



# YOUNG ENVIRONMENTAL CHAMPIONS 2023 REPORT

## WHO ARE YOUNG ENVIRONMENTAL CHAMPIONS?

Put simply, Young Environmental Champions (YEC) are our future.

In 2023 the [Young Environmental Champions](#) program, delivered by [Action4Agriculture](#), was launched in the Hunter and Hawkesbury areas of regional NSW to give young people in primary and secondary schools the agency to feel empowered to change the world.

By connecting students with mentors and bright minds, the program gave them support to identify and act on environmental and social issues important to them, their schools and communities and to transform complex global challenges into real-world local solutions.

Underpinned by the [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#), Young Environmental Champions has allowed our young people to embed sustainability, resilience and wellbeing into their, and our, way of life. It has given them confidence and hope to look towards the green jobs of the future and know there is a place for them. They have become the change they want to see.

The program focuses on three key pillars of support - networking, mentoring and empowering - and we have found that this model inverts as our young people inspire us. These are our Young Environmental Champions.

## WHO HAS BEEN INVOLVED IN THE PROGRAM?

Action4Agriculture gratefully acknowledges funding from the [Office for Regional Youth](#) and [Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation](#), which has allowed the [Young Environmental Champions](#) program to run in 2023.

The program was delivered to Stage 3 and 5 students in a mix of ten primary and secondary schools in the Hawkesbury and Hunter areas of regional NSW.

Four schools from the Hawkesbury region came together under the banner of the Centre of Excellence in Agricultural Education to create four unique projects. The other participating school in the Hawkesbury was Llandilo Public School.

Schools from the Hunter region were St Brigid's Primary School, Hamilton Hill Public School, St Joseph's College, Newcastle East Public School and St John the Baptist Catholic Primary School.

Leadership coach [Josh Farr](#) facilitated student workshops while teachers learnt with [changeologist Les Robinson](#).

# HOW WAS YEC LAUNCHED?

The YEC program was launched at events in both the Hunter and Hawkesbury.

At the Hunter launch event, held at Tocal Agricultural College, we were joined by representatives from the University of Newcastle, local councils, Office for Regional Youth and Hunter Local Land Services. Special guests were teacher Kristen Jones, who spoke passionately about challenges that face schools in the modern era, and Zane Osborn from Hamilton Public School who spoke about students teaching their peers, using Hamilton's Blue Gate Garden TV as an example.

At the Hawkesbury event we were joined by representatives from RDA (Regional Development Australia) Sydney and the Greater Sydney Landcare Network.

50 students from primary and secondary schools representing ten Local Government Areas attended the initial workshops at the launch events and were introduced to team building, project brainstorming, community action planning and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, which underpinned their projects.

*"I was able to open up ideas, I looked through the lens of my teammates, and by putting our brains together we have come up with an idea that may be difficult but possible to do. Overall, we are thinking big and are exhilarated for the weeks to come."*

- Student comment





## WHAT DID *THE STUDENTS DO?*

*“Over 10 weeks, young minds dedicated themselves to creating a social impact project that will bring about positive change and contribute towards achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Our young people are reshaping, rewiring and reimagining the future; a future where they will be the leaders.”*

– Action4Agriculture director Lynne Strong

Taking their learnings from the initial workshop our students identified their own strengths and goals as they began the YEC program in earnest. Guided by the leadership coach and their mentors they learnt skills to improve their wellbeing and resilience. They connected with community projects, government agencies, volunteers, and individuals who shared their visions and supported bringing their big ideas to fruition.

Over the course of another two workshops in design thinking and project planning the students refined their ideas and solutions and looked at a diverse range of topics including:

- Waste management
- Pollinator promotion
- Sustainable fishing
- Flood mitigation
- Poverty in Australia
- Transitioning to high school
- People powered transport
- Student mental health



As students learnt, so too did their teachers as they attended a workshop with changeologist Les Robinson. Funded by Hunter Local Land Services, that workshop aimed to demystify behaviour change and, in doing so, taught how to enable other people to act on change through action projects or campaigns.



## WHO WON?

At the final pitch, reflection and celebration event held on May 12 at the Newcastle Museum, the ten teams from each school presented their community action plans to a panel of judges comprised of AAEE (Australian Association of Environmental Educators) chair Sue Martin, Newcastle environmental advocate Alexa Stuart, Hunter Youth Community Coordinator (ORY) Dan Brown, CoastXP founder Dominic May and founder of theBEATS Tommy Viljoen.

