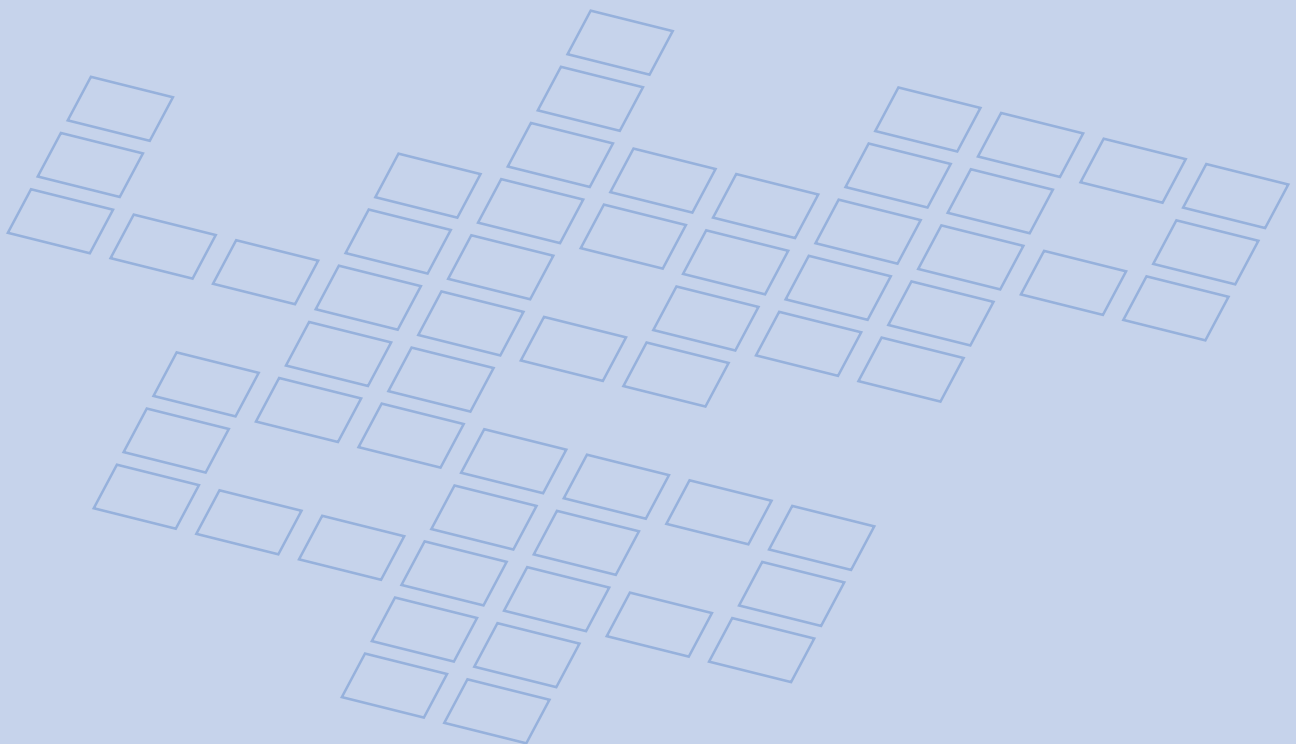


**AUSTRALIAN
DEMOCRATS**

YOUTH POLL 2006

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Senator Natasha Stott Despoja
PO Box 3419, Rundle Mall
Adelaide SA 5000

Phone - 08 8232 7595
Fax - 08 8232 7601

senator.stottdespoja@aph.gov.au

1. Introduction



For more than a decade the Australian Democrats have conducted an annual Youth Poll that highlights the attitudes and opinions of young people on a diverse range of important issues.

The poll is aimed at 15 to 20 year olds and is distributed to schools, TAFEs, universities, youth and church groups, and welfare, charity and community organisations in every State and Territory.

Youth Poll asks young people about employment, health, education and training and a range of other issues.

This poll is part of a commitment to recognising the contribution young people make and the importance of including their views in the political process.

Young Australians continue to search for new opportunities, greater understanding and a platform from which to voice their ideas. Often, young people's views and opinions are misrepresented, ignored or stereotyped.

Youth Poll 2006 (also available at www.natashastottdespoja.com) provides a detailed insight into how young Australians feel about themselves, their place in society, their approach to life and the issues that are important to them. Youth Poll provides an invaluable indicator of the attitudes of Australia's young people.

While Youth Poll reveals a diversity of opinions on various issues, the results show that many young people are united in their concerns and feelings. This year, Youth Poll has found that family, health and education are important to young people and youth suicide remains an issue of particular concern. It also gauges opinions on the state issues that affect young people.

Youth Poll not only provides a great opportunity for young people to have a say, but it also gives policy-makers the chance to incorporate these views into policy so as to reflect the interests and concerns of young people. Like all Australians, young people deserve attention and respect from their Government. Youth Poll is just one way we seek to better represent the interests of young Australians.

