ANNUAL REPORT
2017

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1.0 Executive Summary

The Youth Environment Council (YEC) has been running for 20 years now, and provides young people across SA 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. It also 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. In addition they develop skills in social entrepreneurialism.

Students take part in a year-long program to help them implement action projects within their schools or communities. To support them in this, they are led through a series of activities which challenge them to think about how they can improve sustainability in a broad context. Over the course of the program students become powerful learners, able to make decisions, solve problems, communicate their messages and collaborate with others. This enables them to build and develop planning and organisational skills, teamwork, public speaking, responsibility and social skills. They also come into contact and create friendships with new people holding similar passions, leading to a boost in their confidence and self-belief.

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

- Literacy
- Personal and social capacity
- Information and communication technology
- Ethical understanding
- Critical and creative thinking
- Inter-cultural understanding.

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

The Department for Education (DfE) and the Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges NRM Board (AMLR NRMB) recognises the value of authentic student voice, which empowers young people and provides 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 skills, they are equipped to tackle environmental and sustainability challenges today.

2.0 Background

Since 1997 the YEC 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 DfE and the NRM Education program of the AMLR NRMB. NRM Education values young people as equal partners and active participants in making decisions that affect their lives. NRM Education also 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 How YEC aligns with the Australian Curriculum, DfE and NR-AMLR

The Youth Environment Council's outcomes align with the Australian Curriculum, DfE 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.*

To align with this NRM Education works to develop the capacity of the community with a focus on schools, by *"supporting school sustainability initiatives and their opportunities to extend education to their connected communities"*.

This will help to ensure that the community is:

- living within resource limits
- informed and engaged in actively protecting and restoring our natural resources.

The Youth Environment Council has been very effective in developing young engaged leaders who are advocates for sustainability and communicate strong messages to their wider communities and involve them in taking action.

4.2 DfE Priorities

4.2.1 Best practice pedagogy

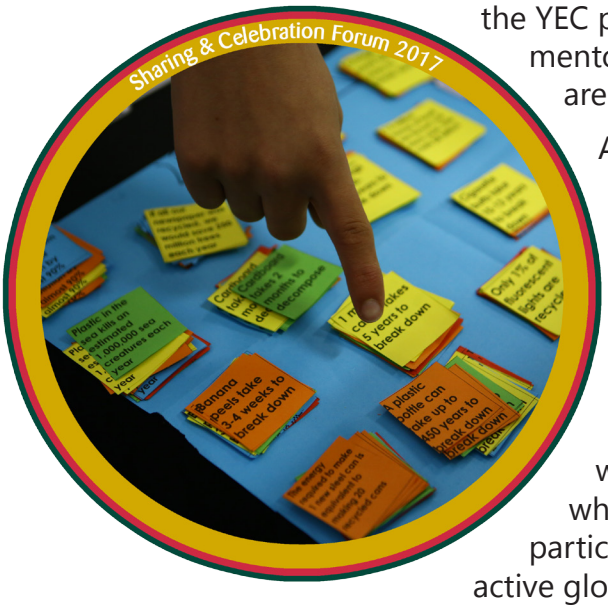
The YEC program adopts best practice pedagogy through the Teaching for Effective Learning (TfEL) Framework. This involves:

- encouraging students to voice their passion and concerns for sustainability and the environment (2.1 Develop democratic relationships)
- students sharing what they have learnt and experienced in varied modes: displays; speeches; newsletter articles and workshops (2.2 Building a community of learners; 4.4 Communicate learning in multiple modes)
- expecting students to drive their own learning around a sustainability or environmental topic of their interest, with staff support when needed (3.1 Teach students how to learn)
- students skilfully solving problems and being pro-active in new situations (3.2 Foster deep understanding and skilful action)
- recognizing and building upon students' prior knowledge about projects, their community and sustainability (4.1 Build on learners' understandings)
- encouraging students to participate in the community by joining local groups, advocating for change and getting involved in local on-ground projects (4.2 Connect learning to students' lives and aspirations)
- students applying their learning in real world contexts by taking action to support a positive change for our world (4.3 Apply and assess learning in authentic contexts).

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 Supports the intentions behind the Australian Curriculum

Sustainability is one of the three cross-curriculum priorities in the Australian Curriculum and the focus of the YEC program. It involves many complex issues. If YEC students are to take ownership of the sustainability issues they are researching they must have a deep understanding of how these issues apply to them and their local environs. As a result the YEC program content is developed in collaboration with YEC mentors (see section 5.2), to ensure activities provide skills, and are engaging and relevant for the whole YEC audience.



As a result NRM Education uses multiple ways to engage with young learners by developing approaches that cater for all learning styles and by challenging the students 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 engaging others in the process of developing more sustainable lifestyles, with the philosophy that we are a far more powerful force when we work with, and hear the voices of others. Students participating in the YEC program develop valuable skills to be active global citizens.

4.3 Links to the Australian Curriculum

The Youth Environment Council creates opportunities for student empowerment as students design and direct their own learning through a community based project. The skills and knowledge that students are exposed to through the YEC are aligned to six of the seven general capabilities (as outlined below) and strongly associated with the subject areas of Geography, Biology, Health and Physical Education and Civics and Citizenship. The cross-curriculum priorities of Sustainability and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures are emphasised through the YEC experience and are incorporated into several areas of the program.

