



North Central CMA Mid-Year Report 2026



Goornong PS students identifying waterbugs
to understand the Campaspe River

"The River Detectives program provides authentic, hands-on learning that connects students to their local environment in a meaningful way. Our students are highly engaged by practical, real-world experiences, and this program allows them to become active scientists while building skills in data collection, observation, teamwork and environmental responsibility."

Kalianna School educator



**North
Central
CMA**



AGNICO EAGLE
AUSTRALIA

**COMMUNITY
PARTNERSHIP
PROGRAM**

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Wamba Wamba Traditional Owner Uncle Ron Murray

Acknowledgement

The River Detectives program acknowledges all First Nations People and recognise their enduring connection to these lands and waters. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present and affirm our support for their sovereignty, self-determination and continued connection to Culture and Country.

Program delivery

[River Detectives](#) is an engaging environmental education program connecting young people to nature by understanding and caring for their local waterway.

Students participate in citizen science and learn about the importance of healthy waterways through water quality testing, macroinvertebrate sampling and habitat surveys. They learn how healthy waterways and catchments are inextricably linked to healthy land, plants, animals, people and communities.

Participating schools are provided with equipment, support, training, and teaching resources to collect real data about waterways in their local area. Building a sense of place then encourages them to advocate for their waterway and take practical action by collaborating with their community.

River Detectives proudly began in the North Central Catchment Management Authority (CMA) region more than 20 years ago and is highly valued by our organisation as an effective vehicle to:

- Achieve our purpose: Connecting rivers, landscapes, and people to deliver lasting positive change
- Demonstrate our values: Care, courage and connection
- Enable active communities; Encouraging and supporting community action for the environment
- Focus on 2025/26 strategic priorities: Taking action on climate change and supporting Traditional Owner and Aboriginal self-determination
- Engage a youth audience and through them, connect with a broader audience
- Embed education and citizen science in broader North Central delivery projects

Additional providers

Environmental education providers (Twisted Science) and ResourceSmart Schools facilitator Emily Condon provide program content to both River Detectives schools and a broader range of schools as incursions or excursions in our region.

Additional funding

River Detectives in the North Central CMA region has had an extra injection of funding thanks to the Australian Government's Local Environmental Projects Program for the Yaram Yaram Bayikina project, project partnering with DJAARA and the City of Greater Bendigo. See page 11 for more details.

The 2026 River Detectives program is also offered by these delivery partners:

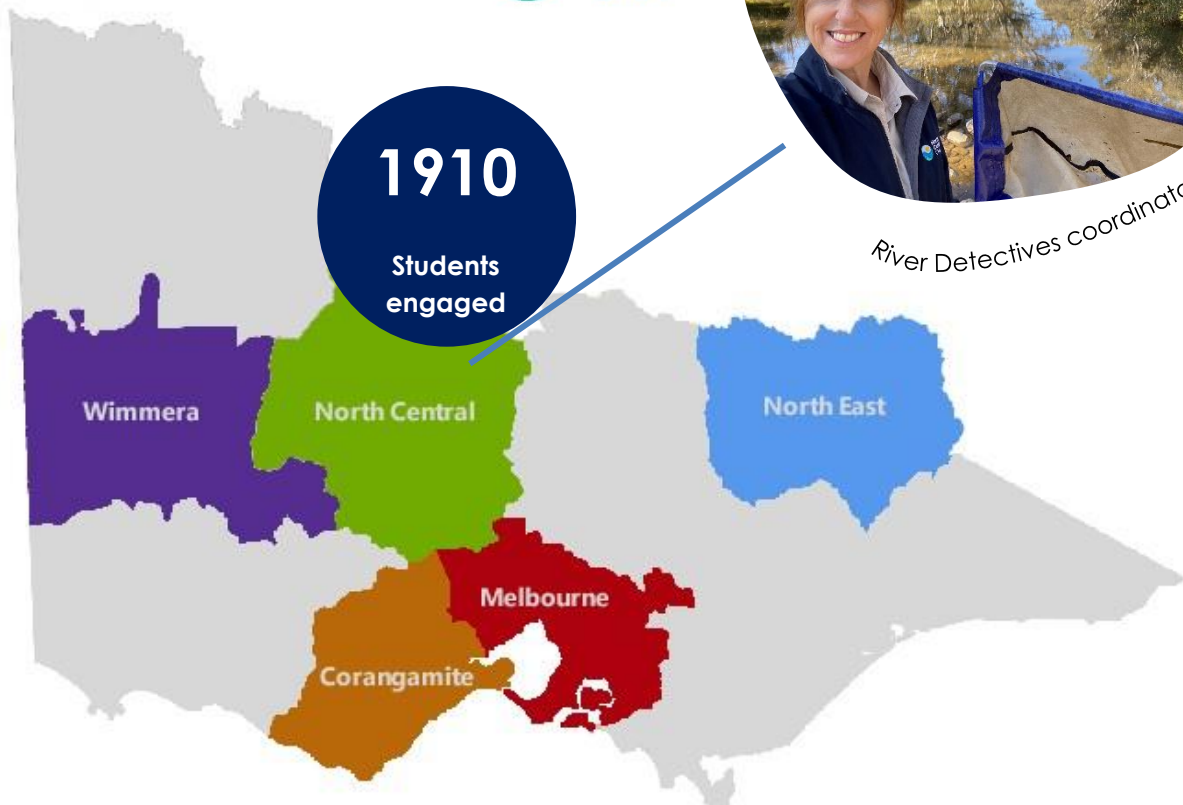
- Corangamite Catchment Management Authority (CMA)
- North East Catchment Management Authority (CMA)
- Wimmera Catchment Management Authority (CMA)
- Melbourne Water