*“It was a pleasure to be involved and to hear some amazing ideas from the students. It restores my faith in how the next generation will be equipped to deal with the challenges of tomorrow,”*

- Dominic May

The calibre of the program and of the projects generated by the students was reflected in the special guest presenters who attended the event including Declan Clausen (Deputy Mayor of Newcastle), The Hon. Tim Crakanthorp (Member for Newcastle Minister for Skills, TAFE and Tertiary Education, Minister for the Hunter) and The Hon. Kate Washington (Member for Port Stephens Minister for Families and Communities, Minister for Disability Inclusion) alongside representatives from Newcastle and Maitland Council, Hunter Local Land Services and the Office for Regional Youth.

*"This was a fantastic showcase of creative and innovative young minds from across our region. I was very impressed by what I saw and I've no doubt these kids have big futures ahead of them."*

- The Hon. Tim Crakanthorp

*"I love this program. It gives students, who are already solving the problems of the future, a chance to shine,"*

- The Hon. Kate Washington,

Winning the primary school section was Hamilton Public School who focused on SDGs 3 (Good Health and Wellbeing) and 13 (Climate Action) to create a project titled People Power.

*"[We are] aspiring to improve the health of individuals and our community. We aim to clean the air and promote physical health by promoting modes of transport that are strictly people powered!"*



Winning the secondary school section was St Joseph's Lochinvar who looked at flood mitigation due to local urbanisation and how it would affect their school, coming up with a solution that utilised the excess water through irrigation. Their project incorporated SDGs 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure) and 15 (Life on Land) and was an excellent example of how global issues can be addressed at a local level.

Runner-up in the secondary section was the Centre of Excellence in Agricultural Education for their focus on SDG 3 (Good Health and Wellbeing) and in the primary section the runner-up was St Brigid's Primary School who focused on SDG 15 (Life on Land).



## WAS THE PROGRAM *A SUCCESS?*

Through entry and exit surveys of teachers and students we were able to gauge how effective the YEC program was, and the results were impressive.

The evaluation data indicates that YEC had a highly positive impact on students' confidence levels across a range of issues. The most notable areas of increased student confidence came from:

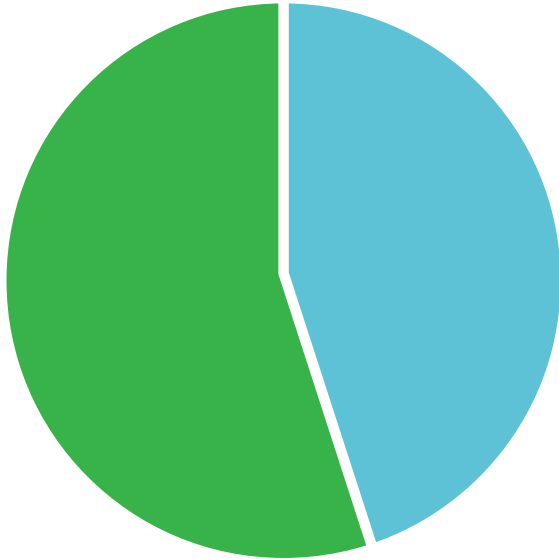
- Planning for school projects.
- Asking questions and seeking help.
- Doing something to improve the community.
- Being a good team member.
- Coming up with more ways to solve a problem.



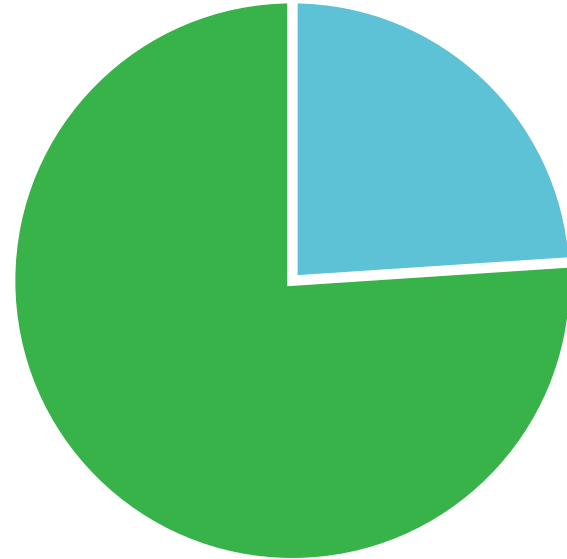
PITCH EVENT MC JOSH FARR SHARES THE VALUE OF THE YEC PROGRAM  
[\(CLICK TO WATCH\)](#)



