RCE Gippsland 2014-2016

Gippsland Regional Centre of Expertise in Education for Sustainable Development (RCE Gippsland)

RCE Gippsland is one of 127 centres under United Nations' auspices throughout the world and one of four in Australia. “Education” is accepted to be formal, informal and non-formal. RCE Gippsland is a sub-committee of the Gippsland Climate Change Network (GCCN – which is an incorporated not-for-profit network of approximately 50 diverse member organisations across government departments and agencies, private businesses, community groups and other organisations, covering the six local government areas across the greater Gippsland region).

In 2014 RCE Gippsland took up an office in the School of Education at Federation University (FedUni) in Gippsland (Churchill), which was the culmination of several years of planning. Taking up the office space created an opportunity for a closer working relationship between the newly created Fed Uni (January 2014) and RCE Gippsland. Interested people from the Fed Uni (Ballarat Campus) visited the RCE Gippsland on several occasions where mutual ways of working together were discussed. RCE Gippsland gained a seat on the University’s Sustainability Committee, and an RCE Gippsland sub-committee member, Joan McColl attended a meeting in Ballarat. Subsequent meetings have been held using Skype, and attended by a Gippsland RCE member Dr Monica Green and the Head of the Gippsland Campus, Dr Harry Ballis.

Having the office space in the School of Education meant that RCE Gippsland had a public face, which enabled greater communication and a better understanding of the role of an RCE. The office allowed Dr Monica Green, a Senior Lecturer in the School of Education, and Joan McColl, the RCE Gippsland Project officer to work closely together in the planning of RCE events. During this time, Joan conceptualised a regular RCE Newsletter, ‘TENUTO’ that was produced across several editions. Work began on an Open Space Forum project (April 2014) with the theme “Creating a Sustainable Gippsland: What are the issues and opportunities?” The Forum, which was held in the Student Lounge at FedUni (Churchill) provided an important opportunity for people across the region to come together to work on complex problems requiring innovation, problem solving, creativity, teamwork, and rapid change. Forty-two participants from many walks of life, and from four Gippsland Shires took part at a particularly relevant time for such a discussion, as it was during the historical 45-day long fire in the adjacent Morwell Open Cut Mine. The morning session that used the open space format enabled individuals to raise fourteen different topics, and to join groups that formed around these topics.

Many of the topics chosen were concerned with the theme of Sustainability Education and community sustainability, but participants also relished the opportunity to bring matters of current relevance into the discussion with topics/questions such as:

- Is sustainability achievable within a minefield?
- The future of Gippsland lies in large scale energy generation via renewables
• Transitioning the Latrobe Valley away from reliance on coal and changing people’s perceptions on the need for fossil fuels
• Making Morwell a swinging seat (or marginal seat)

Action Planning Topics chosen for the afternoon session followed along the same lines. The groups that formed created statements of intent to pursue actions they identified as being worth working on. RCE Gippsland has been able to satisfy some aspirations expressed during these sessions. Actions pursued included expanded collaboration with FedUni, continued engagement of all levels of formal, non-formal and informal education in RCE activities; engagement in several ways with other RCE’s, and research being on behalf of RCE. Noteworthy is the fact that the seat of Morwell did become a swinging seat at the election that followed the forum.

The RCE received a great deal of help from local individuals and groups to make this event a reality. It would not have been possible for our small committee of volunteer members to have achieved the success we did without this support. Donations from private individuals, Baw Baw Sustainability Network assistance with administration, sponsorship from Gippsland Water, Latrobe Shire, Department of Environment and Primary Industry, Bunnings and GCCN all contributed to making the day a reality and success.

As a direct result of the Forum’s success, RCE Gippsland embarked on another project: the inaugural RCE Gippsland Sustainable Schools Expo. In December 2014, RCE Gippsland invited primary schools across to the region students to FedUni to display their sustainability activities and initiatives. Many of the schools that participated were involved in the ResourceSmart Schools program and were able to elaborate on the practical experiences they had been exposed to through their involvement in the program. Dr Harry Ballis opened the day’s activities and told a story about digging in his garden and finding an unusual critter – something that primary students could well relate to. Dr Doris Paton, an Elder of Gunnai, Monaro Ngarigo followed with her own wonderful story of the Gippsland dreamtime.

Students from six schools gave outstanding presentations to the audience of around 450 students and over fifty teachers. Many schools set up stalls displaying an array of thoughtful sustainability projects, and students were excited during the breaks to manage these stalls and tell others about their impressive sustainability efforts. There were stalls also held by SWEP, ResourceSmart Schools, FedUni and Gippsland Water. The MC for the day, Will Tait not only kept the program moving along, but also provided an amusing sketch that included the audience and expanded the notion of sustainability. At the end of the day, students joined with a talented choir from Grey St PS Traralgon to sing “I Am the Earth”

A graffiti wall provided another avenue for the children to participate in. Further stories and photos of the Expo can be seen at https://rcegippslandblog.wordpress.com/

Early in 2015 RCE Gippsland once again gathered some funds, this time to assist Dr Monica Green on behalf of RCE Gippsland to conduct research as a followup to the Expo held in December 2014. Here is an excerpt from the research.

