Students go ‘beyond the fence’ to investigate sustainability

More than 120 students and teachers from schools across NSW will come together in Sydney this week to share the results of a 12-month project pioneering a new approach to learning about - and tackling - sustainability.

NSW Minister for Climate Change and Environment, Frank Sartor said the students from New England, Illawarra, Riverina and Sydney will present the results of a project titled ‘Beyond the Fence’.

“Beyond the Fence established these schools as a learning hub in their communities, sending students beyond the school gates and fences into their local communities to address a sustainability issue.

“The skills and knowledge these students have acquired through this project will help them make sound environmental decisions in their own lives,” Mr Sartor said.

The participating schools are among 1384 schools registered with the NSW Government’s Sustainable Schools NSW Initiative.

The students have been exploring new ways to learn and respond to global sustainability issues in their local area, including climate change, sand dune erosion, air pollution, species loss and over consumption.

The Minister for Education and Training, Verity Firth said the program helped schools to become more aware of their impact on the environment and what action they could take to reduce it.

“The program aims to teach students about environmental awareness in all their activities, from the classroom to the canteen, school grounds or the sports carnival as well as travel to and from school,” Ms Firth said.

“It’s about helping schools to develop good practices and policies so they can share their ideas with schools across NSW.”

Teacher Marianne Bower, one of the project coordinators from Glen Innes Public School, said Beyond the Fence had changed the way both teachers and students approached learning for sustainability.

“This project has taken students and teachers out of the classrooms and into the community to explore sustainability issues,” Ms Bower said.
“Our students have tapped into the wealth of information and knowledge that exists in the community and they have brought that back to find ways to solve the problems,” Ms Bower said.

“Having researched the issues and engaged their communities, the students are now putting their heads together to refine how they will put plans into action.”

The conference will include presentations from students in the Riverina about working with Landcare, TAFE and Charles Sturt University to revegetate a neglected bushland reserve.

Inspired by the wisdom of Dr Seuss’ *The Lorax*, students from four Catholic schools in Liverpool will present their research into illegal dumping, graffiti and water pollution in the Georges River.

Students from the Illawarra will discuss coastal sustainability and stormwater management, while students from New England, through music, are raising awareness of species loss and the impacts of over-consumption.

Beyond the Fence is conducted in partnership with the Department of Education and Training and is jointly funded by the NSW Government’s Sustainable Schools NSW Initiative and the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities.

The conference is being held at 10.00am on Tuesday, 2 November 2010 at the Vision Valley Conference Centre, Arcadia. More information about Sustainable Schools NSW at www.sustainableschools.nsw.edu.au