

Chapter 3

National governance structures and progress reporting

3.1 This chapter summarises suggestions from the evidence on improving the national governance of the SDGs, and tracking Australia's performance against the goals. Proposals included 'localising' the SDGs for the Australian context through the development of an implementation plan with national targets and a regular reporting mechanism. Other suggestions included establishing a new coordination team, and increasing the integration of the SDGs within Australian Government agencies.

Current approach to national coordination

3.2 Submissions generally agreed that the Australian Government should coordinate the national implementation of the SDGs and adopt a whole of government approach involving cooperation between relevant agencies and sectors.¹ This was largely preferred because it would address the 'very significant and important interdependencies, inter-relations and connections between the 17 goals'.² The Australian Academy of Science and Future Earth Australia (FEA) cautioned:

...a siloed approach to the goals can easily result in responses and strategies to advance a particular goal resulting in deleterious effects on others. Conversely a holistic view of the SDGs has the potential to enable synergies and trade-offs across both the goals themselves and the various sectors and stakeholders involved.³

3.3 The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) asserted that Australia is adopting a whole of government approach to the SDGs consistent with 'many countries, including China, Japan, Mexico, Finland, Norway, Timor Leste, Fiji and Tuvalu'.⁴ Mr Chris Tinning, First Assistant Secretary, DFAT explained the Australian Government's decision to 'mainstream' the SDGs:

...across government and to keep with the longstanding budgetary and policy process that we have, and to build on those when it came to collaboration with stakeholders and making decisions about priorities across government. We've obviously got the cabinet as the peak body for doing that, and relevant ministers. The decision was...to mainstream the SDG agenda into what we already have rather than create something new.⁵

3.4 The following sections describe the details of the current approach.

1 See, for example, Oxfam Australia, *Submission 18*, p. 8; United Nations Association of Australia (UNAA), *Submission 47*, p. 5; International Women's Development Agency (IWDA), *Submission 98*, p. 4; Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), *Submission 138*, p. 9.

2 Australian Academy of Science and FEA, *Submission 108*, p. 3.

3 *Submission 108*, p. 3.

4 *Submission 60*, p. 4.

5 *Committee Hansard*, 24 August 2018, p. 53.

Interdepartmental committee

3.5 DFAT and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) co-chair a Deputy Secretary-level interdepartmental committee (IDC) on the SDGs, established prior to the release of Australia's first Voluntary National Review (VNR). Mr Jason McDonald, then Acting Chief Adviser of the Domestic Policy Group, PM&C, emphasised that 'an IDC process would not have that level of representation unless it was a very serious issue that the government was interested in making sure was well coordinated'.⁶ He contended that the 'IDC process itself is a very powerful tool and will continue the seeding of the SDGs throughout government'.⁷

3.6 Other groups that supported the development of the VNR included a First Assistant Secretary (FAS) working group chaired by DFAT; a VNR Task Team of executive level staff across government; an internal DFAT reference group; and working groups on communications and data.⁸ While it appears that some of these groups were disbanded following the presentation of the VNR in July 2018, the committee was assured that the IDC would operate indefinitely, and would meet at least twice in the 12 months following the hearing on 24 August 2018.⁹ Mr McDonald indicated that the IDC can happen on an as-needed basis like the FAS group.¹⁰ In 2017 it was indicated that there were no plans to formally release minutes from the IDC or other working groups.¹¹ The IDC allows agencies to share best practice:

...which started to happen at the last meeting as well, particularly with Defence and some of their ideas...That's the kind of model that we have going forward. It will be sharing information, updating information and having best practice in terms of accountability.¹²

3.7 The IDC has also had discussions with representatives from business and non-profit stakeholders, and this practice is expected to continue.¹³

3.8 An international analogue to the IDC may be the central coordinating body for the German Sustainable Development Strategy, the State Secretaries' Committee,

6 *Committee Hansard*, 24 August 2018, p. 11.

7 *Committee Hansard*, 24 August 2018, p. 17.

8 DFAT, *Submission 60*, p. 5; Dr Rachel Bacon, First Assistant Secretary, Policy Analysis and Implementation Division, Department of the Environment and Energy (DoEE), *Committee Hansard*, 24 August 2018, p. 30.

9 Mr Chris Tinning, First Assistant Secretary, DFAT, *Committee Hansard*, 24 August 2018, p. 14; Mr Jason McDonald, Acting Chief Adviser of the Domestic Policy Group, PM&C, *Committee Hansard*, 24 August 2018, p. 15; Mr McDonald, *Committee Hansard*, 7 December 2018, pp. 18–19.

10 *Committee Hansard*, 7 December 2018, p. 16.

11 DoEE, answer to question on notice, 23 October 2017, Senate Environment and Communications Legislation Committee.

12 Mr McDonald, PM&C, *Committee Hansard*, 7 December 2018, p. 16.

13 Mr McDonald, PM&C, *Committee Hansard*, 24 August 2018, p. 11.

chaired by the Head of the Federal Chancellery and supported by a working group.¹⁴ This body is the contact point for government stakeholders and updates the German National Sustainable Development Strategy.¹⁵ Unlike Germany, Australia does not have a national strategy or plan for sustainable development.

3.9 Some submissions called for clearer communication regarding the IDC. The University of Sydney questioned its effectiveness, noting it 'has had very little visibility'.¹⁶ Mr Lachlan Hunter, National Executive Director of the United Nations Association of Australia (UNAA) identified the absence of an 'obvious reporting mechanism or known contact list for the SDGs across government agencies'.¹⁷

Responsibility for specific goals

3.10 Responsibility for each goal was allocated to an Australian Government agency, as shown in the table from DFAT's submission below.

Table 1—Government agencies for domestic reporting on the Sustainable Development Goals for the Voluntary National Review

| <i>These reporting responsibilities reflect domestic reporting. As identified in this submission, DFAT's overseas activities contribute to all SDGs.</i> | | |
|--|--|---|
| <i>Goal</i> | | <i>Lead/Supporting agencies</i> |
| 1 | End poverty in all its forms everywhere | Social Services; PM&C; ABS; Home Affairs (EMA) |
| 2 | End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture | Agriculture and Water Resources; Health |
| 3 | Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages | Health |
| 4 | Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all | Education and Training |
| 5 | Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls | PM&C; DSS |
| 6 | Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all | Agriculture and Water Resources; Environment and Energy |
| 7 | Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all | Environment and Energy; Industry, Innovation and Science |
| 8 | Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all | Treasury; Jobs and Small Business; ABS |

14 *German Sustainable Development Strategy: Summary*, 2016, (tabled by Mr Marc Purcell, Australian Council for International Development (ACFID), on 24 August 2018), p. 5.

15 *German Sustainable Development Strategy: Summary*, p. 14.

16 *Submission 52*, p. 5.

17 *Committee Hansard*, 24 August 2018, p. 2.

| <i>Goal</i> | | <i>Lead/Supporting agencies</i> |
|-------------|--|---|
| 9 | Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and foster innovation | Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities; Industry, Innovation and Science; Communications and the Arts |
| 10 | Reduce inequality within and among countries | Treasury; Social Services; Home Affairs |
| 11 | Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable | Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities; Communications and the Arts; Home Affairs (EMA) |
| 12 | Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns | Environment and Energy; Agriculture and Water Resources; Finance |
| 13 | Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts | Environment and Energy; Home Affairs (EMA) |
| 14 | Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development | Environment and Energy; Agriculture and Water Resources; Home Affairs (Maritime Border Command); Infrastructure Regional Development and Cities (Australian Maritime Safety Authority) |
| 15 | Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss | Environment and Energy; Agriculture and Water Resources |
| 16 | Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels | AGD; Defence |
| 17 | Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development | DFAT; Treasury; ABS |

Source: DFAT, *Submission 60*, pp. 17–18.

3.11 Some agencies have mapped their responsibilities in more detail, such as the Attorney-General's Department, which provided a table showing which agencies shared responsibilities for the targets supporting Goal 16.¹⁸ Agencies are also responsible for contributing data to the Australian Government's online reporting platform on the SDG indicators, launched in July 2018. Mr Tinning, DFAT, explained:

18 Attorney-General's Department, *Sustainable Development Goals: Commonwealth Agency lead on Goal 16 Targets* (tabled 24 August 2018).

Each department is responsible for making sure that the latest available data is on the SDG website, and we're going to have that as a standing agenda item on the IDC agenda to remind people that that's their obligation.¹⁹

3.12 More detail is provided on the reporting platform later in the chapter. Very few submitters opposed the approach illustrated above, but those who did raised concerns that it risks replicating existing silos between agencies and failing to identify and address potential synergies and trade-offs between the goals.²⁰

Leadership of the 2030 Agenda

3.13 DFAT submitted that it and PM&C have been 'leading a process to ensure whole-of-government coordination on how to best give effect to the 2030 Agenda, domestically and internationally' including the drafting of the first VNR.²¹ PM&C stated elsewhere that it 'is not leading on domestic implementation, rather, responsibility for the SDGs has been decentralised to promote agency ownership'.²² In December 2018, Mr McDonald, PM&C explained that no one Australian Government agency holds authority over SDGs implementation by other agencies.²³ When asked if anyone has reviewed the inclusion of the SDGs in agency annual reports, he reiterated that it 'would be up to each individual agency'.²⁴

3.14 Annual reports are the key reporting tool of all government agencies, and in recent years, a number have referred to the SDGs. Some variety has been evident in the approach and extent of the information provided. For example, the recent PM&C annual report included an appendix on the SDGs.²⁵ In contrast, the SDGs were mentioned in different sections of the 2017–18 annual reports of the Department of the Environment and Energy (DoEE) and DFAT. Many agencies that referred to the SDGs in their annual reports noted their contributions to the VNR process and other events or stakeholder consultation processes. Agencies tended not to include data on how they were making positive or negative contributions to the SDGs. At least one 'lead' agency did not refer to the SDGs in its most recent annual report at all.²⁶

3.15 Mr McDonald described the approach at interdepartmental meetings:

19 *Committee Hansard*, 24 August 2018, p. 14.

20 See, for example, Volunteering Australia, *Submission 127*, p. 5; Fred Hollows Foundation, *Submission 36*, p. 4; Australian Academy of Science and FEA, *Submission 108*, pp. 6–7.

21 *Submission 60*, p. 5.

22 PM&C, answer to question on notice, 22 May 2018, Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee Budget Estimates.

23 *Committee Hansard*, 7 December 2018, pp. 16–18.

24 *Committee Hansard*, 7 December 2018, p. 16.

25 *Annual Report 2017–18*, October 2018, pp. 262–263.

26 Department of Social Services, Answer to question taken on notice, 24 August 2018 (received 9 October 2018); Department of the Treasury, Answer to question taken on notice, 24 August 2018 (received 6 September 2018).

We go around the table, and everyone provides an update on where they're up to. Because the government's point of view is that the SDGs are consistent with current government policy, to the extent that they have to deliver government policy they're also delivering the SDGs. So there's that kind of accountability, which is the primary accountability.²⁷

3.16 He added that discussion at the executive level 2 group was a bit more intensive around setting consistent standards for data, but noted that 'beyond that different agencies will have different levels and standards that they are keen to meet'.²⁸

3.17 Evidence indicated that the Australian Government's approach to the SDGs is not well understood and that this, in part, may be because the overarching leadership responsibilities are unclear. When responding to a question from the committee about PM&C's domestic coordination through the agencies, Mr Hunter, UNAA asserted that 'there is a big gap in what is on paper and what is actually happening'.²⁹ He argued that the activities of the IDC are unclear to some agencies.³⁰ Ms Lavanya Kala, Policy Manager, Volunteering Australia reflected: 'I haven't really seen PM&C to have been the lead on this'.³¹ A teacher at Forrest Primary School explained that it had been harder to find information on what is happening in Australia than internationally.³²

3.18 The perceived lack of clarity may reinforce the misconception that the SDGs relate exclusively to developing countries; thereby limiting opportunities for domestic action.³³ Professor John Thwaites, Chair of the Monash Sustainable Development Institute (MSDI), said that while 'DFAT have played a really good leadership role' and there is 'a lot of commitment from within DFAT to see the goals implemented in Australia...they have limited ability to achieve that'.³⁴ The Centre for Policy Development (CPD) argued that 'the most powerful contribution Australia can make to advancing the goals is genuinely rising to the challenge of sustainable development at home'.³⁵ Dr Cassandra Goldie, Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) commented:

One of the strengths of the SDGs is a strong focus on both the international and domestic arenas, and we would like to see the Australian government

27 *Committee Hansard*, 7 December 2018, p. 16.

28 *Committee Hansard*, 7 December 2018, p. 19.

29 *Committee Hansard*, 24 August 2018, p. 7.

30 *Committee Hansard*, 24 August 2018, p. 7.

31 *Committee Hansard*, 24 August 2018, p. 8.

32 Mr Dan Heap, *Committee Hansard*, 26 November 2018, p. 5.

33 See, for example, Mr Cameron Allen, Professor Graciela Metternicht and Associate Professor Thomas Wiedmann, *Submission 17*, p. 2; Business Council for Sustainable Development Australia (BCSDA), *Submission 48*, [p. 4]; Project Respect, *Submission 133*, [p. 3].

34 *Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2018, p. 11.

35 *Submission 129*, [p. 7]. See also Strategic Sustainability Consultants, *Submission 50*, p. 2.

equally pay attention to its obligations and frameworks for action at the domestic level.³⁶

3.19 Many submissions contended that PM&C should have a clearer leadership and coordination role to promote the domestic implementation of the SDGs.³⁷

Voluntary National Review

3.20 DFAT led the preparation of Australia's first VNR.³⁸ The VNR was released in June 2018, and presented the following month to the UN High Level Political Forum on sustainable development, the central platform for the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda.³⁹ DFAT's expenses relating to the VNR totalled \$402,746.35.⁴⁰

Consultation

3.21 DFAT and PM&C wrote to state and territory governments to provide information on the VNR process and seek input.⁴¹ Agencies also undertook stakeholder outreach, calling for case studies, chiefly through websites, and more than 300 case studies were received, reflecting genuine interest in the national review.⁴² There was evidence to the committee about limited time for public consultation, as well as the need for particular strategies to work with disability sectors and First Nations.⁴³ Again, the awareness of the process, and resulting engagement, was varied, although the pre-VNR roundtable discussions were welcomed as 'very, very useful, highly engaged and extremely positive'.⁴⁴

3.22 The 'formal civil society response at the high-level forum acknowledged that Australia's report was prepared in an inclusive manner and noted our commitment to data and transparency as a central theme of reporting against the 2030 agenda'.⁴⁵ Australia also 'received very positive feedback' relating to Wiradjuri artist Jordana

36 *Committee Hansard*, 2 November 2018, p. 30.

37 See, for example, Australian Parliamentary Group on Population and Development, *Submission 116*, [p. 1]; CPD, *Submission 129*, [p. 7]; Mr Allen, Professor Metternicht and Associate Professor Wiedmann, *Submission 17*, p. 10; Public Health Association of Australia, *Submission 99*, p. 4; The University of Sydney, *Submission 52*, p. 3.

38 DFAT, *Submission 60*, pp. 8, 17–18.

39 UN, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, p. 34; Australian Government, *Report on the implementation of the SDGs*, 2018; DFAT, *Submission 60*, p. 4.

40 DFAT, answer to question on notice, 24 August 2018 (received 19 October 2018).

41 DFAT, *Submission 60*, p. 20.

42 *Report on the implementation of the SDGs*, p. 14; DFAT, *Submission 60*, p. 8.

43 Ms Kala, Policy Manager, Volunteering Australia, *Committee Hansard*, 24 August 2018, p. 6; Dr Goldie *Committee Hansard*, 2 November 2018, p. 32; Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA) and Disabled People's Organisations Australia (DPO Australia), *Submission 136*, p. 3.

44 Dr Goldie, *Committee Hansard*, 2 November 2018, p. 32.

45 Mr Tinning, DFAT, *Committee Hansard*, 24 August 2018, p. 10.

Angus's artwork, and because Mr Duane Fraser, an Indigenous youth leader and Wulgurukaba and Bidjara man, spoke very well as part of the Australian delegation.⁴⁶

Content

3.23 The VNR 'takes a narrative approach, addressing each of the SDGs'.⁴⁷ It describes Australian initiatives at the domestic, regional and global levels. The VNR primarily includes examples from the national level, as well as some from state, territory and local levels of government. It also includes contributions from civil society, the private sector, academia, communities and individuals.⁴⁸ The VNR was accompanied by a data chapter that 'covers Australia's approach to data and how we will report against the SDG Indicators', and lists 'existing national policy frameworks that are relevant to the achievement of the SDGs'.⁴⁹ A media article noted that:

Most of the national policies outlined in the report were developed for other reasons, and some have been around for years or decades. Examples are the National Disability Strategy, which dates back to pre-2010, or the National Drought Policy, which began in 1992. In other words, at the national level, the report emphasises what we have already been doing—not new initiatives explicitly related to the goals.⁵⁰

3.24 A witness from ACOSS argued that the narrative approach highlights:

...specific program initiatives that might go some way to ameliorating disadvantage for a very specific subgroup but not pointing to any kinds of structural reforms that might deal with, certainly, the poverty and inequality issues which are at the heart of the headline goals.⁵¹

3.25 Ms Andrea Spencer-Cooke, Partner at One Stone Advisors, said that the VNR 'missed an opportunity to set out national priorities and bold targets for Australia'.⁵² Professor Graciela Metternicht, UNSW Faculty of Science, noted that the VNR 'lacks detail on what the next steps are for the government' and contains 'little or no assessment of indicators of baseline data and there is no reference to target setting'.⁵³ A baseline 'is the initial measurement of information collected prior to the start of a programme' that 'serves as a point of reference to evaluate progress'.⁵⁴ She concluded

46 *Committee Hansard*, 24 August 2018, pp. 56–57.

47 Australian Government, *Report on the implementation of the SDGs*, 2018, p. 6.

48 *Report on the implementation of the SDGs*, p. 14.

49 *Report on the implementation of the SDGs*, p. 6.

50 Shirin Malekpour, 'Australia must embrace transformation for a sustainable future', *The Conversation*, 19 June 2018.

51 Ms Jacqueline Phillips, Director of Policy and Advocacy, *Committee Hansard*, 2 November 2018, p. 36.

52 *Committee Hansard*, 2 November 2018, p. 1.

53 *Committee Hansard*, 2 November 2018, p. 9.

54 UNDP, *Guidelines to support country reporting on the SDGs*, 2017, p. 30.

that as Australia 'didn't have an assessment of the country's baseline at 2015...it will be a bit difficult to show how we trend and how we progress from now up to 2030'.⁵⁵

3.26 Despite these concerns, a witness commented that the VNR process 'has done a huge amount to raise awareness more generally and engagement, and the real challenge now is to harness that enthusiasm'.⁵⁶ Australia has committed to present at least two VNRs prior to 2030.⁵⁷ As noted earlier, Australia's first VNR was presented in June 2018. Ten countries are expected to present their second VNRs in 2019.⁵⁸ The committee did not receive information on when Australia will present its next VNR, and whether it will present more than two. Ms Spencer-Cooke suggested the government consider presenting an interim VNR in five years.⁵⁹

3.27 Submitters and participants in the 2018 Australian SDGs Summit expressed varying views on the mechanisms needed to implement the SDGs in Australia, 'ranging from the need only for integration of the agenda into existing frameworks and policies, and not creating new entities or structures, and the need for new and dedicated central coordination structures'.⁶⁰ So far, this chapter has outlined the Australian Government's current approach to implementation. The following sections summarise additional suggestions from submissions, including the creation of a national implementation plan, national coordination body and greater integration of the SDGs within Australian Government departments and agencies.

National implementation plan

3.28 Mr Tinning, DFAT, responded to calls for a national implementation plan:

There is no national plan on the SDGs across government, and I think that is where the difference of view is. The SDGs are a very broad agenda. They cover health, education, agriculture et cetera. The government's approach is for the relevant department to take forward that agenda within their space. So there is no single plan...⁶¹

3.29 Many submissions raised concerns that Australia's progress against the SDGs is constrained by the lack of a plan. Dr Goldie described it as a 'major gap', and GNCA cautioned that without a national plan 'this delegated/decentralised model of

55 *Committee Hansard*, 2 November 2018, p. 11.