Literacy:

Students undertake a range of literacy based tasks, taking charge of their own learning. Students identify an issue that they are interested in and undertake research, analysis and development of a project. Students often challenge themselves to source information from professional sources, developing oral and written communication skills, requiring students to explain, justify and deepen their understanding of their chosen issue. Students present their findings and outcomes to their peers, teachers, parents and NRM Education staff, justifying their findings and reflecting on their learning experience.

Learning Area Links: Civics and Citizenship (ACHCS055), (ACHCS084); Geography (ACHGS061), (ACHGS071)

Information and communication technology:

The online discussion forum challenges members' skills for accessing online communication tools allowing them to keep in touch between face-to face events. The forum is interactive and multi-model, enabling students to take responsibility and control for how they interact with the group during the year. Students are encouraged to develop their discussion skills using the YEC online discussion forum to pose questions and share their project research and progress. Members are also encouraged to use email to communicate with each other throughout the year. Through their projects, students also choose to produce websites, make films/videos, and produce online surveys. Many students choose to utilise both new and traditional models of technology when developing their project and gain research material through various online sources.

Learning Area links: Civics and Citizenship (ACHCS085); Geography (ACHGS061)

Critical and creative thinking:

YEC students undertake a major project that requires students to identify an issue they are passionate about, take action within their community and present the outcomes of their project to an audience. Students develop creative solutions and challenge traditional processes to arrive at a solution. Students are deliberately exposed to challenging scenarios and situations that require a creative solution, in order to develop confidence in their own ability to create, adapt and think logically about an issue. Students are exposed to outdoor learning experiences that require students to communicate and work cohesively as a team to solve problems and develop solutions.

Learning Area links: Civics and Citizenship (ACHCS057), (ACHCS055), (ACHCS085); English (ACELY1720); Health and Physical Education (ACPPS079), (ACPMP105); Geography (ACHGS061)

Personal and social capacity:

The focus of the YEC experience is to empower students with skills and strategies to lead change within their local community. Students learn that many projects require skills in leadership, negotiation, collaboration and perseverance in order to be successful. A multiple day outdoor camp allows students to share experiences with others and to develop new and healthy relationships with students they may not meet in their normal lives. Students who have previously participated in the program are encouraged to apply to be a student mentor. Student mentors take an active role in leading activities, modelling responsible and respectful behaviours and providing feedback to students and staff.

Learning Area links: Health and Physical Education (ACPMP086), (ACPPS079), (ACPMP105); Science (ACSHE120); Civics and Citizenship (ACHCS057), (ACHCS085)

Ethical understanding:

Students examine their values and attitudes, justify their opinions with evidence and reflect on the rights of individuals and the responsibilities of society. Students discuss and debate differing opinions amongst themselves, learning to listen and respect opinions that differ to their own. The concept of sustainability; balancing the needs of society, the economy and the environment are presented through a number of tasks students are required to tackle. The student project allows students to research one topic in greater detail to understand the complexity of an issue. Students are asked to justify and support their views with research, and are challenged to present their findings amongst their peers.

Learning Area links: Geography (ACHGK051), (ACHGK052), (ACHGK070); Civics and Citizenship (ACHCS057); English (ACELY1720); Science (ACSSU116); Health and Physical Education (ACPPS093)

Intercultural understanding:

The members of the YEC come from across South Australia and consist of students from rural and urban environments and from a variety of backgrounds. Students are exposed to people who live alternative lifestyles to themselves and who express differing opinions to themselves. In this way, students are fortunate to be introduced to people who they may not meet within their normal social life. Students learn that they are citizens of the world who have the power to create change locally. Students connect with local issues and examine the role of communities in creating change. In 2017 students were fortunate to learn from an Aboriginal educator about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and connections to the local environment.

Learning Area links: Health and Physical Education (ACPPS093), (ACPMP086), (ACPPS079); Civics and Citizenship (ACHCS057); Geography (ACHGK065)

5.0 Membership in 2017

This year 54 students in Years 7 to 11 from 37 schools across South Australia were chosen to be members of the YEC (seven of whom were mentors selected from the previous year). Unfortunately, some members had to pull out during the year but the remaining students on the Council represented the voices of young people from schools across South Australia. Students represented the Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges region, Eyre Peninsula, Northern and Yorke Peninsula, the SA Murray Darling Basin, and the South East. Figure 1 shows the breakdown of representation from the South Australian NRM regions.

