

Staff Paper

Project: Sustainability Reporting and

Climate-related Financial

Reporting

Topic: Developing climate-related

financial reporting

requirements for Australia

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(M193)

Agenda Item: 5.2

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Project Priority: High

Decision-Making: High

Decide on project direction **Project Status:**

Objective

Contact(s):

1 This paper considers potential options for the Board's consideration in developing climaterelated financial reporting requirements for Australia and its approach to broader sustainability reporting in the long term.

2 Consistent with the Board's preliminary decision to address climate as the first sustainability reporting topic, the objective of this paper is to present staff analysis and recommendations about adding a climate-related financial reporting project to the Board's work program for the development of climate-related financial reporting requirements for Australia.

Structure

- 3 This paper is structured as follows:
 - Summary of staff recommendations (paragraphs 4-5) (a)
 - (b) Background (paragraphs 6-10)
 - (c) Revised approach—addressing climate first (paragraphs 11-17)
 - Positioning climate-related financial reporting requirements under the Sustainability (d) Reporting project umbrella (paragraphs 18-22)
 - Appendix A—[draft] Sustainability Reporting project plan (May 2022). (e)

Summary of staff recommendations

- 4 In line with:
 - the terms of recent funding per the Australian Government's Budget October 2022-(a) 23, the Board has been tasked with developing climate reporting standards for large for-profit entities and financial institutions;
 - (b) the proposals put forth in the Treasury's recent public consultation on Climaterelated financial disclosure; and

See Agenda Paper 5.1 Cover Memo: Sustainability Reporting and Climate-related Financial Reporting.

- (c) the Board's preliminary decision to address climate as the first sustainability reporting topic;²
- staff recommend the Board add a climate-related financial reporting project to its work plan.
- To help ensure the [draft] project plan to address climate-related financial reporting is consistent with the [draft] Sustainability Reporting project plan, staff also recommend the Board apply its preliminary decisions and the [draft] Sustainability Reporting project plan to its work on climate-related financial reporting.

Background

- In response to the global demand for climate reporting requirements, the International Sustainability Standards Board (ISSB) was established in November 2021 and in March 2022, published two Exposure Drafts addressing general requirements for sustainability-related and climate-related financial disclosures:
 - (a) Exposure Draft on [Draft] IFRS S1 General Requirements for Disclosure of Sustainability-related Financial Information; and
 - (b) Exposure Draft on [Draft] IFRS S2 Climate-related Disclosures.
- In response to the ISSB's initial Exposure Drafts, in April 2022 the Board published <u>ED 321</u>

 Request for Comment on ISSB [Draft] IFRS S1 and [Draft] IFRS S2. In particular, as part of the preliminary decisions made in its February 2022 (M185) and April 2022 (M186) meetings, and consistent with the anticipated work of international sustainability reporting standard-setters and framework providers, the Board highlighted that climate would likely be the first of many sustainability reporting topics to be addressed by the Sustainability Reporting project.³
- 8 Feedback to ITC 46 AASB Agenda Consultation 2022-2026 and ITC 48 Extended External Reporting highlighted stakeholder demand for climate to be the first topic to be addressed in a broader project addressing sustainability reporting. This demand from Australian stakeholders is consistent with the urgent global demand by investors and other users of sustainability reports for better information about climate-related matters.
- More recently, there has been significant demand from Australian stakeholders for climaterelated financial reporting to be addressed in the short-term, however there is also significant demand for the Board to develop and more carefully consider its long-term approach to sustainability reporting. In particular, feedback indicated that:⁶
 - (a) stakeholders consider international alignment as a high priority but also acknowledge that there is uncertainty about what international alignment will look like for sustainability reporting in the short-, medium- and long-term given the continued jurisdictional fracturing of sustainability reporting requirements (e.g. the European Union's European Sustainability Reporting Standards and the US Securities and Exchange Commission Proposals: The Enhancement and Standardization of Climate-Related Disclosures for Investors);

³ See February 2022 (M185) Action Alert and April 2022 (M186) Action Alert.

² See Agenda Paper 5.1.

See February 2022 (M185) <u>Agenda Paper 3.4 Sustainability Reporting: Feedback summary—ITC 46 AASB</u>
<u>Agenda Consultation 2022-2026</u> and <u>Agenda Paper 3.5 Sustainability Reporting: Feedback summary—ITC 48 Extended External Reporting.</u>

See April 2021 <u>IFRS Foundation Trustees' Feedback Statement on the Consultation Paper on Sustainability Reporting.</u>

See November 2022 (M191) Agenda Paper 3.2.2 Sustainability Reporting: Feedback summary—ED 321 Request for Comment on ISSB [Draft] IFRS S1 and [Draft] IFRS S2.

- (b) while international alignment is considered to be a priority, stakeholders also said the Board should utilise the ISSB's proposed building blocks approach. For example, many respondents to ED 321 encouraged the Board to expand the proposed scope of its work beyond the focus on primary users of general purpose financial reporting and sustainability-related financial disclosures and also consider alignment with a multi-stakeholder framework such as that developed by the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI); and
- (c) stakeholders view using the work of the ISSB as a useful first step in addressing sustainability reporting in the short-to-medium term but that the long-term goal should be the development of comprehensive sustainability reporting requirements that address Australian-specific matters such as incorporating indigenous culture.
- In line with the terms of recent funding per the <u>Australian Government's Budget October</u> 2022-23, the Board has been tasked with developing climate reporting requirements for large for-profit entities and financial institutions.

Revised approach—addressing climate first

- In light of the feedback to ED 321 on the scope of sustainability reporting in Australia (see paragraph 9), and consistent with the [draft] Sustainability Reporting plan (see Appendix A), the Board will seek to redeliberate all its preliminary decisions and reconsider the [draft] project plan in future.
- However, feedback also indicated a more immediate need for climate-related financial reporting to be addressed in the short-term. This demand from Australian stakeholders has also resulted in:
 - (a) the <u>Australian Government's Budget October 2022-23</u> allocating funding to the AASB for the purpose of developing climate-related financial reporting standards for large for-profit entities and financial institutions; and
 - (b) the Treasury publicly consulting on <u>Climate-related financial disclosure</u> in Australia and the existing Australian financial reporting framework. Note that this public consultation highlights a potential effective date for climate-related financial reporting in Australia for 2024-2025.⁷
- Staff expect that given the complexity of the considerations around scoping, the Board will need more time to redeliberate all its preliminary decisions and the [draft] Sustainability Reporting project plan than will be needed to develop climate-related financial reporting requirements. In particular, consistent with the Board's evidence-based approach to standard-setting, staff anticipate that more targeted research and outreach may be needed in order to better inform future decision-making on its approach to sustainability reporting in the long-term.
- Staff note that it is feasible for the Board to address climate-related financial reporting before it finalises its approach to sustainability reporting in the long-term. This is because:
 - (a) Australian stakeholders appear to be more comfortable with the anticipated approach to climate-related financial reporting—that is, research⁹ and stakeholder feedback¹⁰ indicate that preparers are already moving to meet investor-led demand

Note that Treasury's public consultation is still ongoing and will close on 17 February 2023.