56 Dr Tahl Kestin, Network Manager, SDSN Australia, New Zealand and Pacific, *Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2018, p. 15.

57 Mr McDonald, Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee, *Committee Hansard*, 20 October 2016, p. 90.

58 UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *Handbook for the Preparation of Voluntary National Reviews: 2019 Edition*, October 2018, (tabled by Ms Andrea Spencer-Cook on 2 November 2018), pp. 9–10.

59 *Committee Hansard*, 2 November 2018, p. 2.

60 ACFID, ACOSS, Global Compact Network Australia (GCNA), SDSN Australia, NZ and Pacific, UNAA, *Australian SDGs Summit 2018: Unlocking the Opportunities of the SDGs: Outcomes Report*, November 2018, p. 11.

61 *Committee Hansard*, 24 August 2018, p. 16.

accountability may result in missed opportunities of scale and partnership and may make addressing the interrelated nature of the SDGs more challenging'.⁶² The International Women's Development Agency (IWDA) stressed that '[c]oncrete plans for implementation are key to translating policy commitments into action and ensuring the Government will have progress to report'.⁶³

3.30 The committee heard strong, consistent calls from the majority of non-government submitters for the development of a national implementation plan, including national priorities and targets, specific financial commitments, regular progress reviews and public reporting.⁶⁴ Other submissions advocated similar ideas using different terminology.⁶⁵ Submissions supporting some form of national plan came from international development, civil society, academic and business sectors.⁶⁶ Many agreed that a plan should set out which government agencies are responsible for progress on each goal, to 'enable consistency and coherence between Departments and policy priorities, as well as accountability for action'.⁶⁷ CSIRO contended that it 'would be a major step forward for Australia to clearly identify roles and actions within a cohesive framework that guides investment, monitors progress and provides the necessary information for reporting'.⁶⁸ The Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) suggested that a national framework should detail government mechanisms to coordinate action and identify commitments and timelines.⁶⁹

3.31 One Stone Advisors suggested a plan should be able to be 'localised and adapted by state governments and local authorities'.⁷⁰ Others proposed a plan could raise awareness of the SDGs across business, civil society and academia and guide their implementation efforts.⁷¹ For example, the investment community lacks an:

62 *Committee Hansard*, 2 November 2018, pp. 30, 32; GCNA, *Submission 130*, [p. 3].

63 *Submission 98*, pp. 4–5.

64 See, for example, Oxfam Australia, *Submission 18*, p. 8; UNAA, *Submission 47*, p. 5; University of Sydney, *Submission 52*, p. 3; SDSN Australia/Pacific, *Submission 55*, p. 3; MSDI, *Submission 121*, [p. 5]; GCNA, *Submission 130*, [p. 6]; RIAA, *Submission 131*, [p. 10]; ACOSS, *Submission 140*, p. 2.

65 See, for example, Vision 2020 Australia, *Submission 19*, p. 4; Fred Hollows Foundation, *Submission 36*, p. 2; The Smith Family, *Submission 45*, p. 6; The Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW), *Submission 133*, p. 3; Australian Academy of Science and FEA, *Submission 108*, p. 10; Forrest Primary School, *Submission 163*, p. 4.

66 See, for example, ACFID, *Submission 135*, p. 6; ACOSS, *Submission 140*, p. 2; MSDI, *Submission 121*, [p. 5]; Australian Council of Superannuation Investors (ACSI), *Submission 92*, [p. 2]; PwC, *Submission 30*, [p. 3].

67 SDSN Australia/Pacific, *Submission 55*, p. 3.

68 *Submission 85*, p. 19.

69 *Submission 138*, pp. 11–12.

70 *Submission 90*, p. 1.

71 See, for example, SDSN Australia/Pacific, *Submission 55*, p. 3; Responsible Investment Association Australasia (RIAA), RIAA, *Submission 131*, [p. 10].

...overarching framework that says: this is where we need to get to, these are some of the gaps in some of the SDG, and, as a nation, how do we work collaboratively to ensure capital is aligned with business and government to hit the targets we're aiming for? Without that overarching blueprint and plan, we're all shooting a little bit blind here.⁷²

3.32 While almost all non-government submitters concurred on the need for a plan, there were some points of difference between proposals. For instance, some suggested that a plan should cover implementation in both Australia and overseas through the aid program.⁷³ A few suggested that a plan should include a strategy for communicating about the SDGs.⁷⁴ AHRC proposed that a national framework should be supported by a series of 'rolling four-year action plans for engagement and implementation', similar to those on ending family violence against women and children, and closing the gap.⁷⁵

International examples

3.33 While countries vary in their approach to the SDGs, a range of countries have already aligned their national strategies with the SDGs.⁷⁶ The 2030 Agenda encouraged member states to develop 'ambitious national responses to the overall implementation of this Agenda' that 'build on existing planning instruments'.⁷⁷ A review of the VNRs presented in 2017 directed countries to:

Fully integrate the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs into national plans and strategies based on an evaluation of existing policies, approaches and progress to identify gaps, adapt policies and target areas where further progress is needed. The fact that existing policies already align to the SDGs is not sufficient.⁷⁸

3.34 A different review of the literature and VNRs presented in 2017 found approximately one third of countries had developed an SDGs road map or plan, including Belgium, Japan and Malaysia.⁷⁹ Nations that have been performing well

72 Mr Simon O'Connor, Chief Executive Officer, RIAA, *Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2018, p. 40. See also Ms Kylie Porter, Executive Director of GCNA, *Committee Hansard*, 2 November 2018, p. 24.

73 See, for example, SDSN Australia/Pacific, *Submission 55*, p. 3; Oxfam Australia, *Submission 18*, pp. 50–51; World Vision Australia, *Submission 25*, p. 10.

74 See, for example, GCNA, *Submission 130*, [p. 6]; AHRC, *Submission 138*, pp. 11–12.

75 *Submission 138*, pp. 6, 11.

76 Sachs, J., Schmidt-Traub, G., Kroll, C., Lafortune, G., Fuller, G, *SDG Index and Dashboards Report 2018*, Bertelsmann Stiftung and SDSN, New York, 2018, p. viii; Dr Nina Hall and Professor Karen Hussey, *Supplementary submission 37.1*, UN, *Working together: Integration, institutions and the Sustainable Development Goals*, World Public Sector Report 2018, UN, New York, 2018, p. ix.

77 UN, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, p. 33.

78 Canadian Council for International Co-operation, *Progressing national SDGs implementation*, March 2018, p. ii.

79 Mr Allen, Professor Metternicht and Associate Professor Wiedmann, *Submission 17*, p. 9.

against the SDGs such as Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Germany, France and Norway 'typically have a national plan for the SDGs, clear reporting mechanisms and the work is led by government from within the office of the head of government or state'.⁸⁰ Germany has aligned its existing national development strategy with the SDGs, which includes both domestic and international measures.⁸¹ It also includes 'goals with time frames for their attainment, indicators for continuous monitoring, rules for management and definitions for institutional configuration'.⁸² Germany identified national indicators to monitor progress against SDGs, and an indicator report will be published every two years.⁸³ Less frequent progress reports 'are prepared with public dialogue conferences, comprising representatives of all sectors in society'.⁸⁴ The strategy is to be updated every four years.⁸⁵ Several submissions suggested that Australia should learn from Germany's approach.⁸⁶

3.35 Other countries have developed action plans dedicated partly or wholly to the SDGs.⁸⁷ Denmark, for instance, developed an action plan centred on the 5 Ps: prosperity, people, planet, peace and partnerships.⁸⁸ These are supported by 37 national targets, and parliament will receive an annual progress report.⁸⁹ The Danish Ministry of Finance has been made responsible for coordinating the implementation of the SDGs to ensure they are integrated into domestic policy.⁹⁰ In Bangladesh, SDG targets have been assimilated into an Annual Performance Agreement, a 'results-based performance management system, across the whole spectrum of the public sector, assessing individual and ministries/agencies performance'.⁹¹ Chapter 6 includes information on some of Australia's developing country partners that have incorporated the SDGs into their national planning, including Papua New Guinea.⁹²

80 Mr Hunter, UNAA, *Committee Hansard*, 24 August 2018, p. 2.

81 *German Sustainable Development Strategy: Summary*, 2016, (tabled by Mr Marc Purcell, ACFID, on 24 August 2018). See, for other examples: UN, *Compendium*, 2018, pp. 3–4.

82 *German Sustainable Development Strategy: Summary*, p. 3.

83 IWDA, *Submission 98*, p. 5.

84 GCNA, *Submission 130*, [p. 8].

85 *German Sustainable Development Strategy: Summary*, p. 14; IWDA, *Submission 98*, p. 4.

86 See, for example, Plan International, *Submission 67*, p. 4; World Vision Australia, *Submission 25*, p. 9; Mr Purcell, *Committee Hansard*, 24 August 2018, p. 28.

87 UN, *Compendium*, 2018, p. 3.

88 AASW, *Submission 133*, p. 6; IWDA, *Submission 98*, p. 5; Danish Government, *Denmark's Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Report for the Voluntary National Review*, 2017, p. 44.

89 AASW, *Submission 133*, p. 6; UN, *Compendium*, 2018, pp. 10–11.

90 GCNA, *Submission 130*, [p. 8].

91 GCNA, *Submission 130*, [p. 8].

92 Eastern Regional Organisation for Planning and Human Settlements (EAROPH) Australia, answer to question on notice, 7 December 2018 (received 18 December 2018), [p. 2].