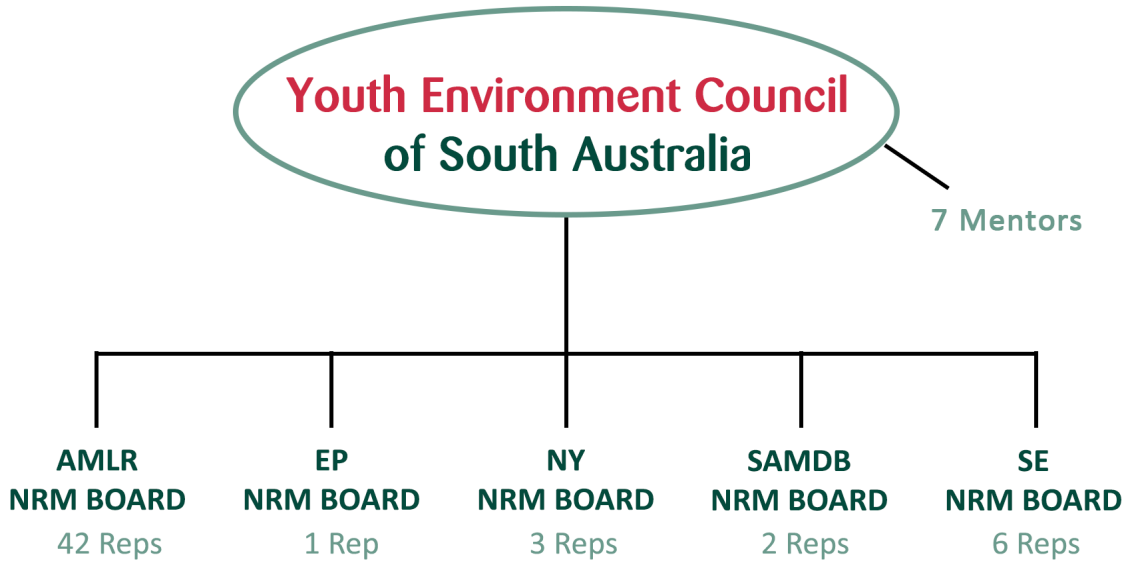


FIGURE 1: Youth Environment Council Representation Breakdown for 2017

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); AMLR and SAMDB NRM Education email lists; 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 DfE, Catholic and Independent high school in the state.

Any student in Years 7 to 10 was eligible to apply but required signed support from a parent/care-giver and a teacher at their school. The selection of students from the applications is normally based on: gaining a balance between city and regional; male and female; and primary school and high school aged representatives. This year 38 applications were received with all applicants being selected as members.

The successful applicants joined seven student mentors to form a council of 54.

Table 1 provides a breakdown of member numbers for 2017.

TABLE 1: Membership breakdown by School Type

	No. of students	No. of schools represented
DECD	44	29
Independent	2	3
Catholic	8	5
TOTAL	**54**	**37**

Primary Schools	31	21
High Schools	16	11
R-12 Schools	7	5
TOTAL	**54**	**37**

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 wide audience and therefore provide training opportunities to a new cohort of students each year.

5.1 Roles within the YEC and the Selection Process for 2017

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

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

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

5.2 The Mentor Program 2017

The mentor program is an innovative peer education program whereby selected YEC students (typically Yr 9-10) are trained in student leadership by NRM staff to help run the YEC program over the year. The seven student mentors interact with and influence younger members by running many of the year's activities at the various forums including the Arbury Park camp. Mentoring the fifty or so YEC students also enhances the mentors' own leadership skills. This further embeds the inclusive and supportive culture of young people taking action for sustainability.

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 to develop these skills) and have the ability to foster relationships with others.

The seven student mentors took part in an additional overnight training camp at Monarto Zoo to develop the skills required for their role, which include:

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

"I do consider environmental careers a bit more it has definitely changed my everyday actions and values."

Oliver, YEC mentor 2017

"My values and goals have changed (in a good way) over the three years I've been a part of YEC."

Bethany, YEC member 2017

"It is much better to work in groups than being alone and that it takes courage to act but the results are worth it."

Olivia, YEC member 2017

"I feel I have gained confidence and leadership. I also have gotten better at teamwork and public speaking."

Connor, YEC member 2017

"I have enjoyed the Monarto Zoo mentor camp because Wally was a great teacher and we learnt a lot about leadership. I loved being left in the night to look at the stars. "

Kira, YEC mentor 2017

6.0 The YEC Program

Representatives took part in the following events:

6.1 Mentor Camp

It is said 'you make your own luck in life' and seven of last year's Youth Environment Council (YEC) students were trained as student mentors to lead this year's council at an intensive overnight camp at Monarto Zoo. At this bush camp, within earshot of roaring lions, they were involved in planning the year's YEC activities, especially the main Arbury Park Camp from 3-6 July. Importantly, they also received training in leadership skills and developing self-confidence, as well as training in the art of delivering games and activities to help bond the new students together and weave them into a dynamic and cohesive group. At times the mentors were made to stretch beyond their comfort zones, but they responded sensitively and capably.

Highlights included a tour of the open range zoo, learning about Tasmanian Devils from the keepers, and going behind the scenes into the native animal breeding area to see some really cute baby Bilbies. In addition to facilitation by NRM Education staff, Wally, an iconic education officer from Monarto, was on hand overnight to stretch them even further with night-time activities, including solo stints out in the bush under the stars followed by a hike in which they had to find their own way back to camp.

NRM Education staff were impressed with the mentors' attitudes, application to tasks and ability to get on well together.

6.2 Sustainability Forum at the Adelaide Botanic Gardens, 13 April

The new student members of the 2017 Youth Environment Council met for their first event of the year at the Adelaide Botanic Gardens. The forum gave the students an opportunity to get to know each other, prepare for their YEC projects and the year ahead. Students explored how we are connected to the environment through one or more of our senses and reflected on the ecological and social systems that operate around us. Students also discussed the importance of Youth Voice, by sharing their own school examples of what it can look like and providing suggestions of how to grow student involvement back in their communities.

