

# 2017 AUSTRALIAN YOUTH REPRESENTATIVE CONSULTATION REPORT



**CAPRICORNIA**

6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION



7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY

# ABOUT

**THE YOUTH REPRESENTATIVE TO THE UN IS A ROLE APPOINTED ANNUALLY BY UN YOUTH AUSTRALIA IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND TRADE.**

Running since 1999, the Youth Representative holds an extensive, nationwide consultation tour to engage with and discover the issues that are most important to young Australians.

During the tour, the Youth Representative tours the country, engaging and collaborating with young Australians through extensive consultation with students, community organisations and other institutions, in an effort to identify the issues that are most important to youth across the nation.

After the Consultation, the Youth Representative travels to New York as a member of the Australian Mission to the UN where they will attend the the UN General Assembly,

presenting the findings of the Consultation to the General Assembly's Third Committee.

Paige Burton is the 2017 Youth Representative to the United Nations. She is passionate about the role young people can play in international affairs, and educating their peers.

In 2015 and 2016, Paige was recognised for her work by Pro Bono Australia as the youngest ever recipient of the 'Impact 25: The 25 Most Influential People in the Social Sector' award. In 2017, Paige was named as a state finalist for the NSW Young Woman of The Year award.

Team of UN Youth QLD facilitators who helped run the QLD consultations.



With some student leaders at the consultation at Marymount on the Gold Coast.

Presentation of Australia's Youth Statement to the UN General Assembly. In the company of Australia's Permanent Ambassador to the UN- Gillian Bird, and Senator Gavin Marshall.



You can find more stories, photos, and data by following along online, or emailing the Youth Representative with a request.

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# FROM THE YOUTH REPRESENTATIVE

PAIGE BURTON

In 2017, I wanted to try and answer the question 'what would society look like if we saw our young people as a product of their values, experiences, knowledge, creativity, and not just of their age?' For too long we have dehumanised young people by imagining them as merely young.

This year I asked tens of thousands of young Australians to tell me what they wish their representatives knew, and considered, about them when making policy.

I travelled over 100,000 kilometres meeting tens of thousands of young Australians. My team and I went to hundreds of schools, and community groups. We went to universities, festivals, markets, and conferences.

We ran thousands of consultations, and took them to the United Nations General Assembly. But it didn't end there. We collected data from every Australian Federal Electorate, and I wanted to share it with you. I want you to share the joy of reading the nuanced, complicated, and thoughtful opinions of the young people who live in your electorate.

Young people all over Australia spoke to me about issues relating to the cost of living, unemployment, and economic productivity. They shared the impact of education—both formal and informal on their lives. They told me of their desires for certainty in the realms of global peace and security. They articulated the importance of access to health services, programs, and quality public infrastructure. Young people expressed their experiences of environmental disaster, of unemployment, of forced migration, and of family violence. They shared their gratitude for fantastic educators, and life-changing programs.

If I've learnt anything this year, it's that our voices get stronger the more we listen. And I hope that listening closer to the young people in your electorate brings you as much joy as it has brought me. Thank you for taking the time to read this report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paige Burton".





# THE 2017 CONSULTATION

## WHO? WHERE? HOW? WHAT?

The consultation took place from November 2016 to August 2017. Whilst a large majority of the consultation and data was collected face-to-face through use of paper surveys, online forms were made available to those unable to make it to a session of the Youth Representative's national tour.

The Youth Representative spent approximately one month in every Australian state and territory over the course of the year, working with a team of UN Youth Australia's facilitators to run consultations. Typically, a consultation lasted 1.5 hours.

All Australians between the ages of twelve and twenty five (inclusive) were able to participate in the consultation.

The team visited schools, universities, other educational institutions, community groups, non-profit organisations, festivals, markets, conferences, and held open events to reach more young people. Approximately 45,000 young Australians participated in face-to-face workshops with the Youth Representative and team. Around 2,500 completed web forms, and thousands more followed along with the stories online.

The Consultation aimed to answer the overarching question "what would society look like if we imagined young people in their full complexity?" and the survey took form to ask questions of five broad areas.

### 1. Engagement:

- Can you name your local Federal MP?
- Do you feel that your opinions are represented in government policy?
- As a young person, do you feel like your opinions are taken seriously by those in power?
- Do you read the news/follow every day?
- Where do you get your news?

### 2. Youth issues:

- What is the most important issue facing young people in your local area?
- What do you think is the most important issue facing young people in Australia?

### 3. General issues:

- Which issues would you like to see the government taking more immediate action on?
- Why are these important to you? Do you have suggestions for solutions?

### 4. Stories:

- What do you wish the government knew, and considered about you and your life when making policy?

