

Zonta Says NOW News - JUNE 2021



School children are fighting for generational climate justice

The climate crisis is a real and present danger. Greenhouse gas emissions have gone through the roof since the 1950s prompting scientists to [question](#) if we have seen the end of the Holocene and are now in the 'Anthropocene' - an age where human beings have become the driving force shaping the environment. As a result, we live in the sixth mass extinction with the [biggest loss of species](#) in the history of humanity. And it has only taken a couple of generations.

What must it be like for young people today? They see the science they learn in school ignored by those in decision-making positions. They know we have the skills and technology to reduce emissions but see opportunities squandered through political partisanship. They do not have the vote, yet today's decisions are destroying their future.

What do they do? They take action - they strike.

This month's newsletter will focus on how young people are fighting for their adult lives.

Be inspired.

Carole

Carole Theobald
District 23 Futurist/Leadership Coordinator



It started with Greta

[Greta Thunberg](#) first heard about climate change when she was eight years old.

In 2018, at the age of 15, following Sweden's hottest summer on record, she sat outside the Swedish Parliament for [three weeks](#) before a general election on her School Strike for Climate. After the election, others joined her on a

weekly Friday strike, which eventually grew into the [Fridays for Future](#) movement. Globally, students demand action to prevent climate change and urge the fossil fuel industry to transition to renewable energy.

Greta's [TED talk](#) in 2018 outlined her personal health and mental struggles. She could not understand why global warming, a known existential threat to humanity, was being ignored by all. But, she said, "the one thing we need more than hope is action. Everything has to change, and it has to start today."

Greta is a vegan, upcycles her clothes and refuses to fly. Yet, in the last couple of years, she has given impressive talks to groups of international leaders, most notably at [COP24](#), the [World Economic Forum](#), the [UN Climate Action Summit](#) and the [European Parliament](#).

She talks of our house being on fire, stolen dreams, fairy tales of eternal economic growth, school strikes, and the importance of cooperating to fairly share the planet's resources.

In three short years, Greta has taken the world by storm and inspired her generation, including three young people from Castlemaine in Victoria.

Action: Watch Greta's speeches, see the world through her eyes and check out the Fridays for Future [map](#) that shows all the strikes and action being taken around the world now.



The Castlemaine Kids start school strikes in Australia

The story of how Milou Albrecht (13), Harriet O'Shea Carre (13) and Callum Neilson-Bridgefoot (11) started Australia's school strike movement features in [Jonica Newby's](#) latest book and what a fantastic story it is.

[Milou, Harriet and Callum](#) had read about Greta's strike the month before and decided to do one of their own. They hoped to persuade the 10 classmates and friends to join the strike held outside the offices of their Federal MP, Lisa Chester.

As they were planning the event, they met some Bendigo demonstrators who aimed to stop the Adani coal mine. A demonstrator put the kids in touch with the Australian Youth Climate Coalition. As a result, a social media campaign was started - even though none of the kids had a phone!

Milou, Harriet and Callum planned several local strikes in October and November 2018 and then a bigger strike in Melbourne for the end of November. The first strike attracted 20 people (double their class size), the next had 30, and then 50. On the day of the big strike, 250 people travelled from Castlemaine to Melbourne - where they were joined by thousands of people to march together

for the climate.

In total, the 30 November 2018 strike involved 15,000 Australian schoolkids in 30 locations. The second strike on 15 March 2019 involved 150,000 kids in 56 locations. On 20 September 2019, the third attracted 350,000 Australians in 130 locations - and across the world, 7-8 million people participated at 6,000 locations in 185 countries. It was the largest climate strike in history.

As Jonica Newby puts it, 'If Greta lit the torch, the Castlemaine kids turned it into a bonfire.'

From these events, the [School Strike 4 Climate Australia](#) (SS4C) emerged. The movement currently has over 350,000 members in all Australian states and territories in over 600 locations. They demand three things:

- No new coal, oil, and gas projects, including the Adani mine
- 100% renewable energy generation and exports by 2030
- Fund a just transition and job creation for all fossil-fuel workers and their communities.

SS4C is part of the global [Fridays for Future](#) organisation.

Did you know that Australia's gas and coal exports make Australia the third-largest exporter of fossil fuels globally, after Russia and Saudi Arabia?

Action: Check out the [Gas Facts](#) section on the SS4C website that covers the problem, key players, gas projects and myth-busting.



Bella's Challenges

Some of the students from School Strike 4 Climate Australia have been passionate about climate change for a while. None more so than Bella Burgemeister.

Bella comes from Bunbury in Western Australia. When she was ten years old (2016), she wrote *Bella's Challenge* about the 17 Sustainable Development Goals to help children understand what they could do about the climate crisis. It was written in 'kidspeak' outlining each goal, a summary of what it means, and actions that kids, adults and communities can take to achieve the goals. She spoke about her book to Western Australian Zontians in 2017.

In an [interview](#) for the RAC, she explained how Malala Yousafzai had inspired her to learn more about sustainability. (Remember that Bella wrote her book before Greta Thunberg had come on the scene!)

