

A Climate and Biodiversity Emergency Declaration by Geographers in Australia - Proposal for endorsement by Endorsement by the IAG/NZGS 2021 Combined Conference delegation

A Climate and Biodiversity Emergency Declaration by Geographers in Australia has been prepared by a volunteer working group made up of 14 geographers from around Australia.



You can read the full declaration on the following pages or at: <https://geographersdeclareau.blogspot.com/p/the-declaration.html>

The declaration will be launched on Wednesday 7 July 2021 as part of the keynote address by Susan Caldis (Macquarie University PhD Candidate and GTA NSW&ACT President) - *Understanding a climate emergency in and through geography education: What can geography educators declare.*

Endorsement by the IAG/NZGS 2021 Combined Conference delegation is being sought and all delegates are invited to vote to support or not support: <https://forms.gle/34kmL6TFTWEtn1VZ7>

This form will be available between 8:30am - 7:15pm (AEST) Wednesday 7 July 2021. Endorsement on behalf of the conference delegation will occur if the majority of votes indicate support.

Individuals, societies and study groups are also invited to support the declaration and can sign here: <https://geographersdeclareau.blogspot.com/p/take-action.html>

A Climate and Biodiversity Emergency Declaration by geographers in Australia

We, geographers in Australia, declare that the world is facing multiple and interlinked emergencies of climate change, biodiversity loss and social inequality. We declare that we have a responsibility to care about and respond to a diversity of threats including human-induced climate change, threats to biodiversity and socio-economic inequality. We are concerned about the differential impacts experienced by people, places, and the human and natural systems that connect and sustain them. Now is the time to act.

In making this declaration, we commit to better understanding, caring about and responding to the threats to people, places and the human and natural systems that connect and sustain them. We recognise the disproportionate impact of these threats and that they are experienced unevenly across space and time.

These multiple emergencies have unfurled over vastly different temporal and spatial scales. In the Australian context our discipline was implicated in the ongoing violence of colonisation. In acknowledging and taking ownership of our disciplinary past, we recognise that Australia has been in a state of crisis since 1788 and that our calls for action are not 'new'.

We use the word 'emergency' to describe the overlapping and mutually amplifying emergencies that are occurring. In using it, we note that language has more nuance than simply signifying that a situation is grave or worsening. Language has power, history and modifies the expectations of a response. In making a declaration through the language of 'emergency', our aim is to encourage a proportionate response as well as complement and draw ourselves into closer conversation with existing organisations and disciplinary bodies that have made public their own declarations.

Our principles

As geographers living, working and learning in places that are now known collectively as Australia, we will:

- **Strengthen connections** between communities, the academy, educators, science and policy makers.
- **Advocate for action** by government, business, industry, our own institutions and our peers to recognise these unfolding emergencies and take immediate action.
- **Care for Country** and encourage approaches that are regenerative for biodiversity, places, people and culture.
- **Acknowledge and investigate** ecological and relational tipping points
- **Work with others** to strengthen relationships with communities beyond our disciplinary and geographical boundaries.
- **Improve our own practices** to align with these principles when researching, teaching and creating knowledge.

We make this declaration to our disciplinary community and peers, our own academic and education institutions, our students, policy makers, politicians, governments and civil actors. Our declaration is more than a statement, but an ethos that we call on geographers to work by. We call for action that is prioritised, coordinated, enduring, and meaningful.

This declaration is open for any individual, collective or institution to adopt. When adopting this declaration we encourage you to identify and develop actions that align with these principles.

Why we are declaring

The world is facing multiple and interlinked crises of climate change, loss of biodiversity and social injustice. The acceleration of anthropogenic climate change, land and water degradation threaten to eclipse planetary boundaries[1] and is already having devastating impact on species, habitats, traditional knowledges and culture. We are living in the Anthropocene; a time period of unparalleled and irreversible human-influenced environmental catastrophe[2]. There are potent calls for action[3]. Now is the time for us to act.

Who are geographers?

geo-graphy: earth-writing

from the ancient Greek, 'geo' meaning earth, 'graphy' meaning 'to write'

Geography is the study of place, space, and the environment. Geographers investigate the character of places, the distribution of phenomena across space, biophysical processes and features, and dynamic relationships between humans, non-humans and environments[4].

Geographers ask questions about why these phenomena and relationships are the way they are and how they could be; about how societies and environments are connected to one another; how and why they change; and about how and why their characteristics vary across time and space at different scales. Geographers ask these questions across scales from the local to the global, and in relation to the past, present, and future.

As geographers, we are teachers, researchers, students and professionals. We work in classrooms, in universities, private and public institutions, in 'the field', and always on Country.

Geography is interdisciplinary and deeply integrative. As a synthesising science, geography encompasses and communicates across different ways of knowing, from the natural, physical, and social sciences to the humanities. We work within different epistemological and ontological frameworks.

At its best, our discipline collaborates with diverse Indigenous and local knowledges, but at its worst, we acknowledge it has been complicit in amplifying the behaviours, philosophies and institutions that create the overlapping emergencies of climate, biodiversity and justice. Geography and geographers are therefore both well-equipped and ethically obliged to act with others to respond to the emergencies we declare in this statement.

Geographers living, working and learning, in places that are now known collectively as Australia, know that environmental and social issues are pressing, and know that action is needed. We are committed to addressing these issues and recognise our role in bearing and taking responsibility for the worlds we live in and create.

[1] Steffen, W., Richardson, K., Rockström, J., Cornell, S.E., Fetzer, I., Bennett, E.M., Biggs, R., Carpenter, S.R., De Vries, W., De Wit, C.A. and Folke, C., 2015. Planetary boundaries: Guiding human development on a changing planet. *Science*, 347(6223).

[2] Crutzen, P.J. and Stoermer, E.F. (2000) The "Anthropocene". *Global Change Newsletter*, 41, 17.

[3] Wilkinson, C. and Clement, S., 2021. Geographers declare (a climate emergency)?. *Australian Geographer*, 52(1), pp.1-18.

[4] This definition of Geography was endorsed in November 2010 by the: Australian Academy of Science's National Committee for Geography, Australian Geography Teachers' Association, Geographical Society of New South Wales, Institute of Australian Geographers, Royal Geographical Society of Queensland, and Royal Geographical Society of South Australia