6.3 Arbury Park Leadership Camp, 3-6 July

Arbury Park Outdoor School (APOS) was the perfect setting for YEC members to learn and experience nature first- hand, work with like-minded people and develop their communication and leadership skills. A key focus of the camp was bringing together students to share their knowledge of, and passion about their chosen sustainability and environmental topic, and to develop ideas and plans for taking action within their schools and communities. Student projects were a major theme over the three days, with students working in groups and brainstorming ideas around areas of interest. Students identified actions they wanted to take such as working with local council on renewable energy options, making stuffed animals as a fundraiser for endangered species, revegetating school grounds, starting a nature club, creating art from beach rubbish to raise awareness of coastal issues, improving the humane treatment of livestock, reducing litter and providing families with alternative options to palm oil at their local shops.

YEC members developed a sense of place and a deeper understanding of the local ecology by exploring this special part of Bridgewater with APOS and NRM Education staff, in activities such as orienteering, participating in the school's sustainable practices, revegetating the creek line, and going on a night frog hunt. The hidden curriculum revolved around team building, showing initiative and taking risks. A highlight for students was guest speaker Trent Hill (Indigenous Culture for Kids), who demonstrated the sophisticated technologies traditionally used by his family for hunting and gathering. Trent also shared a dreaming story about taking responsibility and showing respect, both of which resonated with many YEC members.

Coming away from camp, YEC members reported they had developed or strengthened the following skills and knowledge: leadership, confidence, teamwork, resilience, how to help the environment and local community, including others' ideas, opportunity making, social skills, and how to approach teachers and principals.

6.4 YEC Online Discussion Forum, June-October

Following the camp, students took their evolving project ideas back to their regions for further development, and to gather support from their school communities to action their project. Students stayed in touch with their YEC peers using the YEC online forum to share project updates, achievements, run surveys and to troubleshoot their challenges.

This online tool was also used by NRM Education staff to remotely mentor YEC representatives across the state. Staff supported students to navigate their project planning and delivery, answered student requests and posted links to relevant resources. The online forum was also used to support students to prepare their project displays for the last event of the year. YEC Representatives were asked to complete two online tasks between the Sustainability Forum and the Sharing and Celebration event. Task one was completed by 31 students and task two was completed by 10 students.

6.5 Sharing and Celebration Forum, Cleland Wildlife Park, 26 October

YEC students came together for the final event of the year to share and showcase their completed YEC projects in an 'expo' style event. Each student representative created a project display for the 'expo-style' event, detailing and showcasing the sustainability project they had worked on since the YEC Leadership Camp. Projects that focused more on global issues included raising awareness and funds for cheetah conservation, consumerism, ocean litter, reducing reliance on fossil fuels, renewable energy and teaching fellow students about genetically modified organisms. Projects with a local focus included resource recovery, the creation of nature and learning spaces in the school grounds (vegetable, butterfly, indigenous plants and cultural use gardens, compost), revegetation, water saving at school, feral cats, and establishing student environment groups at school.

Guests were invited to view project displays, and students had the opportunity to promote and celebrate their efforts. The highlight of the day was showcasing the expo displays to parents, caregivers and our invited guests, including Ms Nat Cook, MP, State Member for Fisher, who took time to talk with students about their projects and exchange ideas, particularly about 'spreading the word' and how she could help. The display area was a buzz of energy as students' projects were showcased, ideas were shared and new contacts forged for the future. Ms Cook presented certificates and gifts before the YEC was wrapped up for another successful year.

7.0 The Ripple Effect

One of the key aspects of involvement in the YEC is that students share their passion, knowledge and skills with their whole school and wider community. They are encouraged to do this through various means they think of and to explore new ways to raise awareness.

In 2017 there were some innovative approaches taken, including:

- conducting surveys across the school and community
- proactive awareness-raising through brochures and posters displayed around the school and community
- delivering presentations and education sessions at school assemblies and to classes
- organising quiz nights and other fundraising ideas
- scientific inquiry and ecosystem monitoring
- using art and making videos to communicate a sustainability message
- petition to Local Government
- creating Facebook pages, online games and websites.

Case Study: Axel (year 7) Black Forest Primary School

Spurred on by the ABC's War on Waste series, Axel wanted to promote the reuse of items and reduce the amount of landfill from his community. He wanted to find out what local residents in his community did with their waste, so he developed a survey. Axel surveyed people from school and also did a letterbox drop to some nearby suburbs. The survey asked respondents some demographic questions, how they disposed of their waste, did they watch the ABC's War on Waste and were they influenced by it? The results were collated and presented in a series of graphs and tables.

Axel was most surprised by the number of people who had watched War on Waste, and by the great recycling habits some people had. In comparison, he was shocked by the amount of waste people put into the red landfill bins. Based on the findings, Axel wanted to help educate others about recycling and how items can be reused rather than sent to landfill. He replied to all of the survey respondents, congratulating those who were doing the right thing and suggesting some small and easy actions to those who didn't recycle much. Axel was thrilled to get replies from some of the survey respondents, some even sending photos to show how little waste was in their red bin! Axel said it was really good to know that he's been making an impact on the community.