Engagement snapshot

Terms one and two, 2026



River Detectives coordinator Nicole Howie



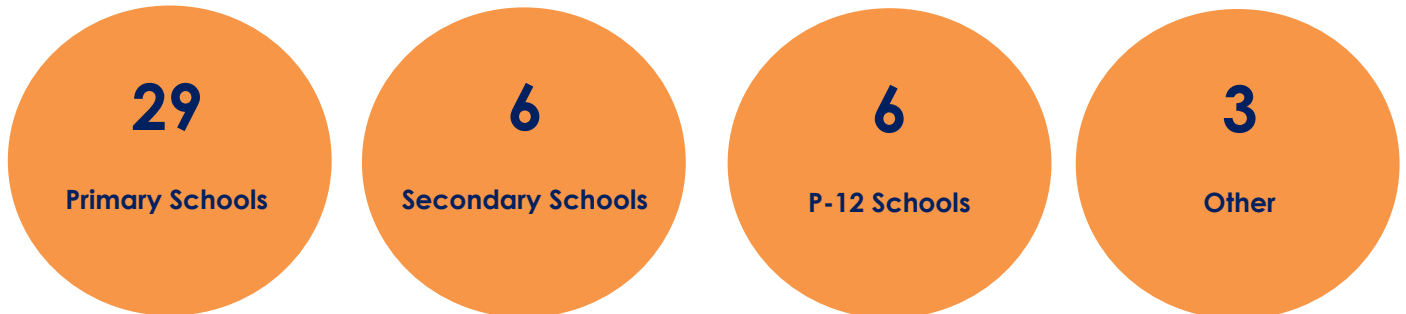
114

Participating schools / groups statewide

- 44 North Central CMA**
- 22 Corangamite CMA**
- 7 North East CMA**
- 5 Wimmera CMA**
- 17 Melbourne Water**



In the North Central CMA region, 44 River Detectives groups are made up of:

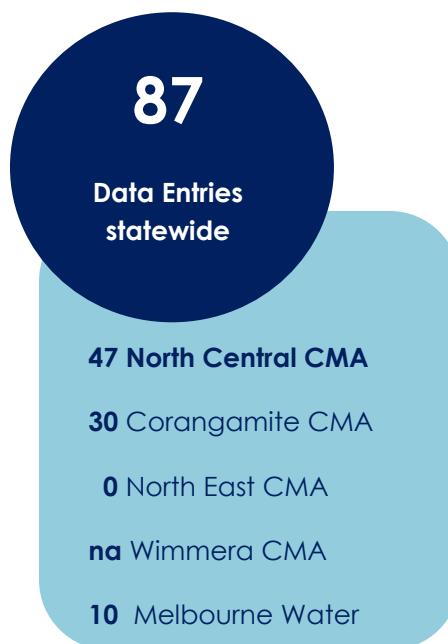
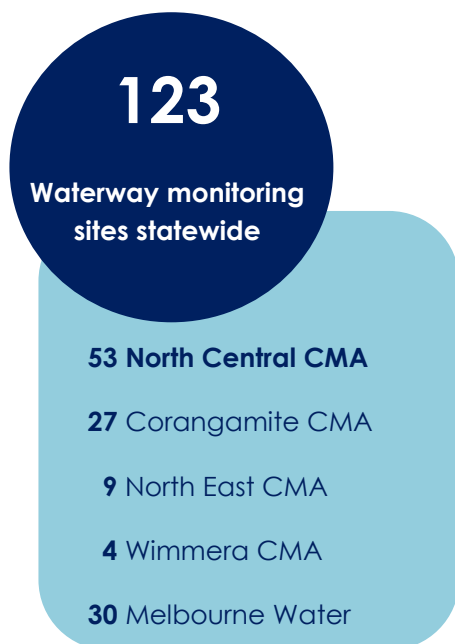