**I CAN EASILY EXPLAIN MY IDEAS TO OTHERS  
- STARTING PROGRAM**



**I CAN EASILY EXPLAIN MY IDEAS TO OTHERS  
- COMPLETING PROGRAM**



- Low confidence (not at all, slightly, somewhat)
- High confidence (Quite and extremely)

Figure 1.1 & 1.2. Comparison of high and lower confidence levels for "I can easily explain my ideas to others".

## MEET THE WINNERS



Champion Primary School - Hamilton Public School  
(click to watch)



Reserve Champion Primary School - St Brigid's Primary School  
(click to watch)



Champion Secondary School - St Joseph's College Lochinvar  
(click to watch)



Reserve Champion Secondary School - Centre of Excellence in Agricultural Education  
(click to watch)

From these 21st century skills development students learnt to network with their counterparts in other schools and professionals in the wider community, to realise adults will listen to their ideas and to build the confidence to make a difference to their world.

*“I enjoyed seeing how older people take our ideas on.”*

*“I had enjoyed how we were able to participate with different people and learn their views and solutions on the problem they had chosen.”*

*“I enjoyed developing my public speaking skills and I liked how I was able to connect to various people and meet many professionals who have interests that I share.”*

*“I enjoyed working together to make a project that will actually improve something in real life.”*

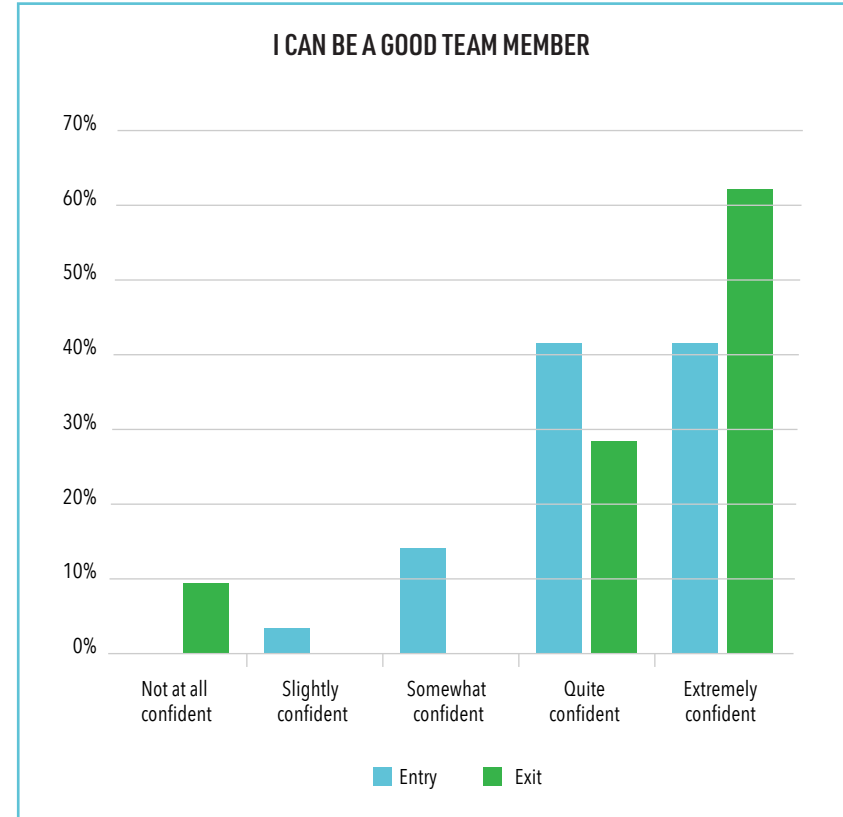


Figure 1.3. Comparison of reported levels of confidence for “I can be a good team member”.

We asked our students how they have changed their actions or thoughts about sustainability and the environment since completing the program:

*"I have realized that bees and butterflies are more important than meets the eye."*

*"Sustainability isn't just a yes or no, but is rather a scale. This way, I have tried to go up further on the scale."*

*"I think even though I'm a child I can do big things."*

*"I believe in my ability do make positive change."*

*"Trying to spread the word about what is occurring in the environment more. Whilst I did this before, I have become more efficient in explaining and sorting my words out."*

Students also reflected on mental health, wellbeing and resilience:

*"I have now become more aware of how people may be struggling with support when coming to school and that we need to create awareness of this."*

*"I have started to look after my wellbeing more."*

*"I think I can make a huge difference by doing little things."*

Success is also measured by teachers who enjoyed watching their students flourish during the YEC program as they took ownership of problems and found solutions.

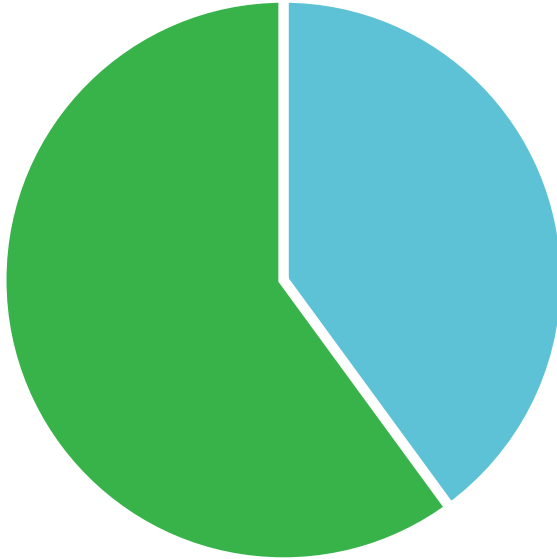
*"The program is wonderful. It enables young people to think beyond their syllabus areas and apply content knowledge to real world applications. The agency provided to our young people through projects like this is fabulous."*

*"Giving kids exposure to external people who actually live and breathe this stuff is invaluable. It's really empowering for the students to come up with an idea and then have acknowledgement outside of school that this is a real thing that could actually work."*

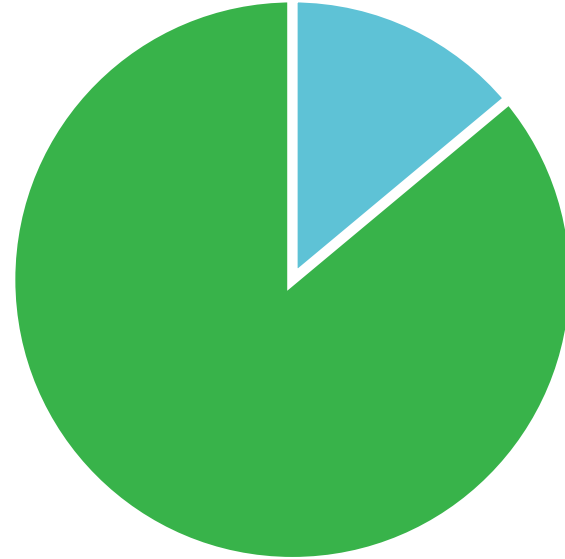
*"The benefits of a project such as this is the authenticity of learning and the development of real world skills. It enables young people to engage in real world systems, to understand constraints and structures on real world problems and to engage with experts in the field."*

*"The best kind of learning happens when kids do something and experience something."*

