2025 YEC Annual Report

57 Members

30 Schools

6 Across 6 regions: Adelaide, Northern and Yorke, Hills and Fleurieu, Kangaroo Island, Murraylands and Riverland, and Limestone Coast.

The Youth Environment Council (YEC) has been running annually since 1997, enabling likeminded 11 to 17-year-old SA students to share their passion for the environment and take action in their local communities.

Green Adelaide staff deliver the YEC through face-to-face and online forums involving; leadership training, skill development, collaboration, project planning and mentoring members to take action through a sustainability project of their choice.

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What environmental issues in their school or local community concern young people?

Biodiversity (animal focused)

- common starlings, house sparrows, common blackbirds, foxes, rabbits, deer, European carp and red fin cause a massive issue to ecosystems
- litter which makes animals like fish, turtles, birds, mammals and reptiles struggle to thrive
- lack of biodiversity
- native wildlife losing its habitat, ecosystems are weakened
- more invasive species overtaking the little native fauna left
- house cats being let loose outside, predating on native wildlife
- local species (e.g. Emu Wrens, and Yellow Tailed Black Cockatoos) not having enough suitable habitat

Biodiversity (plant focused)

- conservation of our natural environment
- trees getting knocked down for development
- not enough trees for shade and animal habitat
- soil degradation
- destruction of the Adelaide mangroves through increased salinity
- loss of native Australian plants through urbanization increasing and land cleared for development, farming and housing
- lack of green spaces
- invasive species, such as the non-native Blue Gums on Kangaroo Island
- no low vegetation and lack in multiple storeys of native plants consisting of the ground covers, low shrubs, bushes, under canopy and upper canopy

Waste

- waste and rubbish management
- litter/pollution control
- lack of recycling bins and knowing how to use them
- fast fashion
- food waste is a serious issue. Not only does this generate greenhouse gases when disposing of the waste, it also means wasting large amounts of water needed for food production
- litter/trash scattered across the school
- littering in my community

Community connection/ engagement

- lack of understanding of the environment by those in the community
- not many people seem to care about the environment
- as well as the little education and community there is no-one to enforce action towards these issues
- there is not any hands-on actions for students to connect to nature and gain education on biodiversity
- pollution from nearby industries or highways affects air and water quality, impacting community health
- students spending less time outdoors, which leads to a lack of connection with nature

Water (e.g. wetlands, rivers etc)

- pollution of the River Torrens
- algal blooms, invasive species and leaf litter
- lots of people litter and that rubbish ends up in the river
- water wastage (by people)
- off flow from farms into water ways
- River pollution from farming activities

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What environmental issues in their school or local community concern young people?

Coast and marine

- pollution in the ocean and river
- the Dolphin Sanctury
- lack of sea grasses, and lack of oysters in the Port River
- plastics from factories polluting the Port River
- dune care the planting and managing native plants in the dunes
- stop people driving on the beaches
- microplastics

Climate change

- excess of carbon emissions produced by everyday things such as transport, use of electricity/heat and product manufacturing/consumption
- unsustainable farming is a huge contributor to climate change
- high use of electricity in classrooms
- car use instead of taking buses
- efficient use of water and power
- my school uses a considerable amount of energy to power day-to-day
- a recent audit at my school found that the total carbon emissions produced by all of the school's sites was a total of 3,102 tons of CO_2
- lack of green urban spaces
- climate change causing urban heat and devastating fires

Cultural connection

- loss of Australian native plants

Food gardens

- non-sustainable farming
- not enough compost bins
- more vegetable gardens installed around the communities

What young people would change to address these issues in their school and/or community?

Biodiversity (animal focused)

- warn people about threats that the invasive animals have and what they can do to the habitats to protect native animals
- plant more Banksias, She-oaks, and Hakeas to attract more Yellow Tailed Black Cockatoos to our local community

Climate change

- have the lights off in classrooms more frequently as it would save a lot of electricity
- suggest for people to take the bus more often
- to avoid wasted energy, installing solar panel systems will be the best option
- address urban heat and climate resilience by increasing green spaces: expanding and creating more parks, community gardens, and green roofs can help absorb heat

Biodiversity (plant focused)

- the number of trees in the community
- educate people about the problems the mangroves of St Kilda and what their birdlife are up against
- restore native plant species by creating dedicated native gardens in schools and public spaces. But I don't just want to plant gardens, I want to create ecosystems
- native plants for students to grow themselves
- people should be encouraged to replace the invasive plant species for native one
- increase the green urban spaces in my community, but not with thirsty and unsustainable grasses and vegetation
- plant understoreys in the parklands to bring back the natural habitat, capture more carbon emissions from the atmosphere and create more biodiversity of plants and animals in Adelaide's back yard

Waste

- change the issues of mass consumption and mass waste caused by fast fashion by changing the awareness of others
- change the bin system at my school by getting more bins and a larger variety of appropriate colours and sizes
- join projects like the citizen science small plastics group to make a hands on difference. I would also share my learning and experience with my classmates
- implementing a stricter recycling system and reduce single-use plastics

