Zonta Australia
Zonta Says NOW Think Tank
MAY 2026 UPDATE

In this May UPDATE:

- On to the Next Stage
- Landmark UN Resolution
- Federal Budget and Climate Justice
- Women Delivered
- June Think Tank: Why Glaciers Matter
- April Think Tank: Women Leading our Climate Future
- Vancouver Calls
- What Our Allies Are Doing
- The Biennium in Review

On to the Next Stage



The painted lady butterfly does not stop at one flower. Neither do we. This is the final edition of the Zonta Says NOW Australia Update, but we will refocus and continue with a Zonta Australia Update in the new biennium. In the future, we will be bringing climate justice into conversation with all four of Zonta's interconnected causes: education equality, ending violence against women, women in decision-making, and climate justice.

Five years ago, climate justice was not a part of most Zontians' vocabulary. Through our Zonta Says NOW Think Tanks and Updates, we have worked to change that. We have heard from medical anthropologists about extreme heat

and women's health, examined the links between climate disasters and violence against women, and explored how excluding women from decision-making produces worse climate outcomes for everyone. Speaker by speaker, we have built a community of Zontians who understand, from evidence, why climate justice belongs at the heart of Zonta's work.

We have also built relationships along the way. The Women's Climate Congress, 1 Million Women, Gender and Disaster Australia, and other allies have become part of how we work. In the biennium ahead, we look forward to working more closely with them and amplifying all of our voices.

Our May Update opens with two new developments: a landmark UN General Assembly resolution and the Federal budget. We also learn about Women Deliver in Melbourne and the launch of the Feminist Climate Collective, preview the June Think Tank, reflect on April's Think Tank, look ahead to Vancouver, and look back on a remarkable biennium.

This edition does not mark the end of Zonta Says NOW; it marks the beginning of a more holistic approach to advocating for a better world for women and girls.

Keep breathing, keep smiling, and have fun!

Carole
Carole Theobald
Chair, Zonta Says NOW Working Group
zontasaysnow.org.au

Back to top

Landmark UN Resolution



This week, the UN General Assembly adopted a landmark resolution affirming that countries have a legal obligation to act on climate change and can be held responsible under international law if they fail to do so.

Backed by 141 countries, the resolution follows the International Court of Justice's 2025 advisory opinion, requiring states to protect the environment from greenhouse gas emissions. The UN resolution was prepared and championed by Vanuatu, a Pacific nation facing an existential threat from rising seas. Australia voted in favour of the resolution. The United States, Russia,

Israel, Iran, and Saudi Arabia were among the eight countries that voted against, and 28 countries abstained.

The domestic implications are immediate. Days before the vote, the High Court heard Australia's first-ever climate case to reach the nation's highest court — a Hunter Valley community group challenging the approval of a coal mine expansion. The NSW Court of Appeal had already ruled that the approval was unlawful, finding that planning authorities must consider the local climate impacts of fossil fuel projects. The High Court's decision will set a binding national precedent, so we await the decision with interest.

With the ICJ ruling on the record and the General Assembly's endorsement just days old, the legal weight behind that decision is unprecedented.

Climate accountability is becoming a legal duty under international law, and not just a political choice.

UN Resolution

Back to top

Federal Budget, Women and Climate



The 2026–27 federal budget highlighted some positives and negatives.

On the positive side, the gender pay gap is at a historic low, and Australia has risen to 13th on the Global Gender Gap Index, up from 43rd in 2022. The fifth consecutive Women's Budget Statement shows stronger intersectional awareness, explicit attention to First Nations women, and gender considerations embedded more consistently across economic policy. Concrete measures include reform of the Child Support Scheme to address financial abuse and weaponisation, expansion of Paid Parental Leave to six months from July 2026, wage support in feminised sectors, and stronger investment in women's health.

The negatives? $2.2 billion was cut from climate, energy, and environment programs. The Climate Council has called for a properly costed and adequately resourced National Adaptation Plan, and for more funding to help Australians prepare for and build resilience to climate-fuelled disasters.

Disasters disproportionately impact women, which is why it is important for Australia to develop a National Roadmap for Gender and climate action based on the Belem Gender Action Plan.

Women's Budget Statement

Back to top

Women Delivered



Photo: Lynne Foley, Sandra Burns, Carole Theobald, Bridget Mather, and Sharyl Scott at the Opening Session of Women Deliver.

Women Deliver 2026 drew over 6,100 attendees from 198 countries to Narrm (Melbourne) in April, including around a dozen Australian Zontians. The event was notably inclusive with childcare, disability access, and translation via the event's app, and featured over 100 exhibition stands alongside themed hub areas designed to encourage connection and informal conversation.

The program balanced difficult discussions of injustice with concrete examples of progress across four themes: adolescent girls' rights, sexual and reproductive health, climate justice, and the upholding of human rights.