Axel does not only want to change the habits of his school community, he wants to change the wider community. He says his biggest success was being able to communicate with all the people that he surveyed and to keep on spreading the word so together we can make a big difference.

General capabilities demonstrated through this project: Literacy, numeracy, critical and creative thinking, and personal and social capability.

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:

In 2017, there were 42 projects initiated by students of the YEC to support student voice and action in both school and community contexts. Figure 2 shows the breakdown of projects. Projects included:

Cultural change and awareness-raising: researching feral cats and their effects on native wildlife, forming an environmental/sustainability student group, researching local environmental issues in the Local Government area, researching deforestation and creating an interactive website to raise awareness, researching GMOs and presenting the information to other classes at school, and surveying students on their opinions, created an online game for junior primary students to raise awareness of land clearance, raise awareness (organised a quiz night, poster campaign and created a Facebook page) and fundraising for Cheetah Conservation Fund.

Biodiversity: raising awareness of endangered plants and animals, creating biodiversity gardens and corridors, revegetation, studying bird life and habitat health along Dry Creek and the effects of urbanisation, creating a seed bank for the endangered native creeping mint, making animal boxes (bird, bat and bee hotels), trying to keep cats indoors, creating school community gardens and 'Go Free' carts.

Case Study: Isabelle (year 7) Mt Burr Primary School

A feeling that the beach is often ignored by her school community when it comes to waste, is what gave Isabelle the idea to focus her YEC project on beach and ocean litter. Isabelle said she set out to raise lots of awareness about the issue, that we need to take action to stop it, and that every little bit counts. As part of her project, Isabelle took her school to their local beach to clean up and collect all the litter they could find. The students took the litter items back to school and created pieces of art from them to help Isabelle with her goal to raise awareness. Creating art was a fun way for the students to engage with the issue. The artworks have been displayed at the school and in the Council's library. Isabelle also put together a slideshow and presented to her school on how big the problem is and the effect beach and ocean litter has on wildlife.

To students looking at doing a similar project, Isabelle's advice is, go for it! Don't be afraid to do it, don't be afraid to speak out and ask people for help. If you have challenges keep working through them, get advice from teachers, peers, parents, family and friends. Isabelle hopes that her project will encourage others to pick up a few pieces of litter whenever they go to the beach.

General capabilities demonstrated through this project: Literacy, numeracy, critical and creative thinking, and personal and social capability.

Energy: researching how to reduce our reliance on non-renewable energy sources.

Waste: creating 'beautiful bins' by designing images and printing stickers for the wheelie bins at school, reinstating recycle bins in each classroom, surveying local residents about waste and educating them on reuse and reducing landfill, kids-teaching-kids approach to educating others about the decomposition time of 'waste' items, problem solving with school environment group to have more bins in the areas of the school with the most litter, investigating the container deposit scheme and why some items are omitted, bin audit/survey, encouraging nude food and challenging each class to only produce enough landfill items to fill one cup for one day, creating art from ocean litter, beach clean ups and researching where the litter comes from, creating compost, making reusable shopping bags and sandwich wraps, using recycled materials to make garden beds.

