School Students' Statement on Human Rights Protection for New South Wales



We, school students from the Sydney and Hunter regions of New South Wales (NSW), meeting at NSW Parliament on 11 September 2025:

- Acknowledge that we have worked together on the Country of the Gadigal people and pay our respects to their elders past and present, and acknowledge their continuing sovereignty;
- Welcome this opportunity to share our views about human rights protection for the people of NSW;
- Direct this Statement to Members of the NSW Parliament, our peers and schools, and the wider community of NSW.

We want to challenge some prejudices about young people that we see reflected in NSW society. We feel that young people tend to be ignored more frequently than older people. We see our experiences devalued and our opinions dismissed or taken less seriously.

In fact, young people:

- Will have the same experiences as all other members of society, and despite our young age, we already have had diverse, challenging and sometimes traumatic experiences;
- Deserve access to education about and advocacy for our human rights;
- Are still forming our opinions and our values – for this reason, it is very important that we are treated with respect, because the treatment of young people by the community will shape the formation of our views;
- Are very aware of what is happening in our world, including the urgent risks posed by climate change;
- Are experiencing the impacts of a technology-driven society, including harms like violation of our privacy, damage to our reputations, cyberbullying and restrictions on our ability to participate in public life online;
- Know that we have less political power and that decisions are often taken that will affect us without our input.

We challenge NSW decision-makers and the wider community to acknowledge that young people have views that should be taken seriously. We are the future and should have more of a say in how it is shaped. Young age does not discredit our experiences or mean that human rights protections do not apply equally to us, and it is not fair to discriminate against us or our ideas because we are young. We can provide different perspectives and can make useful and informed contributions to decision-making.

We should be at the forefront of decisions that affect us. We have an internationally recognised right to participate and to have our views heard and taken seriously.

We know that human rights concerns are urgent, and action must be taken now.





We came to Parliament today to discuss human rights protection for NSW. These are our core messages for decision-makers:

- Human rights apply to everyone, regardless of the differences amongst us – human rights are for all humans;
- No rights should be held higher than others – human rights all have equal status;
- The human rights of young people are not subservient to the rights of adults;
- Governments must not deny or violate human rights;
- Australia, especially NSW, is behind as a society in terms of protecting human rights – we need legislative change to advance the wellbeing of everyone in our community;
- NSW law does not offer comprehensive legal protection for the human rights of its people;
- Human rights are important for young people, and we want the confidence and security that our rights are protected in law;
- Legislative protection for human rights would benefit all people in NSW;
- We do not receive enough education around our human rights in our schooling or later in our lives – everyone in NSW and Australia ought to be informed about their rights;
- With better rights protection and more education about our human rights, together we can shape a better future for our society.












In our work at the 2025 Youth Forum on Human Rights, we considered 16 human rights that Australia has promised to uphold under core United Nations treaties and which are likely to be included in a Human Rights Bill for consideration by the people of NSW and the NSW Parliament.

The rights we discussed were:

- Right to recognition and equality before the law and freedom from discrimination
- Prohibition of torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment
- Protection of the child
- Protection of families
- Right to privacy and reputation
- Freedom of thought, conscience and religion
- Right to peaceful assembly and freedom of association
- Freedom of opinion and expression
- Right to participate and the right to take part in public life
- Right to liberty and security of the individual
- Rights of children in the criminal process
- Rights to culture
- Right to education
- Right to health
- Right to an adequate standard of living
- Right to a healthy environment

We call on the Parliament of NSW to pass a Human Rights Act that protects these rights and all other human rights protected in the international human rights framework.

In this Statement, we identify obstacles to the realisation of human rights and argue for stronger legislated protections.

RIGHT TO RECOGNITION AND EQUALITY BEFORE THE LAW AND FREEDOM FROM DISCRIMINATION

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Article 26:
"All persons are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law."

Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Article 2:
"Children must be protected from all forms of discrimination."

All human beings, including young people, should be treated equally, regardless of ethnicity, race, sex, language, religion, political or other opinions, national or social origin, property, birth, sexuality, gender, culture or other status. This right is very important for people with disability, who should receive whatever support they may require to live with dignity and free from discrimination.

By protecting everyone in NSW, including disadvantaged and disempowered groups, from discrimination, our society can promote a stronger, more cohesive and peaceful society in which everyone is respected. We can do more to teach anti-discrimination and promote equality – everyone should be aware that they are entitled to fair treatment.