For a full list of participating schools see Appendix 1.



- **Yaram Yaram Bayikina project** (15 schools)
- **A Healthy Coliban Catchment Project** (2 schools)
- **RiverScan project:** (4 schools)
- **Forest Creek Revitalisation project** (1 school)
- **Waterways of the West project** (1 school)
- **Tularoop Tributaries project** (1 school)

Being affiliated with a priority project provides additional opportunities for schools to connect with project staff, learn about and get actively involved in on-ground works happening in their local area and contribute data to help evaluate on-ground works.



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Educators supported

"The program provides opportunity for homeschoolers to access community, socialise, engage in multiple key learning areas through interest-based, child-led learning. It is low demand, self-paced, hands-on, perfect for home education."

Homeschooler parent

"The River Detectives program is so valuable to our students' knowledge and skills. Making classroom learning relevant to our local community ensures students are understanding the real-world context of the subject and creating passion for learning. This will be a major component of Year 10 Environmental Science curriculum."

Catherine McAuley College educator

"Our school is very small and we try to offer a unique learning experience. A large part of our school's identity is being based on the Loddon River and being a River Detectives school. We hope to continue being involved over the coming years."

Bridgewater PS principal

14

Educator workshops delivered



An educator training workshop in action

1

River Detectives journey story documented

Every River Detectives school is different, and the program likes to showcase the variety of ways schools can engage in the program and adapt it to their unique needs.

RedGum, the Waldorf School of Central Victoria, had its inspirational story documented, showcasing its passion and innovation. The video summary can be viewed [here](#).

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School incursions delivered

School incursions are a vital component of the River Detectives program to support educators, provide on-site training, and highlight ways the program can be embedded into the existing curriculum.