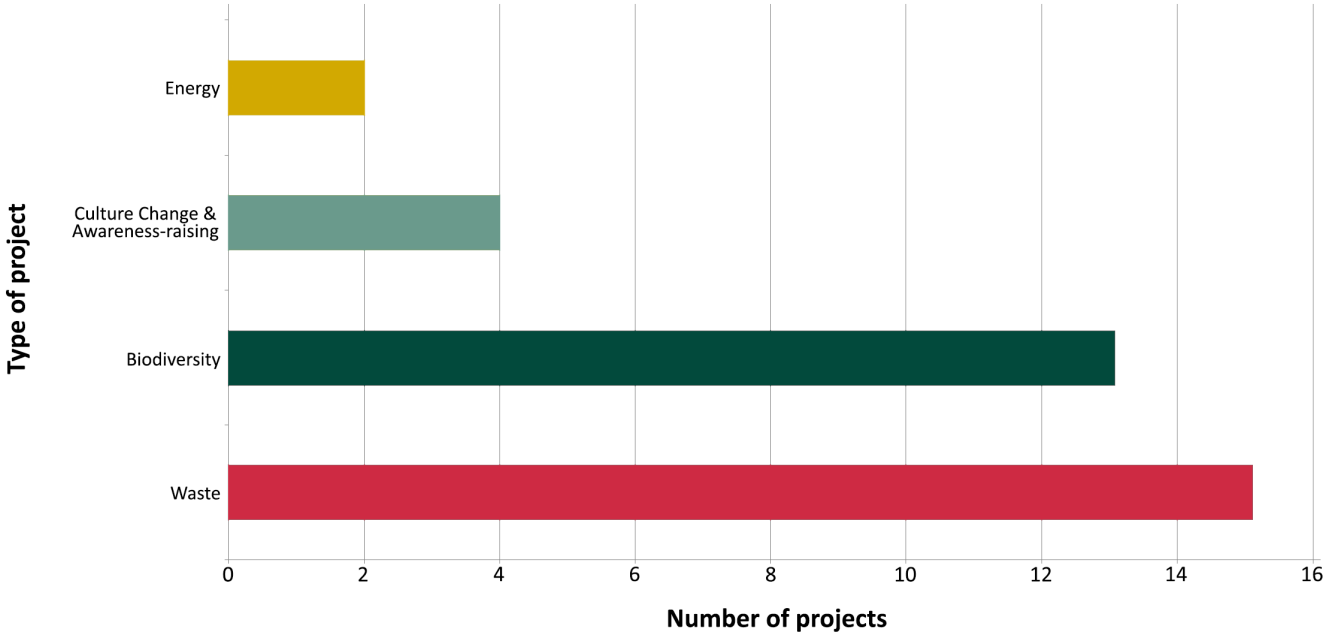


FIGURE 2: Number of projects shared at the Sharing and Celebration Forum

7.2 Ministerial Support

The Minister for Sustainability, Environment and Conservation, and Minister for Education and Child Development were both invited to attend the final Sharing and Celebration Forum at Cleland Wildlife Park. Unfortunately both ministers were unable to attend.

However, MP Nat Cook, State Member for Fisher, was able to attend on the Ministers' behalf.

Ms Cook took time to talk with students about their projects and exchange ideas, particularly about 'spreading the word' and how she could help. Ms Cook addressed the YEC with an inspiring speech and presented certificates. This is a very important part of the YEC program each year, as students report that having contact with members of parliament makes them feel their opinions and ideas are valued and that they have a strong voice to share.

Case Study: Inika (year 7), Mawson Lakes School

For her YEC project, Inika decided to do a scientific inquiry on her local creek ecosystem and enter it in the Oliphant Science Awards. She was interested to find out the diversity and abundance of bird species, and if this was related to the health of the creek ecosystem. To try and answer her question she tested the water quality of the creek, did bird and frog surveys, and considered the effect of the nearby housing development.

Inika was able to compare her data with that of research previous students had done, finding there were now eight less bird species in the area. She hypothesised some potential reasons why the bird numbers were lower using the data she had collected.

Concerned by the decrease in bird life, Inika wanted to raise awareness of the importance of ecosystem health to the students and teachers at her school. She ran education sessions with one class of year 1's, a year 3/4 class and two classes of year 7's. The younger students played a game aimed at recognising the features of birds and why they're important, and then Inika assisted them to make telescopes and binoculars to go birdwatching at the creek. The middle primary students learned about camouflage and the importance of habitat size through interactive games, and the year 7's made bird boxes to install in the schools nature play garden.

Inika said she really enjoyed teaching others about the importance of healthy ecosystems, and she was really glad that the students understood the meaning behind the games and that they enjoyed playing them.

Next year Inika will head to high school and she hopes that the school will continue to monitor the local ecosystem and the bird boxes at school, to identify the birds using the boxes and to see how they're helping the whole ecosystem.

Inika won the Nature Foundation SA R-7 Prize at the Oliphant Science Awards 2017 for the most outstanding entry with a Nature Conservation theme for her Scientific Inquiry: Mystery of the Disappearing Biodiversity.

General capabilities demonstrated through this project: Literacy, numeracy, critical and creative thinking, personal and social capability, and ethical understanding.

7.3 Special events and opportunities

The YEC had a request for input from the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) for contributing to the 2018 State of the Environment Report for South Australia. These reports are put together every five years and their purpose is to make an assessment of the environment and identify key issues to bring to the attention of the government.

To help the EPA select the issues to pay particular attention to in the report, they asked various groups, such as local councils and environmental groups, for their views on what they consider are the most important issues that we face as a State and as South Australians. As the generation to be the most affected by future environmental changes, they were particularly keen to reflect the voices of youth in the report. The YEC members were therefore requested to respond to the following questions:

- **What would you say are the most important environmental issues in South Australia?**
- **What would you say is the single most important thing that can be done to protect and look after the environment?**
- **In general, how concerned are you about environmental issues in South Australia? i.e. very concerned, quite concerned, neutral/unsure, not very concerned, not all concerned.**

8.0 Youth Environment Council Evaluation

During 2017, students completed two evaluations; one after the Leadership Camp and another after the Sharing and Celebration Forum at the end of the year. 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 2017 camp was on engaging and connecting students around their individual passions and interests, and supporting their capacity to act. The evaluation sought evidence for whether these aims had been met, as well as the overall experience. All YEC students felt confident about making a difference in their school and/or community (100% of 54 responses) and the majority of students discovered what they were passionate about and how they can create change (98%). The majority of students (<90% in all cases) also felt inspired by this camp, liked getting to know students from other schools, and enjoyed connecting with the outdoors.

"I have developed my confidence and voice projection. I never saw myself as a leader, but I have received a wealth of encouragement from [YEC] members and other mentors. This is a huge gain from my 4 years spent in the council."

Michéla, YEC member 2017

"If you want something done then do it, don't waste time waiting for someone else to do it."

Axel, YEC member 2017

8.2 End of Year Evaluation

The YEC evaluation process asked students to share what skills, opportunities and personal growth they gained from participating in the program:

- team work
- public speaking
- confidence to make a difference
- leadership
- social confidence
- teaching others
- environmental awareness.

