



# Youth Environment Council Report 2014



Government of South Australia

**NRM Education**  
climate change biodiversity water food air waste transport energy



**AuSSI-SA**  
SUSTAINABLE SCHOOLS

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"I am more aware of the diverse environment I live in and appreciate it to the fullest... an amazing experience"

- Jade, YEC Member 2014, Year 9  
Aberfoyle Hub High

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"I feel like its not impossible to make a difference"

- Gareth, YEC Member 2014,  
Year 8 Paralowie R-12 School



## 1.0 Executive Summary

For 17 years, the Youth Environment Council (YEC) has been providing young people with environmental interests a space to develop their enthusiasm as well as a suite of life-long skills.

The YEC program is geared towards giving members a greater understanding of sustainability; how it applies to their lives and the issues that face society. At the same time, the program aims to empower young people by showing them that their voices are valued and are far more powerful when we work with others to make a difference.

Students are guided through a series of activities and are challenged to think as they are supported through a year-long program to implement a project or actions that help improve the environment and sustainability, within their school and or local community. Students are engaged by their interests to become powerful learners, by making decisions, solving problems, communicating their messages while collaborating with others. This enables students to build and develop planning and organisational skills, teamwork, public speaking, responsibility and social skills while creating new friendships with like-minded people leading to a boost in confidence and self-belief.

Six of the seven general capabilities are strongly woven through the YEC program:

- Literacy
- ICT
- Critical and Creative Thinking
- Personal and Social Capacity
- Ethical Understanding
- Inter-cultural Understanding.

This has resulted in a strong program that contributes to the goals set out in the Melbourne Declaration (MCEETYA 2008) – that young people should be supported to become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens.

The Department of Education and Child Development (DECD) and the Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges NRM Board recognises the value of authentic student voice and empowering young people and providing them with the skills, curiosity and creativity to take action for the environment and live more sustainable lifestyles.

It is important that these students understand that they don't have to wait until adulthood to be a leader in their community. Armed with a network of students like-minded in thinking, confidence and the skills, they are equipped to tackle environmental and sustainability challenges today.

*“One step by a child could change the course of history.”*

*-Isaac, YEC Member 2014, Year 7 St Joseph's Tranmere*



## 2.0 Background

Since 1997 the Youth Environment Council (YEC) of South Australia has provided a voice to young people in key environmental issues facing South Australia and has given them opportunities to take action to achieve a more environmentally sustainable future for SA.

The YEC is a joint initiative of the Department of Education and Child Development (DECD) and the NRM Education program of Natural Resources - Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges (AMLR). NRM Education values young people as equal partners and active participants in making decisions that affect their lives. NRM Education has a Youth Voice Program dedicated to strengthening student voice within schools and the community, as well as providing access to authentic learning opportunities as part of its commitment to Education for Sustainability and the implementation of the Australian Sustainable Schools Initiative in SA (AuSSI-SA).

## 3.0 YEC Aims

The Youth Environment Council of SA aims to:

- develop skills such as leadership, team work and public speaking
- raise youth awareness and encourage involvement in our environment
- empower youth to take action on sustainability issues and lead sustainable lifestyles
- ensure students see themselves as active citizens today and not just “leaders of tomorrow”
- develop a network of youth sustainability leaders
- enable students to share sustainability ideas and actions.

## 4.0 Aligning DECD and Natural Resources Priorities

The Youth Environment Council’s outcomes align very well with the Australian Curriculum, DECD Priorities and the Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges Natural Resources Management Plan 2014-15 to 2023-24.

### 4.1 Natural Resources - Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges Key Targets

The vision of the Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges Natural Resources Management Board is *Thriving communities caring for our hills, plains and seas.*

NRM Education is charged with developing the capacity of the community, particularly school communities, by *“supporting school sustainability initiatives and their opportunities to extend education to their connected communities”*. This is to ensure that the community is:

- living within resource limits
- an informed and engaged communities actively protecting and restoring our natural resources

The Youth Environment Council has been very effective at developing young engaged leaders who are advocates for the environment and communicating the message to the wider community, whilst also developing powerful learners who are active participants and citizens able to solve problems and effectively collaborate with others.

## 4.2 DECD Priorities

### 4.2.1 Powerful Learners:

The YEC program aligns strongly to Challenge 3 of the DECD Literacy and Numeracy Strategy in creating Powerful Learners.

YEC programs are aimed at developing young leaders and learners that have the curiosity, creativity and confidence to:

- actively participate in their learning
- make decisions based on sound evidence
- skilfully solve problems and deal pro-actively with new situations
- communicate effectively in a variety of forms
- collaborate with others.

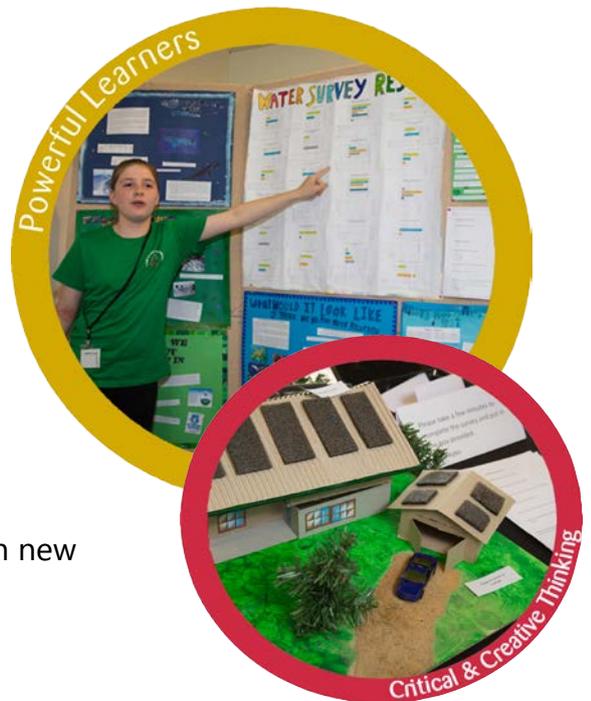
A key aim of the YEC and more broadly the ethos that underpins it, Educating for Sustainability, is to develop young leaders who know themselves, know their voice and are prepared to use it.