Senator Natasha Stott Despoja
Senator for South Australia



2. Demographics

2.1 Age

The Youth Poll 2006 questionnaire sought opinions from people aged between 15 and 20.

2.2 Sex

Male respondents outnumber female respondents - 55% to 45%.

2.3 Residence

Respondents come from all States and Territories, and live in urban, regional and remote areas.

Most respondents live with family, but others live with friends, alone, are homeless, or have alternative living arrangements.

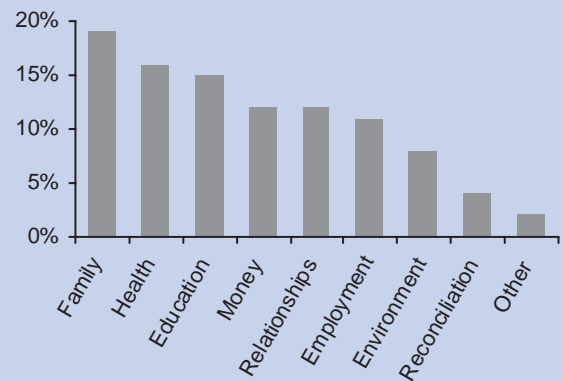
2.4 Important issues

We asked young people to nominate the three issues most important to them from a list of nine.

Family is the most important issue to respondents.

Following closely behind is health on 16% and education on 15%.

These values are represented in the following chart.



A 2005 survey by Mission Australia found young people valued most family relationships, friendships and being independent.¹

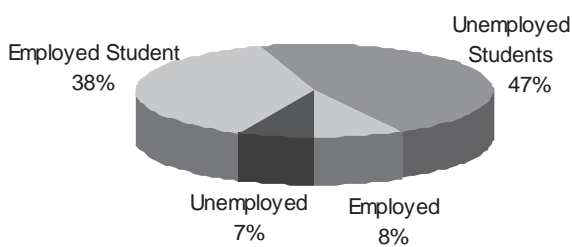
3. Employment



3.1 Employment Status

85% of respondents to Youth Poll are in education or training. 47% are unemployed students and 38% are employed students.

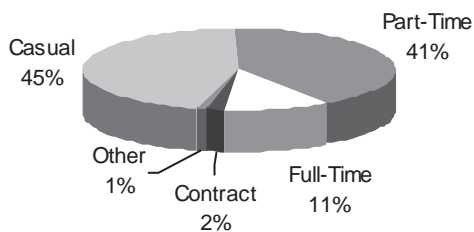
Of the 14% of respondents not studying, 8% are employed and 7% unemployed.



A 2005 report found that 64% of participants had spent some time out of the labour force and full-time education after leaving school.²

3.2 Type of Employment

Only 11% of employed respondents are working full-time. Most of the other respondents (45%) are in casual employment, and 41% work part-time.

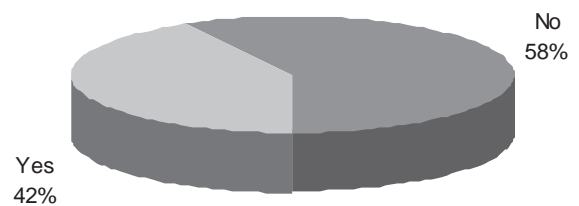


Full-time jobs for young people have declined over the past 10 years. Since 1995, the number of full-time jobs for 15-19 year olds has fallen by 5,000.³

3.3 Employment Culture

Is there homophobia where you work or study?

42% of all respondents said they had witnessed homophobia in their workplace.



A 2005 study revealed that 44% of respondents had been verbally abused and 16% physically abused because of their sexual orientation.⁴ School was the most likely location for this abuse.⁵

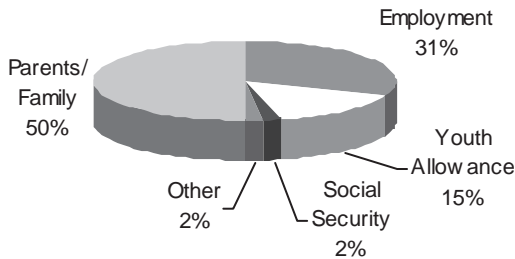
3.4 Source of Income

What is your main source of income?

Half of respondents (50%) rely on their parents or family for income.

Work is the main source of income for 31%.

15% of respondents' main source of income is Youth Allowance, and 2% rely on other social security benefits.

