



# For Our Future

## The Australian Future Generations Policy Brief

**Australia is at a critical juncture where the stakes for future generations have never been higher. Confronted with escalating and interconnected challenges—such as climate change, deepening economic inequality, resource degradation, risks from emerging technologies, and rising polarisation.**

**The For Our Future policy brief by Foundations for Tomorrow (FFT) advocates for a comprehensive, future-focused approach to policy-making that considers the interests of future generations, while helping alleviate immediate pressures Australians face today.**

### The Imperative

Short-termism in Australian policy hinders our ability to address complex, long-term challenges such as climate change, economic inequality, and an ageing population. Rapid technological advances such as AI and rising social fragmentation further strain social systems and increase vulnerability, especially among disadvantaged communities. To effectively tackle these challenges and secure a sustainable and intergenerationally fair future, Australia needs an approach to policy and decision-making that balances immediate needs while taking meaningful action to address long-term impacts.

Australians are aware of the impacts these converging crises will have on their future and are calling for change. A 2024 survey conducted by EveryGen found that 97% of Australian respondents believe that policies today should take into account the interests of future generations, while 81% agree that Australian politicians think too short-term. Leaders have a responsibility to meet this growing demand for change and take action to promote and protect long-termism in policymaking.

### The Opportunity for Australia

Future-focused policies have several advantages. They can strengthen social cohesion, improve living standards, and promote economic resilience by anticipating needs in housing, healthcare, and workforce development. Additionally, by safeguarding the environment and ensuring Australia seizes opportunities in emerging industries, long-term policy can enable Australia to mitigate the severity of climate change, enhance global competitiveness, and foster international partnerships that advance intergenerational equity. Crucially, adopting longer term approaches also allows us to identify challenges early—whether environmental, technological, social, or economic. This supports preventative measures and gradual adaptation, which are more cost-effective than reactive policies.



## **First Nations Leadership**

Australia has the opportunity to be a global leader in future generations policy. There is an even greater opportunity if we elevate the leadership, collective knowledge and intergenerational stewardship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples that have been practised on the lands now called Australia for more than 65,000 years.

Indigenous Peoples around the world have been practising the core tenets of future generations leadership, such as environmental stewardship, supported by intergenerational oral histories, and intergenerational kinship for many thousands of years.

As such, integrating First Nations ways of knowing, being, and doing into future generations policy and governance presents a transformative opportunity to reimagine Australian governance. Failure to reconcile our future policy approaches with this wealth of Indigenous wisdom and leadership would not only re-perpetrate our colonial legacy but also hinder our long-term success.

## **A Global Movement and Mandate**

A growing number of countries around the world are recognising the urgent need to consider the long-term consequences of today's decisions and are implementing initiatives to protect the interests of future generations. From Wales and New Zealand to the Philippines and Nigeria, many governments have already taken action to preserve their national long-term interests. Australia is well-placed to learn from these international approaches, developing our own future generations framework tailored to our unique system of governance and localised policy context.

## **The Declaration on Future Generations**

The Declaration, adopted in September 2024 at the United Nations Summit of the Future, affirms the collective responsibility of countries to protect the needs and interests of future generations, building upon decades of international work on sustainable development, including the principles established in the 2030 Agenda.

The Declaration now serves as a global standard, calling on member states to safeguard the interests and needs of future generations through a “whole-of-government approach to...the assessment, development, implementation and evaluation of policies that safeguard the needs and interests of future generations” (Article 28).

## **Applying a Future Generations Approach in Australia**

A Commissioner for Future Generations would build on and strengthen Australia's existing policy landscape by advocating for intergenerational equity, encouraging evidence-based decision-making, and promoting a wellbeing economy that addresses systemic inequities for the co-benefit of future and current generations. Achieving this requires a multi-partisan commitment to long-termism, ensuring that policy innovation survives through changes of government. Moving beyond traditional economic indicators like GDP, a wellbeing-focused framework would incorporate holistic measures of prosperity, addressing health, environmental stability, technological advancement, and social cohesion.

