



WATERBUG BLITZ LAUNCHES IN NATIONAL SCIENCE WEEK

A snapshot of Australian river health will soon be revealed thanks to citizen scientists across the country participating in the National Waterbug Blitz. The project will be launched in National Science Week with the first of over thirty waterbug workshops taking place in Launceston, Tasmania on Tuesday 13th August.

The Waterbug Blitz is the first nationwide waterway monitoring project that empowers the community to become citizen scientists and explore their local freshwater creeks and rivers to learn about the fascinating world of waterbugs. These ecosystems are intrinsically connected to the lives of all Australians and play an important and often underestimated role in our environment and economy.

Lead scientist and freshwater ecologist, John Gooderham said the Waterbug Blitz aims to assess the status of waterways nationwide by surveying aquatic macroinvertebrates - known as waterbugs – that inhabit rivers, creeks, wetlands and lakes.

"Waterbugs are good biological indicators of the state of freshwater systems. Some species such as stoneflies and mayflies are highly sensitive to pollution while beetles and bloodworms are more tolerant. The greater number and variety of the more sensitive bugs, the healthier the system is."

Project leader and Research Fellow Dr. Birgita Hansen, from the Centre for eResearch and Digital Innovation (CeRDI) at Federation University Australia, said the Blitz is off to a good start with support from environment groups, fly fishers, schools, agencies, Landcare, Waterwatch and more.

"The waterbug surveys can make a significant contribution to detecting changes in water quality. Not only is it important, it's a lot of fun. Anyone can put on gumboots, take a net and bucket to their local creek and get scooping. The method is non-harmful to the waterbugs - after identification & recording, they are released back into the water alive" Dr. Hansen said.

Mr. Gooderham added 'The Waterbug Blitz team will deliver training sessions in every state from August to November, the best time for waterbug activity. The sessions are 'hands on' and participants will gain the skills required to collect the bugs and use the latest technology to identify and record the sample using the Waterbug App. It's free to download and fun to use.'

'The data is then uploaded for verification by the teams' scientists and every survey site is mapped to reflect local water quality, as indicated by the bugs collected in the survey. The maps are publicly available on the website www.waterbugblitz.org.au' said Mr. Gooderham.

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MEDIA RELEASE

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