### 4.2.2 Student Engagement and Intellectual Challenge:

Sustainability has many complex issues and in order to enable students to make sense of what is being explored and assist them to develop an understanding of how it applies to them, students need to be engaged. The YEC program content is developed in collaboration with YEC mentors (see Mentors 3.6) to ensure activities are engaging for the whole audience.

NRM Education uses multiple ways to engage young learners by developing activities that cater to all learning styles and challenging members to think about the sustainability issues that face society. The program builds resilience by helping members to explore potential solutions and/or actions that can be taken. There is also a strong focus on how to engage others in the process of developing sustainable lifestyles, as we are a far more powerful force when we work with and hear the voices of others.

Please refer to case studies on pages 10-12 to review the evidence of the links to powerful learners, student engagement and intellectual challenge.



## 4.3 Links to the Australian Curriculum

Whilst the Youth Environment Council has a focus on empowering student voice and educating its members for sustainability, six of the seven General Capabilities from the Australian Curriculum are also strongly woven throughout the YEC program.

### 4.3.1 Literacy:

At YEC events students are involved in listening, reading, speaking, writing and creating action plans. Members undertake activities that develop their literacy skills

in reading, analysing and interpreting tasks, communicating effectively with other members and staff, expressing their thoughts, opinions and emotions, and presenting ideas for taking action.

#### 4.3.2 ICT:

Online Centra workshops challenge members' skills for accessing online communication tools allowing them to keep in touch between face-to face events. The workshops are interactive and multi-model, enabling students to take responsibility and control for how they interact with the group during the workshops. Students are encouraged to develop their discussion skills using the YEC website blog page to pose questions and share their project research and progress. Members are also encouraged to use email and the YEC facebook page to communicate with each other throughout the year.

#### 4.3.3 Critical and Creative Thinking:

YEC activities encourage students to be creative, consider alternative sustainable lifestyles and problem solve various challenges. They also encourage reason, logic and resourcefulness. Students use their imagination and innovate when developing their action plans. Students are responsible for their own projects, what they will do, and how they will go about creating change and promoting sustainable lifestyles in their communities.

#### 4.3.4 Personal and Social Capacity:

Students assess their individual values sets and explore these by sharing with other students. They develop positive relationships with students from other schools, develop teamwork skills and an understanding for why these skills are important, and have the opportunity to build and experience them outside the school context. Through YEC activities, students develop leadership skills, a sense of self-belief and self-worth and realise that they are able to meaningfully contribute to their communities. They gain the understanding that you are "never too young to be a leader".

#### 4.3.5 Ethical Understanding:

By developing action projects, members are encouraged to develop an ethical outlook by exploring issues that relate to sustainability and their project. Members begin to understand competing values and interests are at the heart of dealing with the issues. Members are given strategies for working with others and how they can influence others with differing values and opinions.

*"I think the ethics really got me thinking, to see other perspectives in areas around our community, learning, as well as nature issues...it made me think beyond the small questions..."*

– Brooke, YEC Member 2014, Year 9 Christies Beach High School



### 4.3.6 Inter-cultural Understanding:

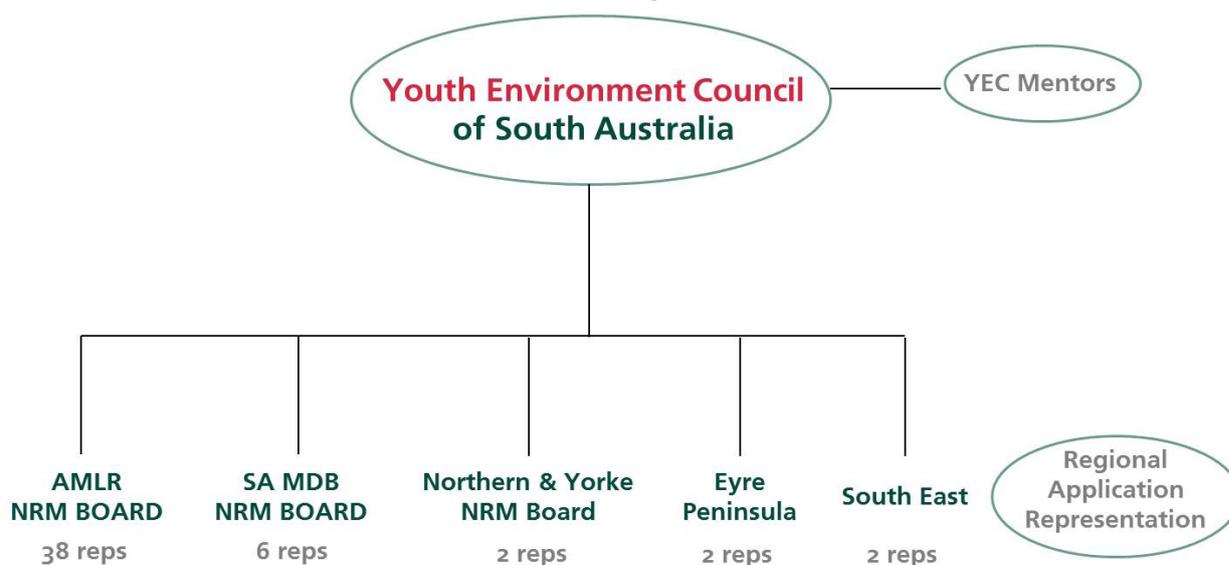
Quite deliberately, the YEC is comprised of a mix of students from different backgrounds and cultures. This is to assist members to engage with and develop an understanding of others, including commonalities and differences, create connections and cultivate respect. This links very closely with Education for Sustainability and the need for local and global citizens working together to develop sustainable solutions.

