 summarises Australian universities according to the two categories used in this assessment.

Note: The University of Adelaide and the University of South Australia merged to form Adelaide University on 1 January 2026. The original 2024 enquiry was therefore sent to 42 universities, while Table 1.1 reflects the current structure of 41 universities.

University	Sustainability Policies & Strategies	Climate Change Policies & Statements	Key Policy / Initiative
Adelaide University (University of South Australia and the University of Adelaide merged on 1 January 2026)	✓	✓	Sustainability Policy; Net Zero by 2050
Australian Catholic University	✓	✓	Sustainability Policy; Carbon Emissions and Carbon Targets
Australian National University	✓	✓	Environmental Sustainability Plan 2026–2030; Net Zero by 2040
Avondale University	✓		Strategic Plan 2024–2027
Bond University	✓		Environmental Sustainability Procedure
Charles Darwin University	✓		Sustainability Policy; Sustainability Plan

Charles Sturt University	✓	✓	Sustainability Statement; Clean Energy Strategy 2030; Australia's First Carbon Neutral University
CQ University	✓	✓	Sustainability Policy; Sustainability Framework; Decarbonisation Strategic Plan 2024–2028
Curtin University	✓	✓	Sustainable Development Action Plan; Sustainability Vision and Strategy; Decarbonisation Plan (Net Zero by 2035)
Deakin University	✓		Environmental Sustainability Plan 2020–2030
Edith Cowan University	✓	✓	Strategic Plan 2026–2031; 2020 Annual Report; Climate Initiative Taskforce (Referenced in the 2020 Annual Report)
Federation University of Australia	✓	✓	Sustainability Framework; Net Zero by 2050
Flinders University	✓	✓	Sustainability Strategy 2030; Climate addressed in strategy
Griffith University	✓	✓	Sustainability Strategy 2023–2030; Net Zero by 2029
James Cook University	✓	✓	Environmental Policy; Sustainability Commitment; Sustainability Report 2024
Latrobe University	✓	✓	Environmental Sustainability Policy (2025); Net Zero by 2029
Macquarie University	✓		Sustainability Strategy
Monash University	✓	✓	Sustainability Action Plans; Net Zero Initiative (Net Zero by 2030)
Murdoch University	✓	✓	Environmental Sustainability Policy; Sustainability Sub-Strategy 2024–2030; Net Zero by 2030
Queensland University of Technology	✓	✓	Sustainability Action Plan 2025–2028; Carbon Reduction Strategy; Climate Adaptation and Resilience
RMIT University	✓	✓	Sustainability Policy; GHGs Gas Emission Reduction Targets & Climate Resilience

Southern Cross University	✓	✓	Interim Sustainability Strategy (2023); Net Zero Scope 1 and 2 by 2035
Swinburne University of Technology	✓	✓	Sustainability and Environment Strategy; Carbon Neutral by 2025
Torrens University Australia			Strategic social impact initiatives ("Be Good") and B Corporation certification; <i>no publicly available institutional environmental sustainability or climate policy identified during this review</i>
University of Canberra	✓	✓	Sustainability Policy (2024); Strategic Framework for Sustainability (Transition to a Net Zero Future)
University of Divinity			2022 Annual Report Includes Environmental Performance Reporting; <i>no publicly available institutional environmental sustainability or climate policy identified during this review</i>
University of Melbourne	✓	✓	Sustainability Plan 2030; Climate Active Carbon Neutral Certification
University of New England	✓	✓	Environmental Sustainability Policy (2026); Climate-related risk management commitment
University of New South Wales	✓	✓	Environmental Sustainability Reports; Climate Action Plan; Net Zero by 2050
University of Newcastle	✓	✓	Sustainability Strategy; Carbon Neutrality by 2025
University of Notre Dame Australia			Strategic Plan 2022–2026; <i>no publicly available institutional environmental sustainability or climate change policy identified during this review</i>
University of Queensland	✓	✓	Sustainability Strategy 2021–2025; Climate commitments and SDGs
University of Southern Queensland	✓	✓	Environmental Management Policy and Procedure (2025); Climate Change Response and Carbon Footprint Reduction
University of Sydney	✓	✓	Sustainability Annual Report; Net Zero by 2030

University of Tasmania	✓	✓	Strategic Plan and Sustainability Commitments; Climate identified within the Strategic Plan
University of Technology Sydney	✓	✓	Sustainability Strategy 2023–2027; Climate Action
University of the Sunshine Coast	✓	✓	Sustainability Operational Policy and Strategic Plan; Climate action recognised in strategic documents
University of Western Australia	✓	✓	Environmental Sustainability Strategy (2020); Energy Carbon Neutral by 2025
University of Wollongong	✓	✓	Sustainability and SDG Report; Carbon Neutrality by 2030
Victoria University	✓	✓	Sustainability Policy (2022); Commitment to Net Zero
Western Sydney University	✓	✓	Environmental Sustainability Policy; Climate Positive by 2029

Conclusion

Environmental sustainability is becoming an increasingly important consideration across the Australian higher education sector. Through policies, strategic planning, climate commitments and practical initiatives, many universities are demonstrating leadership in environmental stewardship and helping to create more sustainable campuses and communities.

The information gathered also shows that sustainability policies, strategic plans and climate-related initiatives are becoming increasingly accessible through publicly available university resources, supporting transparency and accountability. Sharing this information encourages collaboration, promotes the exchange of good practice and enables universities to learn from one another. While not every institution has published the same level of information, this does not necessarily mean environmental sustainability is not being actively pursued.

Collectively, the findings paint a positive picture of the growing commitment to sustainability across Australian universities. By sharing their policies, strategies and initiatives, universities are not only strengthening their own environmental performance but also creating opportunities for others to learn, collaborate and build on successful approaches. It is hoped this report will assist HOPE Inc. (Australia) in identifying emerging trends, recognising examples of good practice, and contributing to future environmental research and informed policy discussions.