See the <u>AASB Evidence-Informed Standard-Setting Framework</u>.

For example, see the <u>AASB-AUASB Research Report Climate-related disclosures and assurance in the Annual Reports of ASX-listed companies</u>.

For example, see February 2022 (M185) <u>Agenda Paper 3.5 Sustainability Reporting: Feedback summary—ITC 48 Extended External Reporting.</u>

- for climate-related financial information by reference to the Recommendations of the Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures; and
- (b) the New Zealand External Reporting Board (NZ XRB) faced a similar situation which saw them successfully implement a climate-first approach to address mandatory climate-related financial reporting as a matter of urgency¹¹ before turning to the development of a sector neutral voluntary sustainability reporting framework.¹²
- 15 Consequently, staff are of the view that the best way to balance the views of Australian stakeholders is to address the immediate need for climate-related financial reporting requirements as a separate project from the Sustainability Reporting project. That is, while the Board redeliberates its preliminary decisions and the [draft] Sustainability Reporting project plan, staff recommend the Board develop climate-related financial reporting requirements that can be applied, at least initially, independently of a broader sustainability reporting framework and standards. Such an approach would:
 - (a) provide the Board with sufficient time to redeliberate its approach to developing sustainability reporting requirements in Australia in the long-term while meeting the more immediate demand for climate-related financial reporting requirements;
 - (b) allow the Board to establish a foundation of work off which to build and develop future sustainability reporting requirements should the Board be the designated body responsible for setting sustainability reporting standards in the long-term; and
 - (c) be consistent with the climate-first approach taken by the NZ XRB (see paragraph 14(b)), and as such would be more consistent with the <u>Trans-Tasman Harmonisation Policy</u>.
- Such an approach would also permit the Board to amend (if necessary) climate-related financial reporting requirements based on future decisions made in relation to the long-term approach to sustainability reporting. For example, so that the climate-related financial reporting requirements can be absorbed into a broader sustainability reporting framework and standards if needed in future.

Staff recommendation and question to Board members

Consistent with the stakeholder feedback received to date and the preliminary decisions made by the Board, staff consider that the best way to address the short-term demand for climate-related financial reporting requirements while permitting the Board sufficient time to redeliberate its approach to broader sustainability reporting is for the Board to address climate-related financial reporting as a separate project. Consequently, staff recommend adding a project to the AASB work program to develop climate-related financial reporting requirements in Australia.

See Agenda Paper 4.1 for an update on the NZ XRB's Aotearoa New Zealand Climate Standards.

See the NZ XRB <u>Sustainability Reporting project webpage</u>.

Question to Board members

Q1: Do Board members agree with staff recommendation in paragraph 17 to add a project to the AASB work program to develop climate-related financial reporting requirements for Australia?

Positioning climate-related financial reporting requirements under the Sustainability Reporting project umbrella

- To help staff develop the [draft] Sustainability Reporting project plan, the Board made the following preliminary decisions in its February 2022 (M185) and April 2022 (M186) meetings:¹³
 - (a) to develop a separate suite of sustainability reporting standards alongside the existing Australian Accounting Standards, and address climate as the first sustainability reporting topic. The Board further clarified that while climate would be the first topic to be addressed, it would not be the only topic and it intends to consider other sustainability reporting topics at a later stage;
 - (b) use the work of the IFRS Foundation's International Sustainability Standards Board (ISSB) as a foundation, with modifications for Australian matters and requirements. The Board further clarified that the focus for the project should be to prioritise international alignment and amend international sustainability-related financial reporting requirements where it is necessary to do so to meet the needs of Australian stakeholders;
 - (c) to focus initially on the development of reporting requirements for sustainabilityrelated financial information, which is consistent with the scope of the ISSB's work;
 - (d) the initial scope of the project relates to the for-profit sectors, with NFP sectors being considered at a later stage; and
 - (e) to apply its existing <u>Due Process Framework for Setting Standards</u> to preliminary work on the Sustainability Reporting project.
- In May 2022 (M187) the Board decided to implement the [draft] Sustainability Reporting plan. 14
- At this stage, staff are not recommending that the Board alter its approach to sustainability reporting or the [draft] Sustainability Reporting project plan. Instead, staff consider that the Board's preliminary decisions and [draft] Sustainability Reporting project plan are suitable for the purpose of developing climate-related financial reporting requirements. In particular, staff recommend that a climate-related financial reporting project build off the Board's preliminary decisions and [draft] Sustainability Reporting project plan in the following ways:
 - (a) consistent with the preliminary decision per paragraph 18(a), climate-related financial reporting requirements would be developed as separate reporting requirements (or in a separate standard) alongside existing Australian Accounting Standards;
 - (b) consistent with the preliminary decision per paragraph 18(b), the Climate-related Financial Reporting project would prioritise international alignment and use the work

See February 2022 (M185) Action Alert and April 2022 (M186) Action Alert.

¹⁴ See May 2022 (M187) Action Alert.

- of the ISSB as a foundation, with modifications for Australian matters and requirements where necessary to meet the needs of Australian stakeholders;
- (c) consistent with the preliminary decisions per paragraph 18(c) and (d), the terms of recent funding to the AASB and Treasury's recent public consultation (see paragraph 12), the development of climate-related financial reporting requirements would, at least initially, be focused on the for-profit sectors; and
- (d) consistent with the preliminary decisions per paragraph 18(e), the existing <u>Due Process Framework for Setting Standards</u> would be applied to the work on the Climate-related Financial Reporting project.
- The [draft] Sustainability Reporting project plan was developed on the basis of the Board's preliminary decisions in paragraph 18. Consequently, staff also recommend that where relevant the development of a Climate-related Financial Reporting project plan be aligned with the [draft] Sustainability Reporting project plan (see Appendix A).

