

Response to:

The inquiry into the response of Western Australian schools to climate change

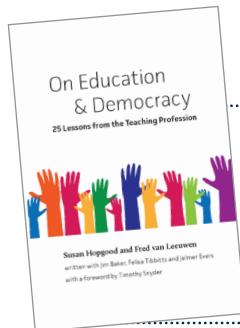
SSTUWA response to the Education and Health Standing Committee – Inquiry into the response of Western Australian schools to climate change



SSTUWA
The State School Teachers' Union of W.A. (Inc.)

We are a strong, independent, democratic union of public educators protecting and improving our industrial and professional rights and promoting quality public education for all.

Our focus areas:



On Education & Democracy

The book *On Education & Democracy* (2019) by Susan Hopgood and Fred van Leeuwen contains 25 lessons from the teaching profession for educators. These six focus areas were identified by the SSTUWA as key organisational directions following decisions from November State Council Conference 2019.

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Background

In responding to this inquiry, the State School Teachers' Union of WA (SSTUWA) draws upon the comprehensive work undertaken by Education International on Climate Change Education who's manifesto we append in full below. Education International is the Global Union Federation representing 32 million teachers and education support personnel in 178 countries and territories. The Australian Education Union (AEU) is a proud member of Education International, and the Federal Secretary of the AEU is also the President of Education International. Given that the SSTUWA is affiliated with the AEU, we have a direct link/affiliation to Education International and wish to amplify the quality work they have produced in this vitally important area.

The SSTUWA represents over 17,000 public school teachers, school leaders, school psychologists, and TAFE lecturers across Western Australia. We strongly support urgent and vigorous action to address the growing climate emergency in a bid to mitigate the enormous threats that global heating poses to humanity and biodiversity both in this country and across the world. We are acutely aware that this is a global issue and that those most at risk of harm in the global south are those who have contributed least to global greenhouse gas emissions. The issue of equity and responsibility cannot be ignored, and we believe that it is incumbent upon developed nations, such as Australia, who are most responsible for global emissions, to do the most to address the problems and challenges our actions have created.

The SSTUWA, looks forward to working with the state government, Department of Education, the Department of Training and Workforce Development and the Schools Curriculum and Standards Authority in this important matter.

Summary list of recommendations

1. The SSTUWA supports the framework outlined by Education International and calls on the Australian government to deliver on our commitments to Climate Change Education and Education for Sustainable Development in the Paris Agreement (article 12) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (targets 4.7, 12.8 and 13.3).
2. That a joint consultative committee with SSTUWA representation is established to develop and progress Climate Change Education (CCE) and action and sustainable practices for infrastructure and maintenance of public school and TAFE sites.
3. The SSTUWA is the key industrial body representing public school teachers, leaders and TAFE lectures in WA. The SSTUWA seeks recognition as a stakeholder in the development of government and Department of Education policies, procedures and guidelines on climate action and sustainability practices in public school and TAFE settings.
4. The SSTUWA seeks recognition as a key stakeholder in the development of quality Climate Change Education (CCE) and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) resources and programs with SCSA. There is a clear need for curriculum to include more explicit and far reaching responses to anthropogenic climate change. The expression “climate emergency” out to be explicitly used when referring to climate change to convey the sense of urgency around which there is scientific consensus. The SSTUWA seeks opportunities for our members to play an integral part in how climate change curriculum and action can be integrated in diverse contexts for all students.
5. That the Department of Education assist and support all schools and require them to include sustainability in their operational plans as an area of priority. This ought to involve the setting of targets to reduce our ecological footprint through consumption of resources, the recovery and reuse of existing resources and by encouraging more sustainable consumption and waste management across the system. This sustainability drive to be resourced by the department so that it does not come at the expense of other priority areas.
6. That climate change and Education for Sustainability be embedded into course design in the development of preservice education courses at university.
7. That a directorate within DoE is established to develop systemic practices, processes for schools to address the climate emergency and through CCE, ESD and improved sustainability practices. That recurrent funding beyond the SCFM is provided for this and that additional workstreams involved are not added to those already faced by overstretched and under resourced schools and TAFE institutions.
8. That recurrent funding be provided to SCSA to develop quality Climate Change Education and curriculum resources to enable diverse climate action to occur in schools and communities and to ensure that all schools are equipped to play their part in tackling the climate emergency.
9. That recurrent funding is provided for regular PD opportunities for all School Education Act staff and TAFE lecturers in WA to develop their understanding of Climate Change Education and Education for Sustainability.
10. That quality Climate Change Education and Education for Sustainability professional learning is delivered by a dedicated team of qualified and experienced lead teachers through DoE.
11. That the diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander understandings about sustainability and caring for country be actively sought and used to guide the design and implementation of local, regional and national policies and initiatives in addressing the climate emergency.
That genuine and on-going consultation is held with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and understanding of climate, climate change and sustainability is incorporated into curriculum resources and teacher education.