**I CAN DEVELOP PLANS FOR HOW TO DO SCHOOL PROJECTS  
- STARTING PROGRAM**



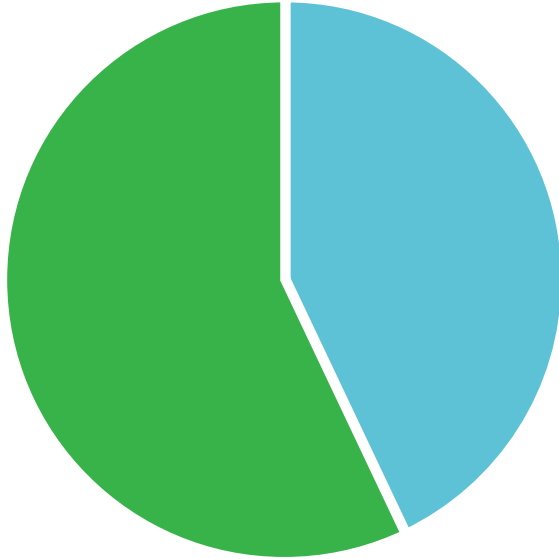
**I CAN DEVELOP PLANS FOR HOW TO DO SCHOOL PROJECTS  
- COMPLETING PROGRAM**



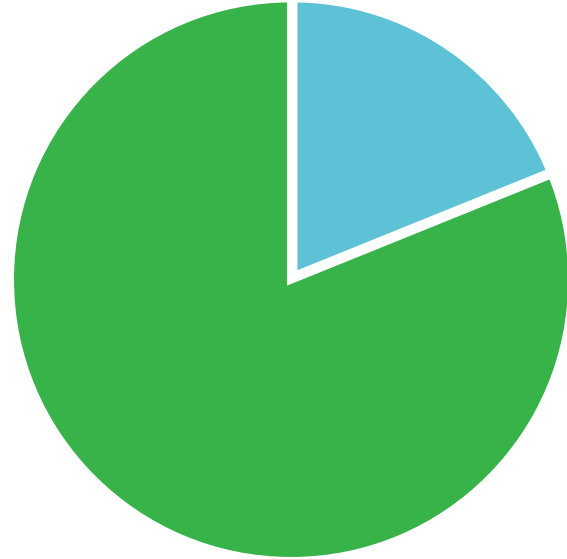
- Low confidence (not at all, slightly, somewhat)
- High confidence (Quite and extremely)

Figure 1.4 & 1.5. Comparison of high and lower confidence levels for "I can develop plans for how to do school programs".

### I CAN DO SOMETHING TO IMPROVE MY COMMUNITY - STARTING PROGRAM



### I CAN DO SOMETHING TO IMPROVE MY COMMUNITY - COMPLETING PROGRAM



- Low confidence (not at all, slightly, somewhat)
- High confidence (Quite and extremely)

Figure 1.6 & 1.7. Comparison of high and lower confidence levels for "I can do something for my community".

## WHAT WERE OUR *CHALLENGES?*

The flow on affects from the pandemic, teacher shortages and over-commitment required by school staff caused challenges in the delivery of the YEC program. For example, we had schools signed up and participating but when a teacher was absent for an extended time the school withdrew.

Teachers also reported challenges with an already crowded school calendar and finding time to implement the program.

*“Timing is tricky at any time in a high school, but we do our best to make it work. You really need 10-12 weeks to follow the full process as all too often schools have interruptions which impact the flow.”*

In early 2023 the government announced Naplan would be brought forward from May to March and this impacted school’s ability to participate in Term 1 and also caused nominated schools to withdraw.

Through our evaluation surveys we were able to identify areas where teachers struggled, such as program timing and number of students participating. All feedback will be used to refine and improve the YEC program in the future.

## OUR FINAL *THOUGHTS*

With our goal to give young people in primary and secondary schools the agency to feel empowered to change the world, the Young Environmental Champions program was an enormous success.

Our YEC graduates can:

1. Investigate the world beyond their immediate environment, framing significant problems and conducting well-crafted and age-appropriate research.
2. Recognize perspectives, others' and their own, articulating and explaining such perspectives thoughtfully and respectfully.
3. Communicate ideas effectively with diverse audiences, bridging geographic, linguistic, ideological, and cultural barriers.
4. Take action to improve conditions, viewing themselves as changemakers in the world and participating reflectively.

This success was only possible through the support of our funding partners and stakeholders who did more than provide money; they came on the journey with us and our students, attending the workshops and presentation, which in turn allowed students to feel seen, heard and valued. See Appendix 6.

This success was reflected in the extraordinary entry and exit surveys that have encouraged us to continue with the program that has built resilience and awareness of wellbeing in our young people and given them the hope and confidence to make changes to their world and future. See Appendix 7.