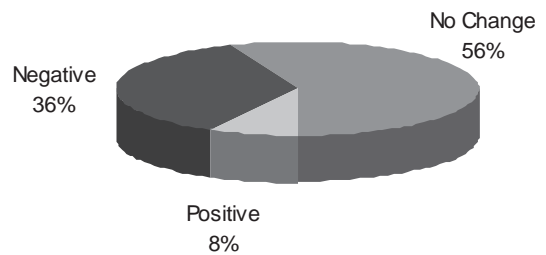


The Advertiser Youth Survey 2005 indicated that 46.7% of young people aged 16-19 relied on employment as their main source of income.⁶ 32.3% relied on their families and 15.9% relied on Youth Allowance.⁷

3.5 Industrial Relations Changes

What impact will the new industrial relations laws have on you?

More than half of respondents (56%) believe the Government's industrial relations changes will have no impact on them. 36% believe the changes will have a negative impact, while 8% thought the changes were positive.



In its submission to the Senate Inquiry into the industrial relations changes, the Young Worker's Advisory Service said "many of the changes proposed by the (Workplace Relations legislation) will be detrimental to young workers".⁸



4. Health

4.1 Youth Suicide

Do you know a young person who has attempted or committed suicide?

A majority of respondents (52%) report knowing a young person who has attempted or committed suicide. This is a small decrease on last year's result of 57%.



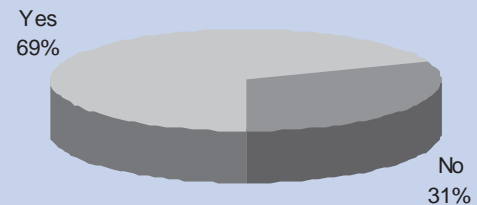
In 2004, 53 males between the ages of 15-19 committed suicide, compared with 32 females.⁹

Suicide remains a significant cause of death for all age groups, accounting for more deaths than transport accidents between 1994 and 2004.¹⁰

4.2 Condom Vending Machines

Should condom vending machines be available in schools?

An increasing number of respondents, 69%, support the installation of condom vending machines in schools, up 9% from last year.

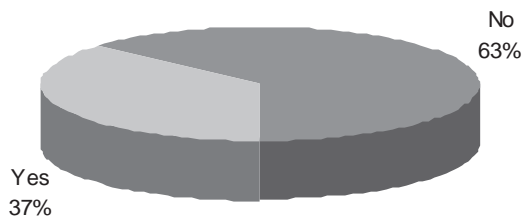


February 14 is National Condom Day.¹¹

4.3 Drugs

Have you ever tried marijuana?

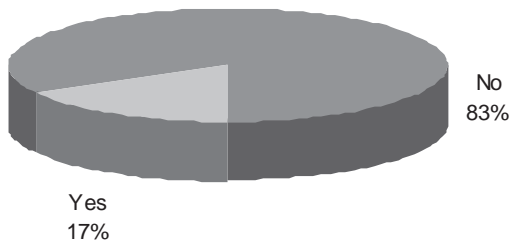
37% of respondents have tried marijuana, an increase of 7% since last year.



The National Council on Drugs says about 300,000 Australians use marijuana every day.¹²

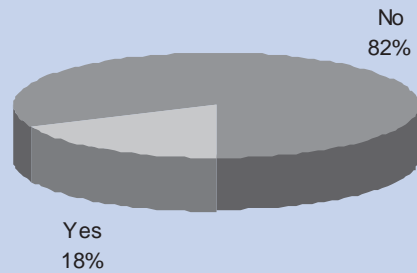
Have you ever tried amphetamines or hallucinogens (such as Ecstasy, Speed or LSD)?

17% of respondents have tried amphetamines or hallucinogens, such as Ecstasy, LSD or Speed. This is an increase of 7% on last year's Youth Poll.



Do you smoke?

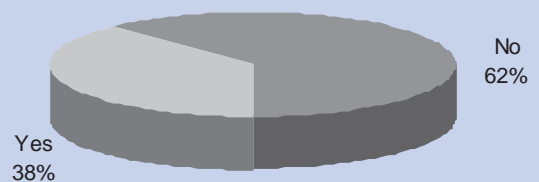
18% of respondents smoke, an increase of 5% since the 2005 Youth Poll, equalling the 2004 finding.



The prevalence of smoking is highest in the 18-34 age group. 34% of males and 26% of females in this age group smoke.¹³

Do you binge drink (more than five drinks in one session)?

A considerable 38% of respondents say they binge drink.



Females are more likely than males to binge drink, with a National Drug Research Institute survey showing that for girls aged 14 to 17 years of age, the rate of drinking at dangerous levels rose from 1% in 1998 to 9% in 2001.¹⁴

5. Education and Training

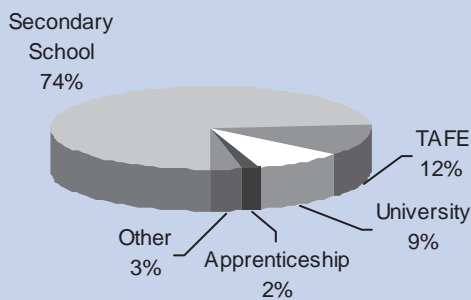


92% of Youth Poll 2006 respondents are in some form of education or training.

