



# Youth Environment Council 20 years

The ripple effect



Government  
of South Australia



# Youth Environment Council 20 years of impact

The Youth Environment Council of SA (YEC) began in 1997 as a ministerial advisory forum for young people to express their environmental concerns to the government. Twenty years on and the partnership between the Education and Environment Departments continues with the initiative being coordinated and delivered across the state by the Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges (AMLR) NRM Board's NRM Education program.

The YEC provides the opportunity for school students aged between 11 and 17 to find their voice in order to drive projects that tackle environmental problems. This is achieved by:

- encouraging involvement and raising awareness in their schools and local communities where they develop skills in leadership, teamwork and public speaking
- reporting on and showcasing their work to government Ministers which helps validate their learning as well as how important their work is
- working collaboratively and sharing their experiences with students from across the state they learn the most important lesson, that together they are capable of making a real difference.



The current YEC program sees students come together for a 3-day camp and participate in forums throughout the year where skills are developed and individual school projects planned. They are supported in this work by NRM Education staff as well as secondary school student mentors who themselves are ex YEC members.

At the conclusion of the year students share and celebrate their projects at an environmental showcase held at Cleland Wildlife Park where they meet relevant Ministers and share their passion for the work they have achieved.

## Building the next generation of environmental stewards and advocates

Whilst they come from different schools across the state they share a common experience and an ongoing network. Some 600 students have been through the YEC during its 20 year history and as you will see it has made a significant impact on their lives. The ripple effect of their time in the YEC suggests that young people will step up to the challenge when given the opportunity but importantly that they will take those skills, values and beliefs into their adult lives .

# Survey

September 2017 survey circulated to past YEC members about their experiences



96 past members responded  
72% female

68% secondary school students  
Of the remaining 32%  
45% full time workers  
35% part time workers  
35% TAFE or UNI  
6% looking for work  
10% other



97%

My awareness of environmental/sustainability issues increased

96%

My public speaking skills improved

99%

I learnt new ways to take action on environmental/sustainability issues

91%

I learnt that sustainability includes social/cultural, economic and political dimensions as well as the environment

91%

My leadership skills improved

95%

I feel empowered to take action on things I feel strongly about

89%

I learnt how to be an active participant in my community as a young person

85%

I inspired or influenced my school/community to make changes to improve the environment/sustainability

93%

I can present my opinions more effectively

92%

Going to camps made a lot of positive change to my life

90%

I made changes to my behaviour to protect the environment/lead a more sustainable lifestyle

96%

My understanding of the needs to cooperate and collaborate to solve environmental issues increased

## 20 years of partnership

For 20 years the YEC has been supported by a cross-departmental collaboration between the Environment and Education Departments. The success and outcomes from that partnership suggest that we should continue to build on this approach and include young people in decision making and action taking. This will benefit the future of our community as well as our environment.

## Inspire and be inspired - it's the ripple effect

“ I'm always inspired by what is possible when you create a safe, nurturing space for young people to pursue their passion in sustainability and the environment. YEC members consistently grow in confidence and make changes in their own lives, their schools and their communities.

Amy Blaylock, NRM Education Officer



“ Through working with the YEC over a number of years, I have shifted from an educational style, focussed more on transmissive delivery, to one that is transformative, collaborative and focussed on empowering young people to discover what they're passionate about, take action and let their authentic voices be heard.

Mel Allery - NRM Education Coordinator

# Journey and influence - past members



**Elinor Cozens, member 2003-05**  
**President 2005. Primary school teacher**

I became a teacher to learn how to best teach sustainability and climate change, and bring these issues into the mainstream school curriculum. A key learning for me is to get kids writing letters to people in positions of influence about the things they care about. When someone sees that a young person can be bothered to write about an issue it's taken seriously.

**Sophie Rogers, member 2003-06**  
**President 2004. NRM Education Officer**  
**(and YEC program support)**

There is something really satisfying and worthwhile in doing smaller projects at a school level. In hindsight I realised it was really valuable learning for me in terms of project management skills and communicating with other people to make things happen. It's the little things that are the building blocks for creating bigger change.



**Pippa Williams, member 2003-08**  
**Engineer at Hydro Tasmania**

The YEC helped me to be empowered. It also challenged a simplistic, right and wrong view of environmental issues. I have strong memories of being in meetings with people much older and wiser than I, but realising the value of being able to listen and contribute in that forum. I also realised that the influence I could have was much broader than just in my own life.

**Matthew Key, member 2000-08**  
**Primary school teacher and counsellor**

The YEC made me confident enough to pursue higher education and become a teacher. Prior to involvement I would say that I seriously lacked direction. This is a truly youth-led model and it's very hard to come across such a thing these days.



**Tom Milham, member 2009-11, mentor 2011**  
**Youth Development Officer, Scouts SA**

The YEC was the first youth council I sat on external to school. This was a launchpad for me to get out and see the bigger picture, and provide motivation and growth for leadership and organisational skills. I didn't care about the title, but began to see myself as a leader of others and this has helped with my work in a number of roles since then.



**Shaheed Bradford, member 1997**  
**Primary school teacher**

Networking was so important. At the age of 15 in the rural and remote area of Kangaroo Island, you've only got the kids you were born with and in my case that was 28 kids. When you're an environmentally minded person in a rural farming community you don't understand that other people can think the same as you.

**Mark Cawdron-White, member 2000-08**  
**Past President, New Home Consultant**

The most significant thing for me is self-worth and self-confidence. It gave me an opportunity to focus my energy on what I can do, what my options are, and what I can do as a member of society. It helped me with my mental development; this is who I am and what I stand for. Being in the YEC definitely challenged my thoughts.



**Erin Henson, member 1998-2004**  
**State Government**

One thing that I remember was the passion and determination to get youth involved with the decision makers in government. It was so worth it, not only for the students but also for the Minister to get a sense of 'this is what's important to young people' and speak about issues at the time.



“ The Youth Environment Council has been valued and supported by a partnership between the departments of Education and Environment.

The Council provides a wonderful opportunity for our young people to develop their social skills, self awareness, confidence and leadership skills, while making a worthwhile contribution to their community in an environmental area of personal interest.

Marianne Nicholas  
Project Officer Australian Curriculum and Teaching for Effective Learning Department for Education

## Young people involved in the YEC have had significant influence over their own behaviours, those of their school community, family and friends

To find out more about the YEC past and present visit:  
[www.yecsa.net.au](http://www.yecsa.net.au)

To find out more how you can develop Youth Voice in your school visit:  
<https://www.naturalresources.sa.gov.au/adelaidentloftyranges/education/for-educators/youth-voice-and-mentoring>

“ Being a part of the YEC has changed how I see the world, and I am forever grateful – Kira Beaubois (current member)