Depending on the projects undertaken, sometimes students need to investigate the cultural elements at play that form a part of the environmental/sustainability topic they are exploring.

## 5.0 Membership in 2014

This year the council began with 50 students in years 7 to 11 from 44 schools across South Australia. Students on the council represented the voices of young people from schools in the Adelaide Metropolitan Region, Barossa, Yorke Peninsula, Eyre Peninsula, the Riverland and the South East. Figure 1 shows the breakdown of representation from South Australian NRM Regions.

**FIGURE 1: Youth Environment Council Representation Breakdown for 2014**



All students interested in being a member of the Youth Environment Council submitted an application. The applications were promoted through the YEC website ([www.yecsa.net.au](http://www.yecsa.net.au)); NRM Education email list; Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges Youth Environment Leadership Program; emails to schools from Natural Resources Management Board Regional Officers across SA; and through emails to every DECD, Catholic and Independent high school in the state.

In 2014, any students in Yr 7 to 10 were eligible to apply. Students required signed support from a parent/care-giver and a teacher at their school. The selection of students from applications was based on gaining a balance of city and regional; male and female; and primary school and high school aged representatives. A total of fifty-three applications were received with forty-two applicants being selected as members.

The successful applicants joined eight student mentors to form a council of fifty. By the end of the end of the year, six students had dropped out of the Council for a variety of reasons; mostly related to family and/or other extra-curricular commitments. The year ended with a total of forty-four students from thirty-seven schools.

Table 1 provides a breakdown of member numbers for 2014.

**TABLE 1: Membership breakdown by School Type**

	No. of Students	No. of Schools Represented
DECD	27	23
Independent	9	8
Catholic	7	5
Homeschool	1	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>37</b>
Primary Schools	19	16
High Schools	25	21
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>37</b>

All members participate in the Council for a term of one year. If council members wish to participate in subsequent years they must apply through the application process. This ensures that the YEC can cater to a wider audience; providing training opportunities to a new cohort of students each year.

### 5.1 Roles within the YEC and the Selection Process for 2014

#### MEMBER

**Selection process:** By application, open at the beginning of each year. Selected on merit and geography by NRM Ed staff.

**Considerations:** The council wants representation from across the state.

**Term:** Become members in Term 1 and are members for one school year.

**Eligibility:** Student in year 7-10, interested in the environment and sustainability.

**Number:** Approximately 60 members on the council.

**Following year:** Need to reapply through the member selection process in the following year to be a part of the YEC again. Members from the previous year will be notified when applications are open.

#### MENTOR

**Selection process:** Approached by NRM Education staff. Conversation between staff and student.

**Considerations:** Opportunity to share experience with other members whilst stepping back. Assist with culture of YEC.

**Term:** Become mentors in Term 1 and are members for one school year.

**Eligibility:** Ideally year 9-11 student. Must have been a part of the YEC for at least one year as a member and demonstrated strong role modeling.

**Number:** Up to eight mentors per year. May change from year to year dependent on numbers.

**Following year:** May be approached to be mentor again.

## 5.2 The Mentor Program

The mentor program is for older students (typically Yr 9-10, but is flexible) within the YEC to enhance their leadership skills by gaining some experience with mentoring other members of the Council. This has the added benefit of continuing the inclusive and supportive culture of young people taking action for sustainability, whilst also transitioning older members onto other things beyond the YEC.

Potential Mentors are selected by the NRM Education team and are invited to participate in the program. These are students who have demonstrated exceptional leadership and role modelling skills, or the potential for development of these skills, have been active participants in all YEC activities, and have the ability to foster relationships with others. Mentors must also have been part of the YEC for one year before they can be considered for a mentor position.

In 2014, eight students were selected to be mentors for the YEC. These students took part in an additional training camp to assist them in developing the skills required for the role. Their role included:

- working with NRM Education staff to plan and run activities
- facilitating discussions and small group work
- welcoming students to help make the process of joining in, taking part and enjoying the YEC easier for others
- ensuring that other YEC members feel included, valued, and guiding them along the way when needed
- role modelling positive and sustainable behaviours.



*“Yes, I have loved being a mentor and helping and inspiring people. I love to do that”*

*-Angus, YEC Mentor 2014, Year 10 Woodcroft College*

*“More confidence and knowledge. Contacts and supportive great friends”*

*-Jade, YEC Mentor 2014, Year 9 Aberfoyle Park High School*

## 6.0 The YEC Program

Representatives took part in the following events:

### 6.1 Mentor Camp at Monarto

An opportunity for the YEC Mentors to develop mentoring and facilitation skills, leadership and teamwork skills. Mentors also provided input and assistance with the YEC leadership camp event planning.

### 6.2 Centra Online Workshop Meet and Greet

An opportunity for all YEC members to meet and greet each other online prior to the Leadership Camp.

### 6.3 Leadership Camp at Arbury Park Outdoor School

The largest YEC event for the year aimed at developing leadership and communication skills through activities, team building exercises, identifying their local environmental topics of interest, developing their practical skills and knowledge in ways to take action, and making plans to create sustainable change in their school communities. The camp also provided a space for students to spend time reconnecting with nature and reflecting on the importance and fragility of the natural world.



*“The ‘Capacity to Act’ activity led me to think a lot more deeply about how I approach issues in my school. To have an overall goal and how to achieve this goal with steps and to know what info and values you want to pass onto others.”*

- Maddi, YEC Mentor 2014, Year 10 Nuriootpa High School

### 6.4 Centra Online Workshop

The YEC community meet online to share their project progress, collaboratively problem solve any project issues that arise, and develop their display ideas for the Sharing and Celebration Forum.

*“I’ve gained knowledge, friendship, a new found confidence in my being able to do something”*

-Taylor, YEC Member 2014, Year 7 Riverdale PS

## 6.5 Sharing and Celebration Forum at Cleland Wildlife Park

The final event for the YEC year; an opportunity to share and celebrate the YEC Representatives achievements towards sustainability in their schools and local communities. Each YEC Representative came to the forum with a project display, detailing and showcasing the sustainability project they had been working on since the YEC Leadership Camp. The highlight of the day was opening up the display showcase to parents/caregivers and our special invited guests, including the Honourable Ian Hunter MLC, Minister for Sustainability, Environment and Conservation. Further information, including select photos, can be viewed on the YEC website ([www.yecsa.net.au](http://www.yecsa.net.au)).