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12. That a systemic plan is enacted by the state government and DoE to replace/upgrade school and TAFE infrastructure so that they are energy efficient and sustainable institutions .
 13. That climate-proofing elements are developed in the planning of all public schools and TAFE worksite developments in WA, actioned throughout the construction and maintenance stages.
 14. That staff and students in WA public schools and TAFEs are provided with opportunities to engage in meaningful Climate Change Education and Education for Sustainability activities to assist in managing eco anxiety and a range of systemic supports are established to support schools, TAFEs and students in this area.
 15. That the prevalence and impact of eco and climate anxiety, as reported in numerous studies, among students and school staff be acknowledged and addressed through the provision of additional Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA), Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) and Australian Counselling Association (ACA) accredited mental health professionals such as psychologists, social workers and counsellors.

Preamble

The SSTUWA believes that Education International's Manifesto on Quality Climate Change Education for All, establishes a clear and framework for all governments to deliver on their commitments to climate change education and education for sustainable development as part of the Paris Agreement (article 12)¹.

Education International's Manifesto on Quality Climate Change Education for All

The climate crisis is the greatest threat facing humanity and our planet. With little time left to reverse the current course and keep global temperature rise below +1.5°C, climate action is more urgent than ever.

Education must be transformed to catalyse the fight against climate change and to support a just transition to a more sustainable world.

Students have a right to gain the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to sustain our world for present and future generations, and they have the right to receive an education which prepares them for the world of work in emerging green economies. It is time to come together to build more resilience in our education institutions, our communities, and our economy, while considerably reducing our ecological footprint through a just transition.

Education International, the global voice of educators, hereby calls on every government in the world to deliver on their commitments to Climate Change Education and Education for Sustainable Development in the Paris Agreement (article 12) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (targets 4.7, 12.8 and 13.3). This Manifesto outlines the profession's vision for quality climate change education and the policy framework necessary to implement it.

The recommendations are thus:

1. Governments ensure quality Climate Change Education (CCE) for all.

- A. Every country includes CCE as part of their climate promises and commits to a credible timebound plan that is regularly monitored and evaluated.
- B. All governments develop, implement, and evaluate CCE policies, in close collaboration with education unions, student organisations, and indigenous groups.
- C. Governments increase domestic investment in education, as well-funded, strong public education systems are a prerequisite for promoting quality CCE for all. Systems are further strengthened through overseas development aid, international cooperation, and open access to resources and knowledge.
- D. Governments ensure that the impacts of climate change do not prevent all children and young people from enjoying their right to quality education. (UN SDG #4)

2. Every student leaves education climate-literate and equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to tackle climate change, adapt to uncertainties, and take part in building a more sustainable future.

- A. CCE is integrated into curricula at all levels of education, including early childhood education, technical and vocational education, further and higher education, and adult education.
- B. CCE is a compulsory and integral part of the curriculum in primary and secondary education across every school or jurisdiction.
- C. As part of a just transition, access to quality technical and vocational education and training, including apprenticeships, and higher education is expanded, equipping students with the skills needed for future careers in a new green economy.

