

All walks of life were Shakin' it for the Dugongs

28 June 2011

What do you get when you put together 10,000 hits on youtube, a groovy rock song about Dugongs, a video camera and people who are not afraid to dance for our rivers? The answer is the Shakin' it for the Dugongs competition which has been running in the Mary and SEQ Catchments for the past 6 weeks.

The brain child of educator and catchment specialist Peter Oliver, the Shakin' it for the Dugongs competition was an experiment in using the internet to generate enthusiasm, interest and awareness around river health and the need to protect our dugongs. Peter announced the winners of the competition at the Noosa Festival of Water on Sunday 26 June and also treated the crowd to an *A capella* rendition of the Dugong Rock, which he wrote about 10 years ago.



The Shakin' dugong!

Dugong populations today are nothing like they used to be. For example, historical records indicate that the dugong population in the Great Sandy Strait and Hervey Bay may have once reached tens of thousands, but most recent estimates are of a population of around 2500. Huge herds of dugong were also reported in Moreton Bay and now it is estimated there may only be 800 in that region. Although over one hundred years of commercial fishing for dugong decimated these large populations, they are now protected. Today, one of the main threats to dugongs arise through seagrass, their primary food source which is so intimately affected by the quality of water running of the land, and particularly our rivers and waterways.

In the case of the Mary Catchment for example, the quality of water in the Mary River has a direct impact on the seagrass beds in the northern part of the Great Sandy Strait, with sediment and nutrients and salinity all needing to be finely balanced to encourage healthy seagrass growth. These same aspects of water quality are important for endangered species in the freshwater section of the Mary River such as Mary River cod, Lungfish and Mary River turtle. It is for this reason that the dugong is regarded as a canary of the catchment. Healthy dugong populations bode well for healthy rivers.

The competition has certainly helped to raise awareness of these issues and get people talking. In feedback on the competition, entrants also explained how much fun it was to put together the entry, regardless of whether they won a prize.

"All the town has been asking us what we were doing and why," explained Paul, principle of Rainbow Beach State School, whose entry won a major prize and involved students dancing down the main street and playing drum kits and guitars on the beach. "It's really helped raise awareness about dugongs and also about the school"

In addition to Rainbow Beach State School, the other major prize winner was Nefertiti Dance in Hervey Bay who were rewarded, not only for the number of hits on youtube but for the creativity and effort. They received the \$500 prizes donated by the International Water Centre. The prizes will be deliver in person by Peter Oliver in the coming weeks.

The Nefertiti Dance school has also found that the Dugong Rock has generated lots of community interest. Jenny, who organised the entry from the dance school, explained "We performed the Dugong Rock at the Paddle Out for Whales in Hervey Bay on Sunday and many people asked if we could teach the dance to them.. they love it!"

Runcorn Primary School and Sumba Primary School in Indonesia will each receive \$100 donated by Peter and Ann Oliver and a selection of books SEQ Catchments, the Noosa Integrated Catchment Association and the Mary River Catchment Coordinating committee.

Other entries were received from Nambour Office of the Department of Environment and Resource Management, Amanda Wilmot, Gympie Line-dancers, Mary Valley Zumba, International Water Centre masters students, Burnett Mary Regional Group, Griffith Centre for Coastal Management and Ian Mackay from Black Bean Productions.



Mary River Catchment Coordinating Committee staff and general committee members choreographing their Dugong Rock!

These entrants will share prizes donated by local businesses– Ride on Mary Imbil Kayak and Bike Hire, Freedom Whale watching in Hervey Bay, Peter Meyer Photography in Hervey Bay, Ferryman Cruises Pumicestone, Night Eyes Pumicestone Night time tour – and some lovely West Australia wines donated by Peter and Ann Oliver.

The International Water Centre, Mary River Catchment Coordinating Committee and SEQ Catchments also uploaded entries to encourage others to do the same.

All of the entries to the competition are available for viewing at:

http://www.youtube.com/playlist?p=PL9902718492E5F9DA&feature=mh_lolz

The competition organisers at the International Water Centre, SEQ Catchment and Mary River Catchment Coordinating Committee would like to thank all the sponsors of the competition and all the people who took the time to put in an entry. It has made a great contribution to raising awareness about dugongs and about river health.

To find out more about the competition, contact:

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Thank you to our local businesses who donated prizes:



*Peter Meyer
Photography*

