

# Climate action heats up



TORRES Strait Islander claimants in a historic climate case are ramping up their struggle, submitting an official reply to the Australian

Government's attempt to get the case dismissed and rallying supporters on social media.

In May last year, eight individuals from across the Torres Strait lodged a complaint with the United Nations Human Rights Committee in Geneva, highlighting the threat of climate change to their culture and their ability to live on their home islands. In August it was revealed that the Australian Government is attempting to get the UN to dismiss the complaint, denying that climate change is impacting the human rights of Torres Strait Islander peoples.

In their formal response, the claimants have expressed disappointment that Australia's position fails to recognise the basic human rights obligations it has to its people. They say it also fails to recognise the environmental impacts climate change has already brought to their islands.

Advancing seas are already threatening homes, as well as damaging burial grounds and sacred cultural sites. Many Torres Strait Islander people are worried that without urgent action their islands could disappear in their lifetimes – a concern backed by the latest climate science.

On September 29, the eight



The Torres Strait Islander group, including Yessie Mosby (front, third from left), who made a complaint to the UN highlighting the impacts of climate on their culture and country, met with supporters in Cairns after a "disappointing" attempt from the Australian government to have the complaint dismissed.

claimants submitted a formal reply to the UN, arguing that Australia has failed to acknowledge that significant climate impacts – such as advancing erosion, coral bleaching and the extinction of regional plant and animal species – are happening now and have already impacted the human rights of Torres Strait Islander communities.

Lawyers for the claimants said that Australia is wrong to claim that

it cannot be held responsible for the global issue of climate change, and disingenuous in claiming that climate change is an issue Australia is currently committed to tackling.

Yessie Mosby, a Zenadh Kes Masig man living in the Kulkalgal tribe area, is a claimant in the case.

"How can the Australian Government say this is just a future threat to our rights?" he said. "We are watching our ancestors' bones

wash away, our crops destroyed by salinity, and our drinking water is contaminated."

Australian climate lawyer Sophie Marjanac, with environmental legal charity ClientEarth, is acting for the Islanders in this complaint.

"Australia is clearly an outlier, a laggard at the bottom of the league when it comes to international climate action," she said. "It has a long track record of inaction at home, and international obstruction

in efforts to reduce the amount of global heating pollution in our atmosphere.

"It has the world's highest per capita emissions and its commitments to the Paris Agreement are woefully inadequate. If the Australian Government claims it's not responsible for the human rights of its most climate-vulnerable citizens after its continued climate inaction, then who is?"

The claimants are calling for solidarity from Indigenous and other people, launching a photo action on social media to coincide with the formal submission of their reply to the Australian Government.

As part of the photo action, photos featuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from many nations across the continent, as well as Indigenous people from across the Pacific region, are being shared with the hashtag #TorresStrait8 and #OurIslandsOurHome. The claimants are calling for Indigenous and other people to share photos.

"Our message to the Australian public is to please support us in solidarity in this fight to save our island homes, our people, and our culture for our children and future generations," Yessie Mosby said.

The #OurIslandsOurHome campaign has already gathered more than 20,000 petition signatures, which the claimants plan to deliver to the Government in November.

# School strike sees national turnout to call for future based on clean energy not gas

By NICK PATON



NGUNAWAL man Josh Bell may have finished school years ago, but he showed up at Campbelltown, NSW, on September 25 for this year's national School Strike 4 Climate.

Mr Bell said he is concerned about the Federal Government's plans to spend millions on gas exploration.

He said his son's future was the main reason he was there.

"When I got to the strike I could see a huge amount of people, all in unity, and standing together ready to rise up for climate action," Mr Bell said. "At one point the microphone got handed to me, but I could just see the passion in the younger ones, and so I handed the microphone to them so we could all hear what they had to say about their future.

"They were saying things like, 'Hold on, this is our future you're destroying,' and, as a father myself, I could hear just how concerned the younger mob is about the current climate crisis."

The #FundOurFutureNotGas day of action involved more than 500 COVID-safe events in capital cities, regional centres and towns throughout Australia.

Aboriginal and Torres State Islander people joined many of the events, organised by the School Strike 4 Climate network.

The School Strike 4 Climate national day of action condemned the Morrison Government and sections of the gas industry, along with prominent figures in the ALP, who are backing a push for public funding to be spent on new gas

infrastructure, as part of a 'gas powered recovery' to stimulate Australia's economy.

Protesters called on the Federal Government to spend economic stimulus money on clean energy to create jobs, rather than attempt to prop up the gas industry, which activists say puts the climate and Australia's economy at risk.

They demanded that no public funds be spent on gas, but on resourcing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led solutions that guarantee land rights and connection to country instead.

Other demands included the creation of jobs that fast-track solutions to the climate crisis, and investment in projects that transition Australia's economy and communities to 100% renewable energy by 2030.

"Things like mining can cause irreversible damage to our homelands and we need to break this cycle so that our sacred sites are not at risk of being destroyed," Mr Bell said. "If we continue to allow the environment to be destroyed through dangerous projects like fracking, then our connection our country is at risk of being destroyed. But we are out here and we are closing the gap on this issue ourselves."

Traditional owners in Broome used the opportunity to highlight their concerns about the controversial mining practice of fracking.

With COVID-19 restrictions in place, students all over Australia found creative ways to have their voices heard, through socially distanced actions, Instagram livestreams, banner drops, climate classrooms on the lawns of State Parliament, and art installations.



Protesters take part in the School Strike 4 Climate in Broome, Western Australia.



Ngunawal man Josh Bell at the Campbelltown School Strike 4 Climate.



Gomerai woman Linda Whitten, centre, with Aunty Rhonda Dixon-Grover and Nadeena Dixon at Martin Place in Sydney.