

Shellebrating sustainability

The Myrtle Turtle Squad has our environment in safe hands.

GEMMA HUNTER



With World Environment Day fresh in our minds, some of us might be motivated to plant native trees; swap our plastic bags for reusable ones; rethink a fast fashion purchase or finally use the compost bin we started nine months ago, all to do our part for the environment.

Established in 1972, World Environment Day has since become a global platform for promoting environmental awareness and action. The day provides an opportunity for individuals and communities to come together and take collective action towards a sustainable future.

For the students at St Brigid's Primary School in Raymond Terrace, every day is World Environment Day. Especially for the members of the school's environmental group, the 'Myrtle Turtle Squad', named after their school mascot, the local endangered Hunter River turtle.

Since it began, the group has led the charge in many school-based projects such as, eliminating single-use lunch order bags and composting waste. These measures have reduced the school's total contribution to landfill by approximately 75%.

The groups next mission is to establish a series of bee and butterfly gardens that form a 'corridor' through Raymond Terrace, designed to promote the growth and sustainability of local native species.

Millicent Fogarty, a Year 6 student at St Brigid's Primary School, is one of four students from the Myrtle Turtle Squad who are spearheading the

project. The initiative will begin with the construction of the first bee and butterfly garden onsite at the school.

"We've researched our native bees and butterflies and the types of plants they need so that we can place them in our garden," Millicent said.



"It's important to protect the bees and butterflies in our area because they are beautiful and they are a part of our ecosystem, and our native plants and animals need them to survive. Bees and butterflies spread pollen to make new plants so that flowers and fruits can bloom," Millicent said.

"We need the bees because they're native. They're very important to Australia because they have adapted to live here, and they already know what plants to move and what plants not to move."

Kristen Jones is the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education teacher at St Brigid's and works with the students in the Myrtle Turtle Squad to help bring their projects to life. She said each project was driven entirely by the interests and ideas of the students.

"We have a real caring for country and a Stewards of Creation philosophy at our school, being a Catholic School on Worimi Country," Mrs Jones said.

"Our students are just so passionate and they have so many ideas on how we can look after our environment. We have beautiful school grounds,

and so they wanted to look at how we can make our school even more environmentally friendly for local threatened species."

Mrs Jones said the project also developed important skills the students would need in life beyond school.

"It teaches them valuable skills, like working with others, how to engage people and articulating and presenting their thoughts. It also teaches them how to be a good human being and that there are bigger things to focus on and strive for, even if sometimes they are unsuccessful with their projects," Mrs Jones said.

"I think there's so much educational value in everything we do. It's not just about the curriculum, it's teaching them skills for life."

The final stages of the project will see Millicent and her team pitch their idea to Action for Agriculture's Young Environmental Champions program for qualified feedback and to connect with other local schools to take part in their endeavour.

"Naturally we fall in a straight line with the other local schools in town. So, our students liked the idea of expanding the project to include other schools and lobbying the principals to create a bee and butterfly corridor through our town to promote further growth," Mrs Jones said.

Millicent is confident other schools will jump on board with this opportunity and said that even a small contribution to help the environment could really make a difference.

"Something as insignificant as a bee or a butterfly can really help the ecosystem and if we take that out, the whole thing can collapse," Millicent said.

"If we take care of the environment and if all schools take care of the environment and if everyone puts a little effort in, we might be able to repair some of the damage."

Perhaps if we follow Millicent and the Myrtle Turtle Squad's lead this World Environment Day, we can be confident the future of our planet is in safe hands.

Stop the Press

St Brigid's Primary School, Raymond Terrace was named Primary Reserve Champions in Action for Agriculture's Young Environmental Awards for their bee and butterfly garden pitch. **Congratulations to the Myrtle Turtle Squad!**