### 5. Learning:

- Are you interested in learning more about current events?
- Are you interested in learning more about the United Nations?
- Are you interested in learning more about how politicians /the government make decisions?

And we threw in some ice-breakers for good measure:

- Cats or Dogs?
- Marvel or DC?
- Netflix or YouTube?
- Winter or Summer?
- Internet or TV?
- Bushwalk or Ocean Swim?





# QUEENSLAND

The average age of the Queenslanders who participated in my consultation was 15.7. Young Queenslanders are passionate about a large range of issues from regional development, to curriculum reform. The top five issues that young Queenslanders would like the government to take action on can be found over the page.

14% of young Queenslanders in the consultation said that they feel like their opinions are represented by those in the government.

Responses like Liv's (17): **"I wish they listened to the upcoming generations more, because we are the future"** can be seen across most Queensland electorates, with many young people calling on their representatives to take them seriously. Of the young Queenslanders involved in the 2017 consultation, 30% of them feel like they are taken seriously as a young people, by those in positions of power.

48% of young people across Queensland follow the news every day. They draw on a variety of sources, including, but not limited

to: social media feeds (predominantly Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram. Occasionally Snapchat, and Reddit), local papers, free-to-air broadcast television, national broadcasters, radio, online foreign news services, new media companies such as Junkee, Pedestrian, and BuzzFeed.

Slightly less than half (46%) of young Queenslanders can name their local Federal Member of Parliament.

## "What is the important issue facing young people in your local community?"

1. Mental health services
2. Job opportunities
3. Harrassment and abuse
4. Youth engagement with politics
5. Peer pressure
6. Education funding
7. Discrimination
8. LGBTI Rights
9. Housing affordability
10. Climate change

70% of the young Queenslanders in the Consultation know what they plan to do for a career, with many concerned about job pathways, and relevant education with frequent talk about the "future of the workforce" leaving them slightly uncertain about their futures.

Curious, we asked about some preferences that young people have for a range of things. 85% of young people in QLD prefer the internet to television. 81% prefer dogs to cats. 67% prefer movies to books. 71% of young people in QLD rather Marvel than DC. 63% prefer YouTube to Netflix. 52% prefer Winter to Summer. And 63% prefer a swim in the ocean to a bushwalk.

## What some young people in QLD wish you knew, and considered about their stories when making policy:

"My mental health is deteriorating, Im concerned there isn't enough help or awareness about mental health issues. I am also gay and concerned that marriage equality won't pass in Australia." Ameia, 15.

"I wish they knew that regional and rural areas matter and that the young people from those area lack access to the quality of education, extra-curricular activities and work that young people from cities take for granted. I wish they understood that decisions like facilitating the mining boom, while it seemed amazing at the beginning, ended up ruining the life of the rural town I grew up in and had loved. Not only did it financially destroy hundreds of livelihoods by completely upturning the local economy, it also decimating crucial water systems and transformed valuable farming land into nothing more than empty properties with abandoned coal seam gas wells. I wish they knew that in the end people matter more than political donations, and that people that live outside of cities need to be considered in political decisions." Inari, 20.

"I am a human, not a hooligan" Cynan, 15.

# 1 Marriage equality

## Top issue raised by young QLDers.

"Why shouldn't people be allowed to marry the person they love?" Jemimah, 12.

# 2 Gender equality

## Equality between genders is important for young Queenslanders.

"I think they need to work on gender equality because everyone should be equal." Max, 14.

# 3 Housing affordability

## Was frequently mentioned in the consultation

"Many of us are scared we will never be able to own a house" Mikayla, 15.

# 4 Healthcare

## Improving mental health and disability services were of significance.

"Improving disability and mental health services is not only an issue regarding the Government but also the community. For example, the stigma surrounding mental health issues" Jordan, 16.

# 5 Climate change

## Was a frequent concern

"We need stronger policies and actions reflecting scientific evidence." Emma, 13.

# 83%

are interested in learning more about current events

# 65%

are interested in learning more about the United Nations

# 61%

are interested in learning more about how the government makes decisions

# STORIES FROM QUEENSLAND



"I wish the government actually valued education in the ways that they claim to. As a young person studying to become a teacher, it is incredibly disheartening to see the stress that teachers and students are put under as a result of our education system. I wish they translated this value into their long-time coming National Curriculum. As much as the National Curriculum is a great resource for primary and most secondary teachers and students, there is a massive gap in its structure for Senior students. It neglects any structure or goals for subjects outside of maths, English, and science, meaning that teachers and students who take any humanities or arts subjects have little to no help in ensuring that students can achieve highly in areas that our society doesn't seem to value. Students should know that there is always a place for their interests and talents, University cut offs to study education are at a consistently low level across Australian universities, and it shows how little value our society and government place on the worth of good teachers. I want the government to acknowledge that my chosen career has value and holds importance, because for some students, their teachers are the trusted adult, nurturer of ideas and talent, and the ones who introduce new concepts to their students. Teachers have the job of preparing the next cohort of doctors, lawyers, engineers, writers, and stock-brokers for their chosen careers, yet our chosen career is looked down upon, when that important place in society should always be valued."