"[I have gained] the knowledge of environmental issues, and the skill of taking action."

Jackson, YEC Member 2017

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 program, 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. Members were also asked what they enjoyed the most during their YEC experience. Their responses included:

- meeting new people with common interests
- being a mentor
- a sense of achievement
- learning about the environment
- developing new skills
- nature-based activities
- forming and strengthening friendships.

"I enjoyed the camp the most. I really got to know everyone, got out of my comfort zone, and learned new skills."

Connor, YEC Member 2017

Members were asked whether they would recommend joining the YEC to their friends, and 92% responded positively:

"I would because it is really fun and you learn heaps. You also get to make new connections with people who have similar interests."

Inika, YEC member 2017

Of the four students (8%) that responded negatively, the most common reason was that their friends were not really interested in the environment. 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: 92% agreed or strongly agreed

b) they had been empowered to create change in their schools: 96% agreed or strongly agreed

c) they had been inspired to take action: 94% agreed or strongly agreed

d) the work they did on camp helped them to plan their project; 86% agreed or strongly agreed.

Since the YEC Arbury Park Camp, students have shared skills and knowledge with the people around them, and encouraged change in their community:

"Talking to people, sharing knowledge with my schools' Environmental Focus Group, getting older people and school clubs involved. Parents and siblings have enjoyed learning and listening and helping."

Kira, YEC member 2017

"I've started an Environmental Group. I talked to the school at assembly and expressed my passion for the environment."

Olivia YEC member 2017

Student feedback reflected the YEC's influence of their ambitions for the future, from their values and everyday actions to their sustainability goals and career choices:

- It has taught me that I will definitely have the environment in my career
- The YEC has influenced my values and sustainability goals
- I am more thoughtful of resources and consumption
- I feel inspired to work on slowly changing the world
- I have ideas on how to improve my community
- I will respect the environment more
- I can do big things
- I want to study environmental science.

8.3 A Parent's Perspective

All parents of YEC members were invited to complete a survey on their child's experience. In 2017, seven parents responded. The questions asked were:

- What did your child gain from being a part of the YEC?
- 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.
- What helped/would help you support your child?
- Any other comments?

The responses strongly reflected the wide range of knowledge and skill sets that YEC members gained from their experience, and demonstrated many different areas of personal development. A selection of quotes from parents is included below.

"It made her more vocal at school, standing up at assembly to invite students to her environmental group. It encouraged her to lead groups and to lead a project, encouraged her public speaking and speech writing and made her more ready for high school and all the new people she would meet."

"It is especially nice to stand back and watch him at the sharing forum events in the last two years, seeing him confidently and passionately explain his projects and what he hopes to achieve."

"Thank you to all the NRM staff and others involved in making the YEC such a wonderful platform for students that often find it hard to find where they fit."

"I think in the current day and age it is fantastic that children are thinking about their environment and the part we all play in that. We can all do our bit and a little bit more to care for the environment and make a difference. I think that the YEC program truly allows them to believe that they can make a difference to sustainability and the environment, and makes the children go out and find ways to do just that. Not just words, but action as well."

"The program was very well run and all the children involved seem to enjoy themselves and immerse themselves in their research and discussions."

"She learned valuable skills which I know she will use every day as she has lots of involvement with other kids."

"Thank you so much for the opportunity for being involved. It has certainly contributed to her self-confidence and self-belief."

A wordle infographic, Figure 3, has been created using the most commonly used words and phrases that came up in parents' responses.

FIGURE 3: Parent observations of what children gained from being part of the YEC

8.4 A Teacher's Perspective

All supporting school staff were also emailed a survey on their students' experience. The survey questions were:

- Have you noticed a change in your student this year as a result of their participation in the Youth Environment Council?
- Have there been any changes/benefits/outcomes for the whole school as a result of this student's involvement in the YEC?
- Would you encourage your students to apply for the YEC next year?
- What helped you to support your student?
- Any other comments?

This year there were 15 respondents, a majority being teachers and a few principals. In answer to the question of whether they would encourage students to apply again next year, 100% of respondents said yes. The perspective of teachers is highly valued as these are the people with long term relationships to the students who are able to see changes in values, attitudes and behaviours within the school setting. A selection of quotes is included below.

"Our students' confidence and leadership skills have grown immensely. They have all been role models for our younger students, encouraging them to minimise waste around the school."

"It has been really noticeable that he has become a more confident person when talking about his area in native animals."

"She will be a leader one day and this experience has been a pathway."

"He was very vocal in class and student voice meetings to try and get this project up and running. He actively sought meeting times with the principal to go over possible options. Overall he was very focused on completing the project."

"The YEC students have been outstanding role models in sustainability and environmental education."

"Both students' participation has boosted the profile of conservation in our school. The next step is to connect with local primary schools and spread the word further!"

"It is exciting to see students who are passionate and enthusiastic about working independently and also collaboratively with the school community."

"For students who are passionate about the environment it is definitely something I would encourage them to be a part of."

"Thank you for providing my students with this wonderful opportunity to grow as learners."

9.0 Summary

The 2017 YEC program continues the legacy of success developed over the 2 decades of its existence. Parents, teachers, and the students' own reflections are testament to the strength of the program in helping give a voice to young South Australians advocating for the environment.