*“I have gained more leadership qualities and team work”*

*- Max, YEC Member 2014, Year 6 Westminster School*

### 6.5.1 Change of Process: The Sharing & Celebration Forum:

To further enable and empower YEC representatives to take action and share their sustainability hopes and concerns with others, NRM Education implemented a series of changes to the format of the YEC Sharing and Celebration events run in previous years.

Student representatives have in the past given presentations to the wider council describing their Sustainable project and their outcomes, usually through the medium of posters or powerpoint. The transmissive nature of presentations fell short in inspiring, engaging and building on student knowledge and awareness of sustainability issues, whilst the lecture-style format of this event lacked the elements necessary to encourage creative, confident and effective communicators in the process.

As a result the Sharing Forum format was redesigned as a celebratory, expo style event. The aim of which was to support students to build on and demonstrate their interests, challenge their ability to communicate through multiple modes and to engage them in the broader range of sustainability issues and passions identified by their peers.

Representatives were expected to creatively engage their audience in their chosen sustainability topic, and effectively communicate their projects, actions and the outcomes they achieved in their school communities throughout the year. Whilst students were given minimal display requirements, they were however challenged to address multiple learning styles when developing their display format and style.

*“(To communicate my project to others, I) ...made a powerpoint presentation and collated lots of research material, a 3 minute interview talking about the fracking process and its environmental impacts and wrote letters to two MP’s including Jay Weatherill”*

*-Abby, YEC Member 2014, Year 7 Glenburnie Primary School*

As a result, through 3D models; radio interviews; educational games; photo stories; recorded footage; infographics; stickers; posters; quizzes and surveys, council representatives (and invited guests) were given the opportunity actively participate in learning about the sustainability concerns of their peers and their broader communities

across the state.

To celebrate student achievements, the council's parent community and VIP guests were invited to attend, including the Minister for Sustainability, Environment and Conservation Ian Hunter and Gary Passmore, Manager of Cross curriculum priorities and General Capabilities. As the event was held at Cleland Wildlife Park, students were also able to participate in an animal experience or 'WildShow', receive a YEC Certificate from the Minister and were given the opportunity to explore the park with their parents after the event concluded.

## 7.0 The Ripple Effect

Students accepted into the YEC are expected to share their passion, knowledge and skills with their whole school, and they are encouraged to connect and share with their local community. In 2014, YEC Representatives used a range of sharing techniques and methods to get their message out there and their voices heard. These include, but are not limited to:

- awareness raising campaigns (e.g. putting up posters around the school)
- running education sessions and activities around the school
- giving presentations at whole school assemblies
- writing newsletter articles
- speaking on local radio
- being interviewed for their local newspaper
- conducting surveys with the whole school and/or community.

*“Talk to your teachers and other students about trying to make a change, talk to the community, bring up issues in the environment and convince people about the issues and what’s happening”*

*- Courtney, YEC Member 2014, Year 10 Gawler District B-12*

### 7.1 The Ripple Effect in Action - Evidence

The Youth Environment Council has inspired powerful learners. By having a choice in the topic they research, students become highly engaged in their learning and by developing a plan of action they are challenged to discuss and develop potential solutions.

#### 7.1.1 Projects Undertaken by YEC Members:

As a result of students participating in the Youth Environment Council in 2014, 33 student driven projects were initiated supporting student voice and action within these schools and communities. Figure 2, shows the breakdown of projects.

## Projects Included:

**Biodiversity:** bush tucker trails; native revegetation of Nepabunna community; school wetlands; insect hotels; bird boxes; increasing habitat for local fauna; palm oil; shark culling; butterfly gardens; endangered species.

**Water:** conducting school water audits; water conservation projects.

**Cultural Change and awareness-raising:** carbon footprinting; healthy school health community; raising awareness and inspiring local action; investigating lifestyle choices in consumption of goods; starting school environment group; creating spaces for learning - indigenous culture and school history.

**Waste:** ocean gyres; recycling systems; nude food.

**Energy:** fracking; making the switch to renewable energy.

*“It has influenced my want of a better future”*

*-Abby, YEC Member 2014, Year 7 Glenburnie Primary School*

## Case Study: Abby (12), Glenburnie Primary School

Abby chose to focus on fracking as she was very concerned about the possible detrimental effects that fracking could have on her local community and its unique ecosystems, so she began her research.

(Personal and Social Capacity, Ethical Understanding, **Engaged**).

She conducted a survey of all the people that live on her street to gain their views and opinions on fracking. This led to her street agreeing to become a ‘no fracking’ street and a protest sign was erected. Abby has written letters to MPs, including the Premier of South Australia, Jay Weatherill, and her local Member.

(Literacy, Critical and Creative Thinking, Personal and Social Capacity)

She has also become involved with a local community group against fracking.

