

2021 Youth Summit program Day 3 Wrap up and take-home messages:

Inspector Shawn Jansen RSPCA on – Responsible Pet Ownership

Shawn introduced the mission of the RSPCA ‘together we change lives.’ It was interesting to note the combined history of concern about cruelty to children and animals in the foundation history of the organisation. He went on to outline five domains of concern for animal welfare held by the RSPCA: nutrition, environment, health, behaviour, and mental state.

This is an organisation with a major economic footprint in Australia, with a budget of \$50 million a year. The Queensland branch has a substantial employed staff and the assistance of 5,500 thousand volunteers who put in 500,000 hours of work a year.

The lobbying and advocacy work of the organisation is important. For example, a humane sourcing of chicken meat, agreed with McDonald’s Australia recently, should lead to an enhanced quality of life for a lot of meat chickens in this country.

Take Home Messages:

As with human health and well-being, the organisation seeks to promote the principle of positive experiences for animals. Not just the absence of ill treatment or illness, but the presence of positive flourishing.

Emily from Ursie’s Earthies environment club based at Saint Ursula’s College.

Emily took us through the inspiring work of this environment group within the college. The group has been set up to promote environmental sustainability within Saint Ursula’s, to encourage students to engage with environmental issues in their community, and to educate them about environmental issues and to reinforce and normalise sustainable behaviours and lifestyle changes.

The group has an ambitious program of current and future initiatives. I was particularly taken by the eco-bingo cards initiative which seeks to ‘gamify’ environmental and sustainability concepts to students, the idea of meat free Mondays - and the planned school store selling environmentally friendly products such as reusable coffee cups and bags.

Take Home Messages:

Young people will be dealing with many of the consequences of past and present inaction on climate change. So, giving them their say on the treatment of the earth is important. Young people need to be educated about environmental issues, should be encouraged to become active in solving environmental problems, and be encouraged to influence other people in their communities on these subjects. This approach will help both to achieve more progress toward sustainability solutions, but also act as an antidote to climate and eco-anxiety which is a prevalent and growing problem amongst young people.

Peter Sutrin from Proven Energy - Reducing our Carbon Footprint with Renewables.

Peter introduced the value of renewable energy, pointing out that solar and wind are the main forms of this power source in Australia. This country is already sourcing about 21% of its energy from renewables which is a great improvement on the situation of a couple of decades ago.

On the other hand, the energy sector in this country accounts for 74% of our greenhouse gas emissions, and overall Australia produces 3.6% of total global GHG emissions, which is significant for a country of relatively small population size.

Finally, Peter gave us his views about where renewable energy trends could go in Australia in the future, covering uptake of home batteries, electric vehicles, more solar electric, wind power and hydrogen, and renewables recycling. This last point produced a couple of questions on the end-of-life recycling of solar electric panels and weather product stewardship could be built into such products for the future. A good link to the topic of circular economy covered in previous sessions.

Take Home Messages:

Australia is already doing quite well with regards to renewable energy adoption but could and should do a great deal more. Peter's comments on renewables trends point to where improvements could be made. Hopefully, we can move closer to 100% renewable energy adoption across the country soon. This goal has already been achieved in some places (e.g., Canberra).

Cr Megan O'Hara-Sullivan from Toowoomba Regional Council

Megan talked about a wide range of initiatives that the Council operates to make it more environmentally sustainable and to engage with its citizens on environmental issues.

Examples included the Council's Regional Youth Advisory Committee and Youth Leaders' program, the Environment Advisory Committee and Environment Grants program. The latter distributes financial support to a range of environmentally supportive activities locally.

The Council's environment advisory committee, set up recently, involves members of the community interested in the management of our built and natural environments and allows them to bring some influence to bear on council decision-making on subjects such as climate change, environmental sustainability projects, urban greening. Local citizens can also offer input to some council decision making, for example in areas of development planning, using the 'Have your Say' interactive website.

Take Home Messages:

Megan described some ways in which local citizens can get involved with the operations of council on environmental matters. One would be to contact their elected representatives and seek a meeting and discussion with them about matters of concern. Another option would be to attend one of the public meetings of a group like the Environment Advisory Committee. For instance, the next open public meeting of that group takes place on 27 May 2021 at 4 pm in Toowoomba Regional Council city library. Any citizen can attend.