This is 3% lower than last year's figure.

74% are studying in secondary school, a decrease of 13% on last year, and 12% are attending TAFE.

Respondents undertaking university study increased to 9%, with a further 2% doing apprenticeships.

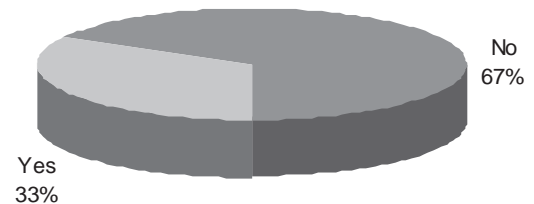


Over the decade to 2005, the proportion of 17-year-olds who were enrolled as full-time students increased from 58.6% to 63.5%.¹⁵

5.1 Youth Allowance

Are you receiving Youth Allowance or a scholarship?

67% of respondents are not receiving Youth Allowance or a scholarship, a considerable decrease from last year's 81%.



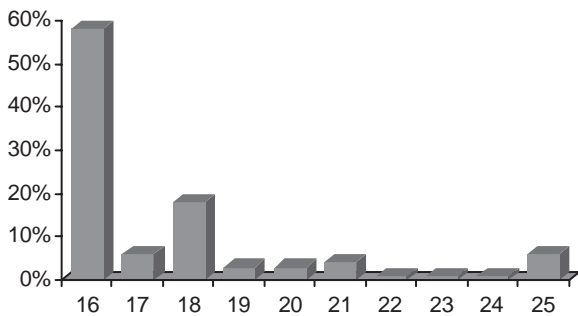
2003 figures showed the percentage of students under 19 who were receiving student income support declined significantly from 33% in 1998 to 21% in 2001.¹⁶

Should higher education be publicly funded?

A large majority of respondents, 84%, believe higher education should be publicly funded.

What should the Youth Allowance age of independence be?

A greater number of respondents than last year (58%) believe the Youth Allowance age of independence should be 16 years of age. 18% believe it should be 18, while 6% believe it should be 17 and a further 4% believe it should be 21. Only 6% of the respondents believe the age of independence should be 25, as it is currently set by the Government.



Under current legislation, students under 25 years of age are considered financially dependent on their parents (with certain exceptions).¹⁷ Parental assets and income, including the family home, jewellery and salary are assessed in determining whether a student should receive income support.¹⁸ Those who qualify for income support, but are considered 'dependent', receive just over half the 'independent' allowance.¹⁹

Are the current levels of student assistance adequate?

A majority of respondents (56%) believe the current levels of student assistance are not adequate. This is an increase on last year's result of 52%.



Current Youth Allowance rates, not including Rent Assistance, are:²⁰

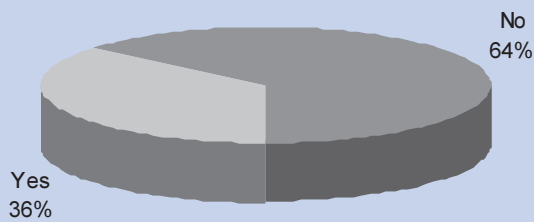
YOUTH ALLOWANCE	Allowance Paid per Fortnight
Single, no children:	
Under 18, at home	\$183.20
Under 18, away from home	\$334.70
18 and over, away from home	\$334.70
18 and over, at home	\$220.30
Single, with children	\$438.50
Partnered, no children	\$334.70
Partnered, with children	\$367.50
Special rate for long term unemployed or migrant English students 21 years or over commencing full-time study	
Single, living at home	\$270.50
Single, living away from home	\$406.50
Partnered, no children	\$367.50

National Rights Welfare Network figures reveal the rate for a single, independent student between 16-24 is 38% below the Henderson poverty line.²¹



Should full-fee paying students be able to enter universities with lower marks than HECS students?

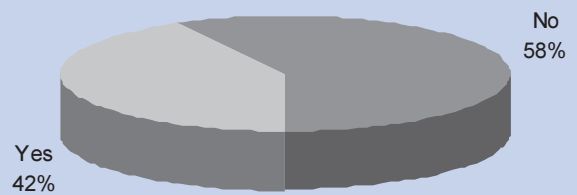
The majority of respondents (64%) do not want full-fee paying students entering university with lower marks than HECS students.



In 2005, cut-off scores for full-fee places were up to 18 points lower than those for HECS places.²²

Do you support the Government's Voluntary Student Unionism policy?

The majority of respondents (58%) do not support the introduction of Voluntary Student Unionism (VSU).



VSU comes into effect from July 1st, this year. It is estimated that around 4,200 people employed on campuses across Australia will lose their jobs due to VSU.²³

6. National Issues

Although most Youth Poll respondents are below the voting age, they hold strong opinions on a range of issues.

