

Engaging young people in the Climate Ready Plan

Summary report



Overview

Introduction

This report provides a review of the Draft ADAPT Loddon Mallee Climate Ready Plan. The core focus of this document is to provide key priorities, actions, and recommendations for a plan that actively includes the youth voice. To prepare this report, first-person consultation was undertaken via Zoom with eleven young people from across the Loddon Mallee. Utilising a multitude of educational and creative activities, discussion questions and online surveys, we were able to effectively understand the youth perspective on climate action and climate change. As a consultation that was done by and alongside young people, we were able to remove the often daunting, governmental angle of youth engagement and do so from a peer-to-peer perspective.

The board is a dedicated, motivated, and inspiring group who are passionate about mitigating the risks of climate change. Their expertise and passion were integral to each recommendation.

Introduction from Y-CAB

Climate change is here. As its impact increases, so too does the likelihood that our generation will feel the worst of its effects. As young people, we feel it is our responsibility to ensure that policymakers include us in decision-making. For climate adaptation to be effective in our local communities, we recognise the importance of strong, inclusive communication and solutions-focused goals. Our priorities in a Climate Ready Plan are: goal-oriented policy, accessible initiatives and communication, action-focused education, funding of youth-led projects, and co-designed approaches to projects and future policy.

Methodology

This plan engaged with eleven young people aged between 12-25 on a fortnightly basis via Zoom. Advisory board members involved in discussion questions, developed project ideas, engaged in educational tasks to support their personal development, and made recommendations directly to the ADAPT website.

It should be noted that the prior knowledge of participants varied, which required educational tasks to ensure all participants felt as if they could provide input to the government document. It is recommended that educational tasks that explain government processes and capabilities be included in future consultations.

The young people were paid for their time with EFTPOS gift cards.

6

Climate action is showing gratitude. Our planet has given us so much. Fresh air, water, food, beauty and more. I believe it makes sense to look after our incredible resource.

Jem McKenzie

Climate change is an issue that is and will continue to affect our communities, especially our most vulnerable. Whilst my town has certainly made strides towards a more sustainable lifestyle, there is still much to do. That action that we take needs to leave no one behind and has to be community focussed. While we have a chance to make an impact on climate change, we should.

Alyssa Lai

9

What does a plan that includes young people look like?

Goal-oriented policy

In driving towards an open, transparent plan that generates trust and community engagement, we believe a plan that is future-focused and actively engages with goals and outcomes will be integral to local trust and adoption. This includes ambitious, long-term goals and explanations on how the ADAPT team endeavour to reach those goals.

Accessible initiatives and communication

For young people, the utilisation of accessible social media platforms is key to communicating the Climate Action Plan and any accompanying resources and programs that are borne from the policy. Social media strategies must actively consider how to engage with young people: for example, infographics, short videos, modern art and images of other young people.

Action-focused education

To effectively engage with local communities, we believe that any approach to education about the importance of climate adaption should be made so with a focus on actionable tasks, and in an environment that is hands-on and open-minded. Engagement is needed at a multitude of levels, and in many ways, for solutions that consider young people and other vulnerable groups.

Funding of youth-led initiatives

For young people to actively engage with climate adaption within the Loddon-Mallee, there should be a clear focus on the funding of projects created and run by young people, for young people.

Co-designed approach to projects and future policy

When programs, projects and future policy related to facets of the Climate Action Plan are undertaken, young people must be included in the consultation.

Key recommendations

Recommended priority goals and actions

The youth advisory board noted several actions that they believe are key in the inclusion of young people and the youth voice in the process of climate adaptation. These actions should be developed in conjunction with youth-led bodies, such as local youth councils or other youth representative bodies. Where youth-led bodies are not possible, it is encouraged that ADAPT connect with local community bodies to develop a youth-led group or ensure the inclusion of young people in alternate organisations.