3.36 DFAT has reached out to countries that have developed new national plans or are integrating the 2030 Agenda into pre-existing plans, including Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Denmark, Fiji, Germany, Indonesia, Italy, Samoa, Switzerland and Tuvalu.⁹³ When asked if it had considered the formulation of a strategy for sustainable development as part of Australia's SDGs work, DFAT responded: 'No. The Government's approach is to integrate the 2030 Agenda across all relevant policies, strategies and programs'.⁹⁴

National priorities and targets

3.37 In addition to the global SDG targets, countries can identify national targets:

...guided by the global level of ambition but taking into account national circumstances. Each Government will also decide how these aspirational and global targets should be incorporated into national planning processes, policies and strategies.⁹⁵

3.38 The process of national target and indicator setting has been described as 'localising' the SDGs, and it is useful because some global indicators are 'unsuitable for Australia, as they are concerned with issues the Australian populace currently do not face'.⁹⁶ It is also important because, as Mr Cameron Allen, UNSW Faculty of Science emphasised:

...unless countries effectively adopt measurable, clear, realistic, time-bound targets the agenda is not really going to be implemented...I think this is a real gap—we've done various things on the SDGs to date, but we haven't really even looked at targets.⁹⁷

3.39 Many submissions that supported a national plan agreed that it should clearly identify priorities and targets for Australia.⁹⁸ The expert literature also supports the development of 'a long-term national vision with an agreed set of priority 2030 targets and indicators of particular relevance for Australia'.⁹⁹ Mr Allen explained:

In my work with the UN, when we talk to countries about the SDGs, we're not telling them to adopt 169 targets and 232 indicators. That's just an impossible task for any country. We're telling them to prioritise, to try to

93 DFAT, answer to question on notice, 26 October 2017, Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee.

94 DFAT, answer to question on notice, 26 October 2017, Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee.

95 UN, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, p. 13.

96 Vision 2020 Australia, *Submission 19*, p. 4.

97 *Committee Hansard*, 2 November 2018, p. 9.

98 City of Sydney, *Submission 54*, p. 8; MSDI, *Submission 121*, [p. 4]; Zoic, *Submission 119*, p. 6; AustralianSuper, *Submission 24*, p. 4; Shared Value Project, *Submission 49*, p. 4.

99 Mr Allen, Professor Metternicht and Associate Professor Wiedmann, *Submission 17*, pp. 4–5.

pick a selection of targets across all 17 goals, but the targets that are of highest priority for your country, or most relevant for your country.¹⁰⁰

3.40 Submissions emphasised that the target-setting process should not equate to 'cherry picking' particular goals, as this could 'risk weakening the integrated framework of the Goals'.¹⁰¹ Instead, CSIRO argued a plan should address the SDGs 'collectively rather than individually, including the consideration of interactions between SDGs and the need for integrated approaches'.¹⁰² UNAA also promoted 'government approaching the goals as integrated, interlinked goals'.¹⁰³ The localisation process must also ensure 'that the capacity to make global comparisons is not lost'.¹⁰⁴

3.41 As noted above, the Australian Government has launched an online reporting platform on the SDGs. This includes data that addresses some of the global indicators (or an approximation of them). However:

While every effort is being made to include datasets where possible and appropriate, the Platform will not report against all 232 SDG Indicators. Not all SDG Indicators are relevant or applicable for the Australian context and in these cases it would not be a proper or efficient use of resources to establish datasets that track them.¹⁰⁵

3.42 The reporting platform 'will be updated as more datasets are confirmed and/or as the work program on the SDG Indicators progresses'.¹⁰⁶ Yet it appears that government has not undertaken the kind of consultative target setting advocated in submissions. More detail is provided on the reporting platform later in the chapter.

3.43 There are a variety of approaches to developing national targets, such as identifying the areas where Australia performs worst in; addressing the SDGs that have high social and economic return on investment; or investing in areas where funding is falling short.¹⁰⁷ Some other approaches are outlined below.

Consultation

3.44 Submissions generally agreed that government should consult broadly to develop the national implementation plan, priorities and targets.¹⁰⁸ MSDI stated that the greatest 'benefit will come if there is a degree of common ownership in these

100 *Committee Hansard*, 2 November 2018, p. 12.

101 CARE Australia, *Submission 123*, [p. 1], [original emphasis removed].

102 *Submission 85*, p. 6.

103 Ms Patricia Garcia, National SDGs Manager for UNAA, *Committee Hansard*, 24 August 2018, pp. 4–5.

104 Australian Academy of Science and FEA, *Submission 108*, p. 7.

105 Australian Government, *Tracking Australia's progress on the SD*, DFAT, 2018, p. 1.

106 Australian Government, *Tracking Australia's progress on the SD*, DFAT, 2018, p. 1.

107 SDSN Australia/Pacific, *Submission 55, Attachment 1, Australian SDGs Summit: On the Road to Implementation*, 2016, p. 9.

108 See, for example, Transparency International Australia, *Submission 132*, p. 4.

targets across levels of government and from different sectors'.¹⁰⁹ IWDA further suggested that the plan should include 'concrete strategies to support the inclusion of disadvantaged groups in design, delivery and reporting on services and programs'.¹¹⁰

3.45 A review of the literature and VNRs presented in 2017 found less than half of the countries had undertaken a process to prioritise and adapt SDG targets and indicators to national circumstances.¹¹¹ Some countries 'made their selections based on a mapping of existing available data and priorities through a government-led process', however another review stated that best practice entailed selecting national targets and indicators through inclusive consultation.¹¹² The German Government held five public conferences, published a discussion draft, and consulted with more than 40 associations to incorporate the SDGs into its national strategy.¹¹³

Alignment with existing priorities

3.46 Submissions also identified the opportunity to align national SDG targets with existing Australian priorities.¹¹⁴ The 2030 Agenda appears to encourage harmonisation, and notes that follow-up and review processes will:

...build on existing platforms and processes, where these exist, avoid duplication and respond to national circumstances, capacities, needs and priorities. They will evolve over time, taking into account emerging issues and the development of new methodologies, and will minimize the reporting burden on national administrations.¹¹⁵

3.47 For example, CSIRO called for the development of local indicators to be aligned with existing reporting requirements, such as the State of the Environment report.¹¹⁶ The Australian Urban Research Infrastructure Network (AURIN) agreed indicators should be aligned with existing schemes and 'reporting mechanisms harmonised for consistent delivery'.¹¹⁷

109 *Submission 121*, [p. 4]. See also the University of Sydney, *Submission 52*, p. 6; ACOSS, *Submission 140*, p. 2.

110 *Submission 98*, pp. 4–5.

111 Mr Allen, Professor Metternicht and Associate Professor Wiedmann, *Submission 17*, p. 9.

112 *Progressing national SDGs implementation*, March 2018, p. iv. See also UNDP, *Guidelines to support country reporting on the SDGs*, 2017, p. 28.

113 *German Sustainable Development Strategy: Summary*, 2016, (tabled by Mr Marc Purcell, ACFID, on 24 August 2018), p. 3. See also the example of Mexico, UN, *Compendium*, 2018, p. 10.

114 See, for example, uBegin, *Submission 89*, [p. 2].

115 UN, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, pp. 31–32.

116 *Submission 85*, p. 15.

117 *Submission 58*, p. 6.

Interaction mapping

3.48 Another approach to setting priorities involves mapping the interactions between SDGs. There may be 'trade-offs within the SDGs, for example between food security and environmental sustainability'.¹¹⁸ CSIRO commented that national indicators 'should allow for assessment of the main synergies and trade-offs among the SDG's to identify actions that leverage those assessments and maximise outcomes'.¹¹⁹ It highlighted the benefits of this approach, showing that:

... identifying both positive and negative interactions, could help us achieve global outcomes at a significantly lower cost through thoughtful coordination of otherwise fragmented action. Likewise, identifying trade-offs ahead of time could enable conflicts among objectives to be managed before they become institutionalised.¹²⁰

Financial commitments

3.49 ACOSS reasoned that funding is required to support any SDGs 'governance and monitoring mechanisms, including resources for research and data collection where there are data gaps, and for participation of key stakeholders'.¹²¹ However, the Business Council for Sustainable Development Australia (BCSDA) noted that it was not 'aware of any additional resources that have been allocated for investigation or follow up'.¹²² Poverty experts asserted that, as the Australian Government has not made any funding available specifically for the SDGs, 'the transformative approach that many argue is necessary to achieve the SDGs is entirely absent'.¹²³ Therefore, many submissions calling for a national implementation plan argued that it should include funding commitments. For example, the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) stated:

A national plan should give a mandate to political and bureaucratic mechanisms to coordinate and drive SDG action, and include shorter-term targets as stepping stones to enable consistent progress towards the 2030 deadline, supported by specific financial commitments.¹²⁴

3.50 A UN compendium on institutional arrangements noted that '[e]ven if the SDGs are effectively transformed into strategies and plans, these plans are unlikely to be successfully implemented if budgets are not aligned'.¹²⁵ A UN report observed that:

118 ACFID, *Submission 135*, p. 4.

119 *Submission 85*, p. 16.

120 Australian Government, *Report on the implementation of the SDGs*, 2018, p. 15.

121 ACOSS, *Submission 140*, p. 2. See also Ms Glenys Jones, *Submission 104*, p. 7.

122 BCSDA (formerly Sustainable Business Australia), *Submission 48*, [p. 4].

123 Academics Stand Against Poverty Oceania, *Australia, Poverty and the Sustainable Development Goals*, University of Wollongong, School of Humanities and Social Inquiry, 2018, p. 9.

124 *Submission 135*, p. 6. See also Global Citizen, *Submission 22*, p. 7.

125 UN, *Compendium*, p. 12.

Budgets can be used to track support to specific targets, identify opportunities for adjustment and constitute an incentive for alignment and integration of programs with the SDGs. The cases of Mexico and Norway show how the budgetary process can be utilized to advance cross-sectoral integration and the 2030 Agenda.¹²⁶

3.51 Norway 'has developed a plan for national follow-up to the SDGs which is linked to their budget process'.¹²⁷ Coordinating ministries report against the goals for which they are responsible in budget proposals, which are then incorporated into the national budget white paper.¹²⁸

Reporting mechanisms

3.52 When asked about plans for communicating Australia's performance against the SDGs in addition to the reporting platform, Mr Tinning, DFAT, stated 'I don't think there's any expectation of, for instance, annual reporting against the SDGs beyond the voluntary national reviews, which will really bring it all together'.¹²⁹ However, the committee heard a range of proposals for additional reporting mechanisms.