As always, the students that have been through the YEC in previous years and rise to become mentors are a keystone in the success of the council. This mentoring role gives older students the opportunity to develop skills as leaders, and their contribution helps build and maintain the supportive and collaborative culture the council has developed.

The mentors also run activities and provide feedback to staff, which ensures high levels of engagement. Another strength of the role is the mentors ability to provide peer-support to members and role-model positive behaviours.

During the year, students develop a project related to an environmental area of interest. They research and explore how they can make a difference in their school or community, and are given support during the YEC sessions and at their school site. Some projects focus on a local issue, while others look more to national or even international issues, but all look to improve socio-environmental outcomes.

At the final event of the year, students share their research and actions at the Sharing and Celebration Forum, where parents, teachers, members of the NRM Board and the local Member of Parliament, Nat Cook, heard about their projects. This expo-style event allows the students to share their work interactively, which made for some very engaging stalls.

This event provides the opportunity for YEC members to hone their presentation skills, share ideas with each other, and receive recognition for their efforts. YEC members developed many skills through their involvement this year including:

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

In their feedback, members frequently cite feelings of agency and power to take positive steps for the environment, challenging themselves and others to live more sustainably. They are encouraged to see themselves and their peers making a difference, which challenges the notion that young people do not have power to create change. Many also mention their desire to pursue careers in the environmental sector.

As a result, their schools and communities have gained young people equipped with skills, knowledge, and values 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 DfE Teaching for Effective Learning Framework.

The Australian Curriculum Learning Areas , General Capabilities and Cross Curriculum 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 2018

10.1 The proposed program for 2018

Date	Event	Intended outcomes
Thursday 5 April – Friday 6 April Week 10, Term 1	Mentor Camp	• Build leadership, mentoring and communication skills • Practice team building, group facilitation skills • Participate in hands on conservation/taking action skills • Review Sustainability Forum and YEC Camp agendas, roles and activities.
Thursday 3 May Week 1, Term 2	Sustainability Forum	• Induct new YEC council • Overview of YEC expectations, events, Leadership Camp FAQ and Online Forum tasks. • Team building and group norms • Establish shared understanding of sustainability, youth voice and taking action • 2017 members share their experiences and projects • Create online forum account By the end of the session members will have: • connected with YEC members that have a common interest • shared their knowledge and opinions to hone in on their area of passion • an understanding of ways they can grow their passion • started documenting the people who make up their sustainability network • participated in hands-on sustainability learning based on the environments within the Botanic Gardens.
Monday 14 May Week 3, Term 2	Reminders sent (email/online forum)	• Reminder to ask any camp questions online

Date	Event	Intended outcomes
Monday 21 May – Wed 23 May Week 4, Term 2	YEC Camp	Camp learning intentions: • What am I passionate about? • What skills do I need to tell my story and influence others? • Who in my school or community can help me? • What are my first next steps? By the end of the camp members will have: • built on leadership, mentoring and communication skills • practiced team building, group facilitation skills • deepened sustainability and ecological knowledge and skills • participated in hands on conservation/taking action skills • worked with YEC members with similar interests to conceptualize and start planning how to progress research, an event or an initiative in their area of passion.
Week 8, Term 2	Online Forum Task	• Report back on progress to date on the 'next steps' identified at YEC camp (choice of questions to answer) • Share photos, contacts and resources that might be useful to other members.
1st week mid-year holidays	Reminders sent (email/online forum)	• Reminder to contact NRM Education if they are experiencing any challenges with progressing their area of passion. • Send information about requirements for sharing achievements at the Sharing Forum • Reminder to ask any Sharing Forum questions online.
Week 3, Term 3	Online Forum Task	• Report back on progress of research, event or initiative (choice of questions to answer) • Share ideas of how they will display their work at the Sharing Forum

Date	Event	Intended outcomes
Thursday 1 Nov Week 3, Term 4	YEC Sharing Forum	• Promote and share achievements over the year through individual or group interactive displays for invited guests • Recognise and celebrate achievements over the year • Plan steps to sustain the initiatives started • Reflect on personal journey over the year, the impact of the YEC and provide feedback to NRM Education to improve the Council for next year.

11.0 APPENDIX

11.1 2017 YEC Member School Representation

- Auburn Primary School
- Blackforest Primary School
- Burra Community School
- Cabra Dominican College
- Christie Beach High School
- Coromandel Valley Primary
- Craigburn Primary
- Fulham North Primary
- Glencoe Central Primary
- Grant High School
- Greenock Primary
- Keith Area School
- Lobethal Primary School
- Long Street Primary
- Mawson Lakes School
- Mitcham Girls High School
- Mt Burr Primary School
- Mundulla Primary School
- Nuriootpa High School
- Ocean View College
- One Tree Hill PS
- Our Lady of the Sacred Heart College
- Parafield Gardens R-7
- Pedare Christian College
- Playford International College
- Rose Park Primary
- Seaton High School
- St Jakobi
- St Pius X
- Star of the Sea School
- Stradbroke School
- The Hills Christian Community School
- Urrbrae Agricultural High School
- West Beach Primary School
- Williamstown Primary
- Willunga High School
- Woodcroft Primary
- Xavier College