Staff recommendation and question to Board members

To ensure consistency between a [draft] Climate-related Financial Reporting project plan and the [draft] Sustainability Reporting project plan, staff recommend the Board confirm the application of its preliminary decisions (see paragraph 18) and the [draft] Sustainability Reporting project plan (see Appendix A) to its work on developing climate-related financial reporting requirements.

Question to Board members

Q2: Do Board members agree with the staff recommendation to continue to apply its preliminary decisions and the [draft] Sustainability Reporting project plan to its work on developing climate-related reporting requirements?

Appendix A—[draft] Sustainability Reporting project plan (May 2022)

Executive summary

Overall objective of the project

- A1. The objective of the sustainability reporting project is to:
 - (a) develop reporting requirements for sustainability-related financial information ¹⁵ for general purpose financial reporting to meet the evolving information needs of primary users; ¹⁶ and
 - (b) improve the consistency, completeness, comparability and verifiability of sustainability-related financial disclosures¹⁷.
- A2. Consistent with the Board's preliminary discussions in February 2022 (see paragraph 3), the project will initially focus on developing sustainability-related financial reporting requirements for the for-profit sector. At a later stage, the project will consider such requirements for not-for-profit (NFP) private and public sector entities.
- A3. This focus is consistent with the Financial Reporting Council's (FRC) strategic direction to the Board and the Board's strategic objectives, which state that the Board should:
 - (a) maintain compliance with IFRS Standards for publicly accountable entities; ¹⁸ and
 - (b) use IFRS Standards as a base for determining the reporting requirements for all other entities, modified as appropriate, in accordance with the Board's <u>Due Process</u>

 Framework for Setting Standards. 19
- A4. To meet those objectives (both the project objectives and, more broadly, the Board's strategic objectives), this project aims to:
 - (a) develop a separate suite of standards that specifically address sustainability-related financial disclosures made as part of general purpose financial reporting; and
 - (b) prioritise international alignment by using the work of the IFRS Foundation's ISSB as a foundation, with modification for Australian matters and requirements when necessary.

Key matters this project aims to address

A5. In 2019 the IFRS Foundation Trustees identified the global consistency of the reporting of sustainability-related information as a critical matter for consideration in its five-year strategy. Following a period of international engagement with stakeholders, in November 2021, the IFRS Foundation announced the establishment of the ISSB to help meet the

¹⁵ Sustainability-related financial information is defined in Appendix A of Exposure Draft on [Draft] IFRS S1

General Requirements for Disclosure of Sustainability-related Financial Information (Exposure Draft on [Draft] IFRS S1) as being information that gives insight into sustainability-related risks and opportunities that affect enterprise value, providing a sufficient basis for users of general purpose financial reporting to assess the resources and relationships on which an entity's business model and strategy for sustaining and developing that model depend.

¹⁶ Note that international alignment is considered to be a priority in meeting the evolving needs of primary users of general purpose financial reporting.

¹⁷ Sustainability-related financial disclosures is defined in Appendix A of Exposure Draft on [Draft] IFRS S1 as being disclosures about sustainability-related risks and opportunities that are useful to users of general purpose financial reporting when they assess an entity's enterprise value, including information about its governance, strategy and risk management, and related metrics and targets.

¹⁸ Staff note that IFRS Standards now include both accounting and sustainability-related financial reporting standards.

¹⁹ As far as is practicable, staff will also look to the guidance in the Board's *For-Profit Entity Standard-Setting Framework*.

demand for transparent, consistent and comparable reporting of sustainability-related information. The intention is for the ISSB to deliver a global baseline of disclosure standards for sustainability-related information that will provide investors and other capital market participants with decision-useful information about entities' sustainability-related risks and opportunities to help them make informed decisions. ²⁰

- A6. There is currently no national approach to sustainability reporting in Australia. This has led to the development of a diverse range of legislation and guidance by individual Australian government and industry bodies about a wide range of sustainability reporting topics. This project will aim to address the following:
 - (a) developing a national approach to sustainability-related financial reporting which prioritises international alignment and addresses sustainability-related topics that stakeholders identify as being material; and
 - (b) improving the consistency and comparability of sustainability-related financial disclosures made as part of general purpose financial reporting.
- A7. This project will be undertaken over several stages in the short-to-medium term:
 - **Stage 1.1** of this project will, based on the ongoing work of the ISSB, seek to develop sustainability-related financial reporting requirements for for-profit sector entities for sustainability and climate-related financial information. There may be a need for amendments or modifications for Australian matters arising from:
 - (a) outcomes of research (see paragraph A43);
 - (b) comparison of the work of the ISSB with other sustainability reporting standards and frameworks and sustainability-related financial reporting requirements being developed and introduced in other jurisdictions (for example, New Zealand); and
 - (c) outreach with Australian stakeholders (see paragraphs A11 and A42).

In **Stage 1.2** of this project, the draft project plan will be reconsidered, and amendments made based on the outcomes of **Stage 1.1** and ongoing global developments. The success of the ISSB depends on the success of its two initial standards addressing sustainability and climate-related financial information. If international alignment is not achieved for these two standards, or it is concluded that the two standards are not in the best interests of the Australian economy, the Board may decide to take a different approach to sustainability-related financial reporting going forward.

Stage 1.3 of this project will, based on the outcomes of previous stages, seek to contribute to the future work of the ISSB through an anticipated ISSB agenda consultation which will determine which sustainability-related topics should be addressed on completion of the standards on general sustainability and climate-related financial topics. Consistent with the ISSB's planned approach, this stage will also consider any potential changes to the Due Process Framework (or developing a specific due process framework) based on the outcomes of previous stages.

A8. This project will be undertaken over several stages in the long term:

Stage 2.1 of this project will initially focus on developing sustainability-related financial reporting requirements for for-profit sector entities.

Stage 2.2 of this project will, based on the outcomes of **Stage 2.1** (and similar to the approach for AASB Accounting Standards), seek to develop sustainability-related financial reporting requirements for different types of entities within the for-profit sector (for

²⁰ See the IFRS Foundation Trustees' <u>Feedback Statement on the Consultation Paper on Sustainability Reporting</u>.

example, through considering modifications or a tiered reporting regime intended to reduce the burden of reporting for smaller for-profit entities).

