

3.2. Coal Loader Schools Education Program

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| ATTACHMENTS | Nil |
| CSP LINK | 1. Our Living Environment 1.1 Protected, enhanced and biodiverse natural environment 1.2 Environmentally sustainable community 1.3 Clean and green places 1.4 Well utilised open space and recreational facilities |

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Coal Loader Schools Education Program.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

- A core function of the Coal Loader Centre for Sustainability is environmental education.
- In recent years, the Coal Loader’s education program for schools has not been adequately resourced and an opportunity to refocus efforts in FY23/24 has allowed for a complete program review and overhaul.
- A comprehensive review of the existing school’s education program was undertaken, followed by the design of a new program.
- The new Coal Loader Schools Education Program is set to be launched in July FY24/25.
- Funding for the Coal Loader Schools Education Program comes from the Environmental Levy.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. THAT the report on the Coal Loader Schools Education Program be received.

Background

The core ethos of the Coal Loader Centre for Sustainability is the facilitation and encouragement of sustainable behaviour in our local community and beyond. At the centre of this is environmental education which comprises of school and tertiary education, as well as broader community education and engagement. This report focusses specifically on the school education program which is undergoing significant review and overhaul this year.

To date, the Coal Loader school education program has been largely *'ad hoc'* in delivery due to inadequate staffing and financial resourcing. The program consisted of piecemeal activities for students rather than a cohesive traditional full day excursion program, and a review of market offerings and teacher feedback indicated the program would benefit from an overhaul.

Background research indicated that primary students are most likely to take up excursion opportunities at the Coal Loader; that teachers would prefer 'set' excursion opportunities that are appropriately organised and resourced onsite; and that all excursion opportunities need to be curriculum linked, with sustainability now being an overarching theme across all curriculums.

Resourcing at the Coal Loader does not allow for in-house delivery of school education, as student/teacher ratio requirements mean we do not have enough staff onsite to do more than one class at a time (when most schools will send a grade cohort), and a full day excursion is obviously a full day teaching for Coal Loader staff which is not feasible.

Report

The Coal Loader School Education Program review includes:

- A review of the existing 'Coal Loader Sustainability Learning Guide' resource to ensure relevance/current curriculum links, which will be digitised and made available freely on our website.
- The development of 4 x full day excursion programs, including all resources needed for delivery, for Stage 2-3 (primary) curriculum linked to science, geography and sustainability.
- The introduction of a 'school excursion fee' to Council's fees and charges which will allow for the cost recovery of casual teachers if needed.

Observatory Hill Environmental Education Centre (OHEEC), our local Department of Education and Training Centre, has been engaged for the above-mentioned works. OHEEC regularly teach their own programs onsite at the Coal Loader and are well placed to create our own suite of offerings that are curriculum linked and tailored to our site.

These excursion programs will be fully developed by June 30, 2024, and ready to be made available to the school community for Term 3 of 2024 (July). The 'Coal Loader Learning Guide' resource will also be updated and made freely available on our website by this time.

The roll-out model for the excursions, to be launched next financial year, will be one of two options:

- A. Casual teachers can be employed to run the excursions on set days, invoking the school excursion fee and administered by the Coal Loader Coordinator.
- B. NSC will partner with OHEEC for program delivery. Enquiries will be taken by the Coal Loader and referred to OHEEC for booking.

Consistent with current program delivery, North Sydney schools will not be charged for Coal Loader excursions as these are funded through Council's Environmental Levy. Current budget allocations will allow for approximately 10 North Sydney schools to participate in the program with two classes over the course of one year.

Non-North Sydney schools will, however, be required to pay a fee. In the case of model A), the fee will be charged by the Coal Loader to cover the casual teacher cost, in the case of model B) OHEEC will invoice the Coal Loader per teacher per day. The School Excursion Fee has been included for Council review ready to be implemented in FY24/25.

In addition, this model can be expanded to include specific indigenous education and options to work with the Aboriginal Heritage Office are currently being explored.

In the event a non-North Sydney school requests an excursion but is not financially resourced to pay, they have the option to undertake a self-guided experience. The following will be provided:

- The Coal Loader Sustainability Learning Guide resource, with printed worksheets/clipboards available if needed.
- The Coal Loader augmented reality app available both as pre-visit classroom learning and onsite.
- The Genia/Mess Hall space made available to class for activities.
- A 15-minute site orientation/introduction at the start of the day by Coal Loader staff.

The program will be launched in Term 3 this year via the North Sydney Schools Network. A suite of assets will also be developed for Council's website, digital communications, and social platforms, possibly including a short vox pop or similar.

Due to the timing of the mid-year release, it is anticipated there will be minimal uptake of the program this year due to teachers prior scheduling of activities early in 2024, however, it is expected there will be an upswing of bookings in 2025.

Stage two of this project will be to develop the next set of resources for stage 4-5 (Secondary Schools) for curriculum linked geography and science excursions. These programs will be rolled out from Term 3 (July) 2025.

Consultation requirements

Community engagement is not required.

Legislation

Not applicable.