(Personal and Social Capacity)

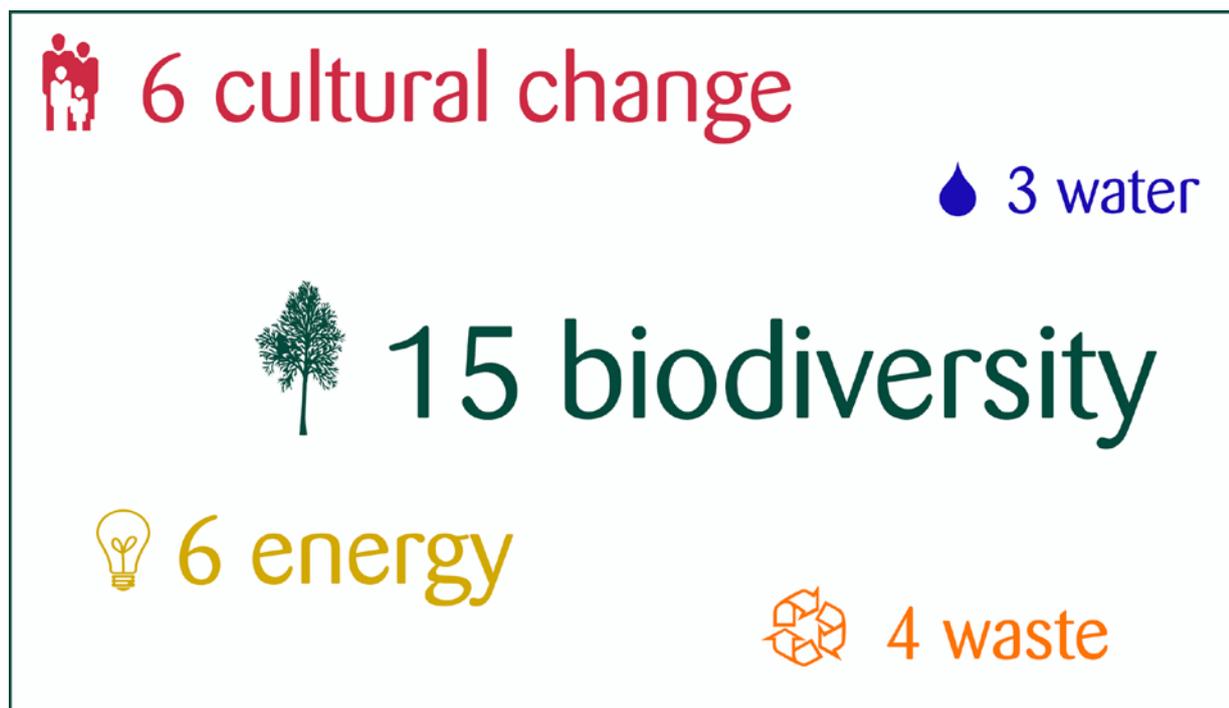
One of the most exciting things Abby achieved was being interviewed on local radio about her project. She explained the process of fracking and its associated impacts during a three minute interview, which her whole school listened to live on air!

(Literacy, Ethical Understanding, Critical and Creative Thinking, **Engaged, Intellectual Challenge, Powerful**)



**FIGURE 2: Number of Projects Shared at the Sharing and Celebration Forum**

## 7.2 Nominations and Awards



### Case Study: Declan (12), Birdwood Primary School

Declan and his environment group had several areas of focus for their school project including developing a culture of nude food at the school to try and reduce the schools footprint, and to reduce the impact of school yard litter. The other area was increasing habitat for and protecting native animals. The group felt there were not enough mature trees on the school grounds to create hollows for birds and possums nor were there any trees suitable for erecting bird boxes. (Personal and Social Capacity, Ethical Understanding, Critical and Creative thinking, **Engaged, Powerful Learners**)



The students set up a display of lunchbox packaging alternatives in the front office, so that all parents could see how to pack “nude foods”. They also developed content for and designed their own brochure for the school enrolment pack so all new parents could see the school’s vision for nude food. (Literacy, ICT, Critical and Creative)Thinking)

Students invited members of the Native Animal Network to talk to the whole school about protecting native animals species. The group planted some local native gum trees to improve nesting habitat for the future. (Personal and Social Capacity, Critical and Creative thinking)

### 7.2.1 Conservation Council of South Australia Youth Award:

YEC mentor Maddi Hegarty from Nuriootpa High School was co-runner up for the 2014 Conservation Council of SA Young Achievers' Awards for her contribution to sustainability both at her school and for her mentoring role with the Youth Environment Council.

Fiona Muggleton, SRC coordinator at Nuriootpa HS said: *"Maddi is extremely organised and committed to making a difference within her community and beyond at the national and global level, and she is proactive in taking the actual steps towards making a difference. Maddi is very skilled at talking to people and getting them to see things from a different perspective and then getting them involved. She leads from the front and by personal example, with the attitude that "if I can do it, you can do it"."*

### 7.2.2 Channel 9 Young Achievers Awards:

Maddi Hegarty was also shortlisted as one of four finalists for the Channel 9 Young Achievers' Awards.

### Case Study: Maddi (16), Nuriootpa High School

Maddi joined the YEC three years ago as a Year 8 student and for the past two years she has been a student mentor, trained by NRM Education staff on how to mentor and assist younger students to develop and integrate into the program. As a mentor she has also helped in running activities at YEC events, such as the annual three day YEC camp at Arbury Park.

Maddi became a mentor *"to help others feel comfortable and share her knowledge of the environment, and to be an inspiration"*.

She is now one of the most experienced and talented mentors, influencing other younger students, as well as other younger mentors, who see her as a positive role model, and she absolutely loves it.

In 2013 Maddie became a sustainability committee rep at Nuriootpa HS, where she initiated a kitchen garden project which provides fresh produce to the canteen and Home Economics; initiated a complete overhaul of the school's bin system, including standardising the bins and their colour coding, and positioning bins in areas of high student use. She also helped save 95,000 sheets of paper a year by putting the daily school bulletin and parents' newsletter on line.

In 2014 she was the initiator and co-leader of the school's World Vision V Gen group and she attended the Global Leadership Conference run by World Vision. She was also selected as an AFS exchange student to Germany.



### 7.2.3 Regional Brand Awards:

On Friday 10 October, members of the NRM Education Team attended the South Australian Regional Awards ceremony for the Hills and Coast region. The team was thrilled that the Youth Environment Council of SA received a finalist award in the Education category for:

- achievement in developing the mentor program
- empowering young people
- the ripple effect the YEC has on schools and the communities of it's members.