The law must protect us all from discrimination. We call on the NSW Parliament to ensure comprehensive and enforceable legal protections against discrimination in a Human Rights Act for NSW.





PROTECTION FROM TORTURE AND CRUEL, INHUMAN AND DEGRADING TREATMENT OR PUNISHMENT

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Article 7, and Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 15:
"No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment."

Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Article 37(a):
"No child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment."

We are aware, as young people, that these prohibited practices can disproportionately affect young people. Young people may be disempowered in situations where they face risks of abuse (for example, when they are in custody or state care). Our relative lack of awareness or capacity to advocate for our rights, including our right to freedom of expression, can heighten the risk that young people will not receive protection from torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

We are outraged and alarmed by the disproportionate criminalisation and incarceration of First Nations people, including in NSW where First Nations young people represent 8% of young people in the state but account for 60% of children in detention. It is also shocking for us to learn that – in NSW and many other Australian jurisdictions – children as young as 10 can be prosecuted for criminal offences and imprisoned. This causes early contact with the justice system and instead of helping children or making communities safer causes children and young people to become trapped in deeply harmful cycles of repeated offending and imprisonment.

The experience of torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment is deeply traumatising for people. It causes lifelong harm. Trauma will likely be compounded for groups who are marginalised, for example people with disabilities, First Nations peoples, culturally and linguistically diverse groups, and members of the LGBTQIA+ community. We call on the NSW Parliament to prohibit and protect everyone against torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment.

PROTECTION OF THE CHILD

Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Article 19:
"Children must be protected from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation."

Article 3: "In all actions concerning children, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration."

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 7:
Governments must ensure "the full enjoyment by children with disabilities of all human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with other children."

This right is focused on the best interests of the child. We observe in our society stigma and prejudice against young people, particularly teenagers, and a lack of respect towards children. We also see the normalisation of bullying. Some children suffer violent and abusive treatment and lack protection for their best interests from their families, in out-of-home care, from government agencies and within other institutions.

These special rights that specifically belong to children because they are more vulnerable than adults must be protected in law by governments. Adequate protection of children will help build a stronger and more sustainable NSW society in which all children have the best chance of developing to their full potential, living with dignity and avoiding contact with the justice system.

To promote protection of the child, the NSW government must ensure that children receive education on children's human rights. Parents and caregivers, schools, health care settings, public entities, justice settings and all organisations performing a public function in NSW should operate in accordance with children's rights standards. It is also crucial that respect for children be promoted in workplaces, as there is evidence of young people being exploited in employment and not having access to union membership and support in the early stages of their working lives.





PROTECTION OF FAMILIES

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Article 23:
"The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State."

Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) Article 9(1):
"Children should not be separated from their parents unless it is in their best interests."

Article 18(2): "Governments must support parents and guardians in their child-raising responsibilities."

Article 20: "Children who cannot be looked after by their family must be given special protection and help."

Protection of families is so important for the protection of children. Too often, we hear about people suffering in violent and abusive family situations. Children are sometimes removed from parents who were themselves traumatised by abuse. First Nations children are disproportionally removed from their families in NSW and throughout Australia.

It can be very difficult or impossible for victims to get help, as abuse is still so often hidden or unnoticed by the community. Violence impacts the physical and emotional health of children, but if they are experiencing abuse, they are less likely to access the health care they need.

When families are well protected by law and institutions, they enable young people to learn and practice their cultures and traditions. Every family is different, and different family dynamics should be respected, including kinship relationships for First Nations peoples. When children need alternative family arrangements, including foster and adoptive families, those families must also receive protection to ensure the best interests of the children.

RIGHT TO PRIVACY AND REPUTATION

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Article 17:
"No one shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with their privacy, family, home, or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on their honour and reputation."

Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Article 16:
"No child shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his or her privacy, family, or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his or her honour and reputation."

As young people, we are very aware of how exposed we are to technology.

We know the risks we face, including from cyberbullying, AI deep fakes and other online abuse. We also know that we face risks due to the increasing use of AI, automated decision-making, algorithms and the use of our personal data, including our biometrics. These technology-driven practices can damage our reputations and invade our privacy. We need laws to carefully protect our privacy and reputations to guarantee us the best chance of building our futures free from the harms inflicted in the digital world.

