

MEDIA RELEASE

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Aussie high schoolers write for a cleaner future

Tonight, two Australian high school students will meet with global experts on environmental contamination and remediation to discuss creating a more sustainable future.

Students in Years 7 to 12 entered their essays into a national competition discussing how innovative technologies can help clean up emerging contaminants from the environment.

An expert panel of judges selected 2 essay winners to attend the CleanUp 2024 conference dinner, hosted by crcCARE. crcCARE is a partnership of organisations dedicated to developing new ways of dealing with and preventing contamination of soil, water and air.

Among the winners are 17-year-old Ariel Maevsky and 12-year-old Annabelle Carlin, who have been flown from Victoria and Western Australia to Adelaide to receive their awards tonight.

Ariel, winner of the Dr Roneal Naidu Award, wrote about how a plastic-digesting fungus – *Aspergillus terreus* – could be the key to breaking down hazardous, non-biodegradable plastics in the environment. Ariel's essay, titled '*Plastivorous: A Mushroom's Quest to Save the World*' was praised by the expert judges for the way it infused creativity and storytelling with science.

'Time and time again, I read articles about microplastics ending up everywhere they shouldn't – from uninhabited islands in the middle of the Pacific, to the human brain itself,' said Ariel.

'We didn't even know microplastics existed until 2004, and they've been poisoning our ecosystems and our health from long before then. It was this that drove me to write about *Aspergillus terreus* as a solution to the microplastic problem.'

Ariel said he hoped that his essay would raise awareness about the nature and magnitude of the microplastics issue.

'I hope that, having read my essay, the reader is left with hope for the future. To join the battle against microplastic pollution so that we may all live a happier, healthier and more sustainable life,' said Ariel. 'I look forward to attending the CleanUp 2024 Conference as part of the prize.'

Laureate Professor Ravi Naidu, Managing Director and CEO of crcCARE, said he was encouraged to see the passion of the younger generation: 'It is critical that we have passionate, informed young people to drive change. I am pleased that we can support and encourage young minds through these awards.'

'These essays emphasise how important it is for us to develop new technologies to manage these contaminants, so that future generations do not pay the price,' said Professor Naidu.

Professor Ravi Naidu and Shamila Naidu are sponsors of the award, which honours the late Dr Roneal Naidu, a dedicated medical doctor who inspired others through his passion for the environment and the impact of pollutants on human health.

The crcCARE High School Essay Competition aims to inspire Australian students to recognise the importance of a clean environment for our wellbeing. The essay competition is run every two years, in conjunction with the International CleanUp conference, which is being held in Adelaide from 16 to 18 September 2024.

The conference program is available at: <https://adelaide2024cleanupconference.com/program>

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