Em, 20, QLD.



"I wish the government understood the importance of anti-bullying programs such as Safe Schools. Too often young people slip through the cracks due to their gender identity or sexual orientation not fitting an acceptable 'mould'. The rates of homelessness, mental illness and suicide amongst LGBTQIA\* youths are frankly sickening. Especially considering that, even at 21, I still live in fear that I will not escape this cycle. The magnitude of this issue speaks to a disheartening lack of education and support in schools. The government should therefore be facilitating anti-bullying and sexual education programs, rather than actively stifling them."

Brandon, 20, QLD.



"The monetary gain of select "individuals" in no way validates the destruction of our nation's natural resources and the prospects for future Australians. We must all learn to compromise if we wish to continue to enjoy the unparalleled beauty that we as a country have to offer."

Kate, 19, QLD.



"I wish the government understood that the representation and participation of young people in all levels of decision-making is not just as a pathway for a sustainable and prosperous economy for all but is a moral imperative for the rights and wellbeing of young people. Governmental interaction with young people must transcend paternalistic preaching or well-meaning but superficial outreach. Young people are not your rubberstamp or a box checking exercise. That regardless of however we present ourselves and however we engage in our democracy, it must be the obligation of government to meaningfully listen to us. Politicians of all parties must understand that the roots of youth disengagement stem from petty machinations that do nothing to reflect the diversity of us as people or our nuanced interests as citizens. That political deadlock and dysfunction does nothing to inspire us. We face everyday challenges of negotiating and navigating the complexity of bureaucracies, structural economic disadvantages, intersecting layers of discrimination all whilst the constant broadsides of intergenerational warfare we did not fire – that we are apathetic, entitled, lazy, delicate. And yet we passionate community leaders, pioneering entrepreneurs and innovators, and hardworking artists and scientists. Our political leaders and governments must see young people as who are: human beings with aspirations for not just a better tomorrow but a better today."

Tasman, 24, QLD.



"Being a part of a democracy means that we're bound to spend a great deal of our time in profound and often irrevocable disagreement with one another. The humanities may not be able to resolve those disagreements, but it at least endows us with the empathy, understanding and criticality to appreciate that there are just people on the other side issue. I wish the government knew the importance of the humanities in growing a democracy that isn't us and them, but we."

Damian, 22, QLD.



"Too often governments act and legislate and act in self serving ways, betraying the very people they have sworn to protect. Minority groups are too often marginalised, and this is unacceptable. If bettering the lives of all Australians is not a priority, then what is it?"

Kristopher, 22, QLD.



"I wish the government knew how hard farmers work to give us the food we eat and the clothes we wear. I wish they knew the strain that farming families face, and provided better mental health support services. I wish they knew the importance of farming land, both to farmers and Australia, and did more to protect it from mining companies and the effects of climate change. I wish they would consult and listen to farmers more often. I wish they knew that young people are being forced to leave the bush in huge numbers, and did more to alleviate the challenges they face in buying a property or finding a job.

I'm incredibly proud to be descended from generations of farmers. They're the hardest-working people in Australia but they don't get weekends or holidays. They get up and go to bed in the dark, enduring sleepless nights worrying over the price of fuel or the weather forecast or the future of their family. But they're tough, and resilient, and cheerful, and generous, and we wouldn't be here without them."

Lachlan, 22, QLD.



"I wish the government knew I care about long term natural resource management. We need to think about how people will eat beyond the next 20 years, without destroying our planet."

Sarah, 21, QLD.



"I wish the government knew how important the sufficient funding of community legal services and advocacy organisations is for all of society. Funding the pursuit of community legal advocacy is essential for the improvement of legislative and government responses to diverse and broad legal issues."

Mia, 20, QLD.



"I wish the government knew that all aspects of society are vulnerable to climate change. There are a lot of important things worth doing, but I wish the government knew how challenging I can find it sometimes to take any of it seriously in light of global inaction on climate change and the warnings from experts of our current trajectory. You can't govern for our generation without looking this existential threat in the face; I hope soon I can once again be proud of my country for taking leadership on this issue."

James, 23, QLD.



