



ROTARY MURRAY-DARLING SCHOOL OF FRESHWATER RESEARCH 2010 – 2011

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Overview

Australia's 23 District Governors have determined to establish a National Preserve Planet Earth initiative and adopted, as part of that initiative, the Rotary Murray-Darling School of Freshwater Research. This Program as developed by the Rotary Club of Albury, is designed to involve Rotary in environmental issues in a positive manner. The School has received a number of awards, including a Citation from the President of Rotary International.

The School takes the form of a youth education program operated by the Rotary Club of Albury in conjunction with The Murray-Darling Freshwater Research Centre (MDFRC). Run annually, the school started in 1996 and in 2010 celebrated its 15th anniversary. The six-day residential school provides Year 11 students who live in and around the Murray Darling Basin with an opportunity to work with scientists in the laboratory and field, learning the fundamentals of freshwater research, conservation and the environment. One of the aims of the School is to introduce students to the process of scientific investigation and the role that research plays in living in a sustainable environment.

The school is practice based giving students an opportunity to experience practical fieldwork along the Murray River and its floodplain. It provides direct involvement with scientists and lecturers from three institutions: MDFRC, La Trobe University and Charles Sturt University. Importantly it provides an introduction to the university experience and explores the possibility of a future career in environmental science. During the School, students work in small groups with a mentor assigned to each group. Mentors are usually undergraduate environmental science students and Diploma of Education students currently attending university.

2010

The 15th RMDSFR was conducted from 11-16 April 2010. It was held over six days and five nights during the New South Wales Easter School vacation. The students were accommodated at the Scots School Albury and were transported by bus to various venues for their assigned activities. Working in teams the students were supported by staff and mentors while undertaking field trips, lectures, demonstrations and field sampling at a number of locations including Wonga Wetlands, near the River Murray, which is operated by Albury City, as well as visiting the Norske Skog Albury paper mill.

By combining problem solving activities with information collected in the field, the students were able to form an understanding of the scientific process for determining ecological health. As a concluding highlight of the six-day RMDSFR, each group presented their findings to a meeting of scientists and Rotarians, further enhancing the students' communication and teamwork skills.

The 16th RMDSFR will be held from 16-21 April 2011.



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School administration

The School has an enrolment of no more than 50 Year 11 students from high schools and secondary colleges in and adjacent to the Murray-Darling Basin. The School is administered by the Rotary Club of Albury but involves Rotary Clubs throughout the Murray-Darling Basin. These clubs nominate and sponsor students to attend, working in collaboration with principals, staff and parents. For 2011, selection criteria have been provided to both clubs and schools to ensure the selection of students who will benefit most from the School program. Sponsorship payment of \$450 covers all on site costs including accommodation.

Involvement of Rotary Clubs

The School brings together Rotary Clubs, secondary colleges and high schools in their area. Principals and staff, together with members of the relevant Rotary Club, recommend students who meet the selection criteria and who they consider will best benefit from the experience. On their return home, students will be expected to provide feedback on their experiences to fellow students and to their sponsoring Rotary Club.

A comprehensive nomination form is required and students provide one A4 page of information relating to their reasons for attending, their current school experiences and their career aspirations. Rotarians need to be available to assist with this process. Rotarians and school staff are asked to ensure that the nomination form and other documentation arrive on or before the due date.

Clubs are requested to oversee students' transport to and from Albury. If necessary, members of the Rotary Club of Albury will provide transport to and from Albury bus and train stations and will billet students if required.

Selection of students for 2011

Once a student's nomination and sponsorship is received, a process of selection starts involving members of the Rotary Club of Albury and staff at the MDFRC. Students are notified of their final selection approximately two weeks after the closing date. With the letter of notification comes a draft program/timetable; a checklist of items the student needs to bring; maps and other helpful details. Finally, students will be welcomed to the School at the Scots School Albury between 2:00 pm and 4:00 pm on Saturday 16 April 2011.

In Summary

Attending the Rotary Murray-Darling School of Freshwater Research is a unique experience that will provide Year 11 students with opportunities for research and learning in the environmental sciences. It will give students the opportunity to work with scientists and lecturers in laboratories and in the field and to meet and work with students from three states and the ACT. It encourages liaison and cooperation between Rotary Clubs, high schools and secondary colleges. It provides a friendly considerate environment in which students are able to live, learn and gain experience.

For further information

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