

Student natural resource management workshop at Wilcannia

Introduction

The Murray Darling Association and the Lower Murray Darling CMA conducted a student workshop and tour for senior students at Wilcannia on 11 March 2011. The workshop was held at Wilcannia Central School. The students were part of the Year 12 Earth Sciences studies and participants in the Willvande Access Program run out of Menindee.

Program

The program was developed to encourage the students to look at finding the balance between environmental, social and economic needs. Mr Stan Dineen, former CMA Board member from Broken Hill, attended. Ms Leanne Ryan, Environmental Officer from the Central Darling Shire was to have participated but a flooded road prevented her from getting to Wilcannia.

Is the Darling River important for students at Menindee and Wilcannia?

Students see the river important for fishing, swimming, source of food, water for the town, irrigation. One of the students took great pride in explaining that 'Bark' (in Barkindji) meant 'river'.

Tour

The tour to the bridge and surrounding floodplain allowed the students to see and discuss a range of local natural resource management activities, including water quality, river health, wetlands, role of floodplains, fish, vegetation, feral animals, weeds, etc.

2010 Project

The Willvande Access Program (based at Menindee Central School) has made very good use of the funds provided by the Lower Murray Darling CMA in 2010 to improve resources and equipment for the three schools for the senior earth sciences studies. The funds have been used to enhance and expand the current earth sciences program with science equipment, pH and water monitoring kits, microscopes, rock kits, reference books, excursion resource and support material.

Overview

Schools - The schools not only welcomed the workshop, but the Wilcannia Central School staff and students were very welcoming. It was interesting to be in a school where most of the students are Aboriginal and where the teachers have worked very hard in recent years to meet their needs, improve retention rates, create a safe and productive learning environment, and improve the outlook and lifestyle of the students. .

Menindee Central School is also having similar successes after four years of hard work. The schools play a key role in the towns – far more than just education. They have a strong role in finding and nurturing work opportunities.

Participating student numbers - The student number for the workshop was small but this is to be expected in such small and remote schools. The workshop was a good reminder that there are many of these types of remote and small schools across the Murray-Darling Basin that often miss out on this type of personal NRM engagement.

Interests - The students were particularly interested in:

- the role of floodplains and their link with the river,
- a vegetation ground cover exercise,
- role of the Central Darling Shire Council in natural resource management, and
- the causes and impacts of blackwater events.

Shire Council participation - The Central Darling Shire provided some good material on its role in natural resource management. The students acknowledged the role of the Shire in providing trees for homes and schools that they helped to plant.

Fishing - The students go fishing, mainly catching Silver perch, Murray cod and carp in recent years. Numbers caught have varied little over recent years.

Menindee school radio - The Menindee Central School has a school radio that would welcome messages and interviews about natural resource management and can offer a good contact point with young people.

NRM material - The students were provided with material about the CMA and NRM in the Lower Darling and the Murray-Darling Basin.

Murray Darling Association

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