



Media Release

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Innovative Research Universities showcasing sustainability leadership and impact

The Innovative Research Universities (IRU) is celebrating its members' successes in sustainability with a new publication, *Sustainable Universities and Communities*.

The report highlights best practice across IRU member universities with a collection of case studies that showcase the positive impact of their students, researchers, campus operations and community partnerships. The data and case studies in the report are mapped against the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to highlight key strengths and areas of leadership.

IRU Chair Professor Simon Biggs (Vice-Chancellor and President, James Cook University) said the report provides a data-informed record of the progress made on the way to a more sustainable, innovative and inclusive future.

"Sustainability is in the DNA of our universities, and IRU members were the first in Australia to teach inter-disciplinary environmental studies," he said. "The data in this report clearly shows our research strengths aligned with SDGs such as Quality Education, Reduced Inequalities and Climate Action. And we are leading the way with our sustainable campuses.

"In order to future-proof Australia on the pathway to a net-zero world, we welcome further opportunities to work in partnership with governments and communities."

IRU Executive Director Paul Harris said that member universities are already making significant contributions to the future of their local communities across Australia and around the world. However, many of these positive impacts are not captured in the ways that universities are currently evaluated.

"In recent years, international university rankings have started to focus more on impact and on sustainability," he said. "We see this reflected in the strong performance of IRU member universities.

"This expanding sense of the social value of the university is welcome, but we know that there is still much that rankings do not capture – for example, the role of the university in its local community and the importance of partnership with Indigenous communities to support progress towards self-determination. Our aim with this report is to bring to light the many diverse ways that IRU staff and students are delivering a more sustainable and equitable future for Australia."

The publication, *Sustainable Universities and Communities*, was launched today at the IRU's 2024 Senior Leaders Forum, held at Murdoch University in Perth. It is available [on the IRU website](#).

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Selected Highlights from *Sustainable Universities and Communities*



Murdoch University's Boola Katitjin won in the Higher Education and Research category at the World Architecture Festival, making it the world's best academic building.

Boola Katitjin is also the first 6-star Green Star education building in Western Australia. It incorporates advanced sustainability features including construction from sustainable timber, water recycling and renewable energy.

Flinders University is the first organisation in the world to earn a coveted gold rating under the newly released STARS 3.0 Sustainability Tracking, Assessment and Rating System.

The university is also currently trialling 10 bidirectional vehicle-to-grid (V2G) chargers. These chargers enable compatible electric vehicles to function as mobile battery banks, feeding renewable energy produced on site back into the campus grid when needed.



Griffith University is the leading university partner in the new Solving Plastic Waste CRC (Cooperative Research Centre) a \$140 million project funded by the Federal Government.

The CRC includes representatives from industry, government, and the not-for profit sector, and Griffith researchers will develop new electrochemical, physical, and biological approaches to remove microplastics from agricultural soils, which will have a positive impact on crops and livestock.

Plant disease and pest outbreaks can have devastating consequences for native species, for agriculture and forestry. This is why **James Cook University, the University of Canberra**, the Australian National University and various partners have established the new Australian Research Council (ARC) Training Centre in Plant Biosecurity.

The Centre's research focuses on new technologies to address biosecurity challenges, such as environmental DNA (eDNA) and image recognition with machine learning. The research projects will be co-designed with industry end-users, thereby making the research outcomes relevant to industry needs from the start.



The University City of the Future, located on **La Trobe University's** 235-hectare Bundoora campus, is an example of a new and sustainable way of living, working, learning and socialising in Melbourne's north.

Once finished, the University City of the Future will provide education facilities for more than 40,000 students, sustainable housing for 12,000 students, staff and private residents, and access to reliable public transport infrastructure, powered in part by its own solar farm.

An Employer of Choice for Gender Equality for 22 consecutive years, Western Sydney University was ranked by Times Higher Education as number one in the world for gender equality in 2024.

Additionally, the University is also the number one university in the world pursuing sustainable development goals (Times Higher Education ranking, 2024).



About the IRU

The IRU is a network of seven comprehensive universities across Australia committed to inclusive education and research with impact. Its members are Flinders University, Griffith University, James Cook University, La Trobe University, Murdoch University, University of Canberra, and Western Sydney University.

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