***“Hope comes from having a future you can imagine and understanding how to move towards that future. Confidence comes wrapped up in this, and is related to trying out new things, lots of new things, large and small. This leads to confidence that is akin to resilience.”***

– Liv Pennie, Become Education

But perhaps the most telling example of our success comes from our young people themselves:

***“You can't just tell people to change you have to be the change.”***



## **BRIGHT IDEAS FROM TOMORROW'S LEADERS**

**"LESS SOUND  
POLLUTION"**

**"YOU PUT  
RUBBISH INTO A  
MACHINE AND IT  
TRANSFORMS INTO  
ELECTRICITY."**

**"I'D LIKE  
PEOPLE TO  
GENERATE THEIR  
OWN ENERGY, LIKE  
RIDING A BIKE  
CONNECTED TO  
A DYNAMO."**

**"I WOULD LIKE TO  
MAKE SURE THAT THE  
WATER THAT WE GET FROM  
FLOODS DOESN'T GO TO  
WASTE. I WANT TO CREATE A WAY  
WHERE THE WATER FROM THE  
FLOODS FOLLOWS A ROUTE WHERE  
IT REACHES A DAM AND CAN BE  
USED FOR TRANSPORTING TO  
OTHER COUNTRIES IN NEED  
AS WELL AS FOR OUR  
OWN USE."**

**"BEING A KIND AND DECENT PERSON TO THOSE HAVING TROUBLE AROUND YOU AND SUPPORTING THEM IN ANYTHING THEY MAY NEED HELP IN."**

**"FLYING TO MARS AND STARTING TO TERRAFORM IT."**

**"I WOULD NOW LIKE TO PUT MYSELF OUT THERE AND LET PEOPLE KNOW THAT THEY AREN'T ALONE WHEN IT COMES TO PROBLEMS IN SCHOOL."**

**"I WANT TO LET THOSE IN NEW ENVIRONMENTS KNOW HOW THEY CAN FLOURISH IN THEIR NEW AREA AND THAT THEY CAN USE THEIR ABILITY TO MAKE ACTIVE DECISIONS TO NOURISH THEMSELVES AS A LEARNER."**

# APPENDICES

**YOUNG ENVIRONMENTAL CHAMPIONS HIERARCHY OF INTENDED OUTCOMES**

**1. ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION**  
Sustainability thinking and action are embedded in Australian way of life

**2. ENVIRONMENTAL ENGAGEMENT**  
Individuals, groups, schools, businesses and community have regular participation from the Young Environmental Champions Young Environmental Champions programme and actively address the environmental challenges of our planet and the future

**3. ENVIRONMENTAL LEADERSHIP**  
Young people are empowered and knowledgeable and are contributing to environmental action and leadership in their communities, schools, workplaces, and organisations. The programme has created a generation of young environmental leaders who are confident, resilient and have the skills to address positive environmental challenges in their communities and organisations.

**4. ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION**  
Young people are engaged in a range of environmental activities and projects that contribute to environmental action and leadership in their communities, schools, workplaces, and organisations. The programme has created a generation of young environmental leaders who are confident, resilient and have the skills to address positive environmental challenges in their communities and organisations.

**5. ENVIRONMENTAL INFLUENCE**  
Young people are empowered and knowledgeable and are contributing to environmental action and leadership in their communities, schools, workplaces, and organisations. The programme has created a generation of young environmental leaders who are confident, resilient and have the skills to address positive environmental challenges in their communities and organisations.

**6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**  
Young people are empowered and knowledgeable and are contributing to environmental action and leadership in their communities, schools, workplaces, and organisations. The programme has created a generation of young environmental leaders who are confident, resilient and have the skills to address positive environmental challenges in their communities and organisations.

**7. ENVIRONMENTAL LEADERSHIP**  
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**8. ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION**  
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**9. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**  
Young people are empowered and knowledgeable and are contributing to environmental action and leadership in their communities, schools, workplaces, and organisations. The programme has created a generation of young environmental leaders who are confident, resilient and have the skills to address positive environmental challenges in their communities and organisations.

**10. ENVIRONMENTAL LEADERSHIP**  
Young people are empowered and knowledgeable and are contributing to environmental action and leadership in their communities, schools, workplaces, and organisations. The programme has created a generation of young environmental leaders who are confident, resilient and have the skills to address positive environmental challenges in their communities and organisations.

**11. ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION**  
Young people are empowered and knowledgeable and are contributing to environmental action and leadership in their communities, schools, workplaces, and organisations. The programme has created a generation of young environmental leaders who are confident, resilient and have the skills to address positive environmental challenges in their communities and organisations.

**12. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**  
Young people are empowered and knowledgeable and are contributing to environmental action and leadership in their communities, schools, workplaces, and organisations. The programme has created a generation of young environmental leaders who are confident, resilient and have the skills to address positive environmental challenges in their communities and organisations.