"I wish the government knew the financial burden that competing in high level sport, volunteering, academics, or music puts on regional students and young people. In order to be competing in your chosen area as a regional student, you are usually expected to travel to a major city. Flights alone often add hundreds of dollars onto an already expensive activity. Due to this many regional kids are left behind, or do not get recognised as they can not afford to make it down to larger competitions. This disparity often displays the narrative that regional students are not as educated as metro area students, when this is not the case. As a student who was lucky enough to play sport and participate at UN events, I often had to rely on scholarships to get me from point A to B. Gaining these scholarships can often be difficult and are not always accessible to regional students. This is further emphasised after leaving school, when you are viewed as an adult that can pay their own way."

Holly, 19, QLD.



"I wish the government knew that I am an asset not an inconvenience."

Brianna, 22, QLD.



"I wish the government knew that young women have it tough. You can't just describe our issues and tribulations in neat phrases such as 'gender pay gap', and 'women in STEM' either, although these problems do matter. What women face is much larger, and universal in nature. Whether it's the daily sexual harassment I can experience at my retail job, or a male student cutting me off while speaking in class, or one of the thousands of similar situations my female friends and I could experience, it all matters and it all negatively impacts a woman's confidence and experience and her opportunities thereafter. It's all part of the social conditioning that women and men alike are taught is normal behaviour. And it's near impossible to change this. I wish the government knew that, despite the rhetoric of "equality" and a "fair go" repeated throughout Australian society, not even the parliament can get it right and ensure women are safe, empowered and equal, and how incredibly demoralising that is for the young women in this country, including myself. And I wish the government knew how desperately we want, and deserve, better than this."

Jordana, 21, QLD

# 42%

of young people in Capricornia can name their Federal MP



# 54%

of young people in Capricornia know what they want to do for a career

**What some young people in Capricornia wish you knew, and considered about their stories when making policy:**

"I wish they knew we wanted the education system to promote cooperation, not competition." Luke, 15.

"I can't afford to represent my country because I can't get funding. People with money and people in cities get most of the opportunities, even if we work hard for them." Anon, 16.

"Just because we are young doesn't mean we haven't experienced hardships and pain. We should get a say." Tegan, 15.

"I wish I could feel like the government were doing things instead of always arguing. There is a damaging lack of knowledge and understanding about issues like climate change which is destroying the world." Trent, 16.

"The most important issue facing youth is that they aren't learning relevant skills to aid their future. I don't understand politics and the political system it runs in so how is my vote going to be valuable? We need to learn these things." Jackson, 16.

"I think that young people are generalised, like how people think that all teenagers are disrespectful, self-centred, and knowledgeable. Young peoples' opinions are dismissed by those in the community and it is only causing harm. Start listening to us. Take us seriously, we can help each other." Ben, 15.

**"What is the important issue facing young people in your local community?"**

1. Mental health services
2. Job opportunities
3. Drug/alcohol use
4. Youth engagement in politics
5. LGBTI Rights
6. Curriculum reform
7. Education funding
8. Discrimination
9. Abuse/harrassment
10. Gender equality

# YOUR ELECTORATE

**THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION RELATES TO THE FEDERAL ELECTORATE OF CAPRICORNIA**

The average age of the young person engaged in my consultation in Capricornia was 14.9. A large range of issues were raised in the electorate (results of top 5 issues they would like action on **IN AUSTRALIA** over the page in blue).

50% of those consulted said that they read/follow the news every day, with the majority getting their news from free-to-air broadcast news.

42% of young people consulted in Capricornia can name their local Federal MP.

25% of young people in Capricornia say that they feel like their opinions are accurately reflected in current government policy. 31% of

the young people consulted saying that they feel, as a young person, that their opinions are taken seriously by those in positions of power.

# 1 Healthcare

**Was the top issue raised in Capricornia.**

"Affording healthcare is a big issue for young people from families without much money." Samantha, 13.

# 2 Drug/alcohol use

**Was a frequent concern**

"Drugs are one of the bigger issues in my community." Matt, 16.

# 3 Marriage equality

**is a priority**

"At school they tell us to treat each other equally and yet there is no marriage equality." Chelsea, 15.

# 4 Gender equality

**was mentioned by many**

"Not caring about what someone's religion, race, sexuality or gender is. We should judge each other on how they treat other people not things they can't change." Tegan, 15.

# 5 Cost of tertiary education

**was raised often**

"I wish they knew the difficulties of becoming fully educated due to the cost." Jackson, 15.

# 66%

are interested in learning more about current events

# 75%

are interested in learning more about the United Nations

# 58%

are interested in learning more about how the government makes decisions

# THANKS TO OUR PARTNERS

WITHOUT YOU, THE 2017 YOUTH REPRESENTATIVE PROGRAM WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE

## PLATINUM PARTNERS



## COMMUNITY PARTNERS



SUPPORTED BY THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT THROUGH THE DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND TRADE. CONSULTATIONS RUN IN CONJUNCTION WITH UN YOUTH AUSTRALIA.



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