- **Stage 2.3** of this project will explore developing sustainability-related financial reporting requirements for NFP sector entities.
- A9. The stages outlined in paragraphs A7 and A8 are not independent or cyclical. That is, there will potentially be a significant degree of overlap between stages and as a result, work described in later stages may be considered as part of the work in earlier stages of the project. For example, staff will continue to engage in outreach and research with NFP sector entities throughout all stages of the project despite the draft project plan indicating that specific requirements for NFP sector entities will likely only be considered after requirements for for-profit sector entities have been developed.
- A10. The following draft project plan focuses on the stages in the short-to-medium term as described in paragraph A7.

Key stakeholders

A11. Sustainability-related financial reporting will impact a broad range of stakeholders due to the nature of the topics which could be addressed. Furthermore, staff anticipate that stakeholders may change depending on the sustainability-related topic being addressed.

Impacted stakeholders – sustainability-related financial disclosures (general)	Why?
Primary users of general purpose financial reporting—existing and potential investors, lenders and other creditors	Users
Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC)	Regulator of for-profit sector entities
Australian Prudential Regulation Authority (APRA)	Supervisor of relevant banking, insurance and superannuation institutions.
Professional services firms and professional bodies (including non-accounting professional services firms and bodies)	Auditors, Consultants & Advisors
For-profit sector entities	Preparers
Impacted stakeholders – climate-related disclosures	Why?
Primary users of general purpose financial reporting—existing and potential investors, lenders and other creditors	Users
ASIC	Regulator of for-profit sector entities

Impacted stakeholders – climate-related disclosures (cont.)	Why?
APRA	Supervisor of relevant banking, insurance and superannuation institutions.
Clean Energy Regulator	Regulator of the National Greenhouse and Energy Reporting Act 2007
Bureau of Meteorology	Regulator of the Water Act 2007
Professional services firms and professional bodies (including non-accounting professional services firms and bodies)	Auditors, Consultants & Advisors
For-profit sector entities	Preparers
Other users—for example, Australian Bureau of Statistics, NFP public sector government entities, etc.	Users (not identified as primary users)

Objectives and project outcomes

Objectives and outcomes of the project

- A12. The objective of this project is to:
 - (a) help preparers of general purpose financial reports meet the evolving information needs of primary users by developing reporting requirements for sustainability-related financial information; and
 - (b) improve the consistency, completeness, comparability and verifiability of sustainability-related financial disclosures.
- A13. Subject to future Board decisions, global developments and feedback from stakeholders, the project will occur in three stages as outlined in paragraph A7.

Expected benefits

- A14. Staff consider that the expected benefits of this project will be:
 - (a) improved usefulness of general purpose financial reports through better meeting the information needs of primary users of general purpose financial reporting; and
 - (b) improved consistency, completeness, comparability and verifiability of sustainabilityrelated financial information disclosed as part of general purpose financial reporting.
- A15. The expected benefits are consistent with the guiding principles in the IFRS/AASB *Conceptual Framework for Financial Reporting*.

Priority of the Sustainability Reporting project

- A16. Staff consider the priority and importance of this project to be **high** as a result of:
 - (a) the rapid pace of related global developments in sustainability-related financial reporting; 21 and

²¹ See Agenda Paper 3.1 *AASB Agenda Consultation 2022-2026—Cover memo* and February 2022 (M185) Agenda Paper 3.2 *Background to global sustainability reporting*.

- (b) feedback from respondents to ITC 46 AASB Agenda Consultation 2022-2026: ²²
 - (i) all respondents commented that sustainability reporting is important to them;
 - (ii) almost all respondents were supportive of the Board expanding its scope of activities to include sustainability reporting, with most commenting that the Sustainability Reporting project should be considered a high priority for the Board; and
 - (iii) most respondents observed an increase in demand from a wide range of stakeholders for more transparent, consistent and comparable sustainability-related information, with some highlighting the potential economic consequences should Australia not meet that global demand.

AASB Strategic objectives

A17. This project supports the AASB's Strategic Objectives in the following ways:

#	AASB Strategic Objectives	Link to this project
1	Develop, issue and maintain principles-based, Australian accounting and reporting standards and guidance that meet the needs of external report users (including financial reports) and are capable of being assured and enforced. For 'publicly accountable' entities maintain IFRS compliance; for others, use IFRS Standards (where they exist), and transaction neutrality (modified as necessary), or develop Australian-specific standards and guidance.	Directly linked—this project seeks to develop a new suite of standards for sustainability-related financial reporting topics for disclosure in general purpose financial reports. This will improve the usefulness of financial reporting through improved transparency, consistency and comparability of sustainability-related financial information and help preparers better meet the evolving information needs of primary users.
2	With the Auditing and Assurance Standards Board (AUASB), play a leading role in reshaping the Australian external reporting framework by working with regulators to develop objective criteria on: • who prepares external reports (including financial reports) • the nature and extent of assurance required on these external reports.	Directly linked—this project seeks to reshape the Australian external reporting framework through the development of a suite of standards for sustainability-related financial reporting. Throughout this project, it is the staff's intention to work with the AUASB and regulators in order to meet this strategic objective.
3	Actively influence IASB, IPSASB standards and other international accounting and external reporting standards and guidance by demonstrating thought leadership and enhancing key international relationships.	Indirectly linked—this project can inform and influence the work of the ISSB and other national standard-setters seeking to address sustainability-related financial reporting in their jurisdictions. Where appropriate to do so, this project will seek to contribute directly to the work of the ISSB, IPSASB and other relevant standard-setters and framework providers.

²² See Agenda Paper 3.1 and February 2022 (M185) Agenda Paper 3.4 Feedback summary—ITC 46 AASB Agenda Consultation 2022-2026.

