

**THE HON KATE ELLIS MP**

**MINISTER FOR YOUTH  
MINISTER FOR SPORT**

Opening speech to **youTHINK**

Sydney

Friday 20 February 2009

Hello and welcome to the first ever **youTHINK** – an event of the Federal Government’s Australian Youth Forum.

I would like to thank you all for coming and acknowledge that I am not only talking to all of you here in Sydney – but also, in what I understand is an Australian first, we have about a thousand young Australians connected via satellite at 10 different locations right across the country – so that today we can have a truly nationwide conversation of young Australians discussing the issues that are affecting your lives.

We’re going to get stuck straight in by identifying the different fabulous locations that this event is being broadcast to across Australia, starting right here with Sydney.

Then up to Brisbane in Queensland.

Further North to Cairns.

To Darwin and our nation’s top end.

Now we head to the centre of this wonderful country where I understand we have a big turn out in Alice Springs.

Across to our Western neighbours in Perth.

From Perth to my home town of Adelaide.

Down to our most Southern end – Hobart in Tasmania.

Up to Melbourne.

And last but by no means to our National Capital – Canberra.

Now that we know who is here and where, I am going to quickly outline the why- and what we hope to achieve.

I want to quote from a young Australian, Sharon, who posted a message on the AYF website last week. It said:

*“I think the majority of young people feel distanced from the political process, and only really participate when they have to vote. Young people need to feel included in politics and realise that their voices and opinions count.”*

Well, our Government agrees.

We want your involvement in democracy to go beyond just turning up to vote every three years when you’re eligible, to instead contributing to debate, coming up with ideas, playing a key role and backing yourselves to stand up and be the voice you long to hear.

We all know that you have important perspectives on a whole host of issues, and not just on so called “youth issues”- but also that there is a range of issues which particularly affect your generation and which haven’t had the attention from our parliaments that they deserve. That needs to change.

And so we are taking a new approach.

Our Government is prepared to put our money where our mouth is.

We have set an ambitious, innovative youth agenda that is based on getting you involved and including you in the decisions that affect your communities and your nation.

Gone are the days where a select group of people are invited to Canberra to sit around a table once or twice a year to talk to Government on behalf of young Australians.

As demonstrated today we are prepared to come to you on your home turf and we want to engage with as many young Australians as possible- to put in place a structure which is open to every young Australian- right across the country.

We have provided \$8 million to establish the Australian Youth Forum.

This will not only fund regular forums like this one but we've also established the AYF website, which I am pleased has already been accessed over half a million times in just the few months since we've launched it.

And I hope you will all get online and continue the dialogue.

And we will be holding outreach events to get out and engage those groups or communities who are particularly disenfranchised.

This money will also be used to reinstate funding for a national youth peak body, the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC).

Additionally we have also created the Office of Youth, the specific area of Government that looks out for young people, and promotes your interests, in the economy, education, health and the environment.

Today's event only marks the beginning. This isn't just about having a feel good talkfest- this is about using your input to shape our policies and solutions and our directions for the future.

And I'm certainly not going to pledge that we'll agree on everything.

Of course there will be issues that we take different views on – but I'm not going to dismiss your ideas just because you are young – that will happen to you too much elsewhere – but I will take on board your input, act upon it, and report back to you.

You will be discussing two important topics today – topics that came forward from young Australians as being important to you.

I am really keen to hear from you about where you think we go to next for the AYF – I encourage you to give me ideas on what works for you and to use your imagination to identify opportunities on how we can continue this conversation.

We have already heard your feedback loud and clear that February is not a great time for forums!

In summary, we are a Government for all Australians, and that includes you.

So stand up speak up, get involved and make the decision not to be a spectator.

I can't wait to hear what you come up with.

Now it's time to get started.

Today's event has been driven and created in partnership with young Australians just like you – our youth steering committee – and I'd like to thank each of them right around the country for their work.

I'd like to now welcome Angus McFarland, AYF Steering Committee member to the stage, to further kick proceedings off.

**ENDS**