

Rivers, the veins of our Country

Twelve case studies of First Nations involvement in managing water for the environment in the Murray-Darling Basin 2020-2021

Young Veins for future thriving waterways

Most activities occurred on Kamilaroi Country

Sharing stories of fishing trips, learning about Aboriginal tool-making, visiting cultural artifacts, walking in wetlands and seeing waterbugs and fish in various parts of the northern Murray-

Darling Basin were just some of the inspirational activities NSW high school students enjoyed in 2020-21.

Commonwealth Environmental Water Office (CEWO) Local Engagement Officers Jane Humphries and Jason Wilson combined with other stakeholders to visit schools, co-ordinate excursions to rivers and wetlands and build knowledge around First Nations connection to land and water.

Committing to the schools' program, Jane and Jason agreed that young people are the future managers and decision makers in caring for Australia's environment.

"An added bonus is that we can talk to students about the various career opportunities available such as rangers, environmental water managers, environmental monitoring and research, education and engagement work for natural resources management," Jane said.

At Pilliga School, Jane and Jason teamed up with Regional Engagement Officer Annabelle Guest from the Murray-Darling Basin Authority to talk with Pilliga and Gwabegar students about waterways and how they are important to different people for different reasons. Students shared their own experiences of connection to rivers, including tales of the Yellow Belly and Murray cod they have caught.

As a proud Gomeroi/Kamilaroi man, Jason showed tools and instruments made and used by First Nations people including fish-spears, traps and axes. The students also welcomed the opportunity to try out their boomerang throwing skills with Jason.

On another excursion, Jane and Jason took students and teachers from Collarenebri Central School students to the Barwon River and the Gwydir Wetlands systems. Joined by David Preston from New South Wales Department of Planning, Industries and Environment and community leaders, the group visited the incredible Collymungle Carved Trees and the Collymungle Lagoon where burial grounds and important ceremonial sites are located.

Staff and students heard stories of the historical and recent vandalism of these precious cultural artifacts and discussed the need to protect our cultural heritage. As they travelled across the landscape, students witnessed the transition from the dry woodlands on the higher floodplain country to the verdant wetlands on the floodplain. Impressed



Lightning Ridge Central School students at Clear Lake in Narran Lakes Nature Reserve (NLNR) in September 2020
Credit: CEWO

Lightning Ridge Central School
students identifying water
critters, June 2021
Credit: CEWO

by the impact water
can have on birdlife
on the floodplain,
students reflected
on how water for the
environment can benefit
river plants and animals
and help protect areas of
cultural significance for the
Gomeri/Kamilaroi people.

In September Jane and Jason
continued the school program
spending a day with students from
Lightning Ridge Central School on
Dharriwaa country at Narran Lakes.

"This was a great day where I could
take the students along the Lakes track
and point out the plants and animals
important to our people. Clear Lake is
absolutely stunning and the CEWO has
significantly contributed to inflows there,"
Jason said.

"It's so rewarding to see students engaged
in this – listening and asking questions.
You really can see them soaking all the
information in and we hope taking it
home to tell their family members," he
said.

Other schools involved included Walgett
Community College, Fairfax Public School
and Aboriginal students from the north
west region of New South Wales who
were selected to participate in the
Aboriginal Education Consultative
Group (AECG) STEM Camp.

CEWO staff Jason Wilson and Catherine
Atkinson speaking to students at Lightning
Ridge Central School June 2021.
Credit: CEWO