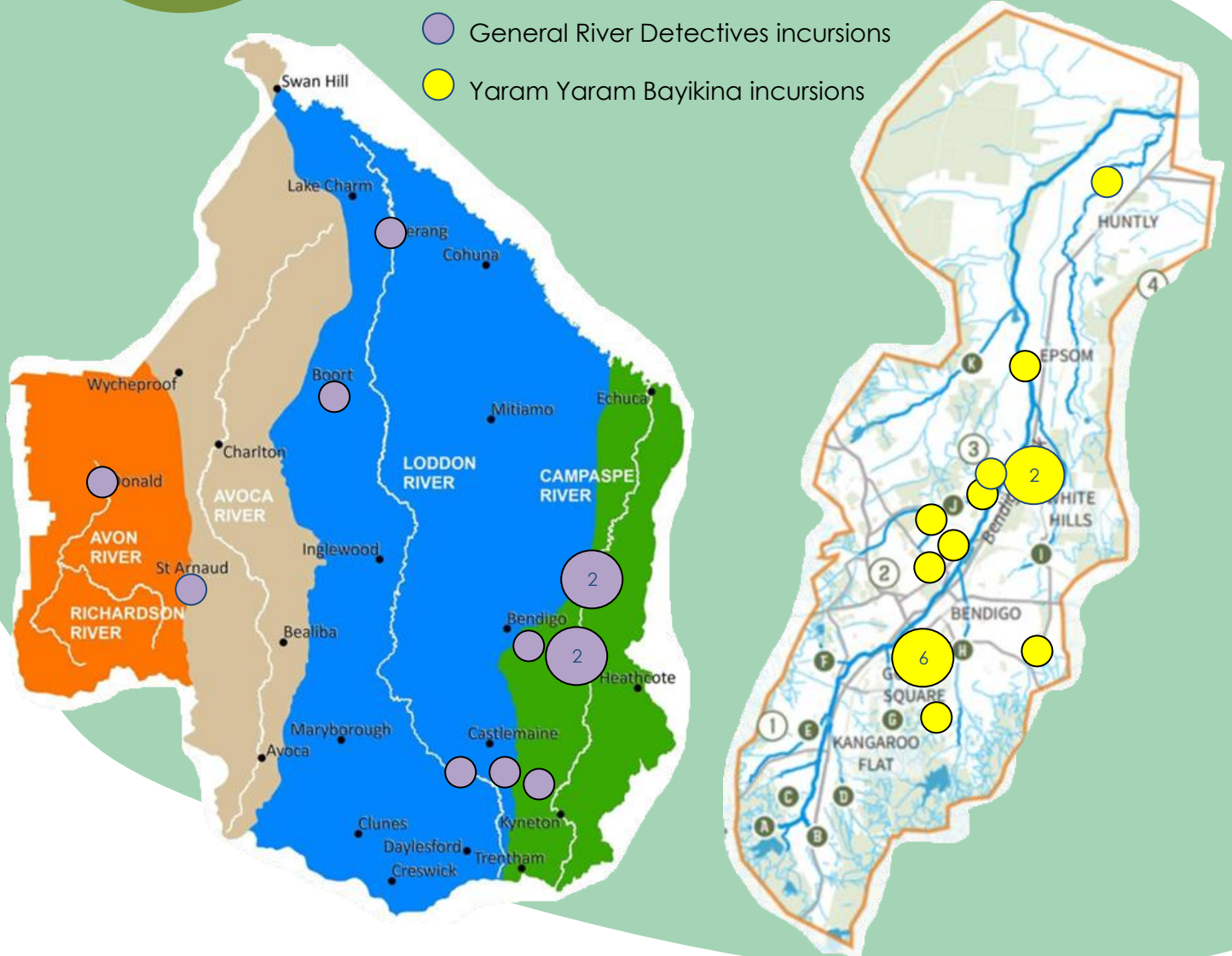
Students enjoy hands-on activities and learning interesting content they can share with their families.

Incursions have been run with schools right across the North Central CMA region and with students from prep to year 12.

1256

Students engaged in incursions

Session numbers have been boosted significantly this year by funding for the Yaram Yaram Bayikina project that has a goal of 15 schools in the Bendigo Creek catchment receiving 5 visits during the 2026 school year.





Waterbugs of Little Lake Boort with Grade 3/4
students at Boort District P-12 School



Year 7 Donald High School students test
the health of the Richardson River



Grade 4 Woodend PS students test salinity of
the Campaspe River at their Carlsruhe campus



Quarry Hill prep students are fascinated by the
waterbugs of Bendigo Creek



Epsom Primary School's Baring Djuwima students
connect with the Bendigo Creek

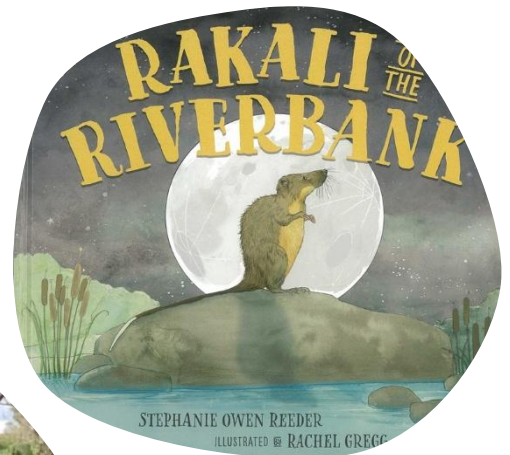
Statewide program highlights

Rethinking Rats as Rakali Ask the Expert webinar

In 2025 rakali (Australia's native water rat) was named Australia's most underrated animal in an ABC Science Week poll. Due to an affiliation with the rats that we consider vermin, rakali have often been misunderstood and undervalued so it was time to shine a light on this fascinating species.

Two wonderful speakers were sought and River Detectives schools across the state were invited to pre-submit questions for our experts after watching introductory videos about rakali. The aim was to produce both primary and secondary webinars.