#	AASB Strategic Objectives	Link to this project
4	Attain significant levels of key stakeholder engagement through collaboration, partnership and outreach.	Directly linked—undertaking this project will require significant collaboration with a broad range of stakeholders—both accounting and non-accounting (see paragraph A11).
5	Influence initiatives to develop standards and guidance that meet user needs for external reporting integral to financial reporting.	Directly linked—one of the objectives of this project is to help preparers meet the evolving information needs of primary users of general purpose financial reporting.
6	Monitor and respond to, or lead on, emerging issues impacting the development of accounting and external reporting standards and guidance, including changing technologies.	Directly linked—this project will directly address the emerging issues related to the reporting of sustainability-related financial information in general purpose financial reports through the development of a separate suite of reporting standards.
7	Develop guidance and education initiatives, or promote development by others, to enhance consistent application of accounting and external reporting standards and guidance.	See also AASB Strategic Objective #1. Directly linked—one of the objectives of this project is to improve the consistency, completeness, comparability and verifiability of sustainability-related financial disclosures made in general purpose financial reports. See also AASB Strategic Objectives #1 and #6.

Cross-cutting projects

- A18. Staff note there are several existing and potential cross-cutting projects relating to sustainability-related financial reporting:
 - (a) Service Performance Reporting project—The Board initiated the Service Performance Reporting project in 2009 in response to feedback received about the needs of NFP private entity financial statement users and, in August 2015, published ED 270 Reporting Service Performance Information. Feedback received was discussed at the Board's December 2016 meeting. ²³ The Board noted that feedback generally agreed with the proposed objectives and principles of ED 270. However, the Board noted some concerns such as the overlaps between ED 270, the reporting frameworks and government reporting requirements. To further understand related user needs, staff conducted and published the AASB Research Report 14: Literature Review: Service Performance Reporting for Not-for-profits in February 2020. The findings of the Research Report provide international evidence that stakeholders prefer that NFPs report service performance information (such as output-based or outcome-based effectiveness) rather than financial statement information.

²³ See December 2016 Agenda Papers <u>13.0 Cover Memo</u> and <u>13.1 Comments on ED 270</u>.

This project was temporarily withdrawn from the work program because the Board intends to prioritise the NFP reporting framework. Consequently, at its February 2021 meeting, the Board tentatively decided not to include any service performance reporting proposals in the NFP reporting framework consultation document, subject to clear communication of how it would address this topic and feedback from relevant regulators on the interaction of this decision with their priorities. The Board reiterated the importance of service performance reporting information to users of the financial statements of NFP private sector entities. Still, the Board acknowledged that complexities in developing proposals in this regard might disproportionately delay progress on the differential reporting framework.²⁴

As noted in Agenda Paper 3.1 AASB Agenda Consultation 2022-2026—Cover memo, as part of ITC 46, stakeholders were asked if this project should continue to be considered by the Board. Feedback to ITC 46 indicated that many respondents view service performance reporting as similar to sustainability reporting for for-profit sector entities. Consequently, some respondents to ITC 46 suggested that service performance reporting be addressed as part of the Sustainability Reporting project. The Board will consider whether to add the project to its work program at a future Board meeting.

- (b) Tax Transparency Code—This project aims to develop guidance to assist businesses in meeting the Tax Transparency Code (TTC) recommendations for the suggested tax reconciliation and calculation of the TTC Effective Tax Rate (ETR).
 - Some respondents to ITC 46 highlighted tax transparency disclosures (such as those suggested by the TTC) as a sustainability-related topic that could be addressed as part of the Sustainability Reporting project.
- (c) Extractive Activities project—the scope of the project is to (i) ascertain whether disclosure requirements in IFRS 6 Exploration for and Evaluation of Mineral Resources need to be amended to better meet the information needs of primary users of general purpose financial statements; and (ii) to remove the temporary status of the Standard. Given the nature of activities accounted for applying IFRS 6, there is a possibility that disclosure requirements could be amended to include sustainability-related financial information which directly affects an entity's financial statements (for example, sustainability-related financial reporting matters related to nature²⁵ and the disclosure of reserve and resource quantities).
- (d) International Accounting Standards Board (IASB) Third Agenda Consultation²⁶— several projects related to sustainability-related financial reporting matters were highlighted by respondents to the IASB's <u>Request for Information Third Agenda Consultation</u>. The following projects relate to sustainability-related financial reporting topics for which respondents considered to be of a high priority: ^{27, 28}
 - (i) Climate-related risks—respondents to the IASB's Third Agenda Consultation commented that information on climate-related risks is not only a matter for sustainability reporting but can also have a material effect on recognition, measurement and disclosure in the financial statements. Respondents also

²⁴ See February 2021 (M179) Action Alert.

²⁵ Defined by the Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures as Land, Ocean, Freshwater and Atmosphere (see https://tnfd.global/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/220321-TNFD-framework-beta-v0.1-Exec-Summary-FINAL.pdf).

²⁶ In March 2021 the IASB published the <u>Request for Information Third Agenda Consultation</u>.

²⁷ See IASB November 2021 Agenda Paper <u>24D Third Agenda Consultation</u>: *Feedback summary—Potential projects (part 1)*.

²⁸ See IFRS - IASB Update April 2022.

- observed that connectivity between financial and sustainability reporting would need to be considered if entities are to provide a comprehensive picture. At its April 2022 meeting, the IASB tentatively decided to add this project to its work plan.
- (ii) Pollutant pricing mechanisms—respondents to the IASB's Third Agenda Consultation commented that there are new pollutant pricing mechanisms and an increasing number of companies using them to meet their climate commitments which can have a material effect on financial statements. At its April 2022 meeting, the IASB tentatively decided to add this project to a reserve list of projects that could be added to the work plan only if additional capacity becomes available.

Depending on how such sustainability-related topics will be addressed by the IASB (or jointly by the IASB and ISSB), the work of the Sustainability Reporting project could be affected.

- (e) IFRS Foundation's International Financial Reporting Standards Interpretations Committee (Interpretations Committee)—historically, the Interpretations Committee has considered several sustainability-related financial reporting topics. For example:
 - (i) Negative Low Emission Vehicle Credits—IAS 37 Provisions, Contingent

 Liabilities and Contingent Assets (open for comment until 12 April 2022)—the
 Interpretations Committee tentatively concluded that, the principles and
 requirements in IFRS Accounting Standards provide an adequate basis for an
 entity to determine whether, in the specific facts and circumstances
 described in the submission, an entity has an obligation that meets the
 definition of a liability in IAS 37; and
 - (ii) <u>Economic Benefits from Use of a Windfarm—IFRS 16 Leases</u>—the Interpretations Committee concluded that, given the specific facts and circumstances provided by the submission, the retailer does not have the right to obtain substantially all the economic benefits from use of the windfarm and therefore the agreement does not contain a lease.

