



THE ROYAL LIFE SAVING SOCIETY

POSITION STATEMENT

TITLE: RLSS ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

DATE: ISSUED 13 DECEMBER 2023

1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this Position Statement is to provide a concise outline of RLSS's recognition of impacts of climate change on Commonwealth Drowning Prevention, and our commitment to environmental sustainability.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Overview

Climate change is a variation in the world's weather systems that occurs over decades. Most of the recent changes in our climate have been brought about by human activity. These changes will have significant consequences for our health, wellbeing and safety.

Effects of climate change include increasing air and sea temperatures, changes in rainfall patterns, more frequent and increasingly severe extreme weather events and sea level rise.

Climate change may affect our health and wellbeing through the impacts of extreme events, worsening air quality, changes in the spread of infectious diseases, threats to food and water quality and quantity and effects on our mental health.

The effects of climate change are already being felt. For example, because of global warming, Australia's climate has warmed on average by 1.4°C since official Bureau of Meteorology records began in 1910¹.

There are things we can all do now to build our resilience to the effects of climate change and help slow its pace.

2.2 The Royal Life Saving Society (RLSS)

RLSS was established in 1891, is a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) registered in the United Kingdom (Charity Commission No: 306094) and is governed by Royal Charter. RLSS is accredited to the Commonwealth Secretariat as a Civil Society Organisation. Our vision is: "No person in the Commonwealth should drown".

¹ <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/climate-change-and-health#climate-change>

RLSS has Member Organisations in more than 30 Commonwealth Nations or Territories.

2.3 The Commonwealth

The Commonwealth consists of 56 Countries comprising some 2.5 billion people, 60% of which are below the age of 30.

The Commonwealth have been pushing for greater climate action since 1989, when Commonwealth leaders committed to protecting the environment in the [Langkawi Declaration](#). This was one of the world's first collective statements to name greenhouse gas emissions as one of the leading problems facing the planet².

Commonwealth Charter – Protecting the Environment

We recognise the importance of the protection and conservation of our natural ecosystems and affirm that sustainable management of the natural environment is the key to sustained human development.

We recognise the importance of multilateral cooperation, sustained commitment and collective action, in particular by addressing the adaptation and mitigation challenges of climate change and facilitating the development, diffusion and deployment of affordable environmentally friendly technologies and renewable energy, and the prevention of illicit dumping of toxic and hazardous waste as well as the prevention and mitigation of erosion and desertification.

The Commonwealth Climate Change Programme.

The Climate Change Programme³ of the Commonwealth Secretariat focuses on strengthening the resilience of Commonwealth countries to the negative impacts of climate change. It provides member countries with measures and support for mitigating and adapting to a changing climate.

The Commonwealth Blue Charter is an agreement by all 54 Commonwealth countries to actively co-operate to solve ocean-related problems and meet commitments for sustainable ocean development.

The connection between ocean change and climate change is obvious for people who depend on the ocean for their livelihood. The change in the ocean is reflected in shifts in weather patterns, extreme ocean and weather events, rising ocean temperatures, and reduced fisheries and livelihoods. Islanders and coastal residents live on the frontline of ocean change and climate change.

While often overlooked or while often neglected in the conversations and planning, the impacts of climate change can increase fatal and non-fatal drowning.

2.4 United Nations Sustainability⁴

Sustainable development requires an integrated approach that takes into consideration environmental concerns along with economic development.

In 1987, the United Nations Brundtland Commission defined sustainability as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” Today, there are almost 140 developing countries in the world seeking ways of meeting their development needs, but with the increasing threat of climate change, concrete efforts must be made to ensure development today does not negatively affect future generations.

² [Commonwealth Climate Change Programme | Commonwealth \(thecommonwealth.org\)](#)

³ Commonwealth Climate Change Programme - <https://thecommonwealth.org/our-work/climate-change>

⁴ United Nations Academic Impact – Sustainability - <https://www.un.org/en/academic-impact/sustainability>

The Sustainable Development Goals form the framework for improving the lives of populations around the world and mitigating the hazardous man-made effects of climate change. SDG 13: Climate Action, calls for integrating measures to prevent climate change within development frameworks. SDG 14: Life Below Water, and SDG 15: Life on Land, also call for more sustainable practices in using the earth's natural resources.