- D. Climate change is addressed across all subjects and education institutions are supported to take an interdisciplinary and whole-institution approach to CCE.
 - E. CCE curricula is gender responsive, taking into account the inequalities experienced by girls and women, and takes an intersectional approach.
- 3. Quality Climate Change Education is based on science, and addresses the ethical, cultural, political, social and economic dimensions of climate change.**
- A. CCE is underpinned by accurate information based on scientific evidence and up-to-date research. Governments invest in research and amplify international cooperation on research to support the development and sharing of scientific knowledge on climate change.
 - B. CCE addresses the unequal contribution of countries towards causing climate change and the unequal impact of climate change today, recognising that the current system is inequitable, and levels of production and consumption are unsustainable. It further recognises that vulnerable populations and groups are most directly affected, including low-income countries, small island states, poor communities, indigenous peoples, people with disabilities, people of colour, women, girls, and children.
 - C. CCE promotes a multicultural vision and recognises indigenous knowledge.
 - D. CCE fosters critical thinking and civic engagement. It is transformative and empowers students to consider just and sustainable alternatives, encouraging them to take action in their local communities and beyond.
- 4. Teachers are trained and supported to provide quality Climate Change Education.**
- A. Governments ensure that teacher training institutions have the funding and resources necessary to deliver quality initial teacher education, and that student teachers are prepared to teach CCE.
 - B. CCE is included in continuous professional development programmes for teachers and responds to development needs identified by teachers.
 - C. The professional autonomy and academic freedom of teachers, further and higher education personnel are protected and guaranteed.
 - D. Governments provide teachers with teaching and learning resources to support them to teach CCE. These resources are up to date, gender-responsive, adapted to local contexts, multicultural and in local languages.
- 5. Schools and learning environments are transformed, to support quality climate change education.**
- A. Educational infrastructure is safe and climate resilient.
 - B. Education providers at all levels prioritise and invest in making education institutions environmentally friendly.
 - C. Education institutions are energy-efficient and sustainable institutions, in line with the climate-proofing of workplaces carried out by the union labour movement.
 - D. School leaders, teachers and education support personnel are supported and trained to climate proof their institutions, with the view to a just transition.
 - E. Students are involved in sustainable practices at education institutions in collaboration with the broader education community.²

Recommendations:

1. The SSTUWA supports the framework outlined by Education International and calls on the Australian government to deliver on our commitments to Climate Change Education and Education for Sustainable Development in the Paris Agreement (article 12) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (targets 4.7, 12.8 and 13.3).

Western Australian context

Western Australian public schools and TAFEs are situated across the most expansive geographical state in Australia, with some staff and students working and living in extremely remote areas.

The SSTUWA is aware that there is comprehensive and growing community support across our public schools and TAFEs to address the climate emergency and to embed sustainable practices across all aspects of schools and TAFEs.

If we are to meet the needs of our students in schools and TAFE campuses, the education system must equip all students with the knowledge and skills necessary to live more sustainable lives. To do this we must provide ongoing experiences in all educational settings which enable students to “*think global and act local*” by engaging in practical activities which promote environmental awareness and sustainable behaviours.

The SSTUWA firmly believes that the diverse and accumulated understandings of Indigenous custodians should be placed at the centre of Education for Sustainability. Such knowledge and understanding ought to guide the design and implementation of local, regional, national and global climate change policies and projects. It is vital that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are genuinely consulted and have ongoing involvement in developing and actioning climate change education and policy across government agencies. This is particularly important in education and training and complements the Department of Education’s Aboriginal Cultural Standards Framework.

The SSTUWA believes that strategies to address the climate emergency and sustainability should not solely be focused on mitigation and adaptation. Lasting systemic change will only be achieved if there is a requirement for planning, action and strategies as a whole of governmental approach with recurrent funding in government budgets.