### 7.3 Meeting the Minister

YEC mentors represented the whole council by presenting to the Minister for Sustainability, Environment and Conservation to share the highlights of Council projects and provide feedback to the government regarding:

- difficulties or barriers to achieving their projects
- essential people for ensuring projects continue in future
- how the Minister can help with projects
- other messages members wanted to share about their environmental project.



Each year, mentors list meeting the Minister as being one of the highlights of their experience. They feel connected to their community and that their opinions, school and community contributions are valued.

*“I learnt about what I as an individual can do to help the environment and what I can do as a member of a group and a community.”*

*- Rachel, YEC Member 2014, Year 7 Eastern Fleurieu School*

## 8.0 Youth Environment Council Evaluation

During 2014, students completed two evaluations; one after the Leadership Camp and another after the Sharing Forum. At the end of the year feedback was sought from teachers and parents about their observations of the impact of their student or child's involvement in the YEC. By gathering multiple perspectives there is strong evidence of the outcomes, reach, and value placed upon, the opportunities provided through the YEC.

### 8.1 Arbury Park Leadership Camp Evaluation

The strong focus of the 2014 camp was on engaging and connecting students around their individual passions and interests, and supporting them to plan what they could

do to create change. The evaluation sought evidence for whether these aims had been met, as well as the overall experience. The majority of students discovered what they were passionate about and how they can create change (92% of 38 responses), and felt confident about making a difference in their school and/or community (92%). All students 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' to being inspired, liking the opportunity to meet other students, and enjoying connecting with the outdoors.

## 8.2 End of Year Evaluation

In their applications for the YEC, students were asked to share what skills, opportunities and personal growth they hoped to gain from being part of the YEC.

From the evaluations received from all 33 students that attended the Sharing Forum the common responses were:

- make new friends
- develop leadership skills
- meet other passionate students
- improve public speaking
- connect with nature
- develop confidence
- share my ideas
- learn about the environment
- learn ways to take action
- inspire others at my school.

*“Leadership, role modelling and knowledge”*

*-James, YEC Member 2014, Year 7 Good Sheppard Lutheran School*

Receiving feedback after the Sharing Forum provided insight into what students had been able to achieve within their school, what they have gained from their involvement, feedback about the YEC program for the year against our aims, influence over ambitions for the future, perception of their own agency to create change, and to see if and why they would recommend the YEC to friends.

At the last event for the year, the Sharing Forum, students were asked the most significant things they actually gained from their YEC experience. Their responses included:

- confidence in giving speeches
- new friendships
- confidence in myself and my abilities
- teamwork skills
- support
- knowledge of environmental issues
- organisation skills
- the ability to work with others.

*“I’ve learnt to plan properly, to be brave, speak up and out.”*

*-Jemma, YEC Member 2014, Year 8 Roma Mitchell College*



It was very pleasing to see that the YEC provided students with the opportunities to build and develop the very skills and knowledge they hoped the experience would provide.

As in 2014, involvement in the YEC program cultivated greater self-belief, a support network, and hope for the future - aspects that go beyond what the students hoped they would gain from the experience.



*“YEC has made me to not keep quiet in what I believe in and in what I would like to work on”*

*-Vanessa, YEC Member 2014, Year 10 Our Lady of Sacred Heart*

Coupled with their increased knowledge and experience in taking action within their communities, these students now know they have the agency to create the change they want to see.

In addition, through participation in the YEC students felt that:

- a) they were good role models: 97% agreed or strongly agreed (down 3% from 2013)
- b) they had been empowered to create change in their schools: 100% (up 3% from 2013). *This is a great result, considering that 31% of the students who attended the Sharing Forum would have liked more support from their school with their project.*
- c) they had been inspired to take action: 100% agreed or strongly agreed
- d) the work they did on camp helped them to plan their project, 94% agreed or strongly agreed, 3% were neutral (1 student) and 3% disagreed (1 student). *The student who said 'neutral' felt that they already had the necessary planning skills.*

*“I think I will be more inclined to raise awareness in the community”*

*- Zac, YEC Member 2014, Year 7 Bridgewater Primary School*



*“I feel like it's not impossible to make a difference”*

*-Gareth, YEC Member 2014, Year 8 Paralowie R-12 School*

Student comments about how participating in the YEC had influenced their ambitions for the future in terms of everyday actions, career, values or sustainability goals included:

- it has truly shown me how much I want to work with animals
- increased my love for the environment
- has influenced some of my views on matters
- to share all my knowledge to get goals done
- broadened my view on sustainability
- I have learnt new things that I can share
- I am now more careful about everything I do in nature
- I am more aware of the diverse environment I live in and appreciate it to the fullest
- the YEC has influenced my ambitions for my future because when I finish school I plan to volunteer with Sea Shepherd
- I feel like it's not impossible to make a difference
- to set some goals for myself personally just little achievable ones
- I am more influenced to become a marine biologist.

*"I don't want to be a bystander while our environment undergoes scary changes. I want to keep being a 'greenie' for the rest of my life, and doing my bit in inspiring others and making change"*

- Maddi, YEC Member 2014, Year 10 Nuriootpa High School

### 8.3 Observed Benefits: A Parent's Perspective

All parents were emailed or posted a survey containing three questions:

- what did your child gain from being a part of the YEC? Explain.
- has your child's involvement in the YEC had an impact on what they do at home or in the local community? If so, please provide examples.
- any other comments...

Twelve parents provided feedback which was invaluable in capturing the depth and breadth of the influence and outcomes of their children's experiences with the YEC over 2014.