"The study found that children’s involvement in sustainability largely stems from practical experiences in school and home environments, mostly through action based projects. Projects involved embodied learning that promoted creating and caring for specific locations, such as wetlands, creeks and rivers, school grounds and food gardens. In conjunction with other adults from the wider community, teachers played a key role in implementing sustainability in schools and supporting children’s subsequent learning, which was often self-directed and discovery based. The children in this study have well developed ideas about what sustainability is, its impact on the planet, and its contribution to planetary survival. Their sustainability
knowledge is testament to the rich sustainability learning opportunities afforded to them in their school."

The research report ‘Sustainability and Children” that resulted from this research can be found at: https://rcegippslandblog.files.wordpress.com/2014/07/sustainability-and-children_report_-2015.pdf

As a committee, RCE Gippsland is very proud and pleased to congratulate committee member Dr Monica Green who was awarded the prestigious Vice-Chancellor’s Citation Award in 2015 For outstanding and sustained leadership that promotes teaching and learning for pre-service teachers through place-based communities and pedagogies.

Amongst the eight academics recognised by the Vice-Chancellor on this occasion was Ballarat based academic Dr Jessica Reeve who in 2015 together with other academics from Ballarat spent time with RCE Gippsland members in order to share interests and knowledge. Jess’s Vice-Chancellor’s Citation award was For a focussed contribution toward education for sustainability, ensuring that the student experience goes beyond the classroom to be integrated into the broader community.

Monica with Dr Harry Ballis, Head of FedUni Gippsland Campus at the award ceremony.

https://federation.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/281933/VC_Battersby_Awards_presentation.pdf

The film Project Wild Thing which emphasises getting children connected with nature was shown in Traralgon in 2015. The film belongs to a movement that promotes getting more children and parents outside to engage with nature through curiosity. An ambitious, feature-length documentary, it takes a humorous and revealing look at a complex issue that is concerned with the increasing disconnect between children and nature. It is a growing movement of organisations and individuals who care deeply about the need for nature inspired outdoor playing children in the 21st century. Many people have committed huge amounts of time, energy, resources and money to help progress the project. The evening was supported by Latrobe City Council, and organised by RCE Gippsland members Ashley Hall and Peter Collins, with Monica Green as guest speaker.

http://projectwildthing.com/
In late 2015 RCE Gippsland hosted an afternoon gathering to celebrate the completion and publishing of a book, titled *Children, Place and Sustainability* co-authored by Monica and Professor Margaret Somerville who was an early RCE committee member, and largely responsible for the emergence of RCE Gippsland. The book sets out to give close and careful attention to the intimate and often surprising nature of children’s sustainability learning in the context of their local places.


In May 2015 members of RCE Gippsland spent a pleasant afternoon sharing information and ideas with members of RCE Greater Western Sydney. It was the first time that RCE Gippsland had an opportunity to share notes in such a manner. The Global RCE Service Centre sends regular newsletters that cover up-dates on events, news and resources connecting RCE’s throughout the world.

**Sustainable Schools Expo, Sale 2016**

Work is progressing apace on the next Sustainable Schools Expo that will be held on Thursday 21 April 2016 from 9:30am - 2:00pm at Lorna Sparrow Hall Gippsland Grammar - Junior Campus and Sale Community College. Airlie PS and the Gippsland Grammar Green Team will make presentations on their sustainability activities, followed by morning tea (Fresh fruit from local organisations). There will be many gallery exhibits to check out. An exciting program of interactive workshops has been developed and students can choose from the following activities:

- Water in the Environment - Gippsland Water
- Making Sense of Sustainability - Will Tait
- Bug Blitz – Crustaceans – John Caldow
- Bug Blitz – Macro invertebrates – Erin Nowak
- Blue Banded bees (Bee hotels) – Max Sargent
- Worm farms/composting – Raquel Harris
Education for Sustainability is promoted by RCE Gippsland in many ways through links and connections of, and between committee members. In 2016 the Committee members are:

- Barbara Johnson (RCE Gippsland Convenor) Farmer and West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority Board Member
- *Peter Collins, Sustainability Education Officer, Latrobe City Council
- Ashley Hall, Sustainability Program Officer, Strategy, Innovation & Engagement, Regional Services, Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning
- Joan McColl, Baw Baw Sustainability Network member and RCE Gippsland Project Officer
- *Raquel Harris, Sustainability Officer, Wellington Shire Council
- Louise Hulls, Teacher of Art and Green Team Leader- St Anne's Campus, Gippsland Grammar
- Monica Green, Senior Lecturer, School of Education, Faculty of Education & Arts, Fed Uni Australia
- *Nola Anderson, Regional Education Officer, Gippsland Waste and Resource Recovery Group, Facilitator & Assessor - ResourceSmart Schools
- Tony Lea, TAFE Lecturer
- Sam Franzì, Education Officer (Secondary Learning Pathways), Catholic Education Office, Diocese of Sale
- *Alison Taylor ResourceSmart Schools Coordinator

* ResourceSmart Schools is a State Government supported program. It is hosted in Gippsland by the Gippsland Waste and Resource Recovery Group and currently has 75 participating Gippsland schools. RCE members Alison Taylor, Raquel Harris, Peter Collins and Nola Anderson support schools undertaking this program.