The success of a Commissioner for Future Generations hinges on sufficient resources and political independence. Without adequate funding, the role risks becoming

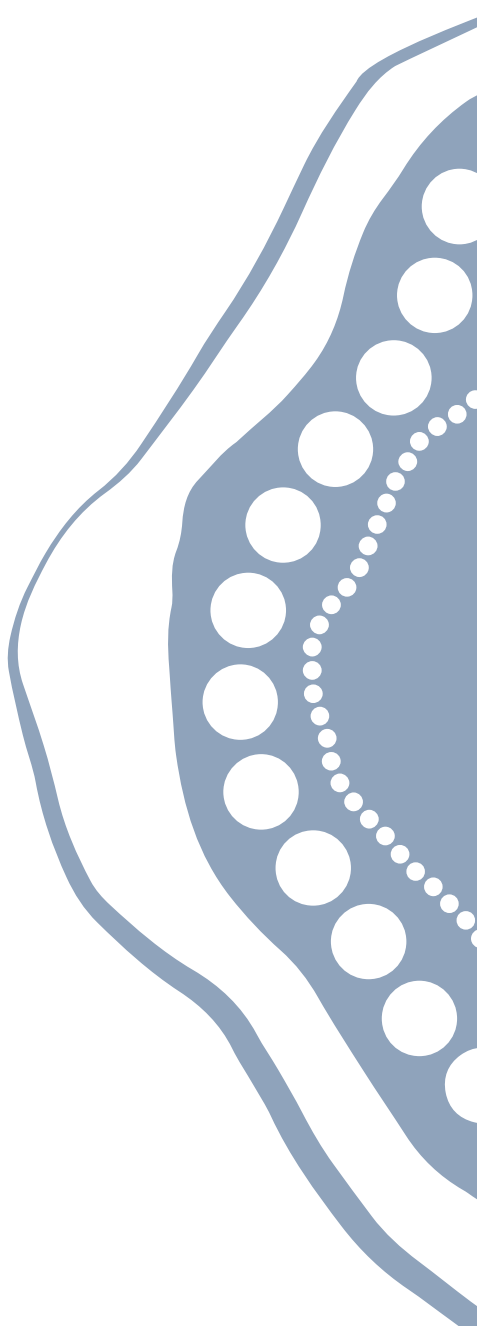
merely symbolic. An interim solution might be establishing a Commissioner within the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet while working towards a permanent, well-funded role. This investment in intergenerational equity would yield long-term economic, social, and environmental benefits, making it a strategic commitment.

## Foundational Recommendations

The policy brief sets out three Foundational Recommendations that Australia should urgently prioritise to embed intergenerational fairness and long-term thinking into our governance framework. These recommendations provide an institutional anchor from which to build a broader future generations approach to policy and decision-making in Australia.

- 1. Legislate a *Wellbeing of Future Generations Act* in the Federal Parliament:** Overarching legislation is essential to protect long-term policy commitments from the shifting priorities of different governments. The Act would provide a framework for advancing intergenerational equity and wellbeing, ensuring that today's decisions do not compromise the wellbeing and opportunities of future Australians.
- 2. Establish an independent statutory *Commissioner for Future Generations*:** The Act would create an independent statutory Commissioner to advocate for and represent future Australians' long-term interests and sustainable practice, ensuring intergenerational fairness is integrated into decision-making across government.

- 3. Mandate the launch of a *National Conversation on Future Generations* and ongoing public engagement:** Led by the Commissioner, this initiative would engage the public as active participants in the co-creation and evolution of the vision for Australia's future, fostering inclusivity and public trust in long-term policies.



## Additional Recommendations

Accompanying the Foundational Recommendations are a series of Additional Recommendations for building a broader ecosystem of future generations policy in Australia.

### 1. Adequately Engaging Key

**Stakeholders:** Actively involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities as equal partners to incorporate intergenerational knowledge and perspectives into governance. Engage young Australians through initiatives like youth citizen juries to ensure that policies reflect future priorities and promote broad community involvement in long-term policy development.

### 2. Establishing Robust Support

**Infrastructure:** Create a statutory parliamentary committee focused on future generations to embed long-term thinking within legislative processes. Require structured impact assessments for policy proposals to evaluate their effects on environmental, economic, and social wellbeing, ensuring policies are aligned with future interests.

### 3. Supporting Existing Initiatives and Fostering Collaboration:

Strengthen frameworks like Measuring What Matters by providing ways for it to be effectively integrated into government decision-making. Support collaboration with the Australian Public Service Commission to further embed long-term thinking in governance and build sustained support for public decision-making that stewards the future.

Adopting these Foundational Recommendations, supported by the broader ecosystem of considerations articulated within this policy brief, will help Australia overcome the limitations of short-term political cycles and human biases that hinder long-term thinking and create a legacy of sustainable prosperity for generations to come.

**In the wake of the 2024 UN Summit for the Future and in advance of the 2025 Australian federal election, there is a unique window of opportunity to meet the growing demand for action to protect future generations.**

**We must act now, before the consequences of inaction become irreversible.**

**Access the full report here:**

<https://www.foundationsfortomorrow.org/futuregenerationspolicyroadmap>

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