In terms of the response of the education system, there is clear need for the following changes to occur as a matter of urgency:

- An official recognition that we are confronting a **climate emergency** which poses an existential threat to humanity and biodiversity
- Enhanced centralised support and recurrent funding for the Department of Education to enable ongoing staff development in CCE and ESD.
- Resourcing provided to the Schools Curriculum Standards Authority (SCSA) for the development of quality climate change education curriculum and support materials with more flexible methods of delivery to cater for WA’s diverse contexts and the needs of all students.
- Centralised processes to oversee the design, procurement, construction and maintenance of infrastructure of school and TAFE sites with sustainability as a fundamental criteria for action
- A systemic and fully funded infrastructure review which seeks to introduce sustainability criteria into the management and maintenance of buildings and facilities.
- A systemic, fully funded and resourced process when designing and constructing new school and TAFE infrastructure which must have sustainability and carbon neutrality at its core.
- A requirement that all schools and TAFE institutions include sustainability and climate action in their business/operating plans accompanied by the setting of targets designed to reduce our collective ecological footprint.

Recommendations:

2. That a joint consultative committee with SSTUWA representation is established to develop and progress Climate Change Education (CCE) and action and sustainable practices for infrastructure and maintenance of public school and TAFE sites.
3. The SSTUWA is the key industrial body representing public school teachers, leaders and TAFE lectures in WA. The SSTUWA seeks recognition as a stakeholder in the development of government and Department of Education policies, procedures and guidelines on climate action and sustainability practices in public school and TAFE settings.
4. The SSTUWA seeks recognition as a key stakeholder in the development of quality Climate Change Education (CCE) and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) resources and programs with SCSA. There is a clear need for curriculum to include more explicit and far reaching responses to anthropogenic climate change. The expression “climate emergency” out to be explicitly used when referring to climate change to convey the sense of urgency around which there is scientific consensus. The SSTUWA seeks opportunities for our members to play an integral part in how climate change curriculum and action can be integrated in diverse contexts for all students.
5. That the Department of Education assist and support all schools and require them to include sustainability in their operational plans as an area of priority. This ought to involve the setting of targets to reduce our ecological footprint through consumption of resources, the recovery and reuse of existing resources and by encouraging more sustainable consumption and waste management across the system. This sustainability drive to be resourced by the department so that it does not come at the expense of other priority areas.

Staffing

The SSTUWA acknowledges the incredible work individual schools, school staff and community partners have undertaken to address the climate emergency. However, many such actions are undertaken without funding based solely upon the dedication and commitment of staff and volunteers.

There is no centralised approach to staffing – from the development of preservice teachers in undergraduate/graduate courses and University in the area of climate change or sustainability and what little development is available, is dependent on the interest of the university staff or preservice teachers.

In school or TAFE settings, very few staff are funded to develop, implement and manage sustainability and climate action programs and projects. Where they do exist, the majority of roles promoting sustainability and climate action undertaken in addition to current workloads with little or no time and resourcing. Our members report that their actions in this space are seen as an additional role beyond their classroom duties. These roles are often not valued by the system, and are not given any degree of priority. The SSTUWA believe this is a haphazard and inappropriate approach which needs to be remedied by specified funding and time allocation for sustainability and climate action coordination at the school/TAFE level.

The SSTUWA believes there is a need for a centrally coordinated approach to support schools to deliver improved sustainability and climate action outcomes through the curriculum as well as through better management of infrastructure. Further, professional learning should be provided to teachers and school leaders through DoE's Professional Learning Institute in collaboration with SCSA.

"For students to experience transformative learning, teachers too must be given the opportunity to learn and be empowered with the knowledge, skills and values to address such a complex subject as climate change, in the context of a wider transformation of society."

Vibeke Jensen, Director of the Division for Peace and Sustainable Development, UNESCO³

Recommendation:

6. That climate change and Education for Sustainability be embedded into course design in the development of preservice education courses at university.
7. That a directorate within DoE is established to develop systemic practices, processes for schools to address the climate emergency and through CCE, ESD and improved sustainability practices. That recurrent funding beyond the SCFM is provided for this and that additional workstreams involved are not added to those already faced by overstretched and under resourced schools and TAFE institutions.

Curriculum

The SSTUWA firmly believes that curriculum content, design and support is the preuve of the SCSA in WA. It is entirely appropriate for quality climate change education to be taught in schools, considering the Australian government signed the Paris Agreement where article 12 states *“the parties shall cooperate in taking measures, as appropriate, to enhance climate change education, training, public awareness, public participation and public access to information, recognising the importance of these steps with respect to enhancing actions under [The Paris] Agreement.”*²

In 2015, United Nations member states adopted the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. These goals are a “universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and improve the lives and prospects of everyone, everywhere.”