Speakers included Australia's Governor-General and Zonta Australia patron Sam Mostyn, Julia Gillard, Jacinda Ardern, Tuvalu Prime Minister Feleti Teo, Justin Trudeau, and UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed. Sessions examined not just what needs to change, but who holds power and what it takes to shift it.

Indigenous women from Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Fiji, Peru, and the United States spoke about colonisation, dispossession, and survival with a directness the audience visibly felt. Women from Gaza, Afghanistan, Myanmar, and Ethiopia addressed conflict, displacement, and loss.

Two main themes stood out at the conference. First was the confidence of young women in politics—they set the agenda, called for accountability, and didn't wait around for permission. Second was the increasing role of philanthropy in shaping gender equality efforts, which raised concerns about possible unintended effects and the distortion of local priorities. Participants also talked about the gap between the widespread use of gender-equality language and the reality that real power-sharing and structural changes are still limited, especially for women and girls.

The conference produced a significant outcome in the Melbourne Declaration for Gender Equality — a collective commitment from organisations across the gender equality ecosystem to centre human rights obligations, resource local civil society, confront unjust economic systems, and stand united against militarism. The Declaration is explicit that the systems shaping gender equality have not worked for the majority of women and girls, and that this moment demands long-term transformation rather than incremental adjustment. It aligns closely with Zonta's own advocacy priorities and is worth reading in full.

Another outcome was the launch of the Feminist Climate Collective (FeCC) within the Climate Hub. Kate Thwaites MP, Special Envoy for Climate Change Adaptation and Resilience, and our guest speaker at the April Think Tank, was among those present for the launch.

The FeCC calls on the Australian Government to lead with gender-transformative climate finance for women and girl-led initiatives in Australia and internationally; develop a ten-year National Gender and Climate Roadmap with mandatory parliamentary reporting; and rapidly transition away from fossil fuel licensing, production, subsidies, and exports in line with a credible 1.5°C commitment that centres First Nations women and marginalised communities.

The FeCC includes our allies, the Women's Climate Congress, 1 Million Women, and Women's Environmental Leadership Australia, as well as organisations such as Action Aid Australia, Plan International, and the International Women's Development Agency. Zonta Australia plans to join FeCC in the near future.

For Zonta, Women Deliver reinforced the value of nationally coordinated advocacy grounded in grassroots action — and both the Melbourne Declaration and the FeCC launch demonstrated the kind of collective impact that collaboration makes possible. The next Women Deliver Conference will be held in 2029, and the location is yet to be determined.

Read the Melbourne Declaration here

Back to top

June Think Tank: Why Glaciers Matter



As winter approaches, the June Think Tank examines what glacier loss means — scientifically, ethically, and practically.

Glaciers are the planet's largest repositories of fresh water outside the polar ice caps, sustaining the lives of billions of people, the health of ecosystems, and the flow of major river systems. Their loss is accelerating, and its consequences extend well beyond the mountain regions where they sit, including to Australia, where changes in precipitation patterns and sea levels are already being felt.

Dr Megan-Jane Johnstone AO brings an unusual combination of experience to this conversation. She is both a nationally recognised healthcare ethicist and a visual artist whose work engages directly with environmental change. Her session will address the science and human stakes of glacier loss, as well as the ethical frameworks through which we might understand our obligations in response to their loss.

The June Think Tank will also serve as the biennium review — an opportunity to reflect collectively on what we have built and learned across 2024–2026, and to hear what the 2026–2028 biennium will hold.

Please circulate the flyers through your networks [jpeg] and [pdf]. Register using the link below.

Register for the June Think Tank

Back to top

April Think Tank



The April Think Tank brought together two practitioners whose work sits at very different points on the policy-to-practice spectrum, and the conversation was the richer for it.

Kate Thwaites, Federal Member for Jagajaga and Special Envoy for Climate Change Adaptation and Resilience, spoke about the federal government's approach to building a renewable energy economy and the upcoming COP31 climate conference, where Australia will be leading the negotiations. She engaged seriously with participants' questions and, for those in the room at Women Deliver a few days later, the conversation continued in person.

Sally Quinn, Founder and CEO of Green Collect and the 2025 Women Taking Climate Action Award winner for Zonta District 23, presented a working model of circular-economy practice. Green Collect's approach to waste reduction, emissions, and inclusive employment is practical evidence that climate solutions and social equity are not competing priorities. Her work also illustrates how much can be achieved at the organisational level without waiting for systemic change.

Both speakers reinforced that women's leadership at every level, legislative, regulatory, community, and enterprise, enhances good climate outcomes. If you missed the event, you can catch up on the video and slides using the link below.

View the April Think Tank and Slides

Back to top

Vancouver Calls



The Zonta International Convention takes place in Vancouver in July, marking the formal close of the 2024–2026 biennium and the start of 2026–2028. It is where Zonta conducts its international business, hears from award recipients and speakers, and sets the direction for the organisation for the next two years.

