

River Detectives Story of Change

Mitta Mitta Primary School, North East CMA region, 2022



River Detectives is a cross-curricular, citizen-science program connecting teachers and young people with their local waterway. Through water quality testing, macroinvertebrate sampling, and habitat surveys students learn about the importance of catchment health and their role in caring for it.

Since 2016, the program has been available to schools and youth groups in five regions across Victoria.

In the North East CMA region Michael McBrien is the teaching principal at Mitta Mitta Primary School, a small rural school of one Prep-Grade 6 class situated 81km south east of Wodonga, set amongst the hills downstream of Dartmouth Dam. The school dates back to the 1860's, serving the farming communities of Dartmouth and Mitta Mitta near Mt Bogong.

The school has been an active participant in the River Detectives program since 2017;

"We are always on the lookout for citizen science activities to engage students in real study that extends beyond the school. Our school 'horse paddock' backs onto the Mitta Mitta River so it seemed like a good fit. Through our local Landcare Group we had been involved in several land based projects so River Detectives enabled the inclusion of the aquatic environment."

Mitta Mitta Primary School has a long association with their local Landcare Group, planting native shrubs to attract birds, revegetating river banks and breeding dung beetles as part of an ongoing trial. Along with cluster school partners they participate in a sustainability unit each year maintaining vegie gardens and learning about composting.

The River Detectives program has become a regular fixture in the term schedule and the environmental monitoring they conduct is a normal part of the students' learning;

"Two times per term we head down to our local waterways to take water samples, do water quality tests and sample macroinvertebrates. We do it as a whole school activity with older students helping the new students with sampling and identification. The peer teaching allows them to take pride in their developing expertise."

We test at two sites, one on the Mitta Mitta River after it exits Dartmouth Dam and the other on Snowy Creek, a natural flow river. It's interesting to see the differences in diversity and seasonal change between the two sites."



Testing water quality at the Mitta Mitta River site behind the school

On cluster days, when we join small schools in our area, our students talk to their peers from neighbouring schools about our River Detectives monitoring and at least two other schools are now joining in the program.”

The program has given teachers and students a far greater awareness of the aquatic environment and the creatures that call it home. They understand the relationship between land use, water use and the connections between the two different ecosystems.



The school's second site on the Snowy Creek at a public reserve in town

The program has instigated opportunities for further inquiry;

“We have been involved in the Great Australian Platypus Search eDNA project, using water samples to identify waterways with platypus populations. We continue to look for opportunities to be involved in citizen science projects such as the Backyard Bird Count and the Great Plastic Hunt.”



Michael explains the impact the River Detectives program has had on the school and students;

“It has certainly increased awareness and appreciation of the local waterways and our role in caring for them. Students are proud of their knowledge of aquatic invertebrates and enjoy identifying them and discussing them with family and other schools that visit.

The program aligns with our Landcare involvement and helps us value the local environment.”

For more information:

Email riverdetectives@nccma.vic.gov.au

or visit www.riverdetectives.net.au