- “Climate change is already impacting public health, food and water security, migration, peace and security. Climate change, left unchecked, will roll back the development gains we have made over the last decades and will make further gains impossible.
- Investments in sustainable development will help address climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and building climate resilience.
- Conversely, action on climate change will drive sustainable development.
- Tackling climate change and fostering sustainable development are two mutually reinforcing sides of the same coin; sustainable development cannot be achieved without climate action. Conversely, many of the SDGs are addressing the core drivers of climate change.”³

While some schools are integrating activities around the Sustainable Development Goals, it is entirely dependent on individual teachers and supportive school leadership, with associated costs coming out of their current funding arrangements.

For effective and systemic quality climate education, there must be a coordinated approach to the development, provision, resourcing and funding of curriculum resources. The SSTUWA believes this be through the SCSA, which is the independent curriculum authority in WA, and free from commercial interest and intervention.

The SSTUWA highly recommends the inclusion and collaboration of first nations peoples in the development of curriculum support documents on climate change and sustainability. It is vitally important that our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders voices are included and represented. Knowledge from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the ongoing care and management of country/boodja must be recognised, valued and respected. The SSTUWA believes that this will provide a comprehensive, collaborative and sustainable approach to education for future generations across our schools and TAFEs.

Education for Sustainability (EFS) is one of three overarching cross curricula priorities set out in the curriculum, yet it lacks specificity and often does not pervade the curriculum. Climate Change Education and Education for Sustainable Development ought to be explicitly featured in the curriculum and the curriculum itself needs to focus on climate change and climate action.

Active and experiential learning around CCE and sustainability ought to be valued, accredited, encouraged, and facilitated; all students ought to have the opportunity to engage in environmental and sustainability education in their local contexts. Partnerships with custodians, local government agencies and conservation and environmental groups ought to be facilitated enabling students to engage with school and local environmental recovery projects.

It is vital that SCSA makes more explicit and frequent reference to human induced climate change in the curriculum alongside its well established causation and impacts. It is important that terminology such as climate emergency and climate crisis are specifically referenced and that practical climate and sustainability actions are incorporated in the curriculum.

The SSTUWA wishes to highlight commitments and investments by governments around the world who are actively seeking to support Climate Change Education in schools. We note that the recent announcement by UK Education secretary Nadhim Zahawi of range of measures “designed to put climate change at the heart of education”⁶ in his speech at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) on 5 November 2021 alongside a draft sustainability and climate change strategy, to be developed over the next six months in collaboration with young people, educators, sustainability experts and environmentalists before a final publication in April 2022.

Recommendations:

8. That recurrent funding be provided to SCSA to develop quality Climate Change Education and curriculum resources to enable diverse climate action to occur in schools and communities and to ensure that all schools are equipped to play their part in tackling the climate emergency.
9. That recurrent funding is provided for regular PD opportunities for all School Education Act staff and TAFE lecturers in WA to develop their understanding of Climate Change Education and Education for Sustainability.
10. That quality Climate Change Education and Education for Sustainability professional learning is delivered by a dedicated team of qualified and experienced lead teachers through DoE.
11. That the diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander understandings about sustainability and caring for country be actively sought and used to guide the design and implementation of local, regional and national policies and initiatives in addressing the climate emergency.

That genuine and on-going consultation is held with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and understanding of climate, climate change and sustainability is incorporated into curriculum resources and teacher education.

OSH

There is a responsibility by government and DoE to ensure that worksites for teachers, school leaders and TAFE lectures and students are safe working and learning environments. This includes the physical infrastructure of current school and TAFE buildings and sites as well as in planning for future school and TAFE sites.

Thirty years ago, the WA government commenced the massive task of removing all asbestos from schools and TAFE institutions; the scale and urgency of the task called for a coordinated and well-resourced systemic response. The climate emergency we face today necessitates a similar response across the whole of government albeit on a bigger scale. The climate challenge is not one to be borne by the education system alone and must be the core business of all government departments and agencies.