Grade 3/4 students of Boort District P-12 School compiled a list of great questions that Nicole used to frame a chat with author Dr Stephanie Owen Reeder. Stephanie wrote a wonderful picture story book *Rakali of the Riverbank* in 2025 and this inspired lots of great talking points.



Rethinking Rats as Rakali for primary students
with author Dr Stephanie Owen Reeder

"How do rakali sense danger?"

Emma, Boort District P-12 school student

Answer: Rakali use their sensitive whiskers to sense food and predators whilst in the water. They also have very good hearing.

"Are rakali related to rats or otters?"

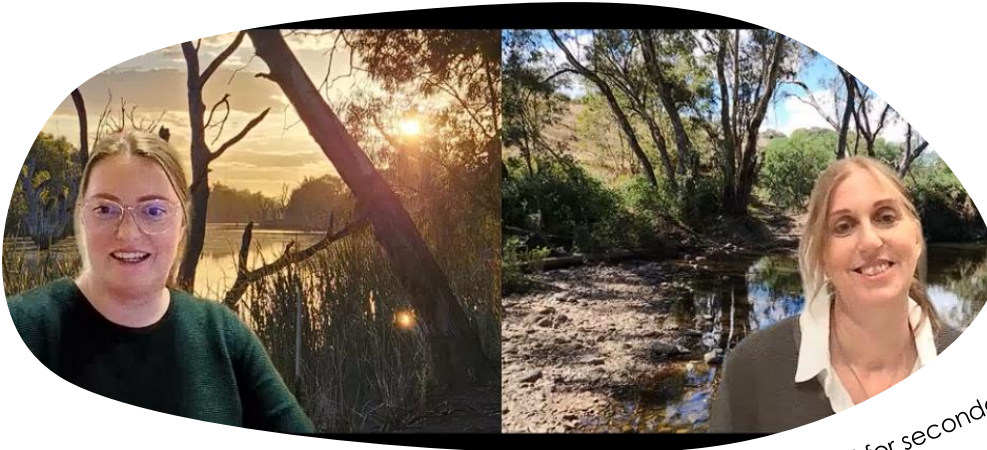
Zane and Levi, Boort District P-12 school students

Answer: They behave like otters but are not related. Rakali are rodents so are more closely related to rats. They actually have more in common with platypus being the only two amphibious mammals in Australia.

The webinar recording suitable for primary schools can be viewed [here](#).

Cornish College is a passionate and very active River Detectives school, always keen to participate in extra River Detectives opportunities. Students' questions were so thoughtful and insightful that they were used for the secondary webinar chat with Charles Sturt University research fellow and freshwater ecologist Dr Emmalie Sanders.

Emmalie was highly impressed by the knowledge and interest students demonstrated by the mature vocabulary used in their impressive questions.



Rethinking Rats as Rakali for secondary students
with freshwater ecologist Dr Emmalie Sanders

"Can rakali survive brackish water?"

Aarav, Year 5 Cornish College student

Answer: Rakali are found in estuaries and along coastal beaches. They are not bothered by the salinity of water.

"How do rakali adapt when hunting in different biomes?"

Henry, Year 5 Cornish College student

Answer: Rakali have different hunting mechanisms for different habitats. They are usually an ambush predator but can dive underwater, swim and circle logs, dig up their prey from the substrate of waterways or hunt on land. They are very adaptable.

"How do rakali affect their habitat's food chain?"

Caitlin, Year 5 Cornish College student

Answer: Rakali are good at controlling species that can become abundant including exotic fish such as carp.

The webinar recording suitable for secondary schools can be viewed [here](#).

River Detectives schools shine at the 2026 ResourceSmart Schools Awards

Four River Detectives schools were named as finalists across a variety of categories in this year's ResourceSmart Schools Awards, recognising their commitment to embedding sustainability, in part by using the River Detectives program.

Pleasant Street Primary (Corangamite CMA region) won the CDS Vic Excellence Award for their container recycling initiatives keeping drink containers out of our waterways.

Stephen McNeight of Wendouree Primary School (also in the Corangamite CMA region) won Primary Teacher of the Year. Stephen implements the River Detectives program at the school along with a variety of other innovative sustainability initiatives.

In the North Central CMA region, RedGum, The Waldorf School of Central Victoria, won the overall **ResourceSmart School of the Year** recognising outstanding sustainability achievement through:

- positive impact positive impact and innovation
- addressing sustainability as a cross-curriculum priority in the Victorian Curriculum
- engaging the broader community
- improvements to campus operations and/infrastructure
- sustainability leadership in the education sector/other schools.



