

University of Melbourne Sustainability Charter Public Statement of Rationale

Growing Esteem recognises the University's role as a public-spirited institution dedicated to research, teaching and engagement. Sustainability underpins this mission. Our future success as a University, and indeed as a society, relies on our ability to manage our financial, organisational, environmental and social impacts. The University is rising to this challenge. That is why 'Sustainability & Resilience' is one of the grand challenges of our Research Strategy. It is also why sustainability is embedded in our graduate attributes, so all students learn how to be active, informed citizens.

As a pre-eminent research and teaching institution, we have the ability to shape public thought and practices to achieve a sustainable future. We are privileged to be home to some of the great environmental and social thinkers. Our students are active and engaged with social and environmental issues. This energy and insight is our greatest asset.

In response to recognition that sustainability is a universal principle for the University, the Sustainability Executive began developing a Charter in June 2015 as a succinct and enduring statement of the University's values, principles and commitments. This will flow on to an operational plan, which has detailed milestones and timelines. The University's first Sustainability Plan for 2016-2020 will be co-designed with staff, students and other stakeholders in the coming months.

The Sustainability Charter was open for public consultation from October until December 2015. Stakeholders were invited to give their views on how the University should frame its enduring commitments to sustainability. Feedback was gathered through internal committee consultations, email submissions, a South Lawn marquee event and a public forum. We received 111 emails from stakeholders about the Charter.

Support from the University community was strong. We were pleased that there were no fundamental objections to the Charter concept. Many respondents offered positive feedback that the University is on the right track in aspiring to sustainability leadership. There was support for our progress so far to improve our sustainability performance across research, teaching and campus management. But there remains more to do.

Feedback responses were well researched and considered. Many called for more involvement in shaping the University's sustainability agenda. These calls have been heard. Much of the Charter feedback was operational and will be used to develop the Sustainability Plan. The Charter states our overarching sustainability principles, flowing on to commitments for each area of our activities. The Plan then outlines how we will work to deliver these commitments. It will contain priority actions and specific targets against which we can track our progress over the next five years.

The Sustainability Plan participation process will offer more ways for all members of the University community to engage and problem solve. This is a great opportunity to harness our community to create innovative sustainability solutions.

This statement outlines the key areas of feedback from stakeholders and explains the rationale of the Sustainability Executive in finalising the Charter. We have taken on board the feedback, but not all can be reflected in the Charter.

Formal responses to the feedback

The Sustainability Executive considered all feedback in reviewing the Charter, including the key areas below. There was a considerable amount of feedback that related to operational matters, with suggestions about resource use, campus initiatives or other specific activities. This feedback is an important input into the Sustainability Plan rather than the Charter.

Defining sustainability

Stakeholders called for a clear definition of sustainability to be included in the Charter. The Charter identifies the specific aspects of sustainability which relate to the activities of the University.

Fossil fuel divestment

The Charter sets out a revised commitment to “*Implement investment strategies consistent with the University’s commitment to sustainability and its financial and legal responsibilities*”.

Fossil fuel divestment and the University’s engagement with the sector as a whole was the main theme from responses. We acknowledge the ongoing student interest in this issue over a number of years preceding development of the Charter. We look forward to progressing dialogue on this with students and others as part of the Plan development.

Divestment is an important issue for the University community, which is captured in the Charter’s commitment to sustainable investment. The University is taking a broad response by addressing all our interactions with the fossil fuel industry, rather than treating investments as a standalone issue. Our approach to engaging with the fossil fuel sector will be articulated further in the Sustainability Plan.

As part of early work on our Sustainability Plan, we are undertaking analysis of the University’s multi-faceted relationships with the fossil fuel sector. We are convening a working group of internal and external experts to provide advice on our future strategic direction, including our investments and how we engage with the sector. We can then determine if our desired approach is compatible with current arrangements.

Social inclusion and indigenous engagement

Feedback was that social inclusion should be acknowledged in the Charter. This has been addressed through the document in references to direct engagement with the University community. Similarly, stakeholders gave the feedback that the Charter should recognise Indigenous people and heritage. This has been included in the preamble in line with other University policies and practices to recognise the traditional owners and cultures that contribute to sustainable land management and social inclusion.

Carbon emissions

Carbon emissions reduction, going beyond carbon neutrality and setting bold targets was another theme. There were strong calls for the University to show leadership by raising public awareness about sustainability and shaping the discourse on how to transition to a low carbon future. Energy and emissions will be a priority area in the Sustainability Plan. We will undertake investigations of the most viable carbon reduction pathways. These will involve energy reduction, on-campus energy generation and direct arrangements to purchase renewable energy from third party providers.

Sustainability governance

Specific feedback asked for more emphasis on how staff and students can be involved in setting the University’s sustainability agenda. Some called for the Charter to commit to more formal student representation on sustainability governance bodies. Sections on the University’s commitments to engage have been clarified to explicitly refer to involving the University community. The University is also committed to engaging its staff and students in sustainability considerations. The consultation process for developing the Charter is an example of this. The success of our sustainability performance is defined by how we listen, engage and act in partnership with the University community and beyond.

The Sustainability Plan development will focus on broad consultation. The process is to be designed to include events, forums and other feedback mechanisms so that staff, students and other stakeholders can be involved.

We welcome your feedback on the priorities for our activities for the next five years. We want this to be an open conversation about how we can solve sustainability challenges and show global leadership.

Summary of changes

Feedback	Response
Clarify what sustainability means at the University	The preamble has been revised to outline what sustainability means from a University perspective
The Charter should reference the social dimension of sustainability, particularly social inclusion and indigenous engagement	The Charter's main focus is environmental sustainability, but it has been amended to refer to the importance of social impacts
The University should commit to fossil fuel divestment	This is not addressed in the Charter, though it is referenced in the commitment to sustainable investment. Engagement with the fossil fuel sector is a priority for the Sustainability Plan.
Including students and staff in sustainability governance	The Charter has been amended to make explicit reference to the importance of student and staff participation in advancing sustainability
Operational suggestions about reducing resource use, increasing renewables, waste management, procurement, health and nutrition and social inclusion	These are time-bound activities and are too detailed for the Charter, but will be input into the development of the Plan's priorities and activities.

Continue the conversation

Now that we have finalised our sustainability values and commitments in the Charter, we want to realise these in the Plan. The Plan will set out priority activities in each of our strategic areas: research, engagement, learning and teaching, operations and governance.

We would like the University community to contribute and will offer the opportunities below for input into developing the Plan.

Consultation process

- Sustainability Plan Consultation Period
 - Call for comments April, May, June 2016 throughout consultation period
 - Open public forum on the plan April/May
 - Divestment debate event April/May
- Sustainability Plan consultation process closes end June 2016
- Sustainability Plan release August 2016