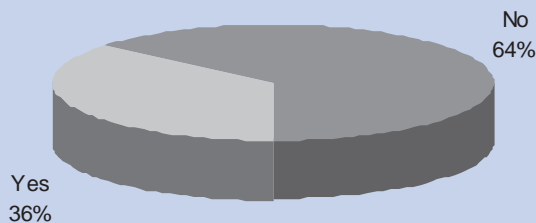
Young people feel they are not able to have a significant impact on the decisions that affect them. Their poor representation in policy making processes has left many young Australians cynical and disillusioned about politics. Initial findings of a four year survey by the Electoral Commission suggest young people do not trust politicians, and are not necessarily interested in "politics", but are willing to engage with issues that concern them.²⁴

Young Australians have a social conscience and are often highly engaged in political issues. It is party politics with which they do not identify.²⁵

6.1 Asylum Seekers

Do you support the mandatory detention of asylum seekers?

An increasing proportion of participants (64%) do not support the mandatory detention of asylum seekers, compared with 60% last year. This response is significantly higher than in 2004 (42%).



The Advertiser Youth Survey 2005 indicates that 47.1% of 16-19 year olds disagree with the Government's treatment of asylum seekers.²⁶

6.2 Indigenous Treaty

Do you think the Government should enter into a treaty with Indigenous Australians?

61% of respondents support a treaty with Indigenous Australians.



A 2001 poll by *The Age* newspaper found that 74% of 18-24 year olds supported entering into a treaty with Indigenous people, the highest support rate of any group surveyed.²⁷

6.3 New Anti-terror Laws

Do you support the new anti-terrorism laws?

More than half of the respondents (55%) support the new anti-terrorism laws.



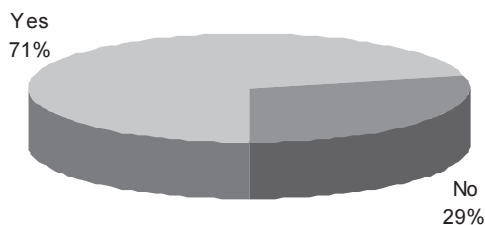
The Youth Affairs Council of Victoria raised the concern that "young people may be disproportionately affected by the (stop, search and question) powers, particularly given they are significant users of, and highly visible in, public space."²⁸



6.4 Bill of Rights

Do you think Australia needs a Bill of Rights to protect our civil liberties and human rights?

More than two-thirds (71%) of respondents believe that Australians need a Bill of Rights to protect civil liberties and human rights.



The Democrats have a Private Member's Bill on a Bill of Rights - the *Parliamentary Charter of Rights and Freedoms Bill 2001 (2005)*.

6.5 Republic

Should Australia be a Republic?

Support still remains for Australia to become a Republic, with 55% of young Australians agreeing with the question.



A recent opinion poll showed 60% of 18-24 year olds support Australia becoming a Republic, and 66% of them think it is inevitable.²⁹

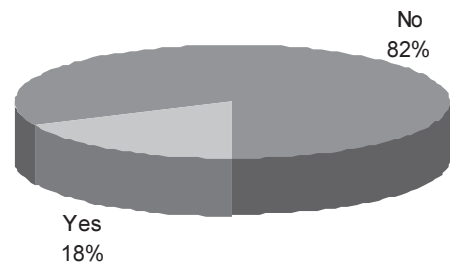
A Parliamentary Inquiry was established in 2005 to consider the most appropriate path towards an Australian Republic and to look at suitable models.³⁰ You can find the recommendations from this Inquiry at:

http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/legcon_ctte/completed_inquiries/2002-04/republic03/report/c08.pdf

6.6 Climate Change

Do you think the Federal Government is doing enough to address climate change?

An overwhelming 82% of respondents believe that the Federal Government is not doing enough to address climate change.



In a 2005 survey, 67% of respondents agreed with the statement in regard to global warming "If we don't act now it will be too late".³¹

6.7 Embryonic Stem Cells

Do you support research using embryonic stem cells?

The majority of respondents (62%) support the use of embryonic stem cells in research.



In a 2006 survey, 64% of respondents regarded the use of embryonic stem cells in medical research as acceptable.³²

6.8 Youth Representation

Should the voting age be lowered to 16?

An increased number of respondents, 32%, up from 25% on last year, believe the voting age should be lowered to 16.



South Australian Parliamentarian, Bob Such, plans to introduce a Private Member's Bill to allow voluntary voting for young people between 16-18.³³

6.9 Same-Sex Marriage

Do you support same-sex marriage?

A majority of respondents (57%) wholly support same-sex marriage.

