

# YOUNG PEOPLE LEADING, DEMANDING AND CREATING A MORE JUST WORLD



## Oaktree - The case for an Independent Commissioner for Future Generations

Oaktree has been a consistent advocate for an Independent Commissioner for Future Generations, an independent body designed to adequately address youth issues. Following the Senate Inquiry's 2019 report on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which made mention of Oaktree's recommendation for this body, further steps must be taken to recognise the necessity of an Independent Commission.

### **A national Independent Commission for Future Generations can introduce a youth voice to national policy-making**

Federal policies, such as childcare subsidies and funding to universities, disproportionately impact young people and their futures. However, there is no clear federal legislative provision for young people to participate in relevant policy-making processes. The establishment of an Independent Commission for Future Generations would enable adequate representation of youth issues.

Led by a principal commissioner, aged under 30, the proposed Commission would include a youth council which leads policy responses to issues affecting young people, resources evidence-based youth work practices, and represents young people to government. The body would additionally have necessary issue-specific commissioners, such as an Indigenous Youth Commissioner. Members of the Commission will sit in departmental meetings, and being assigned responsibility to oversee and make recommendations in programs designs and evaluations.

### **The current situation of youth representation in policy-making**

According to the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), there is no national independent body under the federal legislature that monitors, assesses, and evaluates government policies from a youth perspective, with only the Department of Education and Training (DET) tasked with youth affairs.<sup>1</sup> However, the DET's operation and funding initiatives are dependent on ministerial directions.<sup>2</sup> The responsibility of having youth representation in policy is often assigned to state legislatures, considering that some policies areas that disproportionately affect young people,

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, "Human rights and children and young people" <[https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/content/letstalkaboutright/downloads/HRA\\_young.pdf](https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/content/letstalkaboutright/downloads/HRA_young.pdf)>.

<sup>2</sup> Department of Education and Training, "2017-18 Annual Report: Opportunity through learning" (2018).

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such as housing and child protection, fall under state jurisdiction. Jurisdictions including the Northern Territory, Victoria, and South Australia currently have an Independent Commissioner of children and young people.<sup>3</sup> Youth representation in policy in other jurisdictions is either incorporated into the state government's overall governance or other statutory bodies, including New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory, or does not put an emphasis on young adults (Queensland). This jurisdictional difference, in conjunction with the lack of an independent youth voice at the federal level of governance, undermines the opportunity for young people to engage with national policy-making in a productive and positive manner.

## **Justification for an Independent Commission for Future Generations**

Evidence shows that an Independent Youth Commission can provide a platform for assessing and evaluating policies with a youth focus, ensuring the accountability of ministerial portfolios. Some significant changes directed by an Independent Youth Commission have been achieved at the state jurisdictional level. The Victorian Commissioner of Children and Youth People (CCYP) has provided oversight over multiple youth justice programs to address violence in youth justice centres across Victoria, holding the state government accountable for their policy implementation.<sup>4</sup> Other state commissions similarly act upon issue-specific policy areas, including the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care, child protection, and school bullying.<sup>5</sup> These successful intervention outcomes show that an Independent Youth Commission can produce tangible impacts on policy implementation and development.

## **Implementing an Independent Commission for Future Generations**

The success of the Future Generations Commission for Wales, an independent statutory body in the United Kingdom, shows that an independent commission can inject a youth voice across all federal ministries and legislative area, including de-carbonisation and national budgeting processes.<sup>6</sup> Within Australia, the proposed commission can provide oversight for the execution of federal legislations, such as that concerning Centrelink<sup>7</sup>, medicare services<sup>8</sup>, education funding<sup>9</sup>,

<sup>3</sup> Australian Institute of Family and Welfare, "Children's commissioners and guardians" (2018), <<https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/childrens-commissioners-and-guardians>>.

<sup>4</sup> The Victorian Commissioner of Children and Youth People, "Annual Report 17-18" (2018). <<https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/assets/corporate-documents/CCYP-AR-2018-P6-FINAL-web.pdf>>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.; Australian Centre for Child Protection, "Assessing the Quality and Comprehensiveness of Child Protection Practice Framework" (2018).

<<https://www.ccyp.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/2018-06-ACCG-Child-Protection-Report-June-2018-A4483618.pdf>>; ACT Human Rights Commission, "Annual Report 2017-18" (2018).

<<http://hrc.act.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Human-Rights-Annual-Report-2017-18-Screen.pdf>>.

<sup>6</sup> Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, "Work" <<https://futuregenerations.wales/work/>>.

<sup>7</sup> *Human Services (Centrelink) Act 1997* (Cth).

<sup>8</sup> *Human Services (Medicare) Act 1973* (Cth).

<sup>9</sup> *Australian Education Act 2013* (Cth).

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and housing affordability.<sup>10</sup> The commission acts as an effective solution to the underrepresentation of youth issues at a federal level. Given the success of state commissions and the Welsh commission, establishing an Independent Commission for Future Generations in Australia is a necessary solution to the underrepresentation of young people in policy.

\*Note: The terms 'Independent Commission for Future Generations' and 'Independent Youth Commission' are used as interchangeable terms.

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<sup>10</sup> *Treasury Laws Amendment (Reducing Pressure on Housing Affordability Measures No. 2) Bill 2018 (Cth).*