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## **Nyoongar culture in schools program**

A new primary schools activity program that explores the links between Nyoongars and their environment has been released by CALM.

*Exploring Woodlands with Nyