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Esperance Primary School science shines in WA Education Awards

An innovative science course at Esperance Primary School that is engaging students in real-life environmental monitoring has been recognised at the WA Education Awards ceremony in Perth today.

The school claimed a \$2,500 prize as a finalist in the Science School Award category, with the big prize going to Ardross Primary School.

South Coast NRM Biodiversity Implementation Officer East, Robyn Cail, has been supporting the school with several science projects over the past two years requiring Year 5, 6 and 7 students to collect data from the local environment using principles, methodology, recording techniques and equipment that meet professional scientific standards.

The projects are integral to the school's Biodiversity Climate Change Monitoring and Wetland Health Monitoring programs- which aim to monitor biodiversity and climate change in local heathland and monitor salinity, pH, temperature, and turbidity in the Ramsar-listed Lake Warden Wetland and surrounding catchment.

Students embark on two field trips per program in spring and autumn each year.

Deputy Principal Nola Smith said that while she was thrilled the school was a finalist in the awards, seeing staff and students get passionate about science was the best reward.

Ms Smith said the programs were very unique in their collaborative approach with the community, and the way they allowed the students to provide accurate monitoring of biodiversity that had real scientific outcomes.

"We felt if students could engage in hands-on, real life science, with help from local experts in their field, then science would be more exciting and relevant for them. Robyn Cail at South Coast NRM has made that possible and given us the confidence as teachers to embark on scientific investigations," she explained.

"In particular, Robyn has done an amazing job in raising awareness of the water-borne mould *Phytophthora* dieback, which is infecting bushland across the region. Our kids are absolutely full bottle on it now and know what is required to prevent the spread."

Other successful science initiatives at the school include a project to study healthy catchments using Lake Warden and the Stokes Inlet Catchment as examples, and a study of the impact of Climate change on Lake Warden, which won a national NATA science award this year.

South Coast NRM's Robyn Cail said the students were an inspiration and thanked Esperance Primary School for its continued enthusiasm and support of the programs.

"It's really encouraging to see the kids apply real-science in the field and express a strong interest in future careers in science and natural resource management. I'm looking forward to continuing the projects next year," she added.

Both Ms Smith and Ms Cail expressed their appreciation of volunteer Coral Turley from the Esperance Wildflower Society for helping students identify wildflowers and weeds across both programs, Ken Read from The Esperance Bird Observers Group for helping to identify wetland bird species, and the Esperance Regional Forum for its continued support.

ENDS

PICTURE CAPTION

L-R Todd McIlroy (Year 6/7 teacher EPS), Robyn Cail (South Coast NRM), Lisa Helenius (Principal EPS), Nola Smith (Deputy Principal EPS).

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South Coast Natural Resource Management Inc. is the leading regional group for natural resource management on the South Coast of Western Australia. As an independent non-profit organisation, we work with the community to improve the environment by preserving and protecting unique plants and animals, managing land and waterways, and sharing knowledge and skills in natural resource management.