Staff expect that, as sustainability-related financial reporting becomes more prominent as a result of the work of the ISSB and sustainability-related topics are considered jointly by both the IASB and ISSB, the Interpretations Committee will receive further submissions on sustainability-related topics which could affect the Sustainability Reporting project.

Project team and responsibilities

Name	Role	Responsibility
Nikole Gyles	Technical Director	 Strategic and technical advice Review and project direction Content expert Outreach with key/strategic stakeholders
Siobhan Hammond	Project Lead	 Planning and resource oversight Technical drafting and recommendations (for example, submissions to other standard-setting bodies) Content expert Project planning and management Outreach with all stakeholders
To be determined	Project managers/ Assistant project managers	 Assisting with technical drafting and/or recommendations (for example, submissions to other standard-setting bodies) Assisting with all stakeholder outreach

Specialist knowledge and how to source it

- A19. Sustainability covers a broad range of topics in addition to climate, such as:
 - (a) indigenous and human rights;
 - (b) modern slavery;
 - (c) biodiversity;
 - (d) data privacy and management; and
 - (e) environment and nature.
- A20. It is likely that sustainability-related topics will be addressed by developing individual standards. Given the nature of those sustainability-related topics, the stakeholders impacted will likely change based on what topic is being addressed—for example, climate and emissions reporting specialists will not have the relevant expertise to prepare disclosures on indigenous and human rights.
- A21. Subject to available resources, staff recommend that, where appropriate, the expertise of external consultants or secondees be sought to assist with the development of sustainability-related financial reporting requirements.
 - Sustainability Reporting Project Advisory Panel
- A22. The Sustainability Reporting Project Advisory Panel²⁹ is an expert panel jointly formed by the AASB and AUASB. The Panel is an informal consultative group only, not a formal decision-making group. Panel members act in an advisory capacity, providing specific and industry technical expertise and the perspective(s) of the Panel member and their organisation.

²⁹ For additional details refer to: https://www.aasb.gov.au/current-projects/advisory-committees/sustainability-reporting/

Assumptions, risks and other considerations

Assumptions and constraints

- A23. Assumptions made in this draft project plan are:
 - (a) the Board will continue to be the government body responsible for developing reporting requirements for sustainability-related financial information;
 - (b) there will be sufficient resources to complete this project, including funding and external resources potentially needed for current and future stages of the project; and
 - (c) the ISSB will establish itself and successfully position itself as the global leader in developing reporting requirements for sustainability-related financial information.

A24. Constraints on this project include:

- (a) resourcing—given the specific nature of some sustainability-related topics (for example, human rights), securing relevant expertise during the development of related reporting requirements will likely be challenging given that, as highlighted by many respondents to ITC 46, there is currently a lack of relevant expertise in the Australian market;³⁰ and
- (b) timing—given the rapid pace of global developments, ISSB work may not be exposed for public consultation for long periods. That is, comment periods on documents open for public consultation will be shorter than usual and could affect the quality of feedback staff can obtain.

Key project delivery risks

Risk	Risk assessment	Potential impacts	Mitigation strategy	Residual risk
Low engagement during outreach as a result of stakeholder burnout (i.e., due to the start-up phase of the ISSB's work, staff expect outreach will be needed more than usual for a range of publications such as exposure drafts, discussion papers and other consultation papers)	High	Issues may not be identified in a timely manner, causing delays	Build on and continue to manage existing sustainability reporting stakeholder database and develop suitable communication strategies based on the outreach being sought	Moderate
Low engagement during outreach as a result of not having access to the most	High	Issues may not be identified in a timely manner,	Build on and continue to manage existing sustainability reporting stakeholder database	Low

 $^{^{30}}$ See February 2022 (M185) Agenda Paper $\underline{3.4}.$

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Risk	Risk assessment	Potential impacts	Mitigation strategy	Residual risk
appropriate stakeholders		causing delays The quality of feedback may be compromised by irrelevant feedback	Leverage off relationships with existing sustainability reporting stakeholders and identify and build relationships with appropriate stakeholders	
Staff resourcing	High	Delays caused by lack of staff resources	Securing sufficient staff with the relevant level of expertise (see paragraphs A19-A22)	Moderate
Staff resourcing changeover	Low	Delays caused by handover activities	Detailed project planning and documentation for managed handovers	Low
Unexpected feedback/issues causing delay	High	More resourcing and/or time may be required to resolve and consult on solutions to identified issues resulting in delays	Timely outreach on key proposals and publications to identify and manage any issues early	Moderate

Specific sector considerations

- A25. In its initial stages, the project seeks to only develop reporting requirements for sustainability-related financial information for for-profit sector entities. In later stages of the project, the development of such reporting requirements will be considered for NFP sector entities.
- A26. Staff expect that, given the nature of sustainability-related financial information, reporting requirements for such information will differ from IFRS Accounting Standards in that sector or industry-specific considerations will be required for some sustainability-related financial reporting topics. For example, Appendix B of Exposure Draft on [Draft] IFRS S2 Climate-related Disclosures includes proposals for industry-specific technical protocols for greenhouse gas emissions and other disclosures.

Relevant Standards, Legislation and Regulations

A27. As noted at the Board's February 2022 meeting, there is currently no national approach to sustainability reporting in Australia, which has led to a diverse range of legislation and guidance being developed by individual Australian government and industry bodies. ³¹

 $^{^{31}}$ See February 2022 (M185) Agenda Paper $\underline{3.3~Australian~and~selected~jurisdictional~perspectives}.$

- A28. The Australian legislation and guidance identified in this draft project plan are not for broad application. The key Australian legislation and guidance included in this draft project plan generally applies to specific market participants and are not broadly applied outside of their intended scope.
- A29. As noted at the Board's February 2022 meeting, staff identified the following Australian legislation and guidance via:³²
 - (a) Outreach—as part of outreach meetings for ITC 46 and ITC 48 Extended External Reporting, staff asked preparers which sustainability standards and frameworks they applied (including any sustainability-related Australian legislation or guidance); and
 - (b) Research—staff reviewed sustainability reports issued by the largest 20 companies listed on the Australian Stock Exchange (ASX) to identify which sustainability standards and frameworks (including any sustainability-related Australian legislation or guidance) they applied when preparing their reports.
- A30. Outreach and research identified the following key pieces of sustainability-related Australian legislation and guidance:

Relevant legislation and guidance	Reason relevant
National Greenhouse and Energy Reporting Act 2007	The national framework for measuring, reporting and disseminating company information about greenhouse gas emissions, energy production, energy consumption and other information specific under NGER legislation.
Water Act 2007	The national water information service that accurately monitors, assesses and forecasts the availability, condition and use of Australian water resources.
Modern Slavery Act 2018	Establishes national modern slavery reporting requirements. The reporting requirements apply to large companies and other entities in the Australian market with annual consolidated revenue of at least AUD\$100 million and supports the Australian business community to identify and address their modern slavery risks and maintain responsible and transparent supply chains.
Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012	Requires non-public sector employers with 100 or more employees to lodge reports each year to the Workplace Gender Equality Agency.
ASIC Regulatory Guides	In September 2018, ASIC set out their recommendations relating to the consideration and disclosure of climate risk in Report 593 Climate risk disclosure by Australia's listed companies (Report 593).
	In August 2019 ASIC updated its existing regulatory guidance to address the disclosure of climate-related risks and opportunities. The updates were made to:
	 Regulatory Guide 228 Prospectuses: Effective disclosure for retail investors (RG 228); and
	Regulatory Guide 247 Effective disclosure in an operating and financial review (RG 247).

³² See February 2022 (M185) Agenda Paper <u>3.3</u>.

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Relevant legislation and guidance	Reason relevant
Australian Stock Exchange (ASX) Corporate Governance Principles and Recommendations	Issued in February 2019 for application for financial years beginning on or after 1 January 2020, the ASX Corporate Governance Council's <u>fourth edition of the ASX Corporate</u> <u>Governance Principles and Recommendations</u> (ASX Principles and Recommendations) now make reference to climate-related risk.
APRA Prudential Practice Guide CPG 229 Climate Change Financial Risks	In November 2021, APRA issued <u>Prudential Practice Guide CPG</u> 229 <u>Climate Change Financial Risks</u> (CPG 229). While not mandatory, CPG 229 aims to assist APRA-regulated institutions in complying with Prudential Standards CPS 220 <u>Risk</u> <u>Management</u> , SPS 220 <u>Risk Management</u> , CPS 510 <u>Governance</u> , SPS 510 <u>Governance</u> and, more generally, to outline prudent practices in relation to climate change financial risk management.

A31. In addition, staff observed that the ISSB is seeking to align several key concepts in their work with those in the IFRS Conceptual Framework for Financial Reporting, IAS 1 Presentation of Financial Statements and IAS 8 Accounting Policies, Changes in Accounting Estimates and Errors:

Relevant Standards	Reason relevant
IFRS/AASB Conceptual Framework for Financial Reporting	Guiding principles of the <i>Conceptual Framework for Financial Reporting</i> are being applied by the ISSB in the development of sustainability-related financial reporting requirements (for example, the definition of material and explanation of the reporting entity).
IAS 1/AASB 101 Presentation of Financial Statements	Guiding concepts in IAS 1 are being applied by the ISSB in the development of sustainability-related financial reporting requirements (for example, guidance for applying the definition of material, comparative disclosures and sources of estimation uncertainty).
IAS 8/AASB 108 Accounting Policies, Changes in Accounting Estimates and Errors	Guiding concepts in IAS 8 are being applied by the ISSB in the development of sustainability-related financial reporting requirements (for example, errors and changes in estimates).

Interaction with the ISSB and the GRI

A32. In February 2022, the Board tentatively decided to use the work of the ISSB as a foundation, with modifications for Australian matters and requirements. However, to prioritise international alignment and be consistent with the project's proposed scope, staff will continue to engage with other national standard-setters and sustainability reporting standard-setters and framework providers. In particular, as respondents to ITC 46 and ITC 48 observed that the GRI Standards are most commonly applied in Australia for broader

- sustainability reporting, staff plan to engage with the GRI to minimise any perceived or potential areas of conflict. 33
- A33. That is, the work of the ISSB will be the Board's starting point. Staff will then engage in a range of outreach, including outreach with (i) relevant Australian stakeholders; (ii) other national standard-setters; and (iii) the GRI; to determine whether modifications are required for Australian matters and requirements.

Interaction with the AUASB

- A34. Respondents to ITC 46 highlighted that as the Board considers the development of reporting requirements for sustainability-related financial information, it should also consider the auditability of such information. The November 2021 FRC, AASB and AUASB <u>Position</u>

 <u>Statement on Extended External Reporting and Assurance</u> also stated that the AUASB intends to simultaneously update relevant assurance standards while the AASB develops relevant reporting requirements.
- A35. Where appropriate, staff will be liaising with relevant AUASB staff. One way in which staff are already working together is through the Sustainability Reporting Project Advisory Panel (see paragraph A22). Staff also plan to include relevant AUASB staff in outreach meetings where appropriate.

Consideration of New Zealand sustainability-related standards

- A36. In September 2020 the New Zealand Government announced its intention to implement mandatory reporting on climate risks and opportunities to build on the progress already made to tackle the climate crisis. To support the establishment of a climate-related disclosure framework, the Financial Sector (Climate-related Disclosures and Other Matters) Amendment Bill 2021 (the Bill) allows for the External Reporting Board (XRB) to issue guidance on ESG matters. As part of this process, the XRB was tasked with establishing a climate-related disclosure framework that:
 - (a) is based on the TCFD Recommendations;
 - (b) is expected to be accompanied by guidelines; and
 - (c) will include a series of transitional provisions to enable climate reporting entities to begin their disclosure journey.
- A37. In October 2021, the XRB published the public consultation document <u>Climate-related</u>
 <u>Disclosures: Governance and Risk Management (Aotearoa New Zealand Climate Standard 1)</u>.

