

Eastern Metropolitan Regional Council (EMRC)

Submission

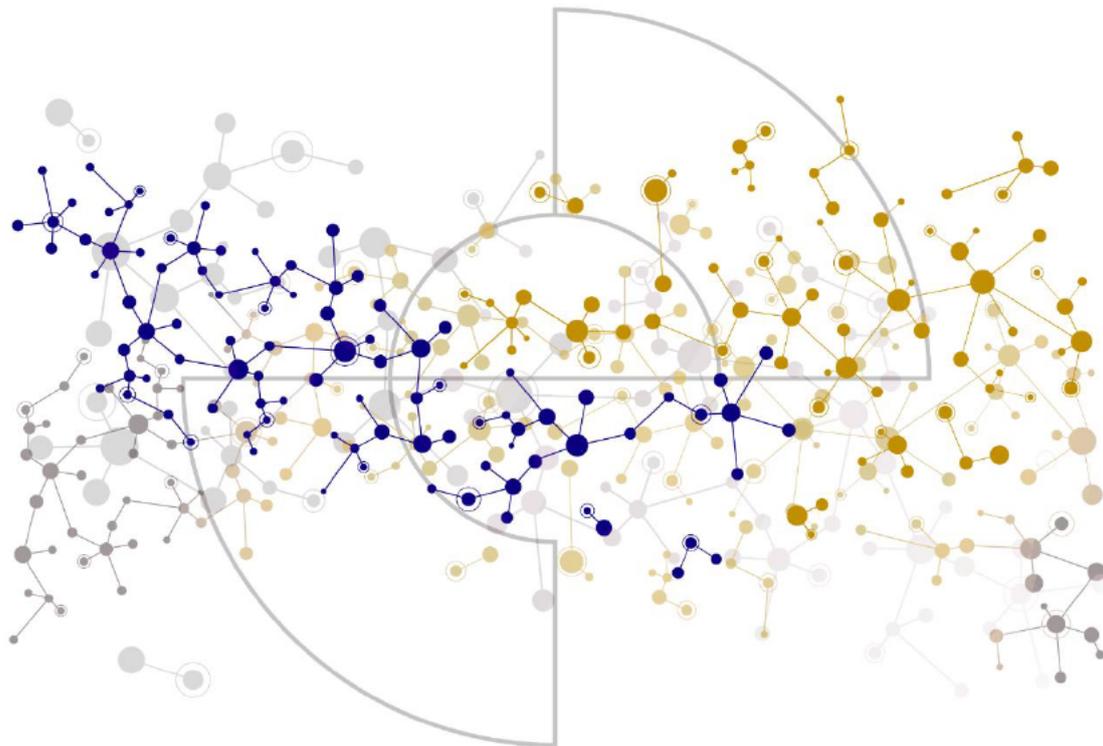
Parliamentary Inquiry into the Response of Western Australian Schools to Climate Change

Closing Date for Submissions Thursday, 11 November 2021

Submissions Sent Electronically leahsc@parliament.wa.gov.au or by post to:

Postal The Principal Research Officer Education and Health Standing Committee
Parliament House, 4 Harvest Terrace West Perth WA 6005

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A THE CO-BENEFITS OF CLIMATE ACTION IN SCHOOLS

- What are the co-benefits of climate action in schools for:
 - ⇒ student learning
 - ⇒ student and staff physical health
 - ⇒ student and staff mental health
 - ⇒ financial savings in the education system
 - ⇒ the community?
- Are these co-benefits recognised and promoted?
- Is there an opportunity to cross-promote existing environmental and health activities being undertaken in schools as climate action?

➤ EMRC Response:

There is a growing awareness amongst young people and student about the effects of climate action globally, particularly via social media channels and through the actions of young role models challenging world leaders to take action on climate change mitigation.

There are opportunities to cross-promote existing activities from within the school system and from external agencies. From an Eastern Metropolitan Regional Council (EMRC) perspective we are actively engaged in schools throughout Perth's Eastern Region demonstrating the benefits of waste minimisation and resource recovery which in turn impacts climate actions. The less waste that ends up in landfill, the less methane gas that is generated from landfill and potentially released into the atmosphere, particularly as methane is a more potent greenhouse gas than Carbon Dioxide with a Global Warming Potential 28 times CO₂.

The EMRC has a Battery collection program in schools where they compete for prizes. In 2020/2021 the total kgs of batteries recovered equated to 6,312.8 kgs collected. This is a great achievement by the 104 schools in the region who take part in the battery collection program.

Schools in Perth's Eastern Region frequent the EMRC's Waste Education Centre and the Red Hill Waste Management Facility where they learn about all aspects of waste education including, recycling, what goes in what bin, the landfill operations and the community drop off areas. School tours of the Facility during 2020/2021 included 18 schools totalling eight hundred and forty-one attendees taking part in tours and information sessions.

The EMRC's Waste Education team undertake waste audits in schools in the region to help students become aware of what is going into their bins, what could be recovered and ways to reduce their waste. The message of waste avoidance continues as this means less waste ending up in landfill thus reducing the amount of methane gas entering the atmosphere.