3.53 UN member states committed to 'regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the subnational, national, regional and global levels'.¹³⁰ Reporting frameworks are essential for implementation as they 'provide an impetus for action ('what gets reported gets done'), ensure accountability, provide feedback on implementation success, create a coherent story on wide-ranging actions, and provide an opportunity for ongoing public engagement'.¹³¹ Some submissions explicitly suggested that targets and measurements be included in a national implementation plan to 'pave the way to meeting the 2030 deadline', while others proposed reporting in addition to a plan.¹³²

Frequency and alignment with existing reporting processes

3.54 Submitters were generally supportive of the Australian Government's existing reporting initiatives, but indicated these did not sufficiently address the need for regular analysis and reporting of Australia's progress.¹³³ As noted above, Australia has only committed to delivering one more VNR, though the committee received evidence supporting 'regular monitoring and reporting (e.g. every 3 years)'.¹³⁴ The 2030 Agenda

126 Dr Hall and Professor Hussey, *Supplementary submission 37.1*, UN, *Working together*, p. ix.

127 UNAA, *Submission 47*, p. 9.

128 IWDA, *Submission 98*, p. 8. See also Norway's Voluntary National Review, 2016, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/memberstates/norway> (accessed 30 January 2019).

129 *Committee Hansard*, 24 August 2018, p. 53.

130 UN, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, pp. 31–33.

131 SDSN Australia/Pacific, *Submission 55*, p. 4; ACFID, *Submission 135*, p. 9.

132 ACOSS, *Submission 140*, p. 2. See also Oxfam Australia, *Submission 18*, pp. 50–51.

133 MSDI, *Submission 121*, [p. 5].

134 Mr Allen, Professor Metternicht and Associate Professor Wiedmann, *Submission 17*, pp. 4–5; MSDI, *Submission 121*, [p. 5].

does not define 'regular', but UN guidelines state that the experience with the Millennium Development Goals 'underscores that more frequent reviews supported the concerted national engagement needed to achieve goals and targets'.¹³⁵

3.55 Submitters generally proposed annual or biennial reports, such as SDSN Youth Australia/Pacific, which supported annual reviews 'to identify previously-unseen issues' and 'implement corrective measures to drive constant improvement'.¹³⁶ Professor Thwaites called for parliament to play 'a key role in overseeing the regular performance of the goals' and advocated an annual progress report to parliament.¹³⁷ The UN compendium noted that engaging parliaments can 'ensure that accountability to people is enshrined in the implementation of the SDGs'.¹³⁸ Parliaments can use their legislative, budgetary, and oversight and monitoring functions to help ensure that policies are integrated and supportive of the SDGs, and several have instituted SDGs review processes.¹³⁹ As noted above, the Danish Parliament expects to receive annual progress reports, and 'established a cross-party network bringing together members from standing committees relevant to the 2030 Agenda'.¹⁴⁰ However, international evidence indicated that '[g]aps remain in engaging parliaments, and in ensuring that the SDGs are not seen as the exclusive domain of the executive branch'.¹⁴¹

3.56 Several submissions suggested reporting against the SDGs should be aligned with the five-yearly Intergenerational Reporting process, because of the shared focus on intergenerational equity.¹⁴² BCSDA proposed government and non-government expert stakeholders undertake an audit as part of the Intergenerational Report process.¹⁴³ To avoid the over-reporting burden, others supported streamlining SDGs and five-yearly State of the Environment reporting.¹⁴⁴

Indicator-based assessments and analysis

3.57 As noted above, Australia's VNR is a collation of case studies, rather than an assessment of performance against the indicators. The reporting platform provides

135 UNDP, *Guidelines to support country reporting on the SDGs*, 2017, p. 16.

136 *Submission 141*, p. 5. Submissions calling for annual or biennial reporting included Monash University, *Submission 120*, p. 4, [original emphasis removed]; SDSN Australia/Pacific, *Submission 55*, p. 4.

137 *Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2018, pp. 8–9. See also Dr Jarrett Blaustein, Dr Kate Fitz-Gibbon and Professor Rob White, *Submission 46*, p. 5.

138 UN, *Compendium*, 2018, p. 7.

139 Dr Hall and Professor Hussey, *Supplementary submission 37.1*, UN, *Working together*, pp. x, 26–27.

140 AASW, *Submission 133*, p. 6; UN, *Compendium*, 2018, p. 7.

141 *Supplementary submission 37.1*, UN, *Working together*, p. 27.

142 University of Sydney, *Submission 52*, pp. 3, 5; Doctors for the Environment Australia, *Submission 33*, p. 3.

143 *Submission 48*, [p. 5].

144 CSIRO, *Submission 85*, p. 15; Australian Dairy Industry Council, *Submission 148*, [p. 4].

national data against SDG indicators, but does not interpret what this represents about Australia's progress, as detailed later in this chapter.¹⁴⁵ Professor Metternicht said:

The data portal is also a great initiative and provides a useful centralised database where one can access official data on the SDGs. However, there is no assessment of Australia's progress of performance on indicators. Providing access to that is, of course, useful in itself, but providing an assessment of Australia's progress integrating the meaning of values reported for indicators would be a great, real value-add.¹⁴⁶

3.58 Several submissions suggested that data on Australia's performance against SDG indicators should be collected and analysed regularly to enable progress to be tracked over time.¹⁴⁷ Macquarie Sustainability argued that if Australia:

...is not performing well against one of the Goals, this must be stated clearly, with the possible reasons why, and what is being done to address the shortfall. The more honest, transparent and available the information, the more civil society will embrace it and work to rectify gaps.¹⁴⁸

3.59 Professor Rod Glover, Deputy Director, MSDI, pointed to the Productivity Commissions' five-yearly productivity reviews, noting that you can achieve 'more when you start to think in terms of not only data but what the interpretation of that data is for some sort of strategic insight about where we're going well, where we're not going well and what the forces that are shaping them are'.¹⁴⁹

Future initiatives

3.60 A few submissions suggested that reports could also detail initiatives and plans supporting the SDGs.¹⁵⁰ Emeritus Professor Rosalind Croucher, President of AHRC, recommended that the VNR 'take a more analytical approach, linking policies and programs to indicators, and identifying implementation gaps and what actions the government will prioritise in the future'.¹⁵¹ UN guidelines suggested that '[r]eports should not just describe trends in indicators; they should analyse underlying causes behind the trends, and offer policy suggestions to overcome obstacles and deal with emerging challenges'.¹⁵² Subsequent VNRs could include:

...analysis of initiatives rolled out since the last VNR; how challenges in implementation, including persistent challenges, were overcome; a more in-

145 Mr Allen, Professor Metternicht and Associate Professor Wiedmann, *Submission 17*, p. 6.

146 *Committee Hansard*, 2 November 2018, p. 9.

147 CSIRO, *Submission 85*, p. 6; Mr Allen, Professor Metternicht and Associate Professor Wiedmann, *Submission 17*, p. 6.

148 *Submission 34*, [p. 4].

149 *Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2018, p. 11.

150 World Vision Australia, *Submission 25*, p. 2; Mr Ryan Kennealy, *Submission 69*, p. 3.

151 *Committee Hansard*, 2 November 2018, pp. 32–33.

152 UNDP, *Guidelines to support country reporting on the SDGs*, 2017, pp. 18–19.

depth coverage of good practices adopted or followed by the country and lessons learned; and an analysis of new or emerging issues.¹⁵³

Data collection and disaggregation

3.61 Submissions agreed that the 'importance of data collection, reporting and monitoring in a transparent manner cannot be overstated'.¹⁵⁴ The following sections summarise suggestions regarding disaggregating data and the reporting platform.

Disaggregated data

3.62 A key principle underpinning the SDGs is the commitment to 'leave no one behind'. To support this commitment, follow-up and review processes should be:

...based on evidence, informed by country-led evaluations and data which is high-quality, accessible, timely, reliable and disaggregated by income, sex, age, race, ethnicity, migration status, disability and geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts.¹⁵⁵

3.63 They should also be 'people-centred, gender-sensitive, respect human rights and have a particular focus on the poorest, most vulnerable and those furthest behind'.¹⁵⁶ The collection of Australian data needs to be improved, as 'disaggregated data needed to address all vulnerable groups...are sparse'.¹⁵⁷ Submissions identified some specific gaps, such as the need for time-use data and an agreed national definition of poverty.¹⁵⁸

3.64 Australia's first VNR noted that the disaggregation of data sets is an 'ongoing challenge', and DFAT stated that 'Australia is working to continuously improve data collection'.¹⁵⁹ IWDA acknowledged the government's efforts to address global gender data gaps, and advocated additional support for the UN Women's Making Every Woman and Girl Count program.¹⁶⁰ Some submissions also commended the government's 'leadership and investment' in the development of the Individual Deprivation Measure (IDM), and called for support to 'ensure it is widely used'.¹⁶¹ The IDM is a new, gender-sensitive and multidimensional measure of poverty. The current

153 *Handbook for the Preparation of Voluntary National Reviews*, (tabled by Ms Andrea Spencer-Cook on 2 November 2018), pp. 52–3.

154 City of Sydney, *Submission 54*, p. 10.

155 UN, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, pp. 31–32.

156 UN, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, pp. 31–32.

157 ACFID, *Submission 135*, p. 11. See also Dr Caroline Lambert, Director of Research, Policy and Advocacy, IWDA, *Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2018, p. 27.

158 Equality Rights Alliance, *Submission 149*, p. 13; P Davidson, P Saunders, B Bradbury and M Wong, *Poverty in Australia*, 2018, ACOSS/UNSW Poverty and Inequality Partnership Report No. 2, Sydney, (tabled by Dr Cassandra Goldie on 2 November 2018), p. 6.

159 Australian Government, *Report on the implementation of the SDGs*, 2018, p. 114; DFAT, *Submission 60*, p. 14.

160 *Submission 98*, p. 4.