ResourceSmart
Schools Awards 2026



"This five-star school fosters strong connections to nature using their wetlands as a classroom."

Students work with RMIT university to study gas emissions from stagnant waterways and with Junior Landcare, North Central Catchment Management Authority and Charles Sturt University to increase biodiversity in the wetlands, a space that has become a place to mentor schools beginning their sustainability journey."

ResourceSmart Schools website



Judges commented: "RedGum models what is possible when a deep commitment to sustainability is paired with strong local and global awareness. The mentoring of other schools showcases a commitment to sustainability at school and beyond."

The school's incredible work has been documented by the River Detectives program in this [video](#) and after winning ResourceSmart School of the Year, staff member Kyle Murphy was interviewed on ABC local radio about the school's achievements.

North Central CMA region highlights

Partnering with Fosterville Gold Mine

As part of the Agnico Eagle's 2026 sponsorship, the River Detectives program engaged Axedale and Goornong primary schools. Both schools have been active participants in the program in the past but their involvement had lapsed in recent years.

Both schools are strongly connected to the Campaspe River, are neighbours to the Fosterville Gold Mine, and have many families connected to the mine through employment.

A River Detectives program has been tailored for these schools to learn about the river, their role in looking after it, and to understand the steps Fosterville Gold Mine implements to ensure river health.

Both schools have received two incursions so far. The first to learn about the Campaspe River catchment and practice the water quality tests and the second to learn about the link between rural runoff, urban stormwater, and the health of the Campaspe River.

Goornong also enjoyed a short waterbug activity at their second incursion and Axedale was fortunate to have Devi Shanti co-deliver its second incursion. Devi is an environmental technician at the Fosterville Gold Mine and spoke about the mine's environmental responsibility to ensure the Campaspe River is protected.



Waterbug sampling at Goornong PS



Devi talking to Axedale PS students



Both schools enjoyed doing the large stormwater floor puzzle

Yaram Yaram Bayikina project

River Detectives in the North Central CMA region has had an injection of funding from the Australian Government's Local Environmental Projects Program for this very exciting project partnering with DJAARA and the City of Greater Bendigo.

The Bendigo Creek Reawakening project will deliver environmental restoration, creek renaturalisation, erosion control, water quality improvements, cultural perspectives and community engagement activities across the Bendigo Creek catchment guided by the Wayaparrangu approach (we all meet).



While this project is very much about reawakening Bendigo Creek that has been highly modified because of the gold rush, it's also about reawakening people's relationship with the creek and River Detectives is playing a pivotal role.

Fifteen schools have been engaged in the program and will receive an intensive River Detectives experience over the life of this project until March 2028:

- Enjoying three annual incursions (water quality testing, impacts of urban stormwater, waterbug sampling).
- Participating in two annual stormwater pit stenciling excursions to have agency in raising community awareness about the relationship between stormwater and Bendigo Creek.
- Receiving a macroinvertebrate kit to carry out citizen science investigations.
- Embedding DJAARA perspectives, accessing cultural resources and experiences.



St Kilians students attend the project launch (left) and Victory Christian College students complete their water quality testing at Kennington reservoir (right). This is important work to measure the impact of recent habitat restoration works.

School highlights

Schools and groups use the River Detectives program as a vehicle to drive learning programs, inform inquiry projects, and inspire community-based action. The program loves to hear about how schools are adapting River Detectives to their own unique needs and embedding it into their learning programs.

The program might provide the equipment, support and inspiration but it's the schools that turn it into powerful outcomes and create a ripple effect beyond their school fence.

Malmsbury PS

**Monitoring site:
Coliban river**



Left: Malmsbury Primary School includes an interactive waterbug display in its stall at the Malmsbury Fayre. On the day they got chatting with the Friends of Malmsbury Gardens group and the school will now add a monitoring site at the lake in the gardens as the group is worried about its water quality. Malmsbury is affiliated with the CMA's A Healthy Coliban Catchment project.

Right: Creswick Scouts helped run a waterbug display at Calembreen Park Creswick as part of the Bald Hills Creswick Landcare open day. The CMA's stall participated as part of its Tullaroop Tributaries delivery project.



