



LET'S TALK ABOUT... CLIMATE CHANGE

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to provide recommendations and report on the outcomes collected from the Salisbury City Rotaract and City of Salisbury Youth Council Let's Talk about... Climate Change Youth Forum held in December 2021.

Figure 1: Young People in Attendance at the Forum



Figure 2: PhD. Candidate Amy Tschirn speaking at the Forum





Background

Salisbury City Rotaract and City of Salisbury Youth Council “Let’s Talk about... Climate Change Youth Forum” was facilitated to provide a space to discuss the mental health effects of climate change, climate anxiety, radical optimism, climate change and media, what sustainably means to young people, and what actions young people want to see from our elected leaders.

The participants of the forum fell within the age range of 12-25 and live, work, study, and play in the City of Salisbury and surrounding northern suburbs, and hence all participant perceptions of climate change are to be understood as at least in part influenced by the City of Salisbury’s experience of, and response to, the climate emergency.

Capitalism has privatised, exhausted, and transformed the Earth’s natural systems, entangling economics with the hierarchical extractive relationship; placing value on the environment as an object for financial satisfaction. This exploitative understanding of our environment creates a causal relationship between favouring Gross Domestic Product (GDP), energy, and materials as means to take value from the natural commons, with fossil fuels fundamentally only existing as an untapped resource to exploit for profit.

Federici (2015) talks about urban gardens for neighbourhood consumption rather than profit seeking a wealth of the common, “recombin(ing) what the social division of labour in capitalism has separated” (2015, p. 4). Federici argues that we need to resist this and that participation in larger wholes (local communities, neighbours, intergenerational traditions) does not eradicate our individuality but shapes our preferences, values, and behaviours. While Federici regarded sustainability as a western concept, First Nations peoples have been practising sustainable practices on Country for hundreds of thousands of years. This reframing of how First Nations peoples lived as one with Country allows us to reconnect with history, and “live as commons” (2015, p. 6) through a process of truth-telling.

Given that the forum was held in the City of Salisbury, it is relevant to frame this forum against the City of Salisbury’s “Salisbury, Sustaining Our Environment: An Environmental and Climate Change Strategy”. The City of Salisbury’s Sustaining Our Environment Strategy consists of goals that aim at meeting Key Direction 2 - Sustaining Our Environment. Many of the responses in the forum relate back to the goals directly, such as goal 1.2, 2.2, and 3.2.

- ★ Goal 1.2 - To optimise the use of renewable energy.
- ★ Goal 2.2 - Encourage resource recovery, reuse and recycling opportunities.
- ★ Goal 3.2 - Encourage and facilitate integrated transport networks, and reduce reliance on fossil fuel motorised forms of transport.



The Paris agreement had countries across the world, including Australia, agree upon putting forward a national plan to reduce emissions known as Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC's). Australia resigned to adopting this strategy in no small part due to how, if we continue on the "business as usual" path, temperatures will increase more than three degrees above pre-industrial levels. Hardly only a temperature increase, this will also cause more catastrophic natural disasters such as flooding, bushfires, extreme weather, dust storms, and destruction of species. Therefore, it is imperative that we address the climate emergency to prevent further irreparable damage to the planet, rather than investing in resources that will bring us closer to the worst case scenario as outlined by the IPCC more coal mining (UKcop26).

Consultation and key findings

The youth forum held on the 8th of December 2021, had 31 attendees, of which 10 were guests and 3 speakers/VIPs present.

This forum consisted of integrated learning with an icebreaker, and a guest speaker, PhD candidate Amy Tschirn, who presented on radical environmental optimism to reframe and stimulate the conversation before delving into the consultation.

Participants were community-minded, having been sourced by community groups with connections to our local youth community centre, Twelve25. These participants are young people who work, live, or play within the City of Salisbury.

