

Interview with Lydia Lassila, Australian Olympic aerial skier

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Australian aerial skier Lydia Lassila, who has won gold and bronze at the Winter Olympics, was among the more than 100 Olympians who petitioned world leaders to address climate change during the 2014 Games in Sochi, Russia.

She spoke to The Climate Institute as part of its [Sport & Climate Impacts: How much heat can sport handle?](#) report, released January 2015.

Why did you sign, led by US skier Andy Newell warning that climate change threatens winter sport and calling for action from world leaders?

Andy's letter really resonated with me prior to Sochi. As an athlete, it's easy to get lost in the preparation and focus of an approaching Olympic Games but no one can deny the grim statistics and impacts of climate change. To think the Winter Olympics may not exist in years to come is a sad thought. But only a small piece in the big picture and there is a lot more at stake, which is why I signed the letter.

In the letter, Andy's said that "once-consistent winters" no longer exist in Vermont, where he grew up. What's your experience?

I didn't grow up skiing in Australia and found winter sport when I was 17 years old. But since then my family have enjoyed the benefits of being able to ski on Australian soil.

Australian ski seasons are getting shorter and more unpredictable and if it continues down this way, my children, my grandchildren and their children won't get to experience snow in the Aussie alpine regions.

What do you think are the major impacts of climate change on snow sport?

Over the last 14 years of my career, I have seen a shift in pre-season training. It has become more unpredictable and it keeps getting pushed back later into the season not leaving much time to prepare for the World Cup circuit.

We have had to find 'early snow' on glaciers over 3,000 metres (which is not an ideal training altitude for our sport) or in the far north of Finland in order to guarantee we get the preseason training in. Less and less resorts will be able to host an Olympic Games and it threatens winter sport in general which affects sporting cultures particularly in the northern hemisphere.



What do shorter seasons and less predictable conditions mean for ski sport in Australia?

Our seasons are too short to get adequate amount of on-snow training. Given the unpredictable nature of our Aussie winter, many Australian athletes already train predominately at overseas facilities or resorts. Although I would like to train on home soil, I haven't been able to since 2009 due to inconsistency of the conditions.

The full Sport & Climate Impacts report and associated content such as infographics can be found at www.climateinstitute.org.au/sport-and-climate.html