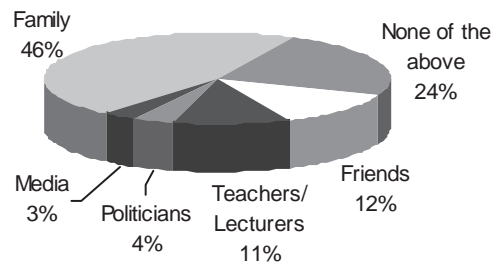


A recent news poll revealed 33% of 18-34 year olds strongly support same-sex marriages, with 20% strongly against it.³⁴

6.10 Trust

Who do you trust most on the subject of politics?

The media has again proved to be the least trusted in this year's Youth Poll, scoring just 3% of the vote. Politicians came in second to last on 4%. Young people are still wary of 'official' sources of political information.



At 46%, the family is considered the most trustworthy source of political information. The category 'none' again polled strongly receiving the second highest response, with 24%. Friends follow at 12% and teachers and lecturers at 11%.



7. State Issues

Each respondent answered one of the following questions, depending on their State or Territory

NT

Should nuclear waste be dumped in the NT?

Respondents were evenly split on this issue, with 50% saying they do not want nuclear waste dumped in the Northern Territory.

In 2005, the Federal Government passed legislation to establish a Commonwealth radioactive waste dump in the Northern Territory.

ACT

Are rental and house prices in the ACT discouraging you from moving out of home?

More than two-thirds of ACT respondents believe rental and house prices are preventing them from moving out of home.

In 2005, Canberra was the most expensive Australian city in which to rent accommodation.³⁵

SA

Is the Government doing enough to restore water flows to the Murray?

More than four-fifths of respondents (84%) do not believe that the Government is doing enough to restore the Murray River.

The Living Murray Initiative aims to return 500 gegalitres (500 billion litres) of water to the Murray each year until 2009.³⁶

A CSIRO report has stated an extra 2000 gegalitres is needed before 2030 just to sustain present water flows.³⁷

QLD

Should QLD have daylight saving?

A slight majority (51%) believe that Queensland should not have daylight saving.

A poll published in a Queensland newspaper found that almost two-thirds of people wanted daylight saving.³⁸

TAS

Has the 50 hour learner driver logbook delayed or prevented you from getting your driver's licence?

67% of respondents do not believe that the new learner driver logbook had prevented them from getting their driver's licence.

Research has shown that new drivers with extensive driving experience are up to 40% less likely to crash in their first two years on the road.³⁹

NSW

Do you think the recent Sydney riots were the result of racism?

The majority of respondents (81%) believe that the riots in Sydney were the result of racism.

A 2005 poll in the *Sydney Morning Herald* found that 75% of respondents agreed that the riots were caused by racism.⁴⁰

VIC

Should the legal drinking age be increased to 21?

89% of respondents do not believe that the legal drinking age should be changed.

Around 35% of 14-19 year olds consume enough alcohol to put themselves at an increased risk of short term alcohol related harm.⁴¹

WA

Are you concerned about WA's water shortage?

More than half (56%) of respondents are concerned about the shortage of water in WA.

In February 2005, Western Australia's water dams were at 29% of their total capacity.⁴² Industry was the biggest water consumer, using 40% of the total amount, which was heavily subsidised.⁴³

Conclusion - A snapshot of young Australians



Family, followed by health and education are the most important issues in the lives of a majority of young Australians.

While most respondents are in education and training, a large percentage are also employed, but on a casual basis. A majority believe education should be publicly funded and that levels of student income support are insufficient.

More than a third of respondents believe that the Government's new industrial relations changes will have a negative impact on them.

There is a small decrease in the number of respondents who know a young person who has attempted or committed suicide.

The use of both marijuana and hallucinogens increased on last year's figures.

Alarmingly, a greater number of respondents than last year said they smoke, discontinuing a trend evident in the last couple of Youth Polls, and a considerable number binge drink.

Once again, an overwhelming majority of respondents do not agree with the current Youth Allowance age of independence, 25. A majority of participants also believe that full-fee paying students should not be able to enter university with lower marks than HECS students, and do not support the introduction of VSU.

Most young people surveyed do not support mandatory detention for asylum seekers and believe the Government should enter into a treaty with Indigenous Australians.

A slight majority approve of the new anti-terror laws, while more than two-thirds believe that a Bill of Rights is needed to protect Australians' civil liberties.

The number of young people who support Australia becoming a Republic has remained steady.

An overwhelming percentage of participants believe that the Federal Government is not doing enough to address climate change.

Northern Territory respondents are split on whether the NT should have a nuclear waste dump.

Two-thirds of ACT respondents think rental and house prices are preventing them from moving out of home.

South Australian participants believe the Government is not doing enough to help restore water flows to the Murray River.

A large majority of NSW respondents believe that the recent riots in Sydney were a result of race conflict.

An overwhelming majority of Victorian respondents believe that the legal drinking age should not be raised to 21 years.

Many Western Australian participants are concerned about the water shortage in their state.