Appendix 1. Hierarchy of Intended Outcomes.

**YOUTH 4 ACTION** EMPOWERING YOUNG ENVIRONMENTAL CHAMPIONS

**PROVE YOUR TEACHING IS HAVING REAL-WORLD IMPACT**  
**IT'S TIME TO SIGN YOUR SCHOOL UP**

**CAPTURE YOUR STUDENTS WHO WANT TO:**  
Challenge the status quo.  
Be part of driving change from the grassroots level.  
Find new ways to create positive social and environmental changes.

**DO YOU WANT A PROGRAM THAT:**  
Aligns with the curriculum, the general capabilities and is fun and engaging?  
Supports teachers with resources, professional learning opportunities and recognition for their dedication?  
Strengthens your school to practise leadership, build resilience and enhance wellbeing?  
Helps others to strengthen their capacity for change?  
Connects your school with the community?  
Fosters leadership and student engagement?

**THEN WE HAVE THE PERFECT OPPORTUNITY FOR YOU!**  
Yourth4Action - Young Environmental Champions program will empower your students to create scalable and sustainable impact connected to your local context.

**THE TIME IS NOW**  
Click HERE to see Key Dates. Submit your Expression of Interest HERE.

Scan QR Code to find out more and sign your school up for this 10 week program to get the support you need!

The Empowering Young Environmental Champions program is supported by the Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation who are Backing Young People with innovative opportunities that advance their independence, social purpose and future security and the Office for Regional Youth.

**THE PROGRAM IS BEING DELIVERED BY ACTION4AGRICULTURE INC**  
Contact E: [Lynnestrong@action4ag.com.au](mailto:Lynnestrong@action4ag.com.au) | M: 0407 740 446

Appendix 2. Program Signup Flyer.

**YOUTH 4 ACTION** EMPOWERING YOUNG ENVIRONMENTAL CHAMPIONS

**YOU ARE INVITED TO THE**  
Young Environmental Champions  
judging and awards event celebrating  
student impact and learning for SDG action

**DATE:** 12th May 2023  
**TIME:** 11.30 lunch 12pm-1pm Judging

**VENUE:**  
Newcastle Museum, McIntyre Theatre  
6 Workshop Way, Newcastle NSW 2300

**JOIN US TO CELEBRATE HOW OUR YOUNG PEOPLE ARE RESHAPING, REWIRING, REIMAGING THE FUTURE**

**PLEASE RSVP HERE BY 21ST APRIL 2023**

Appendix 3. Event Invitation.

**YOUTH 4 ACTION** EMPOWERING YOUNG ENVIRONMENTAL CHAMPIONS

**YOUNG ENVIRONMENTAL CHAMPIONS PROGRAM 2023**

**Pitch Judging Template**

- Thank you for being a judge at the pitch competition
- Student teams are judged on 5 criteria
- Each criteria is judged out of 3 points
- There is space below to provide your feedback and recommendations

Criteria (20 points)	Criteria (20 points)	Criteria (20 points)	Criteria (20 points)	Score
Problem (2 points)	Goal explained Clear problem statement Clear specific objectives	Goal identified Problem well understood Relevance - current	Goal in scope Problem well understood Relevance - unique	
Solution (2 points)	Realistic, feasible, innovative Clear explanation of how solution is unique	Some benefits described Appropriate steps to deliver Solution has potential for scalability	Benefits - unique Benefits - realistic Benefits - scalable	
Program (2 points)	Significant activities listed Realistic, measurable Activities are clear	Measurable activities listed Realistic to deliver	How delivery from the perspective of the judge	
Future Plans (2 points)	Clear future plans identified Realistic, measurable Activities are clear	Some future plans identified Realistic to deliver	Measurable activities listed Plans can be repeated	
Communication skills (2 points)	Clearly communicated with all team Members speaking	Well communicated with most Members speaking	Well clearly communicated with all team members speaking	

**SCHOOL NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_ **TOTAL SCORE:** \_\_\_\_\_ / 15

**Do you have any feedback for the team?**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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Appendix 4. Pitch Judging Template.



Appendix 5.  
Aurora Winter 2023 Article.



Appendix 6.  
YEC Case-Study.



Appendix 7.  
Program Evaluation.



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