Some selected quotes are provided below:



*“It has really encouraged her involvement in the school environment group, and she has become a key member and advocate for that group. In the wider community, she is keen to share her knowledge on environment matters at every opportunity.”*

*- Parent of a Year 9 YEC Member 2014*

*“Confidence was the main one, I think I seen that stands out the most with Rachael. Plus her leadership skills have got even better than they already were. She has made lots of friends all over South Australia. At Rachael’s part-time job she has been trying to make them more aware of the recycling options that are available to them.”*

*- Parent of a Year 9 YEC Member 2014*

*“Given this was the second consecutive year Max participated in YEC we saw an entirely new dynamic. He got to understand the process of creating change a little more and really reflected on other student contribution. His understanding of the political process to effect change was more sophisticated. He was better able to see what would work and what didn’t. He grew in confidence as well.”*

*- Parent of a Year 6 YEC Member 2014*

*“The camp gave Harry an opportunity to experience independence and gain resilience by mixing with others that he didn’t know. It was a valuable experience to see others with a similar concern and interest in the environment. The camp also made him aware that there were things that he could do to help the environment. The highlight was, undoubtedly, looking for and identifying frogs in the pouring rain.*

*The presentation of project work at Cleland was ‘stretching’ but rewarding experience, due to the necessity of explaining to adults what his project work entailed. I felt this was an invaluable confidence-building exercise. He also learnt a lot from other projects that were presented.*

*Overall, being a member of the YEC has given him a sense of responsibility, confidence and furthered his interest in the environment. It has also increased his awareness of his own strengths and abilities.”*

*- Parent of a Year 7 YEC Member 2014*

A wordle infographic, Figure 3, was created using the keywords and phrases listed by parents about what their child had gained by being a part of the YEC.



## 8.4 Observed Benefits: A Teacher's Perspective

All of the teacher contacts for YEC students were emailed a survey containing four questions:

- have you noticed a change in your student this year as a result of their participation in the Youth Environment Council? e.g. leadership, confidence, sense of purpose, social interaction, empowered, taking action.
- would you encourage your student/s to apply for the YEC next year? Why? Why not? Please explain your answer.
- what helped you to support your student?
- any other comments...

Ten teachers provided feedback, which is of real benefit to the YEC organising committee, as these are the people with long term relationships to the students who are able to see changes in skills, attitudes and behaviours within the school setting.

Some selected quotes are provided below which illuminate how the validation, confidence and skills they've gained through their participation in the YEC has created positive benefits and outcomes for them personally, for the student groups they work within, and for their whole school communities.

*“The student has demonstrated an improved sense of self and is more confident, not only in the classroom but with his dealings with other students. He is confident and more comfortable in sharing his environmental knowledge with other students.”*

- Teacher of a Year 7 YEC Member 2014

*“I have noticed that over the course of the year James has grown in confidence and leadership. Coming from last year he was very shy or hesitant to share information with the class or complete public presentations. James now willingly shares his information with the class and did a great job presenting to parents at different times throughout the year. He is more confident and this is evident in the way he stands and projects his voice.*

*James has learnt that he has some great ideas to share with his peers and he can encourage others to do their best. James' leadership ability has increased or he has become more aware of it and he showed leadership by keeping his group on track during a group project.*

*James is now more confident to talk to others in the class and adults and has been good to see him passionate about the YECSA throughout the year.”*

- Teacher of a Year 7 YEC Member 2014

*“Yes I would definitely encourage students to apply. It’s a wonderful opportunity for the quieter students to develop leadership skills and self-confidence. Some students are reluctant to stand up and voice their opinions and take on leadership roles in front of their school peers. The selection process and criteria used by the YEC, means that all students have the opportunity to be selected, not just the loud, confident students.*

*It’s a great opportunity for students to be put outside their comfort zones and normal social groups, to meet and work with like-minded students/adults who fully appreciate their ideas. The realisation that their ideas and opinions are valued by people outside school/family community really boosts confidence and self-worth. These feelings will be carried with them throughout their schooling and into the future.”*

*-Teacher of a Year 9 YEC Member 2014*

*“In Rachael (a mentor) I did notice a change in her thinking about the school community and bettering the school through an environmental approach. It has given her something to strive toward and she has clearly become passionate about wanting to achieve something more for our High School.”*

*- Teacher of a Year 9 YEC Member 2014*

## 9.0 Summary

The enthusiasm and feedback from students, their parents and teachers confirms that 2014 was a very successful year for the YEC.

We now have a much stronger council after two years of an expanded mentor program, which gives older students the opportunity to meaningfully contribute to the program and assist in building and maintaining the supportive and collaborative culture the council has developed with students over the last few years.

The mentors are able to provide staff with insight into activities and how they think other young people will engage with them.

The YEC students and their school communities have been supported to research and develop action projects that really make a difference to the local and global communities, leading to enhanced environmental outcomes and the building of sustainable lifestyles.

The changes to the way that students shared their projects was a huge success. Parents, friends, the Minister for Sustainability, Environment and Conservation and other invited guests were treated to an expo of all the fantastic work created by YEC members. Many positive comments were received about the brilliance and hard work that went into not only the actions and projects but also presenting them in an engaging way. The expo idea initially challenged them as learners but gave them the freedom and flexibility to be creative and innovative in their approach to showcasing their actions.

Students also enjoyed the opportunities to share their projects and troubleshoot any problems in the online workshops and they were also able to put their public speaking skills into practice at the sharing and celebration forum. These events provided students with important presentation and public speaking skills, and more ideas to take back to school for future projects, but also gave them a real sense of accomplishment to showcase them to their own parents and friends and those of other members. YEC members developed many skills through their involvement this year including:

- confidence in developing speeches, teamwork and the ability to work with others
- gaining self-confidence and the belief in their own abilities
- making new friends and developing support networks
- planning and undertaking actions that lead to a more sustainable future.

Members also indicated feeling inspired and empowered to create change and influence their school and local communities and they have seen that their opinions and actions are valued; they are very real contributors to the community right now and not too young to be a leader or take positive action for the environment.