Priority goals and actions are as follows:

- The development of centralised bodies within every Loddon-Mallee community that includes youth councils, community groups, non-profit organisations, and schools to meet consistently to help support climate adaptation.
- Active consideration given to young people within the Climate Ready Plan as the people who will have to inherit the impacts of climate change.
- Getting young people from ADAPT, YCAB and other environmental advisory groups to be ambassadors in raising awareness of the plan in their community.
- A commitment by the ADAPT team to transparent, future-focused policy that recognises the inclusion of the youth voice.
- An adequate marketing campaign for the plan that considers the regular use of social media platforms such as Instagram and Tik Tok, two of the top platforms for young people under 25.
- Utilising youth networks such as youth councils and other relevant groups to ensure young people are included in upcoming projects.
- Provision of a shortened version of the plan (2-3) pages for ease of accessibility, where each sections key aims are outlined.



Recommended projects

As a group, the youth advisory board brainstormed priority projects that they believe should be included within the climate adaption plan. This includes:

- The development of a hotline dedicated to young people and climate anxiety.
- Sustainability for Businesses Project: a project that focuses on education within businesses, that includes grants and subsidies for businesses to use compostable packaging. Businesses are evaluated with a Green Star style system to encourage them to continue to improve their processes.
- An Online Resources Hub: a project dedicated to creating a centralised hub for all relevant resources, which includes community gardens, climate related community groups, recycling plants, places where you can repurpose items, op-shops, educational materials and more.
- Funded Climate Adaptation Advisors who are able to visit homes, schools and businesses within the Loddon Mallee to assist with the adoption of sustainable practices.
- Climate Adaption for Youth Councils: a project that encourages each local youth council to develop their own adaptation program.
- Development of Community Hubs in all towns, which includes a community garden, soft-plastic recycling bin, op-shop bins, and other additional things.
- Life skills programs that talk about what people can do to adapt to a changing climate
- Development of a Schools Sustainability Council, similar to Student Representative Council: They could be in charge of basic sustainability like waste management in classrooms, raising awareness and ensuring students have proper education on environmental issues, providing resources for students to get involved in activities like YCAB, running fundraisers for environmental issues, etc. Student leadership teams in schools are a really great way to connect with a diverse range of youth and it also gets kids thinking about and taking responsibility for these issues from a young age.
- Development of a Sustainable Towns award to incentivise local government to implement to Climate Ready Plan.



People recommendations

In evaluating the first section of the draft Climate Ready Action plan, the advisory board noted the importance of highlighting individual and community contributions to climate adaptation. Familiar faces, community connection and a co-designed process, are integral to supporting community trust and youth engagement. Projects focused on supporting young people are essential to climate adaptation, and these projects should be youth-led.

The following recommendations are as follows:

- Objectives should aim to be more detailed and firm, with achievable goals rather than vague explanations. If the plan is simply goals and objectives that just explain the impacts, the plan is lacking in achievability.
- There should be a greater focus on the impacts of climate anxiety on young people, and the importance of supporting and developing services to deal with this.
- A pro-active approach to climate adaptation planning: when outlining risks and impacts within the plan, explain how ADAPT are planning to mitigate these impacts. The group often felt that much of the policy outlined risks and past projects but failed to outline how they were aiming to change this with this new plan.
- With secure communities, it should include job growth and income stability, not just industry. Innovation and entrepreneurship is needed to build upon what is available and adapt to future employment opportunities.
- The plan is good at highlighting who is in the community and what is already happening, but there should be more emphasis on what the government is doing. There is discussion on government programs that have previously supported residents, so these programs should be explained and discussed in depth alongside the outcomes.
- With connected communities, it is recommended that stakeholder advisory groups for vulnerable people are set up and the inclusion of resources for communities to engage these groups.
- There must be discussion about what projects will be adapted from these goals, to ensure they are successful. This could include: Climate Adaptation for Youth Councils, a project that encourages each local youth council to develop their own adaptation program or the development of a Schools Sustainability Council, similar to Student Representative Council: This could focus on basic sustainability like waste management in classrooms, raising awareness and ensuring students have proper education on environmental issues, and providing resources for students to get involved.
- The development of climate adaptation programs in each town, that will explain how to access resources, make personal changes and understand what the future could look like.
- Assurance that the plan is diversified in the way it is communicated in person and via social media, specialising communication to target young people through channels such as Youth Central or YACvic, and ensuring plain language is adopted for ease of reading.
- There needs to be more information on young people as a vulnerable group, specifically in the 'vulnerable stakeholder' part but also in this entire section. The vulnerability of young people through multiple facets such as home-life, dependency and health should be considered throughout this section.



