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### **Restoring Connections project in national spotlight**

A project which works with Noongar communities to identify, protect and restore cultural places at risk of degradation across the South Coast region of Western Australia has won a prestigious National Landcare Award.

South Coast NRM's innovative *Restoring Connections* project is a community-driven initiative delivered in partnership with the Aboriginal people of the South Coast. The project has developed and implemented a range of natural resource management and heritage projects over the past six years which have helped to build and strengthen community skills.

South Coast NRM chief executive Rob Edkins said the group was honoured to receive the Leighton Holdings Indigenous Award for *Restoring Connections* and hoped it would raise awareness of the significance of Aboriginal cultural heritage to the region, and the nation.

"The *Restoring Connections* project was developed from the ground up by passionate local people dedicated to restoring and protecting cultural sites at risk of degradation and sharing this knowledge with the wider community," Mr Edkins said.

"Gathering and building on the knowledge of Indigenous elders and integrating this with current work in natural resource management and restoration has fostered a greater culture of collaboration and respect in the region, and ensured that important knowledge is not lost."

Sites of significance identified by the Aboriginal community across the South Coast include Lake Pleasant View (Manypeaks), Tooklejenna (Israelite Bay), Mt Ridley and Pink Lake Waterhole (Esperance), Quaranup and Oyster Harbour Fish Traps (Albany), and Blue Lakes (Walpole). Funding previously provided by the State Government and the Australian Government's former Natural Heritage Trust program have ensured that many of the sites have been surveyed and restoration work carried out by local Noongar people.

Last week, the project received almost \$20,000 from the State Government through its Coastcare grants program to carry out cultural heritage mapping of Cape Vancouver, known as Quaranup.

Mr Edkins said the success of the *Restoring Connections* project was testament to strong partnerships between the Aboriginal community and stakeholders including the state and federal departments of Indigenous Affairs, WA Department of Water, City of Albany, Shire of Denmark, Shire of Ravensthorpe, Shire of Esperance, Historical Society of Ravensthorpe, Oyster Harbour Catchment Group, Colgate University, Applied Archaeology Australia, and the Historical Society of Albany.

The project has also engaged several local schools, catchment groups and conservation organisations, providing Noongar people with opportunities to share stories and educate new audiences on a range of traditional activities.

*Restoring Connections* was one of 89 finalists along with the Wilson Inlet Catchment Committee to be recognised in the National Landcare Awards. These celebrate the achievements of individuals and groups that make a valuable contribution to the land and coast where they live and work.

For more information on *Restoring Connections* visit [www.southcoastnrm.com.au](http://www.southcoastnrm.com.au)

**ENDS**

For details on the National Landcare Award finalists and winners visit <http://svc009.wic050p.server-web.com/nationalawards2010/>

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**South Coast Natural Resource Management Inc. is the leading regional group for natural resource management in the South Coast region of Western Australia. As an independent not-for-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.**