The EMRC team is about to embark on promoting the benefits of a three-bin system, including a Food and Garden Organics trial in 14 schools in the region in partnership with the WA Education Department. All involved are keen to see the outcome of the trial which will be concluded at the end of June 2022 and will help inform future opportunities for introducing FOGO into other schools in WA and achieving sustainability in schools.

A number of EMRC's member Councils support and promote the educational platform Climate Clever for residents, business and schools. Some councils provide financial support for the annual subscription.

Other environmental and health actions undertaken in schools that could be cross-promoted include participating the Department of Transport's Your Move program which supports increasing use of active transport (walking, cycling) and public transport. Some schools engage in students in a school community garden to learn about growing food, healthy choices and reducing 'food miles'. Schools often also engage with environmental programs such tree planting.

B CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION AND ADAPTATION ACTIONS CURRENTLY BEING UNDERTAKEN IN SCHOOLS, AND THE BENEFITS THEY ARE ACHIEVING

- How and why have these actions been initiated within schools?
- The Committee is particularly interested to hear about examples of climate action in schools which:
 - ⇒ are low or zero cost
 - ⇒ have been locally developed
 - ⇒ involve community partnerships
 - ⇒ are Aboriginal-led and recognise indigenous knowledge

Schools are encouraged to become 'Waste Wise' and can go through the process of being accredited a Waste Wise school through a series of actions in conjunction with the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation (DWER). This includes reducing waste to landfill by introducing recycling, creating worm farms, undertaking composting, etc. Being waste wise is a significant climate change mitigation strategy for schools and should be encouraged at the highest levels within government. Schools should also be encouraged to participate in the Container Deposit Scheme if they aren't already involved.

C BARRIERS THAT SCHOOLS ENCOUNTER IN UNDERTAKING CLIMATE ACTION AND HOW THESE CAN BE ADDRESSED

- Barriers may include (but are not limited to):
 - ⇒ complexity
 - ⇒ resources and cost
 - ⇒ policies and regulations
 - ⇒ reluctant attitudes towards climate action

Time is often considered a barrier when introducing new initiatives in schools, but when positive outcomes are achieved time becomes less of an issue. Lack of continuity of staff in schools taking on the role of the 'sustainability officers' is another resource that becomes impacted. Additionally, the sustainability role can often be voluntary and left up to someone who is passionate, rather than it being a valued position undertaken by a suitably trained and experienced person.

The Common Use Agreement (CUA) between schools, DWER and Waste Collection providers such as Suez and Cleanaway for refuse collections are an issue and need to be resolved to ensure schools are getting the best possible outcomes whereby they can separate their cardboard/paper, their greenwaste (and soon food organics) and their recyclables and be assured that these separated waste streams do not end up in landfill.

The contracts with school cleaners also need to be reviewed to include the option for cleaners to empty recycling bins, food and garden organics bins in addition to the normal bins. Some schools use their students as 'class monitors' to be waste wise, however this is not the case in all schools and may not be the best use of resources.

With the Education Department in WA heading down the 'sustainability path' it is imperative that schools are supported in all aspects of reducing barriers to climate change and this includes adopting the targets and actions (where appropriate) from the WA State Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Strategy 2030.

D WHAT MORE CAN BE DONE TO SUPPORT SCHOOLS TO RESPOND TO CLIMATE CHANGE

- How can capacity be built within schools to prepare for and respond to climate change?
- How can schools be equipped to make well informed decisions about undertaking climate action?
- How are schools outside WA being supported to undertake climate action, and could aspects of this be adopted in WA?

What actions is the Committee considering?

The Committee will consider school-based climate change mitigation and adaptation actions including (but not limited to):

- water
- energy
- transport
- healthy and ecologically sustainable diet
- biodiversity and green spaces
- purchasing and waste
- built environment.

The Committee is interested in how the education sector fits into cross-government climate action and how government agencies that operate in areas relevant to climate change work together with the education sector.

Energy and water audits should be carried out at all schools in WA in order to help them identify areas for consumption reduction and efficiency. The EMRC has undertaken a Building Benchmark Efficiency program whereby audits have been undertaken of facilities of similar size and purpose to ascertain a benchmark for all other facilities to aspire to. Recommendations to improve building efficiencies are part of the program and examples of how this could be achieved within WA schools can be provided by the EMRC.

In terms of transport, the EMRC has a focus on improving transport efficiencies, reducing emissions and advocating for safer transport and this includes moving its fleet vehicles to hybrid or electric and supporting the development of hydrogen fuelled vehicle initiatives. If school buses could work towards hydrogen fuel this would be a great sustainability option and a great climate change mitigation strategy. EMRC also supports the Your Move program to assist the community to use modes of transport other than the car. Many Schools participate in the Your Move program, however as with most of these initiatives it falls to the one staff member who is passionate rather than being part of a valued role.

Embedding Circular Economy principles into all procurement policies such that there is a Circular Economy weighting criteria applied to all procurement, both via tenders or quotations, should become policy.

All schools within WA should be adhering to, or working towards adhering to the WA State Government's Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Strategy 2030 and its Action Plan which has been endorsed by government and includes achievable targets.

The EMRC recommends that the state government establishes a Working Party with representation from relevant agencies to work towards achieving Net Zero by 2040, through adopting a Circular Economy approach which also aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Education Department, DWER, Department of Finance, and other relevant agencies should be included in the proposed Working Party.

Contact:

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