

Our World Our Say: young Australians speak up on climate change and disaster risk

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Throughout August 2020, young Australians communicated the results of a national survey on their experiences, perspectives and priorities for action, related to climate change and disaster risk.

We want to be ready for when disasters strike through greater preparedness, and we want to reduce the intensity and frequency of disasters through climate action. We know that on our current trajectory disasters will come thicker and faster. We want to know how to plan, prepare and protect ourselves and our communities in an increasingly unsafe world.

Source: Our World Our Say: National Survey of children and young people on climate change and disaster risk

Gathering the data

From February to April 2020, approximately 1500 young Australians (10 to 24 years old) completed the online survey, conducted alongside similar youth surveys across the Asia-Pacific region.

The Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience (AIDR) and World Vision Australia led the design and implementation of the survey, supported by partnering organisations, UNICEF, Oaktree, Save the Children, Plan International Australia and the Australian Red Cross.

In June, a youth advisory panel analysed the survey data and contributed to the development of the survey report. The panel members, selected from more than 80 applications, hailed from rural and urban locations across the country and were broadly representative of different ages, genders, cultural backgrounds and abilities.

Supported by AIDR and World Vision, the youth panel members participated in two online workshops, group and independent data analysis tasks, as well as reviewing and editing the formal survey report. These activities aligned with the 2020 focus on youth voice and participation championed by the AIDR Education for Young

People Program and the Disaster Resilient Australia-New Zealand School Education Network (DRANZSEN).

Messages and calls to action

The survey data indicated concern about the far-reaching impacts of climate change and specific concerns about climate-related disaster risk:

- 78 per cent of respondents reported being 'concerned' or 'very concerned' about climate change.
- 83 per cent of respondents recognised a connection between climate change and natural hazards.
- 73 per cent of respondents reported being 'concerned' or 'very concerned' about experiencing a disaster.

Participants identified transitioning away from fossil fuels, listening to scientists and improving the management of land and water as their top three priority areas for action by the government to address climate change. To reduce the risk of disaster, younger respondents identified accessibility of evacuation centres, continuity of essential services and community education as priority areas for government action.

Natural hazard education and disaster resilience

The survey posed several questions about respondents' lived experiences of natural hazards, recollections from the classroom and the content they value most to understanding and address disaster risk.

These questions revealed a disconnect between the hazards that young learners have experienced and the hazards they encounter through formal education. Young people were most likely to have learned about earthquakes (76 per cent) although far fewer had experienced an earthquake themselves (8 per cent). In contrast, they were most likely to have experienced extreme heat (63 per cent), but less likely (42 per cent) to have learned about it in school.

It is interesting to note how closely the priorities for learning identified in the survey reflect national priorities related to disaster risk reduction and resilience. This alignment is evident despite low awareness of the *National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework* (14 per cent) and the *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030* (5 per cent) among participants. Young people are embracing a vision of education that enables them to plan, prepare, respond and recover from hazard events, and to play a role in prevention and mitigation of risk from a young age.

Table 1: Perspectives on natural hazard education from the youth survey report.

What do you think are the most important things young people need to learn about natural hazards and the risk of disasters? (Top 5)	
73%	How to plan and prepare for natural hazards and disasters
70%	How to care for themselves and others if their community experiences a natural hazard or disaster
69%	Where to access emergency warnings and alerts
66%	The actions children and young people can take to prevent or reduce the impact of natural hazards and disasters
64%	The causes of natural hazards and disasters
When you studied natural hazards, did you learn about...? (Top 5)	
72%	The causes of natural hazards and disasters
54%	The potential impacts of natural hazards and disasters on your community
48%	The influence of climate change on natural hazards and disasters
45%	The types of natural hazards that could affect your community in the future
45%	How to plan and prepare for natural hazards and disasters

Youth voice: providing a platform

With this report, we aim to amplify the voices of young Australians and invite decision-makers to engage with us in developing solutions for a resilient and sustainable nation.

Source: Foreword - Our World Our Say: National Survey of children and young people on climate change and disaster risk

A commitment from the partnering organisations to children’s rights to protection and to participate in decision-making that affects them, drove the process of engagement with young people leading to the publication of the survey report. This commitment continues and has facilitated opportunities for youth panel members to share the findings of the report alongside their own unique stories and perspectives.

Youth panellist Tara Tolhurst, a 20-year-old student from Newcastle, shared her experiences of bushfire, flood and drought in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. In the article, Tara spoke about the mental health effects of living through disasters and the lack of classroom learning about climate-related disasters in the Australian context.

Natalie Dajkovich and Ashley Wild, university students from Canberra and Melbourne, respectively, led a session at AIDR’s ADRC20 Knowledge Week, presenting the survey report to around 170 participants. The recording of this session has attracted attention on AIDR’s YouTube playlist.

After Natalie and Ashley’s powerful online presentation, the Hon. David Littleproud MP, Minister for Agriculture, Drought and Emergency Management, agreed to take part in an evening webinar. The survey findings were introduced to a new audience and provide an opportunity for dialogue between the Minister and youth panel members. Alexander Matters, Grace Lewis, Halima Bhatti, Maddison Canteri, Piper Blake and Riley Curtain joined Ashley for this webinar.

Maddison, a 17-year-old student and climate activist, from Cairns, shared her experiences of learning about tropical cyclones using data from the Philippines, rather than locally relevant data from cyclone-prone North Queensland. Like many of the survey respondents, Maddison is not just calling for action from the government or powerful interest groups but is also demonstrating her commitment to safe and sustainable communities through her actions. Maddison works as a volunteer for the Queensland State Emergency Service.

The webinar was a great show of determination from the youth panel members who made themselves available, planned their contributions and liaised with facilitators from AIDR and World Vision at two days’ notice. We can honour their contribution to the national conversation on climate change, disaster risk reduction and resilience by championing youth voices in strategic planning and acting on the recommendations of these intelligent, informed and committed young leaders.

Information about this study is at: www.aidr.org.au/media/7946/ourworldoursay-youth-survey-report-2020.pdf and www.aidr.org.au/media/7967/youth-survey-report_messages-to-government_2020.pdf.