



Input to the Australian Government in preparation for the 2024 UN Summit of the Future

14 August 2024

We, as organisations mobilising leadership and action by the private sector and the academic sector towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), urge the Australian Government to support efforts to strengthen global cooperation and to update and upgrade the multilateral system at the 2024 United Nations Summit of the Future (SOTF).

We underscore the many specific observations on the SOTF agenda raised in the Sustainable Development Solutions Network's (SDSN) [Recommendations for the SOTF](#) in the [2024 Sustainable Development Report](#) and the SDSN's [Statement by University Leaders in Support of the SOTF](#). However, we particularly want to draw the Australian Government's attention to the following points:

1. Success at the SOTF is important for the future of Australia and the world.

More than half way through Agenda 2030, the world is facing stagnation and decline in most of the SDGs, as well as a range of continuing global and interconnected challenges and "polycrises", including climate change and regional conflicts, that threaten to erode progress even further. The impacts of these challenges transcend national borders, and no one country can solve them alone. It is therefore more important than ever for the world to be able to cooperate and collaborate much better; the SOTF is a unique and vital opportunity for the world community to come together update and upgrade the global multilateral system. While achieving the global cooperation and collaboration needed for SOTF outcomes will be challenging, the Australian Government can play a strong leadership role to help bring about real change.

2. We support continuation of the SDGs beyond 2030, but with a stronger focus on implementation mechanisms.

The SDGs – as the world's largest theory of change – provide a unique and compelling framework to achieve sustainable development in all parts of the world and to leave no one behind. The SDGs provide a strong framework to mobilise and engage sectors beyond national governments, including [academia](#) and the [private sector](#).

Although the SDGs were initially set for the fifteen-year period 2016–2030, it is clear that with the shocks and challenges the world has experienced in the last few years, the SDGs will not be achieved in this time frame. Furthermore, because of these shocks and challenges, it is unlikely the UN will be able to renegotiate a strong and inspirational agenda to replace the SDGs.

For this reason, we believe that at the SOTF provides an actionable space where governments can recognise the pivotal role of the SDGs and commit to the SDG framework until 2050. In the processes, the world's governments can then agree on a process to update high-ambition milestones and quantified objectives.

In addition, greater focus should be placed on improved long-term planning, including by requiring countries and regions to produce medium-term sustainable development strategies to map how they plan to achieve the SDGs. These strategies would also account for synergies and trade-offs among the goals, as well as international spillover effects.

3. The SOTF offers an opportunity to strengthen the important global focus on youth and on future generations, both of which are insufficiently covered in the SDGs.

While the SDGs acknowledge the importance of young people in achieving the SDGs, [we have found](#) that young people in Australia do not feel that their concerns were well represented in the SDGs framework. The SOTF is an opportunity work with young people to develop a more comprehensive sustainable development framework focussed on youth concerns. This framework can then be a basis for measuring and reporting on youth progress on sustainable development.

In addition, there is need to increase focus on future generations, which are also not well represented in the 2030 Agenda, and in particular to encourage all countries and stakeholders to think and plan for the long term.

4. The development of global Beyond GDP metrics aligns with and supports the Australian Government's Measuring What Matters framework

The SOTF cross-cutting effort to review and develop global Beyond GDP metrics is an opportunity to strengthen alignment between SDG reporting and national wellbeing frameworks, including the Australian Treasury's [Measuring What Matters](#) framework. It is increasingly recognised that GDP has significant limitations as a sole measure of national progress and wellbeing. Wellbeing frameworks bring in a strong focus on social inclusion and intergenerational equity, but, unlike the SDGs, can be weak in recognising the fundamental importance of environmental sustainability to societal wellbeing. Aligning wellbeing frameworks with the SDGs is an opportunity to improve both global and Australian wellbeing metrics.

5. The higher education sector in Australia has great expertise and can play a key role in supporting implementation of the SOTF ambitions.

Australian higher education institutions are recognised globally for their strong and innovative focus on advancing the SDGs through research, teaching, operations, community leadership, and genuine cross-sector partnerships. This includes four Australian universities in the top ten of the [Times Higher Education Impact Rankings 2024](#) (out of over 2100 participating universities).

As such, the sector is well placed to support Australian governments, businesses, and civil society to achieve the SDGs and the broader ambitions of the SOTF, including by:

- Undertaking basic, applied and interdisciplinary research, as well as technological innovation, to develop solutions to the SDGs.
- Producing knowledge to support evidenced-based policy-making.
- Educating current and future leaders and decision makers to promote sustainable development and global citizenship.
- Convening governments, businesses, and civil society to develop long-term, multi-stakeholder approaches to sustainable development.
- Incubating and supporting private-sector and civil-sector innovations, businesses and start-ups.
- Supporting strong global and north-south interconnections through knowledge exchange, capacity building.

6. The private sector has a key role to play in the success of SOTF ambition and the achievement of the SDGs.

The private sector plays a crucial role in not only the Pact for the Future, but also more broadly across the achievement of the SDGs.

The [SDG Stocktake Report 2023](#) conducted by the United Nations Global Compact and Accenture highlights that 44% of business leaders look to governments as the key stakeholders they would like to engage more when it comes to SDG action. The SOTF provides the platform to encourage businesses to act on their ambitions and foster further collaboration between governments and the private sector.

As outlined in the most recent update of the [Pact for the Future](#) (the Pact), private sector investment is crucial in a variety of contexts. These include investment in science, technology and innovation across global markets as well as supporting the development of countries who are most in need of support to meet the

SDGs. Additionally, the Pact calls for ensuring that the private sector, with a focus on large corporations, contributes to sustainability and protecting our planet through strengthening reporting procedures and establishing accountability mechanisms for environmental damage.

To ensure that the private sector is effectively mobilised to continue to work towards the 2030 Agenda, collective action across industries – facilitated by groups such as the UN Global Compact Network Australia (UNGCNA) – is essential to drive business ambition to achieve the SDGs and the broader ambitions of the SOTF. This includes:

- **Promoting ambitious action to accelerate progress across all of the SDGs:** The United Nations Global Compact's [Forward Faster initiative](#) is just one example of how business action can accelerate progress across all 17 SDGs through prioritisation of actions in areas including gender equality, climate action, living wage, water resilience and finance & investment.
- **Facilitating multi-sectoral forums for learning and sharing of best practice:** Locally the UNGCNA will continue to engage with businesses in our Community of Practice (CoP) forums, providing the space for governments, businesses, and civil society to collaborate and drive the 2030 Agenda.
- **Driving private sector innovation and change from the inside-out:** The UNGCNA aims to drive organisational change by equipping organisations with the tools and resources to do business responsibly by aligning their strategies and operations with [Ten Principles](#) on human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption.
- **Aligning the Australian private sector engagement with other important global policy initiatives:** The UNGCNA works to update and align its 350+ business participants with other important global initiatives that concern the private sector such as the [Paris Agreement](#), the [Global Biodiversity Framework](#) and the ongoing [Global Plastics Treaty](#).

About us

[United Nations Global Compact Network Australia \(UNGCNA\)](#) mobilises Australia's leading businesses to advance responsible business and the private sector's contribution to sustainable development.

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[United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network for Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific \(SDSN AusNZPac\)](#) mobilises universities and knowledge institutions lead on sustainable development and the SDGs.

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