Creswick Scouts

**Monitoring site:
Creswick creek**

**Victory Christian College
included a macroinvertebrate
survey as part of its information
night to promote the
environmental science
pathway for years 9-12.**

Catherine McAuley College ran a whole day of environmental and cultural activities for their Year 7 Connection to Ground celebration. 100 students cycled through River Detectives activities to learn more about the health of wetlands they have on site at their Junortoun campus.

Axedale PS

**Monitoring site:
Campaspe river**



Axedale Primary School educators take 3D photos of their Campaspe River site (left) so that students can take a look around using a VR headset (right) for times when they can't walk to the site.

Cohuna Consolidated

**Monitoring site:
Gunbower creek**



Left: Cohuna Consolidated School is new to the River Detectives program in 2026 and has made the most of their school community with a parent volunteer, Landcare Coordinator, and work experience student with the Western Murray Land Improvement Group students them to their first excursion to nearby Gunbower Creek and studying aquatic vegetation.



**St Joseph's PS
Kerang**

**Monitoring sites:
Loddon River &
Lake Meran**



Above: Four River Detectives schools affiliated with the CMA's RiverScan project took up the opportunity to experience cultural sessions with Barapa Barapa and Yorta Yorta man Kai Lane from the Habitat Warriors program. They participated in dance and storytelling and wove Yedabila habitat pods from native lignum using traditional techniques. These will be placed in waterways as breeding and refuge sites.

**Catherine
McAuley College**

**Monitoring site:
Bendigo creek**



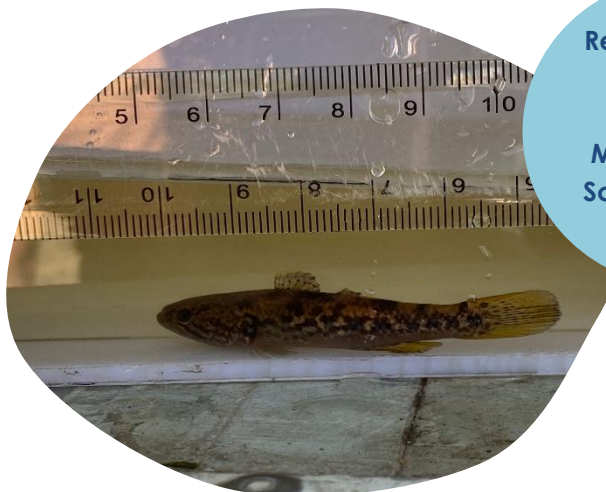
Above: Catherine McAuley College (Barkly St) students carry out monthly testing independently after being inducted as part of the Yaram Yaram Bayikina project.



Right: RedGum school was excited to report the southern purple-spotted gudgeon released into school wetlands by North Central CMA's fish ecologist Peter Rose during 2025 are growing well.

**RedGum School
Muckleford**

**Monitoring site:
School wetlands**



River Detectives is an exciting education initiative of Catchment Management Authorities inspiring students to understand, appreciate and care for their local waterway through engaging, cross-curricular, citizen-science activities.

We have identified and sought permission to access the small creek behind the houses at the bottom of Wright St where, during science lessons, we will monitor the water quality throughout the term. The small waterway eventually joins Sandy Creek which then flows into the Coliban River. The junior class will study the water across the road from school.

It's a fun way to connect students to nature through regular water quality testing. Students learn how water, land, plants, animals, people and communities are all integrally linked and schools are provided with equipment, training and teaching resources.



Elphinstone PS

**Monitoring site:
Ephemeral creek in
Elphinstone**

Left: Schools do a great job sharing their River Detectives journey through school newsletter articles and facebook pages.

This extends the reach of the program and shares the learning to a broader audience.

Community events

Huntly Family Fun Day, February 2026

River Detectives ran a stall beside the Agnico Eagle stall.



Kids searched for waterbugs and gold in water at respective stalls.

Bendigo Sustainability Festival, March 2026



Hundreds of community members learnt about the program

Sharing messages of waterway health with the sustainability community.

Axedale Quick Shear, March 2026



River Detectives ran a stall at this Agnico Eagle sponsored community event.

Participants were very interested in knowing what the bugs told us about the Campaspe River

Weaving the River, Newstead,



The perfect activity at this event all about celebrating the Loddon River.