Places recommendations

In discussing recommendations for how government can support climate adaptation within our local areas, the youth advisory board noted the following answers to discussion questions:

How can section two actively include young people?

- Young people are only included a few times where it discusses the importance of handing down culture and has a quote from a young farmer.
- Quite a few of the sections could mention the impact or benefits of action/inaction on young people - for example, the use of housing and public spaces since it is often young people who make the most use of free public spaces.
- Recognition of the vulnerability of young people when it comes to accessible housing options, particularly those that are sustainable.
- Consider the importance of hubs for young people within local communities - including areas such as schools, sporting facilities, neighbourhood houses and other relevant hubs.

If you had to prioritise one place-related thing in the Loddon-Mallee that you could improve, what would it be?

- The development of community gardens that are actively maintained by community groups. These resources should be actively advertised, and funding should be available for their maintenance.
- Creating a hub for resource access, including grant applications and contact details of local climate groups, so that communities are able to support place-based adaptation.
- Developing Electric Vehicle charging stations in all towns.
- Upgrading public transport between towns in the area to include more sustainable buses and trains, and a greater frequency. This upgrade should take into consideration ticket prices and accessibility for low socio-economic areas.

How can the government support towns in creating innovative infrastructure and urban designs that improve sustainability?

- Through adding green roofs to buildings, particularly with native plants. Studies show that these forms of infrastructure improve building temperature and overall oxygen quality.
- Creating an incentive for landholders to utilise native plants over introduced species.
- Funding for community-led forums on how to grow a garden (i.e. vegetable gardens & native gardens)
- Programs that assist with the reduction of wild cats, including affordable desexing programs and catchment safely and ethically
- Grants and funding for solar panels, including well-publicised initiatives using a multitude of communicative streams



Sectors recommendations

Young people are often not considered throughout the evaluation of sectors. However, many young people are engaged with sectors through employment or are in the process of developing their own business. By including young people within this section, you are ensuring that all levels of the workplace are recognised as important, regardless of age or education. Recommendations include:

- The development of a Sustainability for Businesses Project: a project that focuses on education within businesses, that includes grants and subsidies for businesses to use compostable packaging, improve their infrastructure in order to utilise less energy and water (i.e. replacement dishwashers, light fixtures etc.). Businesses could be evaluated with a Green Star style system to encourage them to continue to improve their processes.
- Funding Climate Advisors within towns to support businesses in their adaptation.
- Acknowledgement of young people in the workforce, and the impact casualisation has on workers, particularly in the face of climate disasters.
- Developing programs for businesses to donate excess food to locals in need
- Education programs for businesses on waste disposal and its importance to everyone. This could include an evaluation where 6 months after the program, regulations are tightened, bins are audited and businesses are held to account.
- A ban on single-use plastic in the packaging of retail items. Currently, stock for businesses in retail comes wrapped (mostly individually) in single use plastic. This is then disposed of. Reducing the plastic retail waste means greater opportunities for recycling to occur.
- More sustainable focussed industries in general. This could include carbon offsetting providers who plant trees to offset carbon in the Bendigo region, electric car charging station manufacturers, sustainable housing builders, renewable energy providers, and more.
- Encouraging the current workforce in less sustainable workplaces to join the above new industries to ensure expertise can be transferred and retained in the region. For example, moving mining engineers into renewable engineering roles.
- Improved TAFE and University options in the town to better the skills of people in the region, reduce outsourcing workers, and create long term employment opportunities with greater diversity in skillsets. Both sectors of education should have the inclusion of accredited and high-quality courses for sustainable business operations, management, and more.
- Developing subsidy and grant programs for businesses to use sustainable materials.



