

# THE CONVERSATION



## Australia ranks 20th on progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals

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Australia still rates poorly on clean energy and climate action. CSIRO/Wikimedia Commons, CC BY

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Australia may be home to some of the world's most liveable cities, but we have a long way to go to meet the world's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Australia ranks 20th in the world – well behind Canada and many European countries but ahead of the United States – according to a new index that compares different nations' performance on the SDGs, which were adopted last September.

Launched at this week's United Nations SDG talks in New York, the index marks each country's performance towards the 17 goals. These aim to put the world on a more sustainable economic, social and environmental path, and feature 169 targets to be met over the next 15 years in areas such as health, economic growth and climate action.

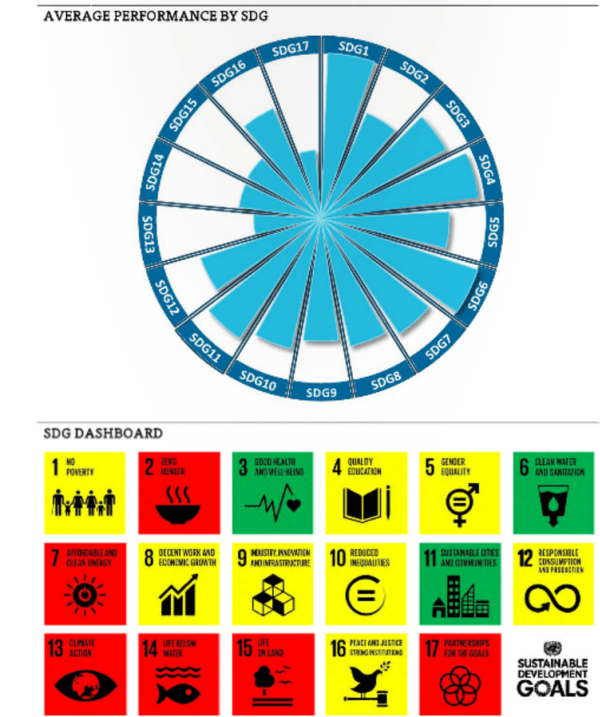
The ranking, called the SDG Index and Dashboard and prepared by the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network and the German think tank Bertelsmann Stiftung, ranks countries' performance using a set of 77 indicators.

### Australia: good water, bad energy

Australia, with some of the world's highest carbon emissions per person, rates poorly on the clean energy and climate change goals. It also falls down on the environmental goals, with high levels of solid waste and land clearing as well as loss of biodiversity.

Despite the long life expectancy and general good health of Australians, the index highlights that Australia has one of the highest rates of obesity in the world.

As shown in the performance chart below, Australia rates relatively highly on lack of poverty, education and water quality. Inequality, while increasing, is not as bad as it is in the United States or the United Kingdom.



Australia's performance on each of the Sustainable Development Goals. SDG Index and Dashboards report

The best-performing countries on the list are mainly the northern European countries. Sweden, Denmark and Norway are at the top of the pile. Yet even these nations have significant challenges to achieve the climate change and environmental goals.

At the bottom of the rankings are sub-Saharan African countries: the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia and the Central African Republic, which face extreme poverty, hunger and major health problems.

In Asia, Japan and Singapore both rate above Australia, in 18th and 19th places respectively. Thailand (61st), Malaysia (63rd) and China (76th) are in the middle of the pack.

Priorities for action

The purpose of the report is to help countries identify the gaps that must be closed in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 and to identify priorities for early action.

The SDG Index notes that Australia performs much better in the UN's Human Development Index (on which it ranks second), which focuses on social and economic development but not environmental sustainability. This clearly demonstrates that Australia needs to act urgently to address the climate and environmental goals. It is in Australia's interest to do so as we are more vulnerable to climate change than most comparable countries.

The report also highlights some other specific challenges for Australia, including fisheries management and sustainable use of nitrogen-based fertiliser. While Australia is not the worst performer on gender equality, many countries have a higher proportion of women in national parliaments than our 26.7% and we have a significantly larger gender wage gap

Rank	Country	Score
1	Sweden	84.5
2	Denmark	83.9
3	Norway	82.3
4	Finland	81.0
5	Switzerland	80.9
6	Germany	80.5
7	Austria	79.1
8	Netherlands	78.9
9	Iceland	78.4
10	United Kingdom	78.1
11	France	77.9
12	Belgium	77.4
13	Canada	76.8
14	Ireland	76.7
15	Czech Republic	76.7
16	Luxembourg	76.7
17	Slovenia	76.6
18	Japan	75.0
19	Singapore	74.6
20	Australia	74.5
21	Estonia	74.5
22	New Zealand	74.0
23	Belarus	73.5
24	Hungary	73.4
25	United States	72.7
26	Slovak Republic	72.7
27	Korea, Rep.	72.7
28	Latvia	72.5
29	Israel	72.3
30	Spain	72.2

The top of the rankings... SDG Index and Dashboards report

than New Zealand.

The SDG Index will be updated regularly to improve its quality and coverage and allow people around the world to measure progress against the goals. Australia's plan for implementing the SDGs within Australia is not yet clear and this will be an important item on the agenda for the re-elected Turnbull government.

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Rank	Country	Score
127	Sudan	42.2
128	Burundi	42.0
129	Togo	40.9
130	Benin	40.0
131	Malawi	39.8
132	Mauritania	39.6
133	Mozambique	39.5
134	Zambia	38.4
135	Mali	38.2
136	Gambia, The	37.8
137	Yemen, Rep.	37.3
138	Sierra Leone	36.9
139	Afghanistan	36.5
140	Madagascar	36.2
141	Nigeria	36.1
142	Guinea	35.9
143	Burkina Faso	35.6
144	Haiti	34.4
145	Chad	31.8
146	Niger	31.4
147	Congo, Dem. Rep.	31.3
148	Liberia	30.5
149	Central African Republic	26.1

...and the lowest-ranked nations. SDG Index and Dashboards report