Above: Four River Detectives schools affiliated with the CMA's RiverScan project took up the opportunity to experience cultural sessions with Barapa Barapa and Yorta



Victory Christian College outdoor education students
collect a water sample from Kennington Reservoir

The River Detectives program is going from strength to strength in the North Central CMA region. The program is grateful for the support of Agnico Eagle's Community Partnerships Program to sustain this initiative that engages so many enthusiastic participants; is a catalyst for change of mindsets, behaviours, and actions, connects students with outdoor learning and encourages a life-long interest in nature.

Thanks for your support

"The River Detectives program provides invaluable benefits for both our students and the wider Carlsruhe community. By engaging directly with the local waterways and ecosystems, students develop a deep understanding of the natural environment that surrounds our Carlsruhe campus. This hands-on learning helps them build strong scientific inquiry skills as they collect data, observe wildlife, and monitor the health of our rivers and catchments."

The Carlsruhe campus was established with a commitment to sustainability, outdoor learning, and caring for the land. The River Detectives program continues this tradition by connecting students with the historical significance of the area—its landscapes and biodiversity. Through this program, students come to appreciate how past practices have shaped the local environment and why it is essential to protect it for the future."

Appendix 1

2026 participant list

Yaram Yaram Bayikina project		
Catherine McCauley College (Barkly St campus)	10-12	Bendigo Creek, Rosalind Park
Crusoe College	9 & 10	Bendigo Creek, Gateway Park
Epsom PS	F-6 Baring Djuwima group	Bendigo Creek, Howard St
Girton Grammar School Bendigo	8 & 11	Bendigo Creek, low line track
Golden Square PS	3-6	Bendigo Creek, Bay St
Holy Rosary PS White Hills	F-6	Bendigo Creek, Scott St
Hunty PS	F-1	Back Creek Huntly
Kalianna Special School	7-10	Bendigo Creek, Waterview Dr
Quarry Hill PS	F-6	Back Creek, Quarry Hill
Riley St Wetland homeschool group	2, 4, 5, 7 & 8	Riley Street Wetland and Bendigo Creek Larni Garingilang
Spring Gully PS	3/4/5/6 Green Team	Spring Creek, Spring Gully
St Kilian's PS Bendigo	5-6	Bendigo Creek, Nolan St
Weeroona College Bendigo	7	Bendigo Creek/Wanyarram Dum
White Hills PS	3/4/5/6 Green Team	Bendigo Creek, Bosquet St
Victory Christian College	9 -12	Kennington Reservoir
Healthy Coliban Catchment project		
Malmsbury PS	F-6	Coliban River
Trentham PS	F-6	Trent Creek
Tullaroop Tributaries project		
Creswick Scouts Group	Primary age students	Creswick Creek
Waterways of the West project		
St Arnaud PS	3-6	Avoca River
RiverScan project (Native Fish Recovery project)		
Boort District	3-4	Little Lake Boort
Cohuna Consolidated School	5-6	Gunbower Creek
Gunbower PS	3-6	Gunbower Creek
St Joseph's PS Kerang	3-5	Loddon River and Lake Meran

Castlemaine area schools (some affiliated with Forest Creek Revitalisation project)

Campbell's Creek PS - Guildford Campus	F-5	Campbells Creek
Chewton PS	F-6	Forest Creek
Global Village Learning	7-12	Campbells Creek
Red Gum (formerly Castlemaine Steiner School)	1-5	School wetlands
Winter's Flat PS	2-3	Campbells Creek

General North Central CMA schools (along the Campaspe River)

Axedale Primary School	F-6	Campaspe River
Goornong Primary School	F-6	Campaspe River
Kyneton PS	1-6	Campaspe River
Langley PS	F & 6	Campaspe River
Our Lady of the Rosary Parish School	3	Campaspe River
Twisted Science (env ed provider)	5-7	Campaspe River and Murray River
Woodend PS - Carlsruhe Campus	4	Campaspe River

General North Central CMA schools

Bridgewater PS	F-6	Loddon River
Bullarto PS	F-6	Kangaroo Creek
Catherine McAuley College Junortoun	7-9	School wetlands
Daylesford Dharma School	3-6	Smith's Creek & Sailor's Creek
Donald High School	7	Richardsons River
Elphinstone Primary School	F-6	TBC
Heathcote PS	F-6	Mclvor Creek
Marist College	4	School wetland
Taradale PS	F-6	Back Creek (and Coliban River)