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## Talking Point: Why UTAS is a climate study leader

UTAS has the lion's share of climate scientists and this week you can join with free sessions like Poets for Planet A and Sustainability in the Pub, say GABI MOCATTA and ROB WHITE.

Gabi Mocatta and Rob White

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WHAT can universities do about climate change? For decades we have been the expert purveyors of the grim

science of climate crisis. We've warned about the escalating seriousness of the situation we're in. We have carefully mapped out pathways to solutions. And we've advised there is little time to act: change is urgent, now.

In the face of unequivocal science, what can we do while we witness ongoing inaction? Can universities lead climate action themselves?

This week, the University of Tasmania is the host of the international climate action initiative [Global Climate Change Week](#). The week-long event, held annually, is focused on galvanising climate change mitigation by universities and their communities. This year's theme "If not now, when? If not you, who?" is a call for all universities and the people they serve to take action, individually and collectively, on climate change.

So what does climate action leadership at universities look like?



The University of Tasmania's Sandy Bay campus.

The University of Tasmania is already a leader on climate in the spheres of research and teaching. And we're leading by example in cutting our carbon footprint.

[The Times Higher Education World University Climate Action Rankings](#) recently placed our state's uni in third position globally for action on climate change. UTAS punches above its weight with many climate change research groups and more Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change authors than any other Australian university. We also lead in research and teaching on climate change in social sciences, law, education and humanities.

The University of Tasmania is also one of only two universities in Australia that is certified carbon neutral. This means it has closely audited and reduced emissions from all aspects of its operations, and has offset its remaining emissions. UTAS has held this status since 2016.

Divestment from fossil fuels is another crucial aspect of meaningful climate action at universities. As we write this, we are awaiting a significant announcement on divestment from fossil fuels by UTAS. The cornerstone of a transition away from investing in fossil fuels will be a combination of negative screening (no new investments in fossil fuel related industries), positive screening (investment in renewable energy and ecologically sustainable industries) and the phased withdrawal of present investments in fossil fuel related industries and activities.

UTAS's support for climate action is evident in other ways as well. Global Climate Change Week, for example, is supported by the university's Sustainability Committee and fits with its commitment to be a global leader in climate research, communication and action.



Antarctic research. Picture: University of Tasmania

The university's Sustainability Committee is engaged in a wide range of activities. It is developing guidelines for a climate-sustainable food culture at UTAS covering procurement, preparation, waste management, growing, vending and food systems education. "Education for sustainability" principles will also be integrated across all areas of the university.

Looking ahead, there's still more work to do.

UTAS's sustainability policy will provide a strategic framework for actions into the future, guiding, for example, what the university does in regards to air travel carbon emissions, how it embodies the UN Sustainable Development Goals and how it implements a circular economy action plan.

Located in cities that are subject to significant flood and bushfire risk — which will worsen under a changing climate — the university's campuses will need to better prepare for such risks. With the right work, they could become exemplar of climate-safe campuses.

The university will also need to look to its carbon footprint and climate-aware sustainability in its built environment. It's crucial that climate change be factored into building design and location wherever new campus development occurs.

The best green credentials for UTAS will also include things such as generating its own renewable energy, enabling sustainable transport and ensuring its purchasing aligns with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.



UTAS and Wine Australia researched climate effects on wine regions. Picture: Zak Simmonds

include, for example, a session on “[Poets for Planet A](#)”, a poetry and live performance session. There’s a panel session, “[Living in a changing climate](#)” on the systemic changes required to protect lives and livelihoods, and a “[Sustainability in the pub](#)” session in Launceston. Most of the week’s events, almost 200 globally, are web-based. All are open to anyone and free. Many events originate from Tasmania and are led by our university’s climate change experts across diverse subject areas. Others are based at universities across the world.

Our goal this week, and going forward, is that other institutions, businesses, and organisations large and small will see universities’ climate change leadership and will be galvanised to act.

And we hope that people, better understanding what is possible, will demand action of them and our governments also. Together, we’re a powerful force for the change that is so urgently needed.

Connect with events at [www.globalclimatechangeweek.com](http://www.globalclimatechangeweek.com)

**Dr Gabi Mocatta is research fellow in Climate Change Communication and Rob White is Distinguished Professor of Criminology at the University of Tasmania. They are on the Global Climate Change Week organising committee.**



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