

Speech

Delivery of Australia's Voluntary National Review UN High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

New York, 17 July 2018

Australia's first report on implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals

[900 words]

[Slide 1 – VNR Cover]

Thank you Mr/Madame Chair. Good morning Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen.

Australia is one of the most culturally diverse nations on earth.

One in four Australians was born overseas and one in two has at least one parent born overseas. We are home to people from over 300 ancestries. We are diverse but share common values.

The Sustainable Development Goals reflect things that Australians value highly and seek to protect – gender equality and the empowerment of women, a clean and safe environment, access to opportunity and services, human rights, strong and accessible institutions, inclusive economies, diverse and supportive communities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and heritage and our unique and priceless environmental endowment.

It is estimated that Australia is home to more than 600,000 species, many of which are found nowhere else in the world. We are a 'megadiverse' country with unique terrestrial and marine environments that we are committed to protecting through our network of protected areas including our World Heritage-listed sites such as the Great Barrier Reef, Kakadu National Park, Uluru – Kata Tjuta National Park and Shark Bay.

We also have the second largest extent of marine protected areas in the world.

This year's focus on transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies is particularly relevant for Australia.

We are the sixth largest country, and the driest inhabited continent on Earth. The majority of our population lives in cities along our coastline, but many people live in rural communities spread out over vast distances. As Australia's population grows, our challenge is to build cities that are liveable, competitive, productive, equitable and environmentally sustainable.

Central to the Australian understanding of the Goals is our value of a 'fair go'. Like 'leaving no one behind', it is a call to action for fairness, justice and equality.

Achieving the SDGs is a whole of Australia endeavour.

Australia's Voluntary National Review

I am pleased to present today Australia's first Voluntary National Review, endorsed by Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull as a "reminder of the opportunities afforded by the Goals for cooperation, growth and prosperity for all".

This is not just a report written by Government alone.

The Review draws on contributions from across Australian society, including from civil society and business bodies, science agencies and academia.

It highlights Australians making tangible contributions toward implementing the Goals in local communities, workplaces, schools and universities across the country and around the world with ingenuity, innovation and commitment. The many case studies are a small sample of the ongoing activity across Australia to advance the 2030 Agenda.

The Review also highlights sectors in which the SDGs provide a guiding framework – the Australian water industry is one such example.

You will hear shortly from a representative of the private sector, Intrepid Travel's Darrell Wade, about how an Australian business with a global footprint is rethinking business as usual.

In our Review, we reflect on efforts to support people who still face barriers to full inclusion. These include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, those from culturally or linguistically-diverse backgrounds, women and girls, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) persons, youth, older persons, people with disability and those living in remote and rural locations.

While Australia is a prosperous country, we still have work to do to ensure that none of us are left behind.

Closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians is a major challenge, addressed throughout the Review. While there is no SDG specific to indigenous peoples, all 17 SDGs are significant for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

In Australia the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander concept of "Caring for Country" is a foundation of Indigenous culture and spirituality.

To reflect this linkage to the SDGs, Australia's Review features individual, yet interconnected, art strips symbolising the 17 Sustainable Development Goals – by contemporary Indigenous artist, Jordana Angus. You can see this artwork on the cover of our report, as shown on this slide, and throughout the Review.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth are driving innovative work in sustainability and social change – in a moment, Duane Fraser will tell you more about these achievements.

Data

[Slide 2: data website homepage]

Relevant, quality, accessible and timely statistics provide crucial evidence for national decision-making and policy.

I am pleased to announce the launch of an Australian SDG data platform, housing available Government datasets on SDG Indicators and showing the status of Australian data collection against all 232 Indicators.

We have released a data paper as a companion report that explains in more detail Australia's approach and strengths in relation to data for the SDGs.

[Slide 3: SDGs website homepage]

Emerging from the Review process, and in response to civil society interest, the Australian Government has also supported the establishment of the Australia Sustainable Development Goals website - created by the Global Compact Network Australia.

The website is a platform for Australian organisations and individuals to profile their work on the Goals, inspire others and form new partnerships.

Since its launch in June more than 50 organisations, businesses and government agencies have contributed over 100 case studies to the platform, and this number continues to grow.

[Slide 4: VNR Homepage]

Conclusion

One of the great virtues of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals is that they bring together the efforts of people from all over the world, into one framework.

The overwhelming majority of people are united in our desire to reduce poverty, promote sustainable development and ensure peace and prosperity for ourselves, in every country and for coming generations.

I'd like to invite Duane Fraser, co-Chair of the Global Indigenous Youth Caucus, to make a few remarks, followed by Darrell Wade from Intrepid Travel Group.

[Slide 5: Duane's slide]

[Slide 6: Darrell's slide]

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Private sector representative: Darrell Wade

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today and share with you our commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals.

All sectors of Australian society understand that it is important to protect our planet, nurture it's citizens and to improve the distribution of wealth amongst those citizens. Whilst most Australian business share these values, it is clear that more progress is required. Some businesses still believe that by engaging with the SDG's it somehow limits growth or profitability. Our experience is quite the contrary however and I hope that in the next few minutes I'll be able to explain why.

The World Travel and Tourism Council reports that tourism accounts for nearly 11% of global GDP and 313 million jobs worldwide. The travel and tourism industry touches every one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and has considerable opportunity to making a large, positive contribution to our world.

Speaking from an Intrepid perspective we are very proud to be an Australian based company, operating in the travel and tourism sector. However our footprint is very much a global one as we send travellers to over 100 countries, with 90% of our staff are located outside Australia.

The Sustainable Development Goals provide us with a platform to create Shared Value between all the stakeholders of the business: Customers, staff, local communities and shareholders. How? Our travelling customers will have a better and more rewarding holiday if they see that local communities are prospering and environments are healthy. Similarly, communities will prosper where they have access to a clean environment, economic opportunity and equality. Our staff will grow and develop as they meet these communities and do purposeful work in creating the best travel experience ever for our travellers. As a business we create a competitive advantage for ourselves by managing this virtuous circle, with the SDG's at the very heart.

We have identified 9 SDG's where we believe our activities can have maximum impact and create maximum shared value for all stakeholders. Those 9 SDG's have become the basis for our strategic planning process, and our approach to

integrated reporting that we share with the UNGC and all stakeholders. This years Annual report was 89 pages where we outlined our goals, actions and performance.

Let me talk to you about just one SDG that we focus on, that of SDG5 Gender Equality and how by it creates value to all stakeholders. By addressing gender equality we can create good paying jobs and significant career opportunities for women. Our business benefits through an increased supply of labor that helps facilitate our continued growth. Meanwhile, our travellers also benefit because when those female staff are tour leaders they get an extra insight into local communities that might not be as well provided by men. As an example, In the last 3 years we have improved our gender balance of Indian tour leaders from near zero % female to close to 50%. Our passenger feedback scores have been the highest in our 30 year history. Everyone wins.

In summary The Intrepid Group continue to grow our top line revenue and our bottom line profitability whilst embracing the sustainable development goals. We urge all business in Australia and around the world to embrace the power of the SDG's in unlocking innovation and value for communities, for business and for our planet. Thank you.