However, we are also digital natives, and we need to be able to participate in the digital world in order to freely express ourselves, share our ideas, access information and support, find community with other young people, participate in public life and be equipped for the future.

We see governments talking about social media bans, but we call for human rights laws that fully protect and proportionately balance our rights, and which recognise both the harms and benefits of access to online communities as technology continues to rapidly advance.

The right to privacy and reputation must also be protected in our real world. For example, families play an important role in respecting the right of children to privacy, as appropriate for their age.

Alongside that respect, we also call for education to ensure that children are aware of how to protect their privacy and reputation as they grow up, particularly because damage to reputation and privacy can follow people throughout life and limit employment and other opportunities.







FREEDOM OF THOUGHT, CONSCIENCE AND RELIGION

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Article 18(1):
"Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice…"

Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Article 14(1):
"States Parties shall respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion."

Many factors impact freedom of thought, conscience and religion for young people. The extent to which we can express this right will be affected by our family situations, our education, gender and age. Our economic opportunities, social status and social groups also impact how we express this right. Some of us feel that our educational environments impose unfair restrictions on how freely we can express our freedom of thought or beliefs.

It is crucial that laws protect our freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right promotes respect for other people and their beliefs. When it is protected effectively there is less discrimination in society. Freedom of thought, conscience and belief is crucial to support important debate in society, break down harmful stereotypes about other people or communities we are unfamiliar with, and build acceptance of difference. When this human right is well protected, we gain confidence to develop as individuals while also building connections with other people and contributing to a united society.





RIGHT TO PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY AND FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) Article 21:
"The right of peaceful assembly shall be recognised… No restrictions may be placed… other than those imposed in conformity with the law and which are necessary… in a democratic society."

Article 22(1): "Everyone shall have the right to freedom of association with others, including the right to form and join trade unions…"

Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Article 15:
"Children have the right to meet with others and to join or set up associations, unless this interferes with the rights of others."

As people under the age of 18, it is vital that we have protection for these rights so that we can communicate our concerns about the future, participate in public life, connect with like-minded people in the community, and explore our identities. Through peaceful assembly and freedom of association, we can build support for peaceful campaigns on issues that matter to us and ensure that our views are heard. We can express these rights in many ways, including through student representative councils, assemblies in public spaces, and through protest. These rights are especially important for our participation in our society, considering that we do not yet have the right to vote.

However, we encounter obstacles to expressing these rights in our everyday lives. Some young people are subject to strict family expectations that make it difficult to participate in peaceful assemblies or freely associate outside our homes or schools. Some young people might not know about their rights to join a union or participate in protests and other community actions, even though they are too young to vote.

Social media bans risk impacting our ability to participate in online forms of peaceful protest and assembly.

We are also worried about expressing these rights through protest, knowing that public authorities sometimes make it very difficult for planned protests to get approval, and that even children can be subject to arrest and serious criminal charges.







FREEDOM OF OPINION AND EXPRESSION

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Article 19:
"Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference…[and] the right to freedom of expression… [including] to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds…"

Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Article 13:
"The child shall have the right to freedom of expression… orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), Article 21:
[Governments shall ensure that] "persons with disabilities can exercise the right to freedom of expression and opinion, including the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas on an equal basis with others and through all forms of communication of their choice…".

In order to exercise our freedom of opinion and expression, we need to be respected as people capable of forming and sharing our opinions. Young people are often forced to follow social norms, and some of us are constrained by an expectation that we should stay quiet or that our opinions and expressions are less worthy of protection compared to adults.

Some of us do not have good access to reliable information. Social media bans risk impacting our ability to freely express our ideas and opinions and to receive the ideas and opinions of others.

We call on the NSW Parliament to protect our freedom of opinion and expression in law. To make that protection meaningful, we ask leaders to consider how all young people can have good access to reliable information and be able to impart their ideas and participate in public discourse. We want to see our communities and governments protecting our right to participate and involving young people in discussions, protests and decision-making. We can bring fresh ideas to important debates, and we deserve a platform to contribute to changes that will have impacts on our lives.









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RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE AND TAKE PART IN PUBLIC LIFE

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Article 25:
Recognises the right of every citizen to take part in public affairs, vote, and have equal access to public services.