A small majority of Queensland respondents believe that the state should not adopt daylight saving.

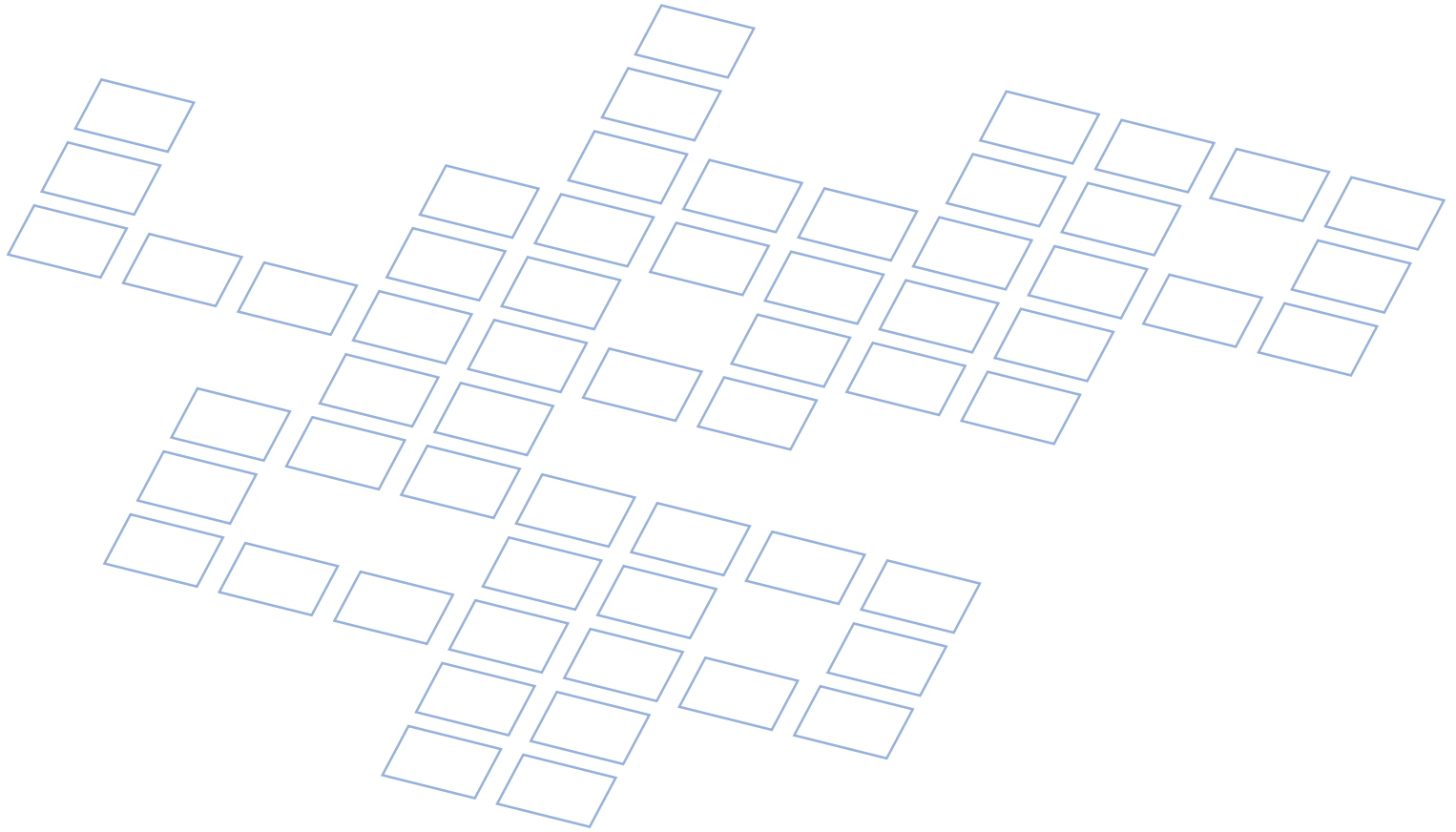
Two-thirds of Tasmanian respondents believe that the new learner driver logbook has not prevented them from getting their driver's licence.