Community connection/ engagement

- improve the general knowledge about the current problems with the environment through things like social media campaigns, supporting and promoting eco-friendly businesses and business practices
- create awareness on the impact of tourism and find solutions where the industry can survive without compromising the river and fish
- I would like to organise a community day and Youth Conference for students, community, and experts to come together and present their work

Coast and marine

- stop cars driving on the beaches

Water (e.g. wetlands, rivers etc)

- remove invasive plants and fish from the River Torrens, replacing them with native ones
- explore solutions on water access by farmers and reduce pollution

Food gardens

- educate and help farmers make more sustainable choices
- establishing veggie patches for students to care for
- plant fruit trees to help feed students and local residents
- plant native edible trees to give another food source to our birds and possums and we can use these native ingredients in our schools cooking classes

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Number of projects that took action on each environmental topic:

17 **Biodiversity** (animal focussed)

19 **Biodiversity** (plant focussed)

13 **Waste**

9 **Climate change**

4 **Cultural connection**

18 **Community connection / engagement**

7 **Water** (eg. wetlands, rivers etc)

8 **Coast and marine**

5 **Food gardens**

Number of projects that involved different audiences:

28 **Other students/ young people**

16 **General community**

27 **Your family**

13 **Community group**

11 **Local Council**

2 **State government**

27 **School community** (students & families)

This shows, not only the number of groups/people that have supported these young people to be leaders and changemakers in their communities, but also the ripple effect of the YEC program and the YEC projects these young people undertake.

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Case studies:

Esther M

Researched and wrote a magazine about the coast and waterways in SA, to showcase issues, actions, indigenous culture and other interesting aspects about our local region.

Joel V

Commenced development of a native bush garden and yarning circle. This space will eventually be used to support community members to learn more about the importance of native plants and the environment.

Saarim S

I designed and built a coral reef restoration submarine which can help deploy structures to support the growth and protection of coral reefs.

Sebastian L

Surveyed nocturnal animals around the city to see what a suitable habitat is for them and how we can make an environment where their preferences are all met.

Evie P

Held a second planting day to improve understorey in grey box grassy woodland habitat and inspire locals to plant natives in their own gardens. Continued maintenance of the site, which involved weed control and watering.

Mila S

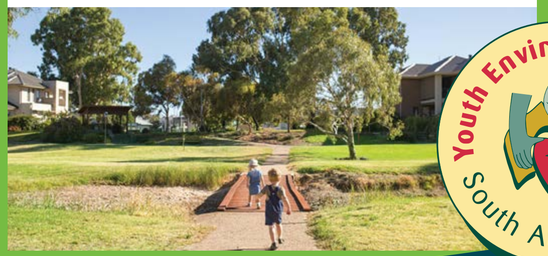
Photographed the St Kilda mangroves then compiled my photos into a photographic essay to raise awareness of that ecosystem.

Piper B

Created a working floating solar raft that can be used on farmers' dams to stop algae blooms and evaporation, and produce energy.

Shudhit M

Landcare in the Dry Creek area, grew native plants at home and encouraged community members to also grow natives, and worked with the Tea Tree Gully seed library to include native seeds.



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Different skills that members develop and practise through taking action on their project:

- **27** Connect with community organisations, councils or government departments
- **11** Create a survey
- **3** Do an audit (e.g. electricity, water, waste, biodiversity, microplastics)
- **8** Make bird boxes, bee hotels, wicking beds, upcycled art etc.
- **19** Make promotional things like posters, videos, newsletter articles, web sites
- **20** Organise a group of people to work on a project or idea
- **31** Plan a project/events
- **27** Promote my ideas to others; persuade others to support my ideas
- **13** Propose an idea to my principal/school leadership/governing council etc.
- **17** Public speaking (e.g. to my class, an assembly, at a council meeting)
- **25** Teach students or community members
- **19** Time management
- **2** Write a grant application or do fundraising

When members were asked what they were going to do next after the YEC, these were some of their responses:

"Do your best for you and the environment."

"Become a YEC Mentor."

"Crochet things to sell to plant native plants and make a native garden."

"I hope to continue to take action for the environment outside of the YEC. To spend time in nature and learn more about the wonderful plants and animals."

"Keep recyclying."

"My next step: write a short novel, even if it takes forever."

"I want to take my project further by using the data I gathered to improve my local parks biodiversity by looking at what animals like what things in different locations."

"Finish your garden. Create the garden club. Make a difference."

"My hope is to keep doing this project and hope I can bring it outside school and bring back the butterflies being able to give them host plants. Keep going."

"Continuing to inform/educate students in my school on environmental matters."

"How can I use my skill in photography to show the world the truth behind environmental issues, and how to elicit emotion to ensure a response."

"Finish year 12 as sustainability captain and go to Flinders Uni to study Bachelor of Science, Biodiversity and Conservation (with honours)."

"Be the voice for the environment."

"Advocate for the environment."

"I want to continue making the small changes like reduce, reuse, recycle and to use the beeswax wraps we made. I hope i can continue to learn and grow."

Youth Environment Council South Australia

www.yecsa.net.au
www.greenadelaide.sa.gov.au

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