2.5 COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on the environment, with changes in human activity leading to temporary changes in air pollution, greenhouse gas emissions and water quality. As the pandemic became a global health crisis in early 2020, various national responses including lockdowns and travel restrictions caused substantial disruption to society, travel, energy usage, economic activity, sometimes referred to as the 'anthropause'⁵.

3. DEFINITIONS

Climate means the weather conditions prevailing in an area in general or over a long period.

Climate change refers to long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns. Such shifts can be natural, due to changes in the sun's activity or large volcanic eruptions. But since the 1800s, 'human activities have been the main driver of climate change'⁶, primarily due to the burning of fossil fuels like coal, oil and gas⁷.

Environment means, in this context, the surroundings or conditions in which a person, animal, or plant lives or operates.

Sustainability means, in this context, avoidance of the depletion of natural resources in order to maintain an ecological balance.

4. STATEMENTS

1. RLSS will encourage its member organizations and those within their influence to advocate for environmental sustainability through education and actions.
2. RLSS will act on opportunities to increase awareness of environmental responsibility amongst staff, volunteers and members.
3. RLSS will take actions to reduce its environmental footprint by changing the way it participates in activities, by reviewing and reducing travel options, by using and fostering the use of renewable energies, and by cutting waste. RLSS will encourage its members to consider these actions.
4. RLSS will endeavour to stay informed about the impact of infectious disease on RLSS environmental sustainability and any related best practices for resuscitation and training and be aware of/track any potential infectious disease risks that would impact the organisation either due to changing practices or organisational impacts.
5. RLSS will align itself with organisations who foster and invest in climate impact solutions.

⁵ [Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the environment - Wikipedia](#)

⁶ [Climate change widespread, rapid, and intensifying – IPCC – IPCC](#)

⁷ [What Is Climate Change? | United Nations](#)

6. RLSS will take actions to protect its members, lifesavers and those involved in teaching sessions, educational programs, lifesaving competition and like activities from natural hazard risks such as extreme heat, flooding, wildfires and other extreme weather events.
7. RLSS will encourage its members to recycle, repair and repurpose lifesaving supplies, support materials, teaching aids, and equipment. Further, RLSS encourages its members to donate equipment to fellow lifesaving organisations that need them and who ordinarily cannot afford some lifesaving equipment.
8. RLSS will encourage its members to use technology to meet colleagues and partners remotely, and for leadership development, teaching and sport related activities through, for example, the introduction of Lifesaving TeleGames.
9. RLSS will encourage community, and regional face to face meetings and events (educational, leadership development, program delivery and sport) and limit Commonwealth wide/global events to align with environmental sustainability leadership.
10. RLSS will reduce unnecessary printing of resources and will wherever possible make its resources available electronically.
11. RLSS will work collaboratively with academic institutions, charities and partners to support the communities in which we operate: building local capacity for organisational and environmental sustainability.
12. RLSS will continue to support the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which address the social, economic and political challenges we face. RLSS has identified the eight goals where we believe we can make the biggest difference. These goals underpin our Positive Business strategy to ensure that we're focusing on areas where we can make the most significant contribution to people and our planet. Included in the advocacy opportunities for RLSS is SDG 13 – Climate Action where RLSS:
 - a. will advocate to include drowning prevention resilience and adaptive capacity,
 - b. foster the integration of drowning prevention into climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning, and
 - c. include drowning prevention in improving education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning.
13. RLSS will strive to continually improve on its environmental performance and will endeavour to report on such in its annual report.

5. REFERENCES

- Charter of the Commonwealth, 2013, [Commonwealth Charter | The Commonwealth](#)
- ISO International Standard, ISO 20121:2012, *Event sustainability management systems – Requirements with guidance for use*. ISO 20121 is a practical tool for managing events so that they contribute to the three dimensions of sustainability – economic, environmental and social.
- Sustainable Development Goals, are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and improve the lives and prospects of everyone, everywhere. The 17 Goals were adopted by all UN Member States in 2015, as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable

Development which set out a 15-year plan to achieve the Goals.

<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

- The Commonwealth Blue Charter, 2021, [Commonwealth Bluecharter \(thecommonwealth.org\)](http://thecommonwealth.org)
- United Nations. Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
- RLSS Position Statement '*The Royal Life Saving Society and the Connection of the UN Sustainable Development Goals with the Global Drowning Prevention Effort*', February 2019.

6. APPROVAL

This Position Statement was first approved by the Board of Trustees on 13 December 2023.

7. CONTACT

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