161 IWDA, *Submission 98*, p. 11; ACFID, *Submission 135*, p. 11.

IDM Program is a partnership between the Australian National University, IWDA and the Australian Government through DFAT.¹⁶²

3.65 The VNR described Australia's support for the multi-stakeholder Washington Group on Disability Statistics, which has developed tools to assist data disaggregation by disability status.¹⁶³ Increasing the data sets disaggregated by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status will also be a focus for the Australian Government.¹⁶⁴

3.66 The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) is supporting agencies 'in finding data sources and understanding where they can be used according to the methodology'.¹⁶⁵ It also works with the lead agencies when the UN agencies ask for reports relating to various indicators.¹⁶⁶ The Australian Government is also working with a range of partners to gather additional data on the SDGs, including the Australian National Development Index (ANDI) and AURIN.¹⁶⁷

The Australian Government's online reporting platform on the SDG indicators

3.67 A number of submissions called for the establishment of an SDGs data sharing platform to encourage accountability and accelerate implementation and research efforts.¹⁶⁸ A reporting platform was launched in July 2018.¹⁶⁹ Funded by DFAT, it was developed by DoEE and ABS to house Australian Government datasets.¹⁷⁰ DoEE engaged with United Kingdom and United States governments to learn from their experiences developing platforms.¹⁷¹ The Australian platform uses similar open source technology and runs on a govCMS site.¹⁷² The approach was recommended by a taskforce on national reporting platforms, and allowed agencies to

162 Individual Deprivation Measure, <http://www.individualdeprivationmeasure.org/> (accessed 23 January 2019).

163 Australian Government, *Report on the implementation of the SDGs*, 2018, p. 114.

164 Australian Government, *Tracking Australia's progress on the SDGs*, DFAT, 2018, p. 12.

165 Mrs Emily Walter, Director of Household Characteristics and Social Reporting, *Committee Hansard*, 7 December 2018, p. 19.

166 Mrs Walter, *Committee Hansard*, 7 December 2018, p. 19.

167 Australian Government, *Tracking Australia's progress on the Sustainable Development Goals*, DFAT, 2018, p. 25; University of Melbourne and ANDI Limited, *Submission 97*; AURIN, *Submission 58*.

168 SDSN Youth Australia/Pacific, *Submission 141*, p. 5; Mr Clinton Moore, *Submission 78*, p. 6; GCNA, *Submission 130*, [p. 6].

169 <https://www.sdgdata.gov.au/>

170 *Report on the Implementation of the SDGs*, 2018, p. 113.

171 DoEE, *Submission 115*, p. 8.

172 Australian Government, *Tracking Australia's progress on the SDGs*, DFAT, 2018, p. 12.

invest 'effort not in a technology but, rather, in coordinating information that goes behind all of that'.¹⁷³

3.68 The platform is expected to reduce the potential reporting burden and streamline reporting for other purposes, such as the Sendai Framework and State of the Environment report.¹⁷⁴ Some departmental officials indicated that the requirements for providing data via the platform were manageable and did not represent too great a burden.¹⁷⁵ For example, the committee heard that the Department of Education and Training is drawing on information that it 'would be reporting anyway or that would be reported in international fora', and suggested it is more an issue of 'working through the alignment with the SDG methodology'.¹⁷⁶

3.69 The platform indicates the status of Australian data collection against all 232 global SDG indicators.¹⁷⁷ Each indicator is colour-coded based on whether data is reported or not (rather than according to Australia's progress against the indicator). As of 30 January 2019:

- 118 indicators had Australian Government datasets included on the platform;
- work was underway to explore and identify data sources for 57 indicators;
- 12 indicators were not reported because the indicators were judged as irrelevant to Australia and the development of data sets was not seen as an efficient or effective use of resources; and
- 57 indicators were not reported as the global methodology had not been set.¹⁷⁸

3.70 Chapters 4 and 5 outline suggestions that the platform be expanded to include data from state, territory and local governments and non-government sources.¹⁷⁹

National coordination body

3.71 Many submissions proposed the establishment of new government bodies to complement the IDC, particularly a national coordination secretariat and a representative multi-sectoral reference group. Other countries have adopted a variety

173 Australian Government, *Tracking Australia's progress on the SDGs*, DFAT, 2018, p. 12; Dr Paul Jelfs, General Manager, Population and Social Statistics, ABS, *Committee Hansard*, 24 August 2018, p. 13.

174 Australian Government, *Report on the implementation of the SDGs*, 2018, p. 113.

175 See, for example, Ms Lisa Elliston, Division Head, International Policy and Engagement Division, Department of the Treasury, *Committee Hansard*, 24 August 2018, pp. 21–22.

176 Ms Karen Sandercock, Group Manager, International Group, *Committee Hansard*, 24 August 2018 p. 23.

177 *Report on the Implementation of the SDGs*, 2018, p. 113.

178 Australian Government, 'Methodology', SDG Reporting Platform, <https://www.sdgdata.gov.au/about/methodology> (accessed 30 January 2019).

179 Dr Hall and Professor Hussey, *Submission 76*, p. 12; SDSN Youth Australia/Pacific, *Submission 141*, p. 5.

of SDGs governance and coordination bodies, suggesting 'no single institutional model is intrinsically more appropriate than the others'.¹⁸⁰ A recent UN report found:

In a sample of 60 countries, 27 had created a new structure for SDG implementation (including 17 new cross-sectoral entities). SDG implementation is chaired, coordinated or led by Heads of State and Government in 27 countries [including Australia].¹⁸¹

3.72 It would appear important that 'the institution leading SDG implementation has sufficient clout, the ability to mobilise resources and the vision and capacities necessary to plan SDG implementation in a comprehensive, coherent and integrated way and in the whole country'.¹⁸² The next sections summarise suggestions for the establishment of government coordination bodies. Proposals for consultative mechanisms are outlined in chapter 5, which covers partnerships beyond government.

National coordination secretariat

3.73 Many submissions called for the creation of a national government secretariat to coordinate SDGs implementation across all levels of government, academia, civil society and the private sector.¹⁸³ SDSN Australia/Pacific summarised this proposal:

Coordination on aspects of SDG implementation, such as priorities, communication approach, information sharing, and measurement and reporting, will help enhance uptake, improve efficiency, reduce transaction costs and maximise collaboration. While different sectors and actors, including SDSN Australia/Pacific, have been strongly active in helping to build partnerships and coordinating efforts among sectors, our reach and resources are limited. We strongly believe a national coordination hub or secretariat, funded by the Government and [run] in collaboration with a cross-sector advisory group, will significantly enhance national SDG action.¹⁸⁴

3.74 A coordination secretariat could develop a national implementation plan, including managing the consultation process.¹⁸⁵ Submissions generally viewed PM&C as the appropriate place for a national implementation plan to be developed.¹⁸⁶ IWDA emphasised that it 'is important that cross-government coordination is resourced, both in terms of human and financial resources', and supported the proposal for a government-funded secretariat to coordinate action on the SDGs.¹⁸⁷ Other

180 UN, *Compendium*, 2018, p. 6.

181 Dr Hall and Professor Hussey, *Supplementary submission 37.1, Working together*, pp. x–ix.

182 UN, *Compendium*, 2018, p. 6.

183 UNAA, *Submission 47*, p. 7; ACSI, *Submission 92*, [p. 2]; GCNA, *Submission 130*, [p. 6]; ACOSS, *Submission 140*, p. 2.

184 *Submission 55*, p. 4.

185 Cbus, *Submission 139*, p. 3; IWDA, *Submission 98*, p. 5.

186 ACFID, *Submission 135*, p. 6.

187 *Submission 98*, p. 5.

submissions called for government to take a greater leadership and coordination role without specifically proposing the creation of a 'secretariat'. For example, CPD and BCSDA suggested some form of coordinating entity based in a central agency such as PM&C.¹⁸⁸ Strategic Sustainability Consultants suggested states and territories could have associated sub-committees.¹⁸⁹

3.75 Mr Marc Purcell, Chief Executive Officer, ACFID, indicated that proposals for a new coordinating body have faced resistance from the Australian Government:

At the summit we made our calls for a national plan and a government coordinating point that organisations like Australia Post, ourselves and others could liaise with. Unfortunately, the PM&C representative said that wasn't needed and that wasn't their intent. We don't think that's good enough. We think that the government should have a central contact point and there should be a more formal mechanism for engaging regularly rather than on an ad hoc basis.¹⁹⁰

3.76 Some other countries have SDGs coordination mechanisms within government. For example, Finland and Germany 'established coordination secretariats at the level of Prime Minister or President's office to guide SDGs work within their respective governments'.¹⁹¹ The German Federal Chancellery is responsible for the National Sustainable Development Strategy, supported by coordinators for sustainable development in each ministry.¹⁹² Some developing nations have created dedicated ministries, or secretariats within ministries, that are tasked with SDGs delivery, such as Colombia, Indonesia, Seychelles and Mauritius.¹⁹³

3.77 The government-based national coordination secretariat received widespread support in submissions. The following proposals were raised by fewer submissions.

Independent policy assessment body

3.78 ACFID recommended the creation of a new, independent body 'to assess policies and provide advice on policy coherence against the SDGs'.¹⁹⁴ This would:

...support the delivery of a national implementation plan by considering policies from different areas of government against the SDGs to ensure a coherent approach. By virtue of its independence, this body would be in a position to provide advice on the degree to which longer-term threats to national and regional achievement of the SDGs and associated agendas are being [adequately] addressed—an aspect of the agenda which poses a

188 CPD, *Submission 129*, p. 2; BCSDA, *Submission 48*, [p. 5].

189 *Submission 50*, p. 19.

190 *Committee Hansard*, 24 August 2018, p. 48.

191 UNAA, *Submission 47*, p. 9.

192 *German Sustainable Development Strategy: Summary*, 2016, (tabled by Mr Marc Purcell, ACFID, on 24 August 2018), p. 4.