 The comment period closed in November 2021 and in February 2022 the XRB published <u>What we heard: Governance and Risk Management sections of NZ CS 1 Consultation</u>
 <u>feedback</u>. The overall approach taken by the XRB received strong support, particularly the principles-based approach and close alignment with the TCFD Recommendations.
- A38. In March 2022, the XRB published the second public consultation document <u>Climate-related Disclosures: Strategy and Metrics and Targets (Aotearoa New Zealand Climate Standard 1)</u>, the comment period for which closed 2 May 2022. Note that the public consultation document does identify instances where the proposed requirements of NZ CS 1 deviate from the those proposed by the IFRS Foundation <u>Technical Readiness Working Group (TRWG)</u> <u>Climate-related Disclosure prototype</u> standard. However, a comparison of the proposed requirements of NZ CS 1 to the recently published <u>Exposure Draft on [Draft] IFRS S2 Climate-related Disclosures</u> has yet to be performed.

³³ Note that in March 2022, the GRI and IFRS Foundation signed a Memorandum of Understanding which seeks to align capital market and multi-stakeholder standards to create an interconnected approach for sustainability disclosures (see: https://www.ifrs.org/news-and-events/news/2022/03/ifrs-foundation-signs-agreement-with-gri/).

A39. A formal exposure draft of the proposed XRB climate-related standard (or standards) is also expected to be published in July 2022, with a final standard (or standards) expected by December 2022.

Project timeline—medium to short-term timeline based on the initial work of the ISSB

- A40. Consistent with the proposed work of the ISSB, the following project timeline focuses on:
 - (a) the initial development of reporting requirements for general sustainability and climate-related financial information; and
 - (b) the initial work of the ISSB in determining the next sustainability-related topics to be addressed.

Milestone	Target (Board, stakeholders, other)	Date
Stage 1.1	1	
Exposure Drafts – development and approval	Board	April 2022
 In addition to the ISSB's Exposure Drafts, staff to develop Australian- specific preface and questions for the Exposure Drafts 		
Exposure Drafts - outreach	Stakeholders	April-June 2022
 Develop and issue communications, including details of outreach events, upon issuing the Exposure Drafts 		
Outreach		
Research		
 Comparison of the proposals of the Exposure Drafts with international sustainability reporting standards and frameworks 		

Summary of feedback and deliberation	Board	June-July 2022
Summary of outreach results		
 Recommendation and decision on submission (or submissions) to the ISSB 		
Stage 1.2		
Drafting final pronouncements and approval	Board	August- December 2022
 Recommendation and decision on option to progress to final pronouncement stages (i.e., based on the final pronouncements issued by the ISSB) 		
 Updating the proposals of the Exposure Drafts based on amendments agreed with the Board (i.e., Australian modifications or requirements) 		
Post-issuing pronouncements	Stakeholders	August-
 Amendments required to other AASB pronouncements (if any) 		December 2022
Basis for Conclusions		
 Non-authoritative guidance (e.g., Australian-specific implementation or other guidance if needed) 		
Redeliberation of the draft project plan	Board	October-
 Recommendation and decision to adopt ISSB standards 		December 2022

Stage 1.3		
Request for Information (through an expected ISSB-led agenda consultation) – outreach	Stakeholders	October- December 2022
 Develop and issue communications, including details of outreach events, upon issue of the RFI 		
Outreach		
 Research 		
Recommendation and decision to amend existing Due Process Framework or develop a new due process framework	Board	December 2022-February 2023
 Consideration of any amendments to the IFRS Foundation's Due Process Framework 		

Stakeholder engagement and communication

Planned outreach for Stages 1.1-1.2

- A42. April 2022 (M186) Agenda Paper 3.1 *Cover Memo* provided an overview of the staff's proposed outreach plan for the initial two Exposure Drafts published by the ISSB. In particular, to obtain detailed and useful feedback on all aspects of the Exposure Drafts from both accountants and non-accountants, staff plan to engage in the following outreach should time allow:³⁴
 - (a) **Proactive stakeholder engagement**—for example, through one-on-one meetings, meetings with existing AASB advisory committees and request submissions directly from sustainability reporting stakeholders. Staff intend to target specifically:
 - (i) those stakeholders (both accounting and non-accounting) that provided feedback on sustainability reporting in their responses to ITC 46 and ITC 48 either through formal submissions or one-on-one meetings with staff; and
 - (ii) other sustainability reporting stakeholders (both accounting and non-accounting) which have been identified as being potentially impacted by sustainability reporting—for example, such as environmental consultants and accountants.
 - (b) Industry-based outreach—for example, Appendix B to Exposure Draft on [Draft] IFRS S2 Climate-related Disclosures (Exposure Draft on [Draft] IFRS S2) includes industry-specific metrics and definitions which must be applied when applying the requirements of the proposals in Exposure Draft on [Draft] IFRS S2. Staff intend to hold roundtable discussions with key industries in Australia (including, but not limited to, mining, oil and gas, superannuation funds, banking and consumer goods) to discuss specifically the proposed industry-based metrics.
 - (c) **Application**—to help the Board and other stakeholders determine the reporting outcomes of Exposure Draft on [Draft] IFRS S2, staff intend to seek both accounting

³⁴ Where appropriate staff will also include and liaise with the AUASB staff as part of all planned outreach.

and non-accounting volunteers to implement the proposals in Exposure Draft on [Draft] IFRS S2 and provide examples of what the reporting outcomes will look like.

Research activities

- A43. Staff note the following research activities have been, or are being, performed:
 - (a) Climate Scenario Disclosure (prepared by the University of Melbourne research team lead by Brad Potter)—this research focuses on climate scenario disclosure by the top 100 companies listed on the Australian Stock Exchange (ASX 100).³⁵
 - (b) The AUASB's current scholar is Dr. Shan Zhou. Dr. Zhou focuses on research on Extended External Reporting, which is a strategic priority area for the AUASB. Dr. Zhou is currently completing a literature review on the reporting and assurance of climate-related and other non-financial information, which will be issued as an AUASB Research Report.³⁶
 - (c) At its February 2022 meeting, the Board discussed a preliminary academic literature review that focused on:³⁷
 - (i) climate-related disclosures in a global setting; and
 - (ii) the boundaries of leading sustainability reporting standards and frameworks.
 - (d) The AASB and AUASB have jointly issued a research grant to the University of Sydney to help support their research on the reporting of climate risk in Australia.

³⁵ See May 2022 (M187) Agenda Paper 6.4 Research update on Climate Scenario Disclosure [Board only].

³⁶ See AUASB March 2022 (M128) Agenda Paper 10 AUASB Academic scholar update.

³⁷ See February 2022 (M185) Agenda Paper <u>3.6 Preliminary academic literature review</u>.