



Leader ... Simon Sheikh. Photo: Andrew Meares

New wave of planet warriors

Join the fight against climate change and convince the government to act, writes **Simon Sheikh**.

■ ACT NOW

At other times in our history, youth have been the vanguards of movements that have changed the world. Climate change is quickly becoming the hottest issue for young people and youth are poised to lead the way once again.

As a young person brought up on a steady diet of Captain Planet, I've been taking action to ensure we convince our governments to make the changes we so urgently need. I'm not alone. There is a rapidly growing youth climate movement in Australia, a movement that needs you.

Last year my organisation, GetUp!, organised a national climate torch relay. We took a torch, with an LED screen powered by a solar panel, and gave it to tens of thousands of Australians.

We're also regularly providing opportunities for Australians, including young people, to tell their politicians what they are thinking.

Increasingly, the "youth vote" can decide election outcomes. Many young Australians voted for Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and his party on the promise of strong action to stop dangerous climate change.

Our politicians, though, only soar as high as we demand. That's why it's time our generation demands more and asks our government to aim higher.

But what gives us, as young people, influence on the national political stage?

Young people are in a better position to learn and grasp new ideas faster than our parents. Our access to the internet and our knowledge of where to look means that we can find information faster, more effectively and more reliably than our parents. This means we have the opportunity to be more informed about what's going on in the world and of what we can change and how we can go about making that change.

So what can you do to make politicians hear – and act on – your voice?

In my conversations with politicians I often hear that they don't believe voters are prepared for governments to make "tough" changes to reduce our nation's greenhouse gas emissions.

Let's tell them they're wrong. Forming a high school climate group is a great place to start. Then get all your friends together and pay your local politician a visit. Even writing letters together is an easy but meaningful first step. A great resource is switchedonschools.org.au.



Canberra Times
20/03/2009
Page: 10
Supplements
Region: Canberra
Circulation: 34629
Type: Capital City Daily
Size: 639.12 sq.cms
MTWTFS-



EARTHFACT

Leaving the tap running while cleaning your teeth uses nine litres of water a minute. If you turn the tap off, you use just one litre. And to save even more, put a clock in the shower and limit your time.



But there's much more we can do when we join together, like getting involved in Australia's largest gathering of young people on the issue of climate change. Imagine a three-day event, where young people from across Australia come together to celebrate, create, dream, learn and act to stop dangerous climate change.

Power Shift 2009 is Australia's first national youth climate summit. You can join me at the event in Sydney this July. The music industry has joined my organisation in throwing their weight behind the event. So far bands like the Cat Empire, Regurgitator, Blue King Brown, Skipping Girl Vinegar, Mr Percival and many more have come on board to support the event. Check out powershift.org.au for all the details.

Right now we have the moment to convince our politicians to aim higher. As they debate how much to reduce our nation's carbon emissions, how much to invest in renewable energies, like wind and solar, and how to help Australians with the transition to a new green economy, we need to ensure that youth are leading the call for strong solutions.

Simon Sheikh is the national director of GetUp!