The Youth Forum focused on four key questions:

1. *What is sustainability to you and how can our local and state governments participate in being a more fair, greener place?*
2. *What do you want to see from all levels of government when it comes to climate change?*
3. *How do the media and politicians talk about climate change? Discuss how this makes you feel.*
4. *Let's talk about climate anxiety: what are things we can do for self-care and to reduce your climate anxiety?*

The young people's responses and discussions that relate to each of the four key questions follow.



Table 1: What is sustainability to you and how can our local and state governments participate in being a more fair, greener place?

The overall perception that participants had of sustainability on an individual level was related to planning ahead, making a conscious effort to make a positive change, and thinking about how actions now affect the future. Initially, the perception of sustainability was looked at as an individual effort of using energy saving light bulbs, engaging in a circular economy, and even suggestions of running a library of things program such as what the Adelaide Sustainability Centre is currently trialing. Participants mentioned that sustainability looked like upcycling clothing, using op shops, sharing cars and being deliberate about their waste awareness and utilising renewable energy.

Participants overwhelmingly suggested that local, and state governments should focus on *transport, infrastructural changes, education, and conservation.*

Transport

Participants shared that local and state governments should place more emphasis on public transport - expanding the O-Bahn, making buses, trams and trains accessible for PWD (invisible disabilities), and allow for more wheelchair places on buses/trains (only one/two at the moment and commonly used by the elderly).

- Make public transport safe - energy conscious lightening, solar powered cameras especially at the Salisbury interchange
- Make public transport free to encourage sustainable transport
- Electric train lines replace buses with more trains
- Avoid privatisation
- Could have a frequent flyer / reward system
- Streak* service so the more often you go the more incentives

**Streaks count sustained, daily or otherwise engagement; weekly streaks with a geo-tested 'holiday mode' pause could work best in this public transport context.*

There was a lot of discussion around electric vehicles (EV) where local or state governments could implement electric vehicle fleets to kickstart the second-hand market, and look at introducing more EV charging stations since they are not currently well spaced; when people switch to EV having conveniently spaced charging stations in locations such as community centres, train stations, shopping centres, or the Salisbury hub will make it so that people can realistically charge their vehicle and increase the likeliness of buying an EV.



Infrastructural changes

On a local government level, participants suggested creating more community gardens as this could be a way to connect the local community and a subsidy program could be implemented as a way to support those who can't afford food. Additionally, local governments could consider including vegetation that is edible such as fruit trees, and herbs in public spaces.

Education

In regards to education, participants suggested that school curriculum should include education on conservation, educating young people about First Nations culture on sustainability and their way of caring for the land, and teaching children about native plants. Additionally, it was suggested that the general public should be educated in regards to affordable sustainability, recycling and how they can make a difference as individuals.

Conservation

Mangroves in St Kilda need to be conserved and discontinued from further damage. Participants stated that local and state governments can collaborate to educate the public on affordable sustainability, and ensure that education in schools implement discussion on a range of topics. Topics include First Nation culture education on sustainability and caring for the land, bringing environmental forums to schools, and introducing methods to reduce climate anxiety in addition to the information covered in school subjects that relate to environmentalism and sustainability.

In particular the responses relate to:

- References to transportation like EV fleets or the Gawler line can be linked to Goal 3.2 - Encourage and facilitate integrated transport networks, and reduce reliance on fossil fuel motorised forms of transport.
- References to solar panels from table 1 question can be connected to Goal 1.2 - To optimise the use of renewable energy. Public & community gardens and Recycling hubs link to Goal 2.2 - Encourage resource recovery, reuse and recycling opportunities.



Table 2: What do you want to see from all levels of government when it comes to climate change?

Participants spoke to the need for immediate action from all levels of government, enshrining climate policies and action plans into every step taken forward from here on out. Participants spoke at great length of the need for change to be implemented before 2035, and that 2050 is too far away from when there needs to be measurable, transparent and accountable actions taken. The young people present identified energy, funding and resources, and climate policies as key areas that are missing or flawed in all levels of government.