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), Article 18:
"Indigenous peoples have the right to participate in decision-making in matters which would affect their rights, through representatives chosen by themselves in accordance with their own procedures, as well as to maintain and develop their own indigenous decision-making institutions."

Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Article 12:
Children have the right to express their own views on all matters that affect them. Their views must be given due weight according to their age and maturity.

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), Article 29:
Requires governments to ensure that persons with disabilities can effectively and fully participate in political and public life.

Even though children do not have the right to vote, we still have the right to express our views and be consulted on matters that affect us, have those views taken seriously, and take part in public life.

Young people make up a large part of NSW society, and decisions made during our youth not only impact us in the here and now but will also impact us for a long time. The experiences and views of young people are no less significant because of our age. We are also a diverse group of people with a wide range of individual and unique perspectives – these do not always mirror the views of our parents, elected representatives or communities.

When we do see young people in public life, we see that they are not as well respected as older people. Having visited parliament, we can see that young people are underrepresented among our political leaders. Governments can benefit from considering the views of people who have less power and influence. To better protect our right to take part in public life, we call on the NSW Government to ensure that young people have access to reliable information and are protected from misinformation.

We also call upon the NSW Government to legally protect our right to participate and ensure that we are consulted when decisions are being made that affect us. With good learning opportunities and access to decision-making processes, young people can helpfully advise on decisions and contribute more to our communities.



RIGHT TO LIBERTY AND SECURITY OF THE INDIVIDUAL

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Article 9:
"No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention. Everyone has the right to liberty and security of person."

Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Article 37(b):
"No child shall be deprived of liberty unlawfully or arbitrarily. The arrest, detention, or imprisonment of a child shall be in conformity with the law and used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time."

It is shocking to us that children as young as ten can be arrested and detained in NSW. Children should be recognised as children before the law. The law should be evidence-based and reflect expert research about children's development and needs. It is crucial that children receive care, protection and support for their needs, and detention is incompatible with meeting those needs.

We are very concerned about children who lose their liberty. This can happen through the criminal process or in other ways, for example, some children are subject to court-ordered custody arrangements, and this affects their liberty. When children lose their liberty, this impacts other human rights that are very important for them, particularly their right to education. Along with the psychological trauma young people experience when they are deprived of their liberty, this experience increases the risk that young people will not achieve their potential but instead will become trapped in cycles of trauma, abuse or offending.

We call on the NSW Parliament to better protect the right of young people to liberty and security of person, and to ensure related supports, including access to legal aid, diversion away from criminal justice processes and culturally appropriate trauma-informed supports.



RIGHTS OF CHILDREN IN THE CRIMINAL PROCESS

Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC): Article 37:
"No child shall be deprived of liberty unlawfully or arbitrarily... detention shall be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time."

Article 40: "Children accused of offences must be treated in a manner consistent with the promotion of their sense of dignity and worth... and which takes into account their age and the desirability of promoting their reintegration."

Childhood is a life stage of peak development. We need to maintain the distinction between adults and children in the criminal process and prioritise the safety and security of children. Children need support, protection and education, and these are compromised when they come into contact with the justice system. Trauma is inevitable for young people who are deprived of their liberty.

Considering that children may not have sufficient understanding to have criminal intent, we call on governments and authorities to prioritise support and rehabilitation over punishment of young offenders. Detention dehumanises young people and undermines their identity formation. We would like to see a focus on the factors that influence young people to offend and the development of simplified criminal processes that are accessible and give young offenders a voice. The cost of imprisonment is so high, both in monetary terms and in terms of the impacts on young people. This is particularly true for First Nations young people who are shockingly overrepresented in the NSW criminal justice system.





RIGHTS TO CULTURE

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Article 27:
"In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, or to use their own language."

Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) Article 29:
Education should be directed to the development of respect of each child's cultural identity.

Article 30: Children from minority or Indigenous communities have the right to enjoy their own culture, practice their religion, and use their language.

Article 31: Every child has the right to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.

As young people, we feel connected to our cultures and the values of our communities. A feeling of belonging to culture is very important for our socialisation, sense of community and connection to family. Our cultural identities are tied to our individual identities and self-expression. Language and traditions are key means of expressing our cultures.

