

# Western Australian School Canteen Association Inc.



*Supporting healthy choices*

November 10, 2021

## **Inquiry into the response of Western Australian schools to climate change**

The Western Australian School Canteen Association is a not-for-profit, health promotion charity based in Western Australia, formed in 1994. Since 2006, with support from the Departments of Health and Education WASCA has assisted schools to implement the Western Australian Department of Education's *Healthy Food and Drink* policy. The *Healthy Food and Drink* policy is a whole school approach to healthy eating whose scope includes what occurs both inside and outside the classroom.

Regardless of whether a school is public, catholic or independent, the Western Australian School Canteen Association provides services to all schools that seek our assistance. Our submission is focused on the response of school canteens to climate change.

### **a. The co-benefits of climate action in schools**

What we eat affects both our physical and mental health and the environment. To address climate change and the obesity epidemic we must transform the food system. Schools on their own cannot solve climate change or the child obesity epidemic but it cannot be resolved without them. Children and adolescents consume 19-50% of their daily energy requirements at school and spend more time there compared with any other environment outside of the home. Schools can support climate change and healthy eating habits both in and outside the classroom.

In 2017-18 6.3% of Australian children aged 2-17 years met the recommended serves of vegetables [1]. At the same time discretionary foods (energy-dense, nutrient poor foods such as sweet biscuits, chocolate, snack foods, fried potato products, ice cream and pastries that are predominantly packaged) accounted for 41% of children's energy intake at age 14-18 [2].

Foods associated with the greatest negative environmental impacts such as ultra-processed, nutrient poor, over packaged foods and red and processed meat are often both over-consumed and associated with the greatest increases in disease risk. At the same time foods associated with the greatest health benefit such as vegetables often have the lowest environmental impact and are under consumed. Positive climate actions in schools from the canteen to the classroom could benefit both physical and mental health and guard against climate change.

**b. Climate change mitigation and adaptation actions currently being undertaken in schools, and the benefits they are achieving**

We are aware of a number of actions being undertaken in school canteens to mitigate their impact on the climate. This includes but is not limited to:

- Requesting students supply their own reusable cutlery rather than the canteen supplying single use cutlery
- Switching from single-use plastic cutlery for non-plastic single-use cutlery such as bamboo
- Switching from plastic straws to paper straws
- Switching from polystyrene cups to compostable cups
- Serving icecream in a cone or compostable cups
- Producing their own icypoles which are free of plastic-wrapping
- Switching from single-use plastic cutlery and serving containers to reusable cutlery and containers
- Avoiding plastic wrap wherever possible
- Purchasing juice in recyclable containers rather than being served in plastic cups
- Not selling water bottles and promoting the use of the school's water fountains instead
- Not using lids or spoons when serving food in cups such as soup
- Recycling bread tags and depositing soft plastics at Coles which offers soft plastic recycling
- Using reusable containers wherever possible to purchase food e.g. using reusable bags to purchase fruit and vegetables loose rather than pre-packaged, bringing containers to the Deli to purchase meats rather than having them wrapped in disposable plastic
- Purchasing milk and ice-creams in cartons rather than plastic packaging
- Banning fruit juice boxes
- Contacting their local council to request a reduction in fees for waste and recycling collection
- Laminating paper for recording sales data and then entering this into a computer
- Labelling foods with the date it was opened or prepared on and using a first in, first out method of rotation
- Participating in containers for change
- Using a produce garden both for educational purposes and to reduce food miles
- Starting a worm farm and composting.

c. Barriers that schools encounter in undertaking climate action and how these can be addressed

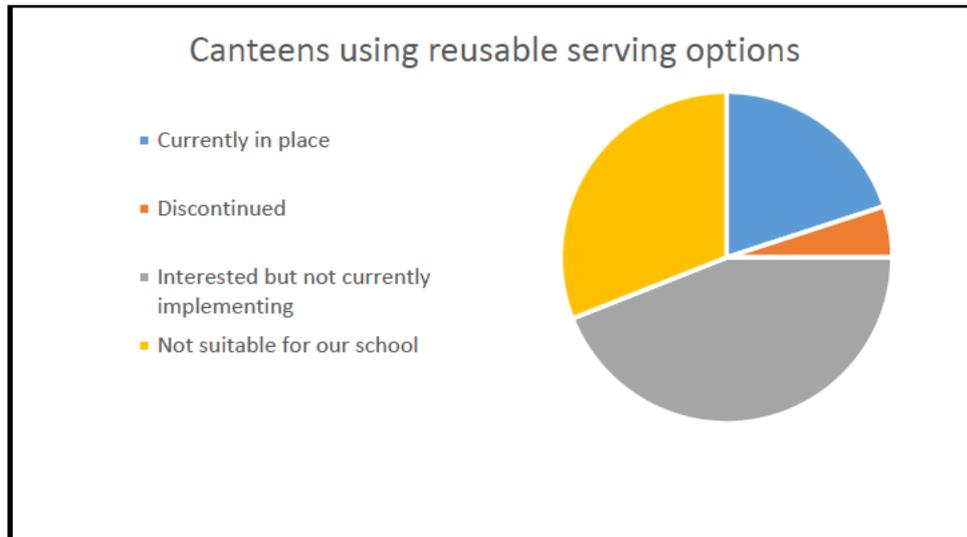
There are a number of barriers school canteens face in undertaking climate action. Table 1 describes some of these barriers and potential solutions to them.

*Table 1. Barrier to climate action from the perspective of school canteens and potential solutions*

Barriers	Potential solutions
Inadequate number of canteen staff and or volunteers to clean reusable containers, cutlery etc on their return and to produce food options that are both healthy and ecologically sustainable. This is particularly the case in secondary schools where students numbers are much greater compared with primary schools.	Government funding to increase canteen staff in schools that could processes reusable containers, cutlery etc and increase production of healthy, seasonal, locally produced food options which have both environmental and health benefits.
Limited equipment to clean reusable containers and cleaning procedures that's comply with healthy and safety protocols i.e. no dishwasher and limited sinks.	Government funding and or grants schemes for canteen infrastructure that supports the use of reusable containers e.g. energy and water efficient dishwashers.
Limited eco-friendly single-use alternatives for single-use plastic containers, cutlery etc in cases where reusable items are not feasible.	Industry solutions for eco-friendly, non-plastic single use alternatives.  Education to support schools to identify what non-plastic single use items are preferable to single use plastics.
In cases where reusable containers, cutlery are offered difficulties in return and retention.	Government funding to support a whole of school approach to sustainability in schools which shifts the culture and environment to support sustainability.
Considerable investment required to purchase reusable items in the first instance.	Government funding or grants schemes for the purchase of reusable containers, cutlery etc in canteens to support schools that have the capacity to offer this.

Of respondents (n=59) in a survey conducted by the Western Australian Council of State School Organisations on climate change 31% (n=18) indicated that using reusable serving options was not suitable for their school however 44% stated they would be interested in implementing strategies in the future (n=26).

**Figure 1. WA Council of State Schools Associations survey**



**d. What more can be done to support schools to respond to climate change**

A whole of school approach is required to support schools to respond to climate change. In the school canteen sector climate action could be supported by funding canteen staff and equipment to increase the availability of foods which are both healthy and ecologically sustainable.

Amanda Ferguson

Acting Chief Executive Office

**References**

[1] Australian Bureau of Statistics , "Children's risk factors," 2018 . [Online]. Available: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/health-conditions-and-risks/childrens-risk-factors/latest-release#data-download>.

[2] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, "Poor diet in children," 2019 . [Online]. Available: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/food-nutrition/poor-diet/contents/poor-diet-in-children>.

