**10 September2018**

**Environmental protection from**

**the next generation of coastal innovators**

On Wednesday 5 September, around 160 students from five local schools gathered in Torquay to learn, work-shop ideas and celebrate coastal conservation at the annual Coast Guardians Forum hosted by the Great Ocean Road Coast Committee (GORCC).

The year 9 students from Northern Bay College, Surf Coast Secondary College, Geelong Lutheran College, Lorne Aireys Inlet P-12 College, and Sacred Heart College had a day of guest presenters, exciting activities and prizes as part of the GORCC’s award-winning Environmental Education Program.

The day featured special presentations from Corrina Eccles, Wadawurrung Aboriginal Corporation; Meg Cullen, Birdlife Australia; Deidre Murphy, Corangamite Catchment Management Authority; Alan Beckhurst, Queenscliff Marine and Freshwater Discovery Centre, Victorian Fisheries Authority; Lachlan McKenzie, Eco Logic; Luke Hynes, Jan Juc Coast Action and Sam Marwood, Edge Pledge.

Great Ocean Road Coast Chairman Ken Northwood said educating the next generation about the precious coastal environment was a major priority for the organisation.

“The Coast Guardians program is aimed at increasing awareness around environmental issues and encouraging social responsibility and environmental stewardship. Ultimately, we hope that participants will be able to walk along a well-cared for coastline and enjoy the benefits of their hard work.  The program is also aimed at fostering partnerships between the schools, GORCC, local community organisations and local environmental volunteer groups.

“We’re incredibly proud of the achievements of our education program, which has been celebrated with awards by the Victorian Coastal Council and was a finalist in the recent VicParks Awards in the Community Category.”

“These students are making a real contribution to our coastal landscape and support our conservation team, and the tireless efforts of local volunteers.”

GORCC Education Activity Leader Hilary Bouma said the forum will encourage students to reflect on their achievements throughout the year and share their experiences with other schools.

“Each school protects a different environment along the coast and has a different experience to share with the other schools,” she said. “This forum celebrates the students’ personal development and their hands-on contribution to the enhancement of the coast.”

**BACKGROUND: COAST GUARDIANS PROGRAM**

The Coast Guardians Program is a Great Ocean Road Coast Committee educational opportunity for year 9 students. Every year, the schools involved each take ownership of the rehabilitation and conservation of a coastal site. Schools involved are:

* Lorne Aireys P-12 College
* Geelong Lutheran College
* Northern Bay College
* Surf Coast Secondary College
* Sacred Heart College.

The Great Ocean Road Coast Committee is a State Government Agency responsible for protecting, enhancing, and developing coastal Crown land from Point Impossible to Cumberland River. All funds raised through our commercial endeavours are reinvested back into the coast.

**For more information on the Coast Guardians Program visit** [**www.gorcc.com.au**](http://www.gorcc.com.au)***.***

**Media enquiries:** David Petty- 0437 557 960