However, we see several obstacles to the free expression of cultures in NSW society. We are concerned about the oppression of First Nations peoples and cultures. Having learnt about how First Nations people suffered forced detachment from culture during the Stolen Generations, we were distressed by the rejection of the Voice to Parliament proposition in the 2023 referendum. We are aware of the trauma experienced by racialised communities when their cultures are suppressed. Some young people feel alienated from their cultures because they see a decline in the celebration of multiculturalism in our society. We call on the NSW Parliament to protect rights to culture for all people, including by celebrating diversity, protecting language rights and encouraging the representation of the widest possible range of voices in institutions and media.





RIGHT TO EDUCATION

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), Article 13:
Recognises the right of everyone to education, aiming to achieve full development of the human personality.

Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) Article 28:
Every child has the right to education, with primary education compulsory and available free to all.

Article 29: Education must aim to develop a child's personality, talents, abilities, and respect for human rights.

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 24:
Governments must ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and not exclude anyone from the general education system on the basis of disability.

The right to education is fundamental for young people, but we are concerned about the many obstacles that are preventing all young people from having equitable access to this right. Access to education varies for young people across urban, regional and rural locations. Decisions about where we go to school are typically made by our parents or caregivers, meaning that we have limited agency or choice in our own education. Education costs are growing, especially for families that choose private schooling. Children deprived of their liberty face significant barriers in accessing their right to education. Importantly, school systems have a long way to go in inclusively accommodating the individual needs of young people with disability or health conditions.

We call on the NSW Parliament to legislate protection for the right to education. Quality education is essential for us to build the foundations of our knowledge about the world and develop aspirations for our future lives and work. We can better exercise other human rights if we receive a quality education. Leaders and educational institutions must ensure true equity in access to quality education and work to ensure that all students' needs are being met. We also call for safe, inclusive and respectful school environments where we can be free from bullying and express our identity free from fear.

RIGHT TO HEALTH

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), Article 12:
Recognises the right of all people to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.

Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Article 24:
Every child has the right to enjoy the highest standard of health and access to healthcare services.

When we have the highest possible standard of physical and mental health, we have more capacity to enjoy all of our other human rights. Access to quality mental health care is a particular priority for young people because of the high rates of conditions like anxiety and depression in our age group and the risks these pose for our quality of life and capacity to learn and develop.

We call on the NSW Parliament to consider the obstacles young people experience in relation to accessing health care. For example, we often lack access to quality medical information. We may be limited in our ability to consult health professionals or protect our privacy in medical contexts. We may not be given adequate opportunities to provide free, prior and informed consent to medical treatment. Family or cultural factors may prevent us from seeking help for health issues, including mental health issues. Some schools do not provide basic health resources, including soap and feminine hygiene products. For young people living remotely, it can be especially hard to get access to health care. Children generally do not have independent funds to access health care, which is often very expensive. Governments and education authorities can do more to help us understand our health and access care when we need it.





RIGHT TO AN ADEQUATE STANDARD OF LIVING

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), Article 11(1):
"Everyone has the right to an adequate standard of living… including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions."

Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Article 27(1):
"Every child has the right to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development."

An adequate standard of living is a basic standard that supports a person's health, dignity and development. It includes things like access to adequate housing, nutrition, sanitation and social security. When young people enjoy an adequate standard of living, they are better able to access their other fundamental rights. A good standard of life limits the risk of young people experiencing violence, trauma and mental ill-health. An adequate standard of living in childhood makes it more likely for people to develop to their full potential and enjoy a full range of opportunities later in life.

But children do not get to choose the circumstances of their birth, and their standard of living is heavily influenced by the experiences of earlier generations in their families. Socio-economic factors and geographic disparities in terms of access to essential services also have a significant influence on the standard of living young people may enjoy.

We call on the NSW Parliament to protect the right of all people to an adequate standard of living and set this right as an expectation for all young people, regardless of their social and economic circumstances.







RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

UN General Assembly Resolution 76/300 (2022):
Recognises that the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment impacts the enjoyment of all human rights. Also recognises that climate change and unsustainable environmental management interferes with the enjoyment of the right to a healthy environment.

The right to a healthy environment is the most recently recognised human right in the international framework, and it has recently been included in the ACT's Human Rights Act. As young people aware of the triple planetary crisis, including the climate crisis, biodiversity loss and pollution, we are mindful of how dependent we all are on the natural world and its future health. If our environment is destroyed, our human rights will no longer matter – we depend on a clean, healthy and sustainable environment for our survival.