Voting for incoming Directors and the International Nominating Committee was conducted online for the first time, ahead of the Convention itself. This means the incoming leadership is already known and gearing up for the new biennium.

For Zontians who cannot travel to Vancouver, virtual participation is strongly encouraged. Virtual sessions run from 15 June to 14 July and are accessible through the Whova app.

The Zonta Says NOW program at the Convention includes virtual and face-to-face workshops on Women and Sustainable Decision-Making co-hosted with Women 4 Climate in Vancouver. There will also be the first-ever Zonta International Zonta Says NOW Walk along the Vancouver waterfront. Nearly 700 people have registered for the walk so far, including members of the Vancouver branch of Women 4 Climate.

If you can't be in Vancouver in person, consider registering for the 'Virtual Convention'!

Register for the Zonta International Convention

Back to top

What Are Our Allies Doing?



What are our allies up to? Here are some of their upcoming events:

- *One Million Women — Demystifying Clean Energy Webinar,* Thursday 4 June, 12–1pm AEST. Explores the electricity grid, large-scale renewable projects, household electrification, and how communities can navigate the transition. Register here
- *Women's Environmental Leadership Australia — Power Mapping for Change,* Tuesday 23 June, 12–1.30pm AEST, online. Tickets $45. For the first time, WELA is bringing one of the core sessions from its leadership programs to the wider community. This practical workshop facilitated by Ruth Langford and Cherry Muddle, draws on the campaign to stop dredging and dumping on the Great Barrier Reef. Participants will work through how to identify decision-makers and allies, map influence, find leverage points, and build the relationships change requires. concessions available. Register here
- *Gender and Disaster Australia — Free Lessons in Disaster Trainin***g** that addresses the gendered impacts of disasters, including family violence, workforce wellbeing and suicide. Face-to-face training on 28 May in Mullumbimby, 1 June in Gold Coast, 10 June in Perth, 11 June in Bunbury, 16 June in Melbourne, 19 June in Castlemaine, 23 June in Fraser Coast, and 24 June in Brisbane. Online training on 9 June. Also, a webinar on 25 June will explore how gender, colonization, geography, and systemic inequity shape the experiences of First Nations women during and after disaster. Register here
- *Women's Climate Congress (WCC) — Climate & Gender Equality Hub* The WCC is creating a collaborative online hub to share information, amplify leadership, connect grassroots voices to national conversations, and strengthen feminist advocacy. The *WCC Book Club* takes on David Attenborough's 2025 book *Ocean: Earth's Last Wilderness*, co-authored with Colin Butfield. Members of the WCC can join the conversation on Monday 15 June, 5–6.30 pm AEST, via Zoom.

Don't forget that it is free to join the WCC and 1 Million Women!

Back to top

The Biennium in Review



Across the 2024–2026 biennium, the Australian Think Tanks brought together a sustained and substantive set of conversations about climate justice including:
:

- *August 2024:* Alana Mountain, forest campaigner and activist, and Dr Janet Salisbury, Women's Climate Congress
- *October 2024:* Anjali Sharma, climate activist and lead litigant in Sharma v Minister for the Environment
- *December 2024*: Dr Catherine Trundle, medical anthropologist specialising in heat stress and climate justice
- *February 2025:* How to engage effectively for gender-equal climate justice before an election
- *April 2025:* Assoc Prof Carly Cook on women shaping conservation, including the IUCN's green list of protected areas
- *June 2025:* Maya Farmer, Generation Justice — intergenerational climate justice
- *August 2025:* Fiona Dorman, National Council of Women — purposeful collaboration and the W20
- *October 2025:* Charlotte Sterrett, WWF — nature-based solutions and the Climate Resilient By Nature program across the Indo-Pacific
- *December 2025:* Nicki Lees, Maurice Blackburn Social Justice Practice — climate justice and the law
- *February 2026:* Dr Margaret Moreton, CEO of Gender and Disaster Australia — the gendered impacts of disasters
- *April 2026:* Kate Thwaites MP and Sally Quinn — renewable energy policy and circular economy practice

The depth and breadth of these conversations have left Zonta Australia well-connected in the climate justice space. Through relationships with speakers, partner organisations and allied networks, we are well-positioned to continue this advocacy effectively in the biennium ahead.

Thank you for your support during the last two years. Let's see how we can make our work go further in the next biennium!

Review the 2024-2026 Think Tanks

Back to top

Zonta Australia
Zonta Says NOW Think Tank
www.zontasaysnow.org.au
info@zontasaysnow.org.au

This email was sent to {{ contact.EMAIL }} You received this email because you have attended an Australian Zonta Says NOW Think Tank meeting or registered on the mailing list.

Click here to join the Australian Think Tank mailing list
Click here to join the Intercontinental Think Tank mailing list

Unsubscribe here

Sent with Brevo

© 2026 Zonta Says NOW, Zonta Australia