While young people are highly sceptical about trusting sources of political information, they do care passionately about a range of issues and want to make a difference in their communities.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Mission Australia 2005 Youth Survey <http://www.mission.com.au/cm/resources/documents/2005YouthSurvey.pdf>
- 2 Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth, "Life satisfaction of Young Australians", <http://www.acer.edu.au/research/projects/lsay/reports/lsay43.pdf>
- 3 Inquiry into Workplace Relations Amendment "Work Choices" Bill 2005 http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/eet_ctte/wr_workchoices05/submission/sub115.pdf
- 4 Lynne Hillier, Alina Turner & Anne Mitchell, 'Writing Themselves In Again' 2005, ARCSHS, La Trobe University
- 5 Ibid
- 6 Advertiser Newspapers Ltd. Marketing Information Services Department, 'The Advertiser Youth Survey 2005', <http://www.theadvertiser.com.au/youth/>
- 7 Ibid
- 8 Young Workers Advisory Service submission to the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, and Education References Committee Inquiry into Industrial Relations changes, September 2005, http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/eet_ctte/indust_agreements/submissions/sub057.pdf
- 9 ABS 'Suicide' 1994-2004 Publication March 2006 (Cat. No. 3309.0)
- 10 Ibid
- 11 SHineSA media release "A Valentines Day message on safe sex" 14/02/04
- 12 Jean Kennedy "Evidence cannabis use more harmful than thought" PM-ABC radio 05/05/06
- 13 AIHW 2005. 2004 National Drug Strategy Household Survey (Cat. No. PHE.61)
- 14 AIHW 2002. 2001 National Drug Strategy Household Survey (Cat. No. PHE. 41)
- 15 ABS 23/02/06. 2005 'Schools Australia' (Cat. No. 4221.0)
- 16 Monash Centre for population and Urban Research 'Higher Education at the Crossroads', May 2003, http://www.arts.monash.edu.au/cpur/publications/higher_ed_crossroads.html
- 17 from http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/payments/qual_ind_yal.htm
You are considered independent if you are aged 16 or over and : have been out of school at least 18 months and earned an amount equivalent to 75% of the Commonwealth Training Award Rate in an 18 month period before lodging a claim; or have worked to support yourself for at least 18 months, working full-time at least 30 hours a week during the preceding two years (or for a period of 12 months if you are considered disadvantaged); or have worked part-time for at least 15 hours a week for at least two years since last leaving school; or are 25 or more and a full-time student (in special circumstances). You are also considered independent if you are aged 15-24 and are above school leaving age in your state or territory; and are a refugee, and orphan or it is unreasonable for you to live at home; or are in state care because of your age; have, or have had a dependent child; are, or have been, married, including living in a marriage-like relationship for 12 months or more, or six months (in special circumstances); or, have parents who cannot exercise their responsibilities.
- 18 http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/payments/youth_allow_iat.htm
- 19 http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/payments/pay_how_yal.htm
- 20 Ibid
- 21 National Welfare Rights Network submission to the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Committee Inquiry into Student Income Support, 2005 http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/eet_ctte/studentincome04/report/c03.htm
- 22 <http://www.goingtouni.gov.au/CourseSearch.htm>
- 23 Senate Inquiry into *Provisions of the Higher Education Support Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Up-front Union Fees) Bill 2005* http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/eet_ctte/highed_unionfees/report/c02.htm
- 24 Ben Cubby & Judith Ireland, 'Not Born Yesterday', *Sydney Morning Herald*, October 9-10, 2004 pp.33
- 25 Ibid
- 26 Advertiser Newspapers Ltd. Marketing Information Services Department, 'The Advertiser Youth Survey 2005', <http://www.theadvertiser.com.au/youth/>
- 27 *The Age*, Melbourne, October 8, 2001
- 28 Youth Affairs Council of Victoria "Yikes" Newsletter Vol 4 Ed 5 December 2005
- 29 *The Advertiser* Opinion Poll, July 23 2005
- 30 This Parliamentary Inquiry was initiated by the Australian Democrats.
- 31 "World Issues, Australian Issues and Australian Infrastructure Challenges" *National Infrastructure Investment Leaders Summit*, Melbourne Australia Oct.19 2005 <http://www.roymorgan.com/resouces/pdf/papers/20051001.pdf>
- 32 Biotechnology Australia Media Release "Public support for stem cell research remains strong" 03/05/06 <http://www.biotechnology.gov.au/index.cfm?event=object.showContent&objectID=F27D77EC-F9BE-4E25-79B1C2315479BDCE>
- 33 Kara Phillips "MP's move to let 16-year-olds vote" *The Advertiser* 29/5/06
- 34 Newspoll Market Research Survey / SBS Television June 2004
- 35 ACTCOSS media release "Tight rental market squeezes the homeless and disadvantaged" 15/7/05 <http://www.actcoss.org.au/publications/mediareleases/2005/MR-Rental%20Squeeze05.pdf>
- 36 http://www.dwlbc.sa.gov.au/murray/flows/living.html#What_is_the_Living_Murray_Initiative_
- 37 Liz Minchin "Murray needs faster flow just to tread water" *The Age* 15/5/06
- 38 Do you want daylight savings in Queensland? <http://www.redland.yourguide.com.au/poll.asp?questionid=1712>
- 39 http://www.transport.tas.gov.au/licence_information/ldh/learner_driver_logbook/log_use.html
- 40 Damien Murphy and Anne Davies "Voters disagree with Howard over racism" *Sydney Morning Herald* 20/12/06
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