Having strong sectors is integral to our economy and livelihoods. Young people play active roles within many sectors, whether it be through employment or business ownership. We believe it is key to include young workers and business workers within this section. Climate adaptation is built-in on inclusionary practices

Loddon Mallee Youth Advisory Board





Review of the draft Climate Ready Plan layout, accessibility and design

For much of the draft plan, the Youth Advisory Board noted that the layout seemed accessible and eye-catching and that the design was modern. However, to ensure the plan remains accessible to young people of all backgrounds, the advisory board recommends adopting strong communication strategies online to engage with the youth population fully. The following has been recommended:

- Having a shorter version of the plan will be integral to ensuring its readability and accessibility.
- Accessibility needs to be considered. Is all text easy to read? On page 26 there is white writing on light green, which can make reading difficult for some individuals. Each page should be checked to ensure the contrast isn't too high, to ensure disabled people are able to access the document.
- When engaging with young people on social media, government accounts should consider adopting mediums such as infographics with short, informative points or videos with other young people or animations.
- Utilising bright colours, modern graphics, and recognisable faces such as celebrities or local people are all key to effective communication with young people. Recognisability and familiarity are key to developing trust and engagement.
- Add an icon that focuses on integrating marginalised groups into climate action. They have knowledge in adaptation we can easily forget or determine what's 'best' on their behalf. We need to focus on their voice.
- Consideration should be given generally to how the presentation of the report can be diversified. Alongside social media, accessibility could be improved through attending schools or youth bodies and discussing the plan and its desired impact.

Primarily, consideration for layout and design was positive. The primary recommendation remains consideration of size and consideration given to social media platforms when advertising the finished draft.

Recommendations for future engagement with regional youth

Peer-to-peer engagement

For young people, engaging with government can often be a daunting process. Whether it's the utilisation of unfamiliar words and phrasings, or a level of distrust developed through a lack of communication, engaging with young people on a peer-to-peer level is integral to supporting the youth voice. Seeing other young people in positions within government or supporting government initiatives allows more young people to see themselves as capable of providing input.

Prior knowledge and educational support

The level of engagement a young person has with government varies, with the process of creating policy and enforcing it often feeling like a foreign concept. This is why any form of consultation or youth engagement should aim to include education and information about processes and areas of policy-making, including the differentiation between federal and state government so that everyone can engage meaningfully.

It is also important not to assume a level of knowledge or way of engaging, and instead utilise a multitude of different tasks such as creative activities and small group discussions to give everybody the best opportunity to engage.

It should be noted that the prior knowledge of young people engaged for consultation varied, which required educational tasks to ensure all participants felt as if they could provide input to the government document. It is recommended that educational tasks that explain government processes and capabilities be included in future consultations.



Development and maintenance of a youth network

It is important to ensure young people have a network to connect with other young people. The development of social media pages and groups dedicated to a youth network is integral to creating opportunities and fostering the connection between young people and the government.

Utilisation of social media

To support trust and respect amongst young people, the utilisation of social media is key to engaging and developing relationships. Two key platforms – Instagram and Tik Tok – are integral to providing information and learning opportunities.

When engaging with young people on social media, government accounts should consider adopting mediums such as infographics with short, informative points or videos with other young people or animations. Utilising popular aesthetics such as bright colours, modern graphics, and recognisable faces such as celebrities or local people are all key to effective communication with young people.

Current youth organisations with large followings should be considered in the advertisement and marketing of plans such as this and other relevant community-focused communications.

Additional documents and quotes

Research projects shared by the Y-CAB members can be found at the following links:

Y-CAB City Improvement Project: Castlemaine

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1-mzuJBFPWav_VXfaOmDpJ0T_pZifaaUwgKBQz-UYA0A/edit?usp=sharing

Y-CAB City Improvement Project: Bendigo

https://docs.google.com/document/d/11cDhnInrXTKLs_ep4NYKHU6BoTYRlw_rl9ME5fOfSyw/edit?usp=sharing

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