



North Central

Reinvigorating

environmental education during a drought

Watching water during a drought is a difficult task. But rather than wait for the rains to come in Victoria's north central region, Waterwatch and other environmental education and extension programs combined their efforts and created the Central Murray Environmental Festival.

Local natural resource management programs often struggle to reach remote communities with limited resources. By combining their efforts together for a series of four, fun filled days of education, Waterwatch, Catchment Management Authorities, Central Murray Waste Management Group EcoRecycle Victoria, Landcare Victoria, Water Authorities, local councils and the Department of Primary Industries reached a variety of school groups and shared common sustainability themes.

'A well organised festival. Broad overview of environmental issues was terrific. Gave students a real taste. Well done.'

Colleen Hampson, St Joseph's Primary School.

'Congratulations on a wonderful initiative.'

Lyn Veal, Kerang South Primary School.

'Thanks for a brilliant day. The organisation and presentation of the day was spectacular. The kids really enjoyed it and it was a friendly and positive environment. We really appreciated the work that was put into the day. Thanks heaps!'

Vin Butler, St Mary's Primary School.



The festival travelled across four remote shire areas, and engaged 30 schools and over 1000 grade 5 and 6 students in a wide variety of hands-on activities focussing on waste and recycling, water, energy and land management. Waterwatch ran a number of activities including the 'H₂O Olympics' to educate students about water conservation, 'Aquatic Foodwebs', to demonstrate predator and prey relationships in aquatic ecosystems, and also salinity activities such as 'a taste of salt'.

Despite the different local issues facing each rural community, students learned that everyone can better understand their local environmental issues and values. Teachers were thrilled by the festival's success, and took home a suite of curriculum-linked environmental resources to use in the classroom.

For the event organisers, the success of the festival was not just in the number of students engaged. The festival was an excellent

opportunity to re-forge partnerships and renew enthusiasm amongst the festival partners.

Local Waterwatch Coordinator Donna Pilgrim said, 'Often, we get so wrapped up in our day to day activities and individual environmental fields. It takes an event such as the Environmental Festival to stop and talk to other local environmental extension staff and think about ways that we can combine resources and efforts, and share common messages.'

Hopefully when the drought breaks, these students' interest in environmental studies, and newly forged environmental education partnerships, will continue to grow.

Above left Predator or Prey? Local Waterwatch Coordinator Craig North assists students to create ecosystem food webs.

Above Student teams compete against each other during the Central Murray Environmental Festival.

Photos courtesy of North Central Waterwatch program.