School and TAFE buildings are a major contributor to our ecological footprint. There is huge need to invest in retrofitting, insulation and sustainable design and modification to reduce energy consumption associated with heating, cooling and lighting.

The consumption of electricity and gas is a huge contributor to the ecological footprint of our educational institutions; the adoption of climate clever practices should be considered. This involves a system wide push to reduce our energy consumption involving auditing, monitoring and reducing energy use. There is little doubt that vast savings can be made using simple yet effective strategies to reduce our consumption of energy, water, paper and other resources.

There is also the responsibility by Employers, like the Department of Education, to provide support for mental health and well-being of its employees and students.

Concurrent to the development of Climate Change Education and action, there must also be consideration of the growing ecoanxiety felt by students and staff.

The threat posed by climate breakdown can add to growing ecoanxiety felt by many young people, and it is essential that students are empowered to act as well as learn. Only by taking actions to promote sustainability and environmental recovery can students escape the feeling of powerlessness in the face of the climate emergency.

“For most young people, the awareness and concern about the impact of climate change is a healthy response to a serious problem and doesn’t impact their mental health. This awareness can motivate young people to be actively involved in positive change. Examples of young people’s contribution to positive change include attending public marches, raising awareness through conversations, and reducing their ‘carbon footprint’ through changes in lifestyle.

‘Climate anxiety’ and ‘eco-anxiety’ are terms being used to describe feelings of helplessness, stress, worry and frustration about the effects of climate change. There is growing research in this area to understand how concerns about climate change can significantly interfere with some people’s daily lives. Young people may experience ‘climate anxiety’ because they are aware that it is their generation and future generations that will be most affected by climate change. They can feel a sense of urgency to create immediate change and make a difference to future generations.”⁴

Recommendations:

12. That a systemic plan is enacted by the state government and DoE to replace/upgrade school and TAFE infrastructure so that they are energy efficient and sustainable institutions .
13. That climate-proofing elements are developed in the planning of all public schools and TAFE worksite developments in WA, actioned throughout the construction and maintenance stages.
14. That staff and students in WA public schools and TAFEs are provided with opportunities to engage in meaningful Climate Change Education and Education for Sustainability activities to assist in managing

eco anxiety and a range of systemic supports are established to support schools, TAFEs and students in this area.

15. That the prevalence and impact of eco and climate anxiety, as reported in numerous studies, among students and school staff be acknowledged and addressed through the provision of additional Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA), Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) and Australian Counselling Association (ACA) accredited mental health professionals such as psychologists, social workers and counsellors.

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Appendix 1

Education for Sustainable Development Goals: Number 13 – Climate Action – Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

Learning Objectives and Target Competencies for SDG 13 on Climate Action

Cognitive learning objectives

The learner:

1. understands the greenhouse effect as a natural phenomenon caused by an insulating layer of greenhouse gases.
2. understands current climate change as an anthropogenic phenomenon resulting from increased GHG emissions.
3. knows which human activities—on a global, national, local and individual level—contribute most to climate change.
4. knows about the main ecological, social, cultural and economic consequences of climate change locally, nationally and globally and understands how these can themselves become catalysing, reinforcing factors for climate change.
5. knows about prevention, mitigation and adaptation strategies at different levels (global to individual) and for different contexts and their connections with disaster response and disaster risk reduction.

Socio-emotional learning objectives

The learner is able to:

1. explain ecosystem dynamics and the environmental, social, economic and ethical impact of climate change.
2. encourage others to protect the climate.
3. collaborate with others and to develop commonly agreed-upon strategies to deal with climate change.
4. understand their personal impact on the world's climate, from a local to a global perspective.
5. recognise that the protection of the global climate is an essential task for everyone and that we need to completely re-evaluate our worldview and everyday behaviours in light of this.

Behavioural learning objectives

The learner is able to:

1. evaluate whether their private and job activities are climate friendly and—where not—to revise them.
2. act in favour of people threatened by climate change.
3. anticipate, estimate and assess the impact of personal, local and national decisions or activities on other people and world regions.
4. promote climate-protecting public policies.
5. support climate-friendly economic activities.

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