

Community drives Landcare projects

A range of community and farm-based projects across East and Far East Gippsland will be delivered under the National Landcare Programme (NLP), with grants announced last week by Member for Gippsland, Darren Chester.

Mr Chester said there was strong demand for NLP funding, showing the wide representation of groups and individuals who participate in community and farm-based environmental work.

"National Landcare Programme funding supports Landcare networks, farming and other groups to help restore and protect the environment for the benefit of the whole community," he said.

"These groups have tremendous support from their local communities and they are well placed to deliver the best results."

The funding is coordinated through the East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority (EGCMA), to local NRM community groups.

Mr Chester last week inspected the site of one of the recipients of 2015/16 NLP funding, Nagle College.

The school's long-term project to restore native Rainforest at their Mitchell River site has been a core focus for the Eco-Warriors year nine students guided by science teacher, Andrea Savage.

"The purpose of Eco-Warriors is to show the students the incredible biodiversity we have here and for them



Nagle College year nine Eco Warriors Symantha Churches (left) and Lara Benton (right) show East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority community projects officer, Carolyn Cameron, and Member for Gippsland, Darren Chester, some of the rare species used to restore their rainforest site, under the project's NLP funding. (PS)

to understand how everything is connected," she said.

Mrs Savage said that students have planted seedlings, including rare and threatened species given to the school by the Royal Botanic Garden of Victoria. The students also meet local volunteer groups involved in conservation, went on excursions to see sustainable fishing and visit other environmental restora-

tion works.

"Students enjoy this course because it is outdoors, interactive and enables them to see the big picture of how the rivers and Gippsland Lakes work together as part of an overall healthy ecosystem," she said.

EGCMA chief executive officer, Graeme Dear, said the 2016-2018 proposals had been reviewed by the new Community Programs Committee, and were assessed

against the NLP Community Grant guidelines.

"Each year, there is a great mix of projects across rural, coastal and urban environments," he said.

* East Gippsland Landcare Network will receive funding to work with its groups on revegetation in the Gippsland Plains, Dargo, Tambo and Buchan valleys and improving farming sustainability.

The project will focus on

encouraging individuals and groups to enter into long-term voluntary agreements to manage their local landscapes. Strategies include creating 15-metre wide vegetation corridors to link with existing vegetation. Stock exclusion fencing and changes in grazing practices are also planned with the aim of increasing ground-cover.

* Far East Victoria Landcare will receive funding for

an innovative project - Plants for Pollen.

It will involve community members in and around towns and farming communities planting more native species of pollen and nectar-producing plants, to support bee populations and pollination activity for horticulture and agriculture.

* East Gippsland Rainforest Conservation Management Network will be supported in the second phase of their restoration work at Lake Tyers Beach.

* Snowy West Landcare Group is introducing a fauna monitoring program including nest boxes along the East Gippsland Rail Trail. The group already has strong ties with the local school and good community involvement, but is hoping this project will encourage awareness and participation in the wider community.

* Snowy River Interstate Landcare Committee will be funded to establish a program of keynote speaker events in 2017, aimed at promoting best practice and innovation in remote rural communities. It intends to cover subjects such as wildlife management, biosecurity, conservation, sustainability and small-scale holdings.

The Australian Government has invested \$1 billion through the National Landcare Programme, including more than \$450 million directed in regional funding through to Australia's 56 natural resource management organisations.