193 CSIRO, *Submission 85*, p. 19.

194 *Submission 135*, p. 8.

challenge to typical, electorally-based policy cycles. It would also be well placed to consider cross-cutting issues including gender equality, inclusion and partnership. This body could report to the existing interdepartmental committee and its reports should be made public.¹⁹⁵

3.79 The suggestion of an independent policy assessment body was supported by several other submissions, including the South East Queensland special network joint submission, which proposed that independent commissioners could consider both regional and national issues.¹⁹⁶ SDSN Youth Australia/Pacific and Oaktree supported the establishment of a Future Generations Commission to 'work independently to develop key areas for youth action' and 'help identify gaps in SDG implementation especially pertaining to youth policies'.¹⁹⁷ Oaktree reasoned that the 'short term nature of electoral cycles impedes the ability to design and deliver long term policy priorities necessary to sustain the implementation of the SDGs to 2030'.¹⁹⁸ Wales has established a Future Generations Commission that builds sustainable development principles, goals and progress measures into the long term development of Wales.¹⁹⁹

Independent monitoring and reporting body

3.80 A number of submissions broadly supported the creation of an independent body to monitor and report on progress against the SDGs, though the specifics of these proposals varied. For example, UNAA and SDSN Youth Australia/Pacific called for an SDG Commission to monitor and report on the SDGs, comprising distinguished members from civil society, business and academia.²⁰⁰ One Stone Advisors noted Brazil has established a National SDGs Commission.²⁰¹

3.81 Other submissions suggested the creation of a central overseeing body to report to the federal government and UN, or the establishment of a National Sustainability Commission coupled with a National Environmental Protection Authority.²⁰² Another submission proposed the establishment of an independent monitor similar to the Independent Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor established in Victoria following the Royal Commission.²⁰³ Instead of establishing a

195 *Submission 135*, p. 8.

196 *Submission 53*, [p. 2], [original emphasis removed]. See also Plan International, *Submission 67*, p. 2; The Institute for Human Security and Social Change at La Trobe University, *Submission 77*, p. 3, [original emphasis removed].

197 SDSN Youth Australia/Pacific, *Submission 141*, pp. 4–5; Oaktree, *Submission 42*, [pp. 2–3].

198 *Submission 42*, p. 3.

199 SDSN Youth Australia/Pacific, *Submission 141*, p. 6; Australian National Development Index (ANDI) Limited and the University of Melbourne, *Submission 97*, p. 7; AASW, *Submission 133*, p. 7.

200 UNAA, *Submission 47*, p. 7; SDSN Youth Australia/Pacific, *Submission 141*, p. 5.

201 *Submission 90*, p. 2.

202 AASW, *Submission 133*, p. 3; Doctors for the Environment, *Submission 33*, p. 2.

203 Dr Blaustein, Dr Fitz-Gibbon and Professor White, *Submission 46*, p. 5.

new organisation, CARE Australia suggested government task and fund a body, such as the AHRC, to report annually on progress by all Australian Governments.²⁰⁴

3.82 While statistical offices are responsible for monitoring SDGs implementation, most countries also have other monitoring mechanisms.²⁰⁵ For example, Bangladesh has an Inter-Ministerial SDG Monitoring and Implementation Committee, while the independent Ombudsman in the Argentinian National Congress established a Monitoring and Evaluation Program.²⁰⁶ In other nations, the bodies leading the implementation of the SDGs also hold reviewing responsibility, such as the Nepalese National Planning Commission and Maldives Ministry of Environment and Energy.²⁰⁷

3.83 Submissions did not focus on the potential role of the Australian National Audit Office, however a recent UN report noted that Supreme Audit Institutions 'can play a key role in examining the overall, cross-sectoral effects of policies and [provide] oversight on governments' efforts to deliver on the SDGs'.²⁰⁸ The Brazilian audit institution contributed to its VNR and was part of the delegation to the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.²⁰⁹

Ministerial and parliamentary mechanisms

3.84 A few submissions called for new SDGs parliamentary processes and positions. For instance, World Vision Australia agreed that the SDGs 'require dedicated leadership at the political level given their significance and broad reach'.²¹⁰ It suggested the SDGs could be 'included as a key responsibility in the charter letters for all ministers' and proposed government appoint an Assistant Minister for Sustainable Development.²¹¹ This Assistant Minister would be supported by a secretariat, develop a national plan and work with PM&C and DFAT to coordinate implementation.²¹² Examples of countries that have appointed ministers to lead on sustainable development include Belgium, France and Luxembourg.²¹³

3.85 PwC supported the creation of 'a governance committee with high level standing (eg: chaired by a Member of Parliament)' to increase accountability.²¹⁴ A

204 *Submission 123*, [p. 2], [original emphasis removed].

205 UN, *Compendium*, 2018, p. 10.

206 UN, *Compendium*, 2018, pp. 10–11.

207 UN, *Compendium*, 2018, p. 10.

208 Dr Hall and Professor Hussey, *Supplementary submission 37.1*, UN, *Working together*, 2018, p. x.

209 UN, *Compendium*, 2018, pp. 11–12. Other examples of countries with SAIs that have engaged with the SDGs include Costa Rica and Indonesia.

210 *Submission 25*, p. 18.

211 *Submission 25*, pp. 2, 11.

212 World Vision Australia, *Submission 25*, pp. 2, 18.

213 World Vision Australia, *Submission 25*, p. 18.

214 *Submission 30*, [p. 3].

'substantial number of countries have created new inter-ministerial committees to spur and coordinate the implementation of the SDGs' such as Bangladesh, Denmark, Germany and Japan.²¹⁵ Some of these are chaired by the head of state or government, such as Finland, Germany and Mexico.²¹⁶ Nigeria, Thailand and Zimbabwe have all established parliamentary committees or sub-committees on the SDGs.²¹⁷ While the committee heard a range of suggestions for new SDG-related bodies, the national coordination secretariat and multi-sectoral reference group (covered in chapter 5) received the most consistent support in submissions.

Integration of the SDGs by Australian Government agencies

3.86 The SDGs 'touch on all facets of the Australian Government's work'.²¹⁸ A recent UN report noted:

It is the public service that implements the national strategies and plans and plays an important role in the practical, day-to-day implementation. Hence, public servants need to have the understanding, incentives and mandates to work towards the realization of the SDGs.²¹⁹

3.87 However, the committee heard that while a few government agencies are integrating the SDGs into their planning, reporting and communications, submitters perceived it to be insufficient overall. Dr Caroline Lambert, IWDA, said:

I think there's a real challenge within the Australian implementation of the SDG agenda to see it as a living document that will help guide policy decisions, budget allocations and legal changes...we're still waiting to see how domestic agencies, domestic departments, at the federal, state and local government levels, can take the SDG and use them as a mechanism to support their strategic planning, to support their ambitions for what they want to do and how they're going to measure success.²²⁰

3.88 Mr Purcell, ACFID, observed that some government departments, 'like Environment and Training, get it and are enthusiastic' while others are 'probably begrudging'.²²¹ Attendees at the 2018 Summit expressed the broad view that 'alignment to the SDGs for Government remains largely a retrofitting exercise, undertaken by individual departments within various government agencies, or is otherwise focused on activities in developing countries'.²²² A witness from ACOSS

215 UN, *Compendium*, 2018, p. 5. See also the *German Sustainable Development Strategy: Summary*, 2016, (tabled by Mr Marc Purcell, ACFID, on 24 August 2018), p. 15.

216 UN, *Compendium*, 2018, p. 5.

217 UN, *Compendium*, 2018, pp. 7–8.

218 GCNA, *Submission 130*, [p. 5].

219 Dr Hall and Professor Hussey, *Supplementary submission 37.1*, UN, *Working together*, 2018, p. x.

220 Director of Research, Policy and Advocacy, *Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2018, pp. 28–29.

221 *Committee Hansard*, 24 August 2018, p. 49.

222 The Australian Academy of Science and FEA, *Submission 108*, p. 5.

said that 'at most, the government views its domestic obligations around the SDGs as being to do with monitoring rather than as being a framework for action'.²²³ She related Professor Peter Saunders' analysis:

...of what was required to reach the SDG targets on the poverty front. We are currently at 11.3 percent poverty rate for men, 12.2 percent for women and 17.2 percent for children. If we're going to halve that by 2030 we're talking about getting down to a rate of 5.7 percent for men, 6.1 percent for women and 8.6 percent for children. As he pointed out, it would require a radical change—a pretty drastic change—to current policy settings to get there. We certainly won't get there on the current policy settings.²²⁴

3.89 Therefore, organisations such as the CPD called for the SDGs to be more systematically incorporated into the 'roles and mission of other government departments'.²²⁵ Volunteering Australia emphasised:

...that accountability measures at all levels of Government and within funding structures [are] largely absent, with no reporting obligations on the goals to primary funders, mandatory reporting and linkages with existing workplans, activities or programs. It is vital that local, State/Territory and Federal Governments work together to update reporting processes across jurisdictions and align existing processes to include the 2030 Agenda.²²⁶

Government view

3.90 Mr McDonald, PM&C, acknowledged: 'There are grey areas here about how enthusiastic different agencies should be, but certainly it's government policy to adopt and implement the SDGs'.²²⁷ He accepted that there will be:

...different levels of commitment across the government, so some agencies like the Department of Environment have been very strongly pro SDGs, using them and applying them in delivering government policy, and others haven't seen them as useful in achieving the government's agenda.²²⁸

3.91 DFAT explained that 'Australian Government agencies are identifying the best ways to integrate the SDGs into their existing systems and strategies'.²²⁹ Generally agencies have been taking a minimal approach:

The strong view was that, because basically...our core business is aligned to the SDGs, a minimalist approach made sense. Obviously there is a balance in that, because you don't want people to forget about the SDG agenda when they're talking about something that's obviously related to it.

223 Ms Phillips, Director of Policy and Advocacy, *Committee Hansard*, 2 November 2018, p. 36.

224 *Committee Hansard*, 2 November 2018, p. 34.

225 CPD, *Submission 129*, [p. 7]. See also EAROPH Australia; *Submission 14*, p. 3.

226 *Submission 127*, p. 5. See also UNAA, *Submission 47*, p. 6.

227 *Committee Hansard*, 7 December 2018, p. 21.

228 *Committee Hansard*, 7 December 2018, p. 19.