Participants spoke to the prioritisation of community for local government, having urban planning and cities built for and by people with the planet at the core of everything we do. This includes making recycling practices easier and inclusive, with compostable face masks, and education workshops; urban planning that is green; electric vehicles rebates; and more green spaces and parklands that include edible vegetation.

The young people present suggested local governments engage with private and public stakeholders for projects that foster the sustainability of the community. This approach needs to be accessible, inclusive and forward thinking; to educate and sustain the city, not just for the next three years but for the next fifty. This movement needs to be led by the community, and thus needs to be inclusive of the vulnerable and low socioeconomic that are oppressed by the monopoly of climate change. One avenue to help increase the accessibility of this movement is to provide access to grants and rebates, as the youth felt local governments should be responsible for the opportunity for all residents to engage in positive and environmental change.

One of the other things which local governments could do is include a placement of recycling hubs in community spaces, such as the Salisbury Community Hub, and in public spaces, such as shopping centers, schools, universities, institutions and public parks. These hubs should include three bins including organic, recycling and general waste. There should be increased community recycling hubs for cans, stationeries, soft plastic, facial disposable masks, and old clothings.

For the state government, the youth want to see young people represented in parliament and in conversations regarding climate change. This extends to having independent academics sitting in on the decision making regarding climate change. The young people present called on the state government to be proactive and take action key steps towards a sustainable future. This included a Murray Darling Basin inquiry and an investigation into mismanagement of previous recommendations, as they felt the previous response from



the government was inadequate. Young people want a genuine concentrated and focussed effort on policies that benefit the environment and people. Participants spoke to the management of marine sanctuaries, i.e. Port Noarlunga Reef, and the need for greater restrictions and interventions for marine wildlife. There was great discussion around the responsibilities state governments have for restricting logging rules and creating more water reservation areas and parks or wetlands.

When it comes to the federal government, the young people present wanted to see allocated funding and resources for climate action: this means investing in our planet and people, not for profit. This could be realised through a fund transition program away from animal agriculture, which occurs in Britain, the removal of cotton plantations, investment into recycling goods, and making it affordable, providing accessible and free public transport, or revitalizing energy. The participants spoke to the need to have LED lights installed within institutions and government buildings, encourage a 100% electric vehicle fleet for government employees, alongside providing rebates to make electric vehicles affordable for all. Furthermore participants called for more charge networks for said electric vehicles in both rural and urban areas, an expansion of lithium 'green' mining for batteries and panels, divesting from fossil fuel and coal, and the abolishment of profit-driven priorities underlying our travel infrastructure.

Youth understood climate policies as extending to broader policies such as advocating for independent academics to sit on decision-making bodies and enshrining First Nation voices into both the Constitution and decision-making bodies as well. Participants felt that young people also had a right to be on decision-making bodies and to be listened to, especially when there issues concerned young people, future generations, and the environment.

Federal

Young people expect to see an active government and more transparency from the government in regards to the decision making on climate change. They suggested that independent academics who are experts in the area should be involved in the decision-making process around climate change actions and climate policies at the national level. It was also suggested that there should be a more focussed effort on policies that benefit both the environment and people in tandem. Further key issues included:

- More transparency from the government on the decision making made on climate change
- A federal ICAC
- Climate policies more broadly and with greater urgency
- Independent academics sitting in on decision making around climate change
- Transparency in political donations



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- Governments should pursue more active engagement and play a larger role in our lives
 - A genuine, concentrated, and focused effort on policies that benefit the environment and people in tandem
 - Young people should be involved more in making decisions on climate change
 - Rural and coastal areas need to be better utilised for climate action
 - Elect young people to parliament
 - Every member of parliament to commit to net zero by 2030
 - Have a First Nations voice enshrined in the Constitution
 - Treaty / treaties with First Nations peoples
 - Ban plastic in shops
 - Improve the way climate change / our environmental crisis is taught in the education curriculum
 - Stop subsidising harmful industries such as coal and gas and instead use this money to increase funding for renewables
 - Have more discretion for anti-corruption bodies to weed out individuals going against the public interest due to conflicts of interest
 - Greater enforcement of current environmental laws through an independent body
 - More general representation
 - "Call out" / no greenwashing
 - Wealthy companies to be made accountable for their impacts on the environment
 - Stricter environmental laws

Table 3: How do the media and politicians talk about climate change? Discuss how this makes you feel.