A healthy environment supports food and water security, the survival of diverse flora and fauna and the preservation of symbiotic relationships between humans and other animals. Play is essential for young people to grow and learn, and activities in nature support our health and wellbeing. Children with health conditions can be particularly vulnerable to pollution. First Nations peoples have a spiritual connection to the land that is undermined if the health of the environment is not protected.

We call on the NSW Parliament to protect the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. This protection promises many benefits, including the reduction of extreme weather events and climate impacts that harm people and communities.

Governments and public authorities can also do more to support good education for young people on caring for the environment, and do much more to listen to the advocacy of young people on environmental issues. We see how our economy and the employment market is still heavily dependent on environmental destruction – we want a different future and a NSW Parliament that prioritises a healthy environment for the future, so that we can look ahead and pursue our dreams with hope and create a society that protects many generations to come.



Our human rights matter. They are the tools we use to protect each other and build a better future based on justice, dignity, equality and fairness.

We know that Australia has made promises before the United Nations to respect, protect and promote the human rights we have come to Parliament to discuss today. We are very concerned that, unlike other states and territories, NSW has not enacted its own law to legally protect human rights.

Protecting human rights in law would send a clear message to everyone in NSW - children and adults alike - that people in positions of power care about our future, and are prepared to do the work needed to place dignity at the heart of our society.

We call on the NSW parliament to protect and articulate our human rights in a Human Rights Act for NSW.











The following schools participated in the 2025 Youth Forum at NSW Parliament:

Barker College
Emanuel School
Fort Street High School
Hunter River High School
Hunter School of the Performing Arts
Katoomba High School
Lambton High School
Marrickville High School
Merewether High School
Mount View High School
Northern Beaches Secondary College, Manly
Plumpton High School
South Sydney High School
St Francis Xavier's College, Hamilton
St Joseph's College, Lochinvar
St Mary's Catholic College, Gateshead
Swansea High School
Tomaree High School
Toronto High School
West Wallsend High School
Whitebridge High School



This Statement was drafted and adopted at a gathering of 60 students from 21 diverse high schools across the Sydney and Hunter regions of NSW on 11 September 2025. The forum participants met at NSW Parliament with several visiting MPs before convening in Ferguson Hall at St Stephen's Uniting Church to draft the Statement. The Statement reflects the lived experiences and views of the participating students. Thank you to the staff and volunteers at Ferguson Hall and Parliament for ensuring the access, safety and comfort of all participants.



The 2025 Youth Forum was coordinated by Amy Maguire, Professor of Human Rights and Director of the Centre for Law and Social Justice at the University of Newcastle, and Kerry Weste, Vice-President of Australian Lawyers for Human Rights and Chair of the Human Rights Act for NSW Alliance.













Kerry Weste and Amy Maguire would like to thank the many generous people and organisations who made this wonderful event and this Statement possible.

Thank you to Jenny Leong MP and her electorate office team for hosting forum participants at Parliament, sponsoring our venue and photography, and engaging school students in the law reform process. Thank you for everything you have done and are doing to encourage young people to participate in public life - you made the 2025 Youth Forum a very memorable experience for our participants! Professional photography by Ishbel Dunsmore and additional photos by Harrison Brennan beautifully captured the day's events.

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University of Newcastle student Jenna Carolan contributed enormously to the success of the Forum - thank you, Jen, particularly for your excellent work on the resources that supported student learning and the design of this Statement. Thanks also to Niamh Maguire and Tessa Sobel-Read for outstanding event assistance.

Forum participants were fortunate to hear from several excellent guest speakers - we are very grateful to Daney Faddoul, Craig Foster, Sarah Marland, Timothy Roberts, Leanne Smith and Ryan Vowles for sharing their lived experiences of human rights advocacy to inspire forum participants.

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Special thanks to the schools and teachers who accepted our invitation to participate in the 2025 Youth Forum. We appreciate the effort required to facilitate student participation in off-site events - thank you for supporting your students' right to participate in public life and elevating their voices.

Finally, but most importantly, thank you to the 60 school students who gathered at the forum in a spirit of openness, curiosity and commitment to learning. It was a privilege to see you share your experiences with each other, develop your understanding of human rights, engage with parliamentarians and advocates, and produce this School Students' Statement on Human Rights Protection for New South Wales.