229 DFAT, *Submission 60*, p. 3.

Getting that balance is still a work in progress. We've very much taken this mainstreaming approach of saying that the SDGs are everyone's business. It's very easy in all of our business to see the alignment, but not everyone talks the language yet. It's still a work in progress to make sure everyone is talking about it when they should be talking about it...²³⁰

3.92 An official from the Attorney-General's Department elaborated:

...our core business and the day-to-day work is already very well aligned with goal 16, in particular. We can very clearly have a line of sight to how our existing work and priorities help to achieve particular targets under the Sustainable Development Goals. From that perspective we don't think that there's any need to realign our business planning, reporting processes et cetera around the SDGs, but we can certainly draw a clear line of sight to how we're working towards achieving particular targets under SDGs.²³¹

3.93 The Department of the Treasury stated that though it is the lead agency for goals 8 and 10, the 'majority of policies and programs underpinning progress towards the goals are administered by other portfolios', and it 'has no plans to formally incorporate the SDG agenda into the annual report or work plans'.²³²

Alignment with existing policy and reporting frameworks

3.94 The 2030 Agenda encourages parties to support the implementation of existing strategies in alignment with the SDGs, and the UN has signalled 'that existing international reporting mechanisms should be 'double purposed' to lighten the real or perceived reporting obligations'.²³³ The VNR detailed examples of alignment between the work of government agencies and the SDGs, and stated that the SDGs 'are consistent with Australian Government priorities and long-standing efforts across a range of sectors such as health, education, agriculture, water, the environment, the economy, and gender equality'.²³⁴ As an example, the Department of Health stated:

The design of Australia's health system is based around the principle of universal health coverage, a focal point of all health-related SDGs, and this provides a strong foundation to deliver this vision...The 2030 Agenda also aligns with Australia's focus on integrated and multi-sectoral approaches to health, health promotion and wellbeing.²³⁵

3.95 Mr Andrew Petersen, Chief Executive Officer of BCSDA also noted that the Australian Government is undertaking some actions addressing the SDGs, such as the:

230 Mr Tinning, DFAT, *Committee Hansard*, 24 August 2018, p. 42.

231 Ms Moore, Assistant Secretary, International Cooperation, Attorney-General's Department, *Committee Hansard*, 24 August 2018, p. 42.

232 Department of the Treasury, answer to question on notice, 24 August 2018 (received 6 September 2018).

233 AHRC, *Submission 138*, p. 13.

234 *Report on the Implementation of the SDGs*, 2018, p. 6, [original emphasis removed].

235 *Submission 143*, pp. 1–2.

...national waste audited accounts...That goes to SDG 12—responsible consumption and production. But it also goes to SDG 3. It also goes to SDG 8 and SDG 9...What's heartening to see is that, whilst a lot of people may claim the government is not doing anything on the SDGs, it actually is. It just perhaps has not identified it in such a way and highlighted to its key constituency that it is in fact doing some great work in that area.²³⁶

3.96 Some submissions agreed that governments should further integrate the SDGs with existing departmental and cross-government plans, coordination mechanisms and commitments.²³⁷ Agencies also could be tasked with reviewing how domestic policies within their portfolios align with the SDGs.²³⁸ Professor Carol Adams proposed that departments should report on their contributions to the relevant SDG targets and ensure they are incorporated into strategy, planning and resource allocation.²³⁹

3.97 Some submissions also referred to specific policy frameworks that should be aligned with the SDGs, such as the Bureau of Meteorology National Water Performance Report; second Australian National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security; and Australia's 3rd Universal Periodic Review of human rights in 2020.²⁴⁰ UNAA noted recent examples that did not refer to the SDGs, including the 2017 Review of Climate Change Policies, Independent Review into the Future Security of the National Energy Market, and National Innovation and Science Agenda.²⁴¹

3.98 The Closing the Gap framework could also be aligned with the SDGs, and the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples Co-Chair, Mr Rodney Little, emphasised that:

Australia has always maintained that there's a clear line of sight between the focus of the Human Rights Council on Indigenous rights, the Sustainable Development Goals and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples...All of those other things that we talk about in the Redfern Statement Alliance, the Closing the Gap Refresh and the Close the Gap Campaign, if they are all related to each other, then that keeps the line of sight with all and enables the focus to not drift off to the sides and drift off to particular projects or activities and investment.²⁴²

3.99 The National Congress cautioned that:

236 *Committee Hansard*, 2 November 2018, p. 29.

237 IWDA, *Submission 98*, p. 6; CBM Australia, *Submission 93*, p. 1.

238 World Vision Australia, *Submission 25*, p. 1.

239 *Submission 1*, p. 3.

240 Australian Water Association, *Submission 61*, [p. 2]; ACFID, *Submission 135*, pp. 6–7; IWDA, *Submission 98*, p. 6; Australian Civil Society Coalition on Women Peace and Security, *Submission 59*, p. 5; AHRC, *Submission 138*, p. 7; Oxfam Australia, *Submission 18*, p. 9. See also UNICEF, *Submission 87*, p. 3.

241 *Submission 47*, pp. 5–6.

242 *Committee Hansard*, 7 December 2018, pp. 1, 4. See also National Congress of Australia's First Peoples, answer to question on notice, 7 December 2018 (received 20 December 2018), [p. 2].

The SDGs should not form the sole goals for Closing the Gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians. Concerted efforts should also be addressed to improve incarceration rates, child removals, family and community safety, housing and homelessness among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, which should also be priorities for Government policies and programs.²⁴³

3.100 Mr McDonald, PM&C, noted that senior officials from the Indigenous Affairs Group within PM&C have participated in the IDC and attended an international meeting. He told the committee: 'I expect to see more, going forward, on how the SDGs can actually influence policy' but noted 'we are at the early stages'.²⁴⁴

Approaches to communication

3.101 Officials expressed varying views about the extent to which agencies need to explicitly embed the SDGs into their internal and external communications and strategies. DoEE is 'actively integrating' the SDGs into its policies, strategies, programs and corporate documents.²⁴⁵ It is also integrating the environment and energy goals into Australia's next State of the Environment digital platform and report in 2021.²⁴⁶ An official agreed when asked whether 'the workload involved is not so much a new workload as a restructuring and a relanguaging'.²⁴⁷ She described that DoEE's general approach to delivering and implementing the SDGs is 'to integrate that into our day-to-day business so it's not something that's on the side and difficult to get attention on; it's integrated into the day-to-day business across all of our different functions'.²⁴⁸

3.102 Several other agencies expressed enthusiasm for the SDGs and were in the process of incorporating the SDGs into their communications and strategies to varying degrees. For example, while the 'vast majority' of work done by the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources (DAWR) was described as consistent and compatible with SDG 6, it was not typically labelled or 'co-tagged' as such domestically.²⁴⁹ However, DAWR had developed an internal communications

243 *Submission 154*, p. 5. See also ACFID, *Submission 135*, pp. 6–7; MSDI, *Submission 121*, [p. 5]; AHRC, *Submission 138*, pp. 7, 14; Dr Hall and Professor Hussey, *Submission 76*, p. 9.

244 *Committee Hansard*, 7 December 2018, p. 23.

245 DoEE, *Submission 115*, p. 3.

246 DoEE, *Submission 115*, p. 3.

247 *Committee Hansard*, 24 August 2018, p. 33.

248 *Committee Hansard*, 24 August 2018, pp. 33–34.

249 Mr Richard McLoughlin, Assistant Secretary, Murray Darling Basin Plan Taskforce Head, International Engagement Branch, Department of Agriculture and Water Resources, *Committee Hansard*, 24 August 2018, pp. 34–35.

strategy, so is 'looking to increase references to the SDGs'.²⁵⁰ In relation to the Department of Jobs and Small Business, the committee heard:

We are developing communication products, in the first instance with a focus on internal communication with other areas within the department, but that will very soon spread to our external face also.²⁵¹

3.103 Some agencies described information sessions and seminars intended to inform staff about the SDGs, including the Department of Jobs and Small Business and the Attorney-General's Department.²⁵² The former included staff based in state offices via skype.²⁵³ The Attorney-General's Department has encouraged staff members to refer to the SDGs in speeches and media releases where appropriate, and mapped the work of each branch against Goal 16.²⁵⁴ DFAT has formed a 'reference group that gathers people from the across the department to talk about how the SDGs affect their work or are implicated in their work'.²⁵⁵ Chapter 5 covers the IDC's development of external communication products that are expected to be available through DFAT's website in 2019.²⁵⁶

3.104 The committee heard that further government leadership and coordination on the SDGs should not be delayed.²⁵⁷ GCNA, for example, stated that 'urgent action is required to meet the goals and to seize the opportunities'.²⁵⁸ CPD agreed:

Given long lead times on investment and policy development, and the scale of the efforts needed on both fronts to achieve the 2030 goals, this potential can only be realised if we integrate the SDGs into governance, regulatory guidance and policy formulation now.²⁵⁹

250 Mr Matthew Worrell, Assistant Secretary, Bilateral Market Access, DAWR, *Committee Hansard*, 24 August 2018, p. 28. See also DAWR, answers to questions on notice, 24 August 2018 (received 14 September 2018).

251 Mr Malcolm Greening, Branch Manager, Labour Market Strategy Group, *Committee Hansard*, 24 August 2018, p. 40.

252 Mr Greening, *Committee Hansard*, 24 August 2018, p. 40; Ms Moore, Attorney-General's Department, *Committee Hansard*, 24 August 2018, p. 37.

253 Mr Greening, *Committee Hansard*, 24 August 2018, p. 43.

254 Ms Moore, *Committee Hansard*, 24 August 2018, p. 37.

255 Ms Stephanie Aeuckens, Director, Global Development Branch, DFAT, *Committee Hansard*, 24 August 2018, p. 38.

256 Dr Cate Rogers, Assistant Secretary, Development Policy and Education Branch, DFAT, *Committee Hansard*, 7 December 2018, pp. 19–20; Mr McDonald, *Committee Hansard*, 7 December 2018, p. 20.

257 Ms Garcia, *Committee Hansard*, 24 August 2018, p. 6; Mr Clinton Moore, Vice-President of EAROPH Australia, *Committee Hansard*, 7 December 2018, p. 11.

258 GCNA, *Submission 130*, [p. 4].

259 CPD, *Submission 129*, p. 1.