Overall, there was a negative perception surrounding how the media and politicians talk about climate change, and accounts made to discredit the existence of climate change were seemingly more memorable. An overarching theme driving this perception was that the media played a significant role in delaying action on climate change, and that a significant portion of that very same media now frames our climate emergency as too large to overcome, or supports 'far off targets' or 'greenwashing' where the blame is put on everyday people. 'Bothsiding', where there is an attempt to present a balanced view of an issue by presenting two extremes even if one or more of these extremes are not in line with the current scientific debate, was identified as a major contributor to climate denial and scepticism. The dominant perception was that the media often framed climate change as an issue that you can either believe or not believe in and, more recently, believe is anthropogenic or otherwise.



Conservative politics were also perceived as constraining national broadcasters, such as the ABC, to bothsidesism, supposedly using the justification of its apparent impartiality to threaten national broadcasters with funding cuts when shows and programs veer to politically distinct discourse that fell outside the Status Quo of the time. Hence, participants perceived many politicians as fueling climate denial and scepticism, with accounts of denying climate change remaining much more memorable for young people. Further, there was a recurring perception that jobs in the fossil fuel industry are prioritised above other industries. For example, participants in one group agreed that jobs in education and the arts are demonised and often face cuts without much if any media coverage, unless stakeholder and community groups popularise its coverage. By comparison, the proposition of having similar cuts for the fossil fuel industry, by say phasing out coal plants, is perceived as being opposed much more heavily by the media, even without or at least prior to any public intervention. In turn, participants felt that the media portrays pro-climate action activists in a far more disingenuous light to groups that are anti-climate action or utilising delaying tactics.

While the majority of media recalled were perceived as contributing to the climate emergency, 'counter-media', such as The Juice Media's "Honest Government Ads" and content produced by Crikey, were referred to as ways to 'help to channel our passion healthily and positively'. Similarly, social media was perceived as a way to escape negative portrayals of pursuing climate action, however, participants also noted that, while their personal content was 'echochambered' or specialised to be pro-climate action, social media simultaneously allows people who are climate denialists to find and consume their own preferred content. This means that social media does not productively contribute towards changing attitudes on climate change, so participants agreed that social media is instead a tool to help take reprieve from how the media and politicians talk about climate change. Instead, participants envisioned a media landscape where issues and potential solutions were also discussed in tandem to progress the dialogue.



Table 4: Let's talk about climate anxiety: what are things we can do for self-care and to reduce your climate anxiety?

During the forum there were ample responses from participants highlighting the importance of *Mental health, education, and community*.

Mental health

Participants suggested many different ways in which the local, state and federal government can assist them in improving overall mental health and address climate anxiety. One of the highly recommended actions was to increase the amount of community gardens and in general green spaces around the local communities. A study conducted by Barton et al (2016) provides evidence to this recommendation as it shows that simply being exposed to more natural, green spaces in the neighborhood can be beneficial in improving the mental health and wellbeing in adolescents.

Other suggestions included creating infrastructural changes including council to reduce urban heat island effect, local native plant giveaways, provenance of Indigenous plants, governments listening and opening themselves to the concerns of public and acting upon the concerns rather than using it as a publicity stunt. Building compost worm farms, creating sensory spaces and improving the existing ones to fit the needs, a reduction of concrete, supporting community spaces that provide shelter during hot days, encouraging or organising the eco event and most importantly, to have free public transport.

