

Co-designing and launching a youth climate mental health certificate

Abstract:

1. **Background:** Young Australians are increasingly experiencing what is often termed “eco-distress” or climate-related emotional strain, yet there remains a gap in tailored educational resources that support mental health and agency in the climate space. ECOMIND partnered with young people, mental health practitioners, climate scientists and educators to respond to this dual challenge: harnessing adolescents’ climate emotions while equipping them with the tools to thrive, not just survive.
2. **Approach:** Using a co-design methodology, the project recruited a youth advisory board, practitioner and academic advisors, and mapped current evidence on climate emotions, adolescent development and mental health literacy. Over a series of workshops, we iteratively shaped a “Climate Mental Health Certificate” which launched in May 2025. The certificate blends psycho-educational modules (emotional literacy, agency, action pathways), peer-facilitation skills and climate-resilience practices, aimed at climate active adolescents aged 14-18.
3. **Outcome:** By April, the first cohort will have completed the certificate in its pilot launch, which aims to demonstrate improved self-rated emotional resilience, greater clarity around climate-related feelings, and increased intention to engage in peer-led support and climate action.
4. **Innovation:** This certificate represents a novel convergence of climate education and adolescent mental health support, shifting from a deficit model (anxiety, fear) to a strengths-based model (agency, connection, community). It will be among the first in the Australian context to treat climate emotions as both a wellbeing and an engagement asset.
5. **Significance:** For adolescent health practitioners, educators and policy-makers, this work offers a template for supporting young people at the intersection of climate change and mental health. It demonstrates how targeted, developmentally appropriate, youth-led programmes can both safeguard wellbeing and catalyse climate engagement - a critical dual outcome for the generation who will live longest with climate impacts.