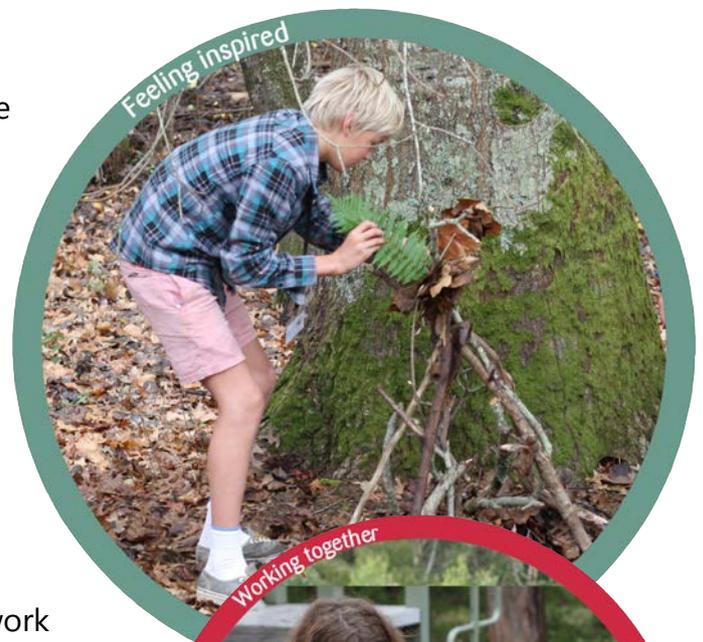
As a result, their schools and communities have gained young people equipped with skills, dispositions and the knowledge to create change. As engaged and active citizens, they are a positive force for their communities, educating and empowering others. These outcomes all meet the aims of the Youth Environment Council of SA, as well as matching the intended outcomes for the General Capabilities.

The Australian Curriculum, General Capabilities and priorities continue to provide exciting opportunities to embed the YEC into a state-wide approach of powerful and engaged learners, which is underpinned by the principles of student voice and Education for Sustainability.

## 10.0 YEC Proposal for 2015

The YEC will expand on the successes of the 2014 model by looking to strengthen the way students are supported once they return to their schools and communities.

NRM Education staff will closely mentor YEC members, checking in throughout the year and assisting them with their projects. We will continue to engage with students via social media and regular emails to maintain support and motivation. It is hoped



that students will also encourage and support each other during the researching and implementation phases of developing their projects and actions.

The YEC Steering Committee has taken on board feedback from the YEC members in 2014, which was; that the camp can be a daunting experience for young students who have not met each other before and are unsure what they are going to experience over the three days.

As a result, we have added another face-to-face event to the program, a forum to be held at the Adelaide Botanic Gardens early in the year to give students the opportunity to meet and get to know each other before the two night leadership camp at Arbury Park in June. The forum will also enable students to explore their understanding of and relationship with nature. We believe this initial forum will help relieve the nervousness of new members.

The rest of the programmed events will continue as they have in previous years, with minor tweaks based on student feedback.

## 10.1 The proposed program for 2015

### 10.1.1 TERM 1

- Week 11: Thursday 9th April  
*Sustainability Forum, Adelaide Botanic Gardens*

### 10.1.2 TERM 2

- Week 6: Monday 1st June - Wednesday 3rd June  
*Two night Leadership Camp, Arbury Park Outdoor School*

### 10.1.3 TERM 3

- Week 2: Thursday 30th July  
*online workshop*
- Week 9: Thursday 17th September  
*online workshop*

### 10.1.4 TERM 4

- Week 2: Monday 19th October  
*YEC Sharing and Celebration Forum, Cleland Wildlife Park*

*“What things I can do is not to be afraid to speak. A quote I made during Council of All Beings is ‘to make a change in the world we must first change ourselves’”*

*- Jordan, YEC Mentor 2014, Year 11 Golden Grove High School*

## 11.0 APPENDIX

### 11.1 2014 YEC Member School Representation

	School	NRM Region	Age	Yr Level
<b>DECD Schools</b>	AberfoylePark High School	Southern	14	9
	Birdwood Primary School	Central	12	7
	Booloroo Centre District School	N&Y	16	11
	Bridgewater Primary School	Southern	12	7
	Christies Beach High School	Southern	15	10
	Christies Beach High School	Southern	15	10
	Cowandilla Primary School	Central	12	7
	Eastern Fleurieu School - Strathalbyn	SAMBD	12	7
	Eastern Fleurieu School - Strathalbyn	SAMDB	11	7
	Eastern Fleurieu School - Strathalbyn	SAMDB	15	10
	Gawler and Districts College	Northern	15	10
	Glenburnie Primary School	South East	12	7
	Golden Grove High School	Northern	16	11
	Goolwa Primary School	SAMDB	12	7
	Homeschool	Southern	14	9
	Lobethal Primary School	Southern	12	7
	Millicent North Primary School	South East	12	7
	Mt Compass Area School	SAMDB	13	8
	Nuriootpa High School	Barossa	15	10
	Paralowie R-12 School	Northern	13	8
	Riverdale Primary School	Northern	12	7
	Roma Mitchell College	Central	13	8
	Stuart High School	Eyre	15	10
	Stuart High School	Eyre	14	9
	Thiele Primary School	Southern	12	7
	Urrbrae Agricultural High School	Southern	14	9
Victor Harbor High School	Fleurieu	13	8	
Woodcroft Primary School	Southern	13	7	
<b>Independent Schools</b>	Encounter Lutheran College	Fleurieu	14	8
	Good Shepherd Lutheran School	Barossa	12	7
	Horizon Christian School	N&Y	14	9
	Redeemer Lutheran School	Barossa	12	7
	Scotch College	Central	15	10
	Tatachilla Lutheran College	Southern	14	9
	Westminster School	Southern	11	6
	Woodcroft College	Southern	15	10
	Woodcroft College	Southern	15	10
<b>Catholic Schools</b>	Cardijn College	Southern	15	10
	Our Lady of the Sacred Heart	Central	14	10
	St Augustine's Parish School	Northern	11	7
	St Augustine's Parish School	Northern	11	7
	St Joseph's School Tranmere	Central	12	7
	St Joseph's School Tranmere	Central	12	7
	Xavier College	Northern	13	8

2014 YEC Council Breakdown

Total Students	44
Total Schools Represented	37
DECD Schools Represented	24
Independent Schools Represented	8
Catholic Schools Represented	5