Furthermore, participants in the forum suggested that it was important to provide education in regards to self-care and understanding the symptoms of climate anxiety as well as how to approach it. Additionally, young people reported that it was important to have proper education, awareness sessions and an opportunity to talk to experts in the field of climate change rather than just briefly learning about it as part of the school curriculum which can also be missed by some teachers. In fact, there should be some programs that bring students from different schools together to talk about the climate, for example, a climate summit that happens every year. Furthermore, young people also suggested the need to be educated on native plants, native animals, and heritage through the lenses of First Nations People in Australia and their connection with the land.

Community

For a community to be socially sustainable the “formal and informal processes; systems; structures and relationships [need to] actively support the capacity of current and future generations to create healthy and liveable communities. Socially sustainable communities are equitable, diverse, connected and provide a good quality of life,” as achieving social sustainability requires shared responsibility (Sustainability, 2022).



Community focussed and led responses to the climate injustice, including the provisions and accessibility to community gardens, pedestrian-oriented streetscapes, human scaled public spaces, and the interconnectivity of street layouts have an impact on people's interaction with each other. As do native sidewalks and public community spaces. For example, in the Salisbury hub, a central location to citizens, having vegetation that is edible provides the space for inclusive and equitable opportunities by rethinking how we live and design the city space using a feminist, municipalism lens that transgresses the capitalist dominant structures to transform cities and the social relations, building co-existence and harmony (Kern, 2019).

Additionally, participants had high emphasis on creating general community spaces for young people to connect and build networks with other like-minded youth. Some of these included places to discuss climate change, environmental forums, a climate summit as well as places which allows us to spend time with ourselves for example quiet rooms/spaces, yoga/meditation rooms, prayers rooms in all community centers, government buildings and institutions to support people's mental health.

Participants also emphasized on community spaces that directly relate to environmental changes in high density areas, and public spaces that need to function and be adaptable to different uses and different needs, this includes architecture that is green, sustainable and is built for the future. This is also about implementing a placemaking approach to the local neighborhoods and areas of urban renewal, to facilitate inclusive and collaborative urban change.



Recommendations/Outcomes

The key recommendations from our consultations are as follows:

1. Council to advocate for fairer, cheaper and ultimately free options, such as the community buses that the City of Salisbury has seen successfully running. Council to advocate for the expansion and provision of accessible routes for people with disability and that these routes are safer for non-men (street lighting, paths).
2. That the City of Salisbury provide more safe, inclusive spaces that are green and planned for the future. To address poverty from an intersectional lens and look at both hostile architecture and food security for residents.
3. That the City of Salisbury improve and focus on diverse language distribution of environmental and sustainability related publications so that all residents, regardless of language comprehension can partake in sustainability measures.
4. That council advocates to state and federal levels of governance for the enshrinement of First Nation voices into their respective constitutions.
5. That council implement co-design features into their planning to include young people and First Nations elders.
6. It is recommended that Council provide advocacy for and education for schools to implement mental health and inclusive self care skills, and for council to explore ways to further engage young people in mental health literacy.
7. It is also recommended that Council implement a placemaking approach to the local neighborhoods and areas of urban renewal, to facilitate inclusive and collaborative urban change with pedestrian-oriented streetscapes, human scaled public spaces, and the interconnectivity of street layouts that have an impact on people's interaction with each other.
8. It is recommended that local government produce/support media with issues/solutions focus - or profile solutions, innovations, progress in transitioning, opportunities to lobby/volunteer, etc.
9. It is further recommended that Politicians should be accountable/leading in providing opportunities to combat the climate emergency - and political systems should reflect this responsibility to represent us (federal ICAC, etc.) Young people would like to see transparency and accountability at all levels of government including that of local governance.
10. That Local government supports activists in the community by providing access to recycled paper for printing, opportunities for flyering, running stalls (such as a permanent spot in the Hub), etc and that this process is able to be aimed at young people.
11. That the city of Salisbury explore sustainability rebates and small grants for residents, this includes the provision of menstrual and incontinence products.



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