

**INQUIRY INTO 2024 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE NET
ZERO COMMISSION**

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A call for a youth advisory council on climate

This submission was made by young people who want to see a Youth Advisory Council on Climate within NSW Government. We noticed in the Net Zero Commission's 2024 Annual Report, there was no explicit mention of engaging young people as key stakeholders in climate policy despite them living out the decisions of today and the past. We believe a just transition cannot occur without being informed by youth voices, hence we have written this submission to advocate for a whole-of-Government Youth Advisory Council on Climate.

Why young people are calling for a voice in climate decision-making

NSW needs to do more to engage young people in climate policy. Last year at the NSW Women of the Year Awards, our project lead asked the Premier of NSW and the Minister for Women how their Government was engaging young people to inform climate policy and the net zero transition. Both said that they did not know, and no initiatives came to mind. Currently, young people across NSW do not have a say in net zero policy, the state's most significant economic transition since the Industrial Revolution. Further, young people lack a substantial voice in climate policy, despite climate change being among the core issues young people care about.

According to p.52 of the Net Zero Commission's 2024 Report, NSW is currently witnessing the adverse impacts of climate change and weather extremes, these phenomena are set to become more common in the future.¹

We believe young people are key stakeholders in climate policy. Young people globally and within NSW have the smallest ecological footprint but suffer the greatest costs from climate change. Furthermore, NSW youth will live out the consequences of today's climate policies. It is therefore imperative that young people are treated as key stakeholders in climate policy and that their voices shape the direction of climate policymaking. Incorporating youth voices is also critical to ensuring NSW achieves a just transition, a transition to net zero that does not leave anyone behind.

A group of young leaders, some with deep roots in NSW and others from interstate, have come together to draft a submission for a Youth Advisory Council on Climate (YACC). This youth-led report was written following extensive consultation with young people from the Hunter, Sydney, and the Central Coast.

Since drafting the report, we have spoken to the NSW Department of Regional Youth, to Minister Rose Jackson's Office, the NSW Environmental Protection Authority and finally to the Net Zero Commission. The Commission suggested the YACC could be best placed within either the whole-of-Government Climate Change Network composed of senior executives or the NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW). After consideration, young leaders have chosen for the YACC to be within the Climate Change Network because this body advises Government on all climate-impacting issues and policy.

The whole-of-Government approach resonates with the young people interviewed given their interests exceed the net zero economic transition and extend to education on climate change, recycling and transport. Therefore, our submission argues for the importance of integrating youth voices in both the net zero transition and climate-impacting policy and programs within the NSW Government.

¹Net Zero Commission, *2024 Annual Report*, Net Zero Commission, viewed 12 December 2010, https://www.netzerocommission.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-11/Net_Zero_Commission_2024_Annual_Report.pdf

Our submission has five sections that seek to demonstrate best practice youth engagement

Our table of contents is as follows:

Heading	Page Number	Overview
Executive Summary	p.4-p.5	Young people are undoubtedly passionate about climate change, as a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Australia has an obligation to include young people in decision-making that affects them.
Existing Literature including Litigation and Youth Engagement in Legislative Processes	p.5-p.8	Youth engagement on climate policy has led to tangible changes worldwide, demonstrating the crucial role of young people in advocating for a human rights-based approach to climate action resulting in more effective policies.
Current State and Gap Analysis	p.8-p.9	Current youth engagement practices in NSW, like the EPA's youth advisory council, are limited in scope and frequency. The lack of regular formal mechanisms for youth participation risks excluding their perspectives on climate policy.
Recommendation, Best Practice Approach, Remit and Financial Considerations	p.10-p.14	To ensure meaningful youth participation in climate decision-making, we recommend establishing a Youth Advisory Council on Climate (YACC) within the NSW Climate Change Network premised on the outlined best practice.
Conclusion and Endorsements	p. 15-16	The establishment of the Climate Change Network across NSW Government will enable young people to inform the path to net zero and other climate-impacting policies, ensuring climate policy considers their needs long into the future.

Why we recommend the creation of a youth advisory council on climate change

Young people should be able to meaningfully participate in climate decision-making because climate change adversely impacts their lives and, is the defining issue young people in Australia care about. We recommend the implementation of a Youth Advisory Council on Climate to be established within the Climate Change Network, built upon the best practice principles outlined in our submission.

As detailed on p.56 of the Net Zero Commission's report: "Most recently, the NSW Government enacted the Climate Change (Net Zero Future) Act 2023 (the Act). Part of the Act's purpose is to give effect to the Paris Agreement's adaptation aim – to increase the ability to adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change. The Cabinet Office subsequently established a Climate Change Network to oversee the whole-of-Government

implementation of climate change objectives.”² With the impacts of climate change set to worsen, young generations will be inheriting a future that has been shaped by the decisions of the present and the past. These decisions are mostly being made without young people. We firmly believe and know that young Australians play a crucial role in climate change mitigation and adaptation. We are calling for a Youth Advisory Council on Climate to sit within the Climate Change Network to provide whole of Government advice on climate change issues for Department secretaries to consider.

The implementation of a permanent advisory mechanism, a YACC, would successfully facilitate meaningful youth political participation. A YACC is a group of “young people who work ... to provide advice on programs and policies affecting young people.” Implementing a YACC would intentionally involve young people in climate decision-making, by allowing them to both consult on and meaningfully contribute to climate policy. The YACC would sit within the Climate Change Network, giving young people across NSW the opportunity to inform the path towards climate change adaptation and mitigation, one of the defining feats of our lifetime. The Network would also have a duty to ‘close the circle’ with young people by relaying to them what sections of policy their suggestions informed.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child outlines that young people have a right to meaningful participation, a NSW YACC would uphold the UNCRC by ensuring the rights of young people are being recognised. Further, facilitating meaningful youth political participation allows for the Government to respond to youth needs. Importantly, a NSW YACC would institutionalise youth voices into the NSW Government, and form new best practice for other jurisdictions to follow suit, potentially facilitating the meaningful participation of youth in climate decision-making nationally. The Department has a unique opportunity to provide a best practice example of youth engagement nationally, and also globally should Australia be successful in its bid to host COP31.

Why youth voices in climate change matter

We heard from young people that climate change is one of the defining issues of our generation. Where previous generations feared the threat of nuclear conflict, today’s young people largely view climate change as the greatest existential threat. Considering this, young people across NSW have taken to climate leadership - they are at the forefront of climate innovation to tackle every aspect of climate change, mitigation, adaptation and net zero. If NSW is serious about having a just transition, they cannot leave anyone behind, therefore young voices need to be heard.

The concept of young people informing climate policy is not new. In Europe, Fridays for Future youth activists alongside European Union parliament jointly passed legislation seeking to reduce greenhouse gas emissions across Europe. In Canada, the Canadian Environment and Climate Change Youth Council advised the Canadian Government on its 2030 Emissions’ Reduction Plan and nature-based solutions to fight biodiversity loss. In Ireland, the Government convened a national youth assembly where delegates shared their vision of a carbon neutral Ireland. This is only the tip of the iceberg, across the world, young voices are being integrated in every facet of climate decision-making. If other jurisdictions can integrate youth voices into their policy, so can NSW. Adopting a YACC is integral to achieving a just transition that leaves no stakeholder and no voice behind.

We thank you for your time and reading through this submission. We would welcome the opportunity to speak at the hearing to demonstrate the importance of youth engagement regarding climate policy and how this is integral to achieving a just transition.

²Net Zero Commission, *2024 Annual Report*, Net Zero Commission, viewed 12 December 2010, https://www.netzerocommission.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-11/Net_Zero_Commission_2024_Annual_Report.pdf