At 15, Bella is co-President of the Youth Board of [Millennium Kids](#) (MK) – an environmental youth organisation. MK empowers young people with a 'skills for life' approach to become leaders and change agents in their communities today.

Bella supports [1 Million Women](#) and is on many committees, including being a member of the Bunbury Youth Advisory Council, a Board Member of the Climate Justice Union and a Youth Advisory Council Member for the Commissioner for Children and Young People.

She recently received the 2020 Women in Environmental Action Award for Environmental Advocacy from 350 Perth – a global movement to end the use of fossil fuels.

Always caring about her community, Bella recently campaigned for the City of Bunbury to install [city lockers](#) – so that homeless people would have

somewhere to put their belongings.

She says *we need multigenerational cooperation working together as one voice. We all must work together in any way we can.*

She demonstrated this in the last year when she joined up with seven other School Strike 4 Climate activists on her biggest challenge yet - to sue the government on behalf of every child under 18 across the world.

Were they successful? Read the next story...

Action: Check out the amazing work of [Millennium Kids](#).



School Strike Activists take the Federal Environment Minister to Court

[In a landmark judgement](#), the Federal Court of Australia has found that the Minister for the Environment has a duty of care to avoid causing injury to young people while exercising her powers to approve a new coal project.

[Eight courageous School Strike 4 Climate activists](#) had worked with Equity Generation Lawyers to file a class action seeking an injunction to prevent the Federal Environment Minister Sussan Ley from approving a new coal project expansion.

Anj Sharma, Tomas Webster Arbizu, Bella Burgemeister, Izzy Raj-Seppings, Laura Kirwan, Ambrose Hayes, Ava Princi and Luca Saunders (all under 18) were aided by their litigation guardian, Sister Brigid Arthur, a former school principal from Victoria.

Expert witnesses included Professor Will Steffen, a climate scientist who has co-authored several International Panel on Climate Change reports and Dr Karl Mallon, who estimated the [financial costs](#) of climate change to young Australians. Their evidence was unchallenged.

They argued that emissions associated with burning coal from the mine's expansion would add 100 million tonnes of carbon emissions over the next 25 years (equal to around 20% of Australia's total domestic emissions from 2019).

The court's [summary](#) document stated *...Perhaps the most startling of the potential harms demonstrated by the evidence before the Court is that one million of today's Australian children are expected to suffer at least one heat-stress episode serious enough to require acute care in a hospital. Many thousands will suffer premature death from heat stress or bushfire smoke.*

As Ava Princi [explained](#) after the judgement, *The Court accepted our evidence that the emissions released from the mining and burning of fossil fuels will contribute to serious and wide-ranging physical, mental and financial harm to young people. The law now recognises that the Environment Minister is in a special position of power to prevent foreseeable harms to young people.*

While the Federal Court found the Minister had a duty of care, it did not prevent the Minister from deciding whether or not to approve the mine - and the case continues.

Justice Bromberg's [judgement](#) (paragraph 293) stated:

It is difficult to characterise in a single phrase the devastation that

the plausible evidence presented in this proceeding forecasts for the Children. As Australian adults know their country, Australia will be lost, and the World as we know it gone as well. The physical environment will be harsher, far more extreme and devastatingly brutal when angry. As for the human experience - quality of life, opportunities to partake in nature's treasures, the capacity to grow and prosper - all will be greatly diminished. Lives will be cut short. Trauma will be far more common and good health harder to hold and maintain. None of this will be the fault of nature itself. It will largely be inflicted by the inaction of this generation of adults, in what might fairly be described as the greatest inter-generational injustice ever inflicted by one generation of humans upon the next.

Action: If you have not already done so, please use this [link](#) to email your Federal MP, the Prime Minister and the Energy and Emissions Reduction Minister and ask them to represent your views regarding the Climate Change Bill currently working its way through the Australian Parliament.



Six Young People in Portugal are Taking 33 Countries to Court

The Australian school strike activists are not the only ones challenging for generational climate justice.

[In Portugal](#), six young people aged between 8 and 21 filed a case in the European Court of Human Rights against 33 countries. Having experienced record-breaking heatwaves and devastating forest fires, they want governments to do more to stop the climate crisis and protect their futures.

André Oliveira, Catarina Mota, Cláudia Agostinho, Mariana Agostinho, Martim Agostinho and Sofia Oliveira are represented by the [Global Legal Action Network](#).

They are suing all EU member states, Norway, Switzerland, the UK, Russia, Turkey, and Ukraine, for breaching their obligations to fight climate change.

They would like to see countries cut their emissions and achieve a 1.5°C Paris Agreement compatible rating as determined by [Climate Action Tracker](#) - an independent scientific organisation providing analysis to policymakers since 2009.

Action: Follow the [progress](#) of this important case for climate justice and see how [Australia is faring](#) on the Climate Action Tracker.



What is your Present for the Future?

Zonta Says NOW aims to create a gender-equal, sustainable world by educating girls, advocating for women's rights and inspiring more female leaders.

We can seek generational climate justice through our service and education programs to make the world a better place for everyone.

You can celebrate a birthday or special event by giving a [Present for the Future](#) to support Zonta's programs and send a colourful e-card to acknowledge the occasion.

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