

MEDIA RELEASE

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Young Aussies recognised for exploring AI's role in tackling environmental contamination

Two Australian high school students have been recognised for their ideas on how artificial intelligence (AI) could help tackle one of the world's biggest environmental challenges: contamination.

Petros Calokerinos and Hannah Wang have been named winners of the 2026 crcCARE High School Essay Competition, which challenges students in Years 7–12 to think creatively about the science and technologies that could help create a cleaner, healthier and more sustainable future. The national competition is run every 2 years as part of the International Clean Up Conference in Adelaide, which is hosted by crcCARE.

This year's competition focused on how AI could be used to understand, prevent and clean up environmental contamination.

12-year-old Petros Calokerinos from NSW said he was excited and surprised to win the competition.

"I was inspired to write about AI and environmental contamination because I believe the power of technology should be harnessed to care for our environment and those around us," he said. "I hope people who read my essay will consider the importance of cooperation in caring for the environment and understand that innovative technology can be a positive force if applied appropriately."

For 13-year-old Hannah Wang from Victoria, the inspiration came from years of hearing about climate change and environmental contamination at school and in the news – and wondering what could be done differently.

"I clearly remember one particular afternoon after a class where we discussed the damage being done to our environment. I remember thinking and hoping that, one day, I would be able to make a positive difference," she shared.

"Although the environmental challenges may seem impossible to overcome, there are still ways we can make a difference. More importantly, I hope people understand that we should focus on preventing environmental contamination rather than simply trying to clean it up after the damage has already been done."

Distinguished Laureate Professor Ravi Naidu, Managing Director and CEO of crcCARE, said that nurturing the next generation of scientists and problem solvers is the key to shaping our environmental future.

"Petros and Hannah have shown tremendous curiosity and thoughtfulness in considering how emerging technologies such as AI could help us tackle environmental contamination. Their ideas give me great confidence that the future of environmental science is in capable hands," Professor Naidu said.

crcCARE is hosting CleanUp 2026 in Adelaide from 13 – 17 September. The 11th International Contaminated Site Remediation Conference incorporates the 5th International PFAS Conference. crcCARE is a partnership of organisations dedicated to developing new ways to deal with and prevent contamination of soil, water and air.

The conference program is available [here](#).

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Media: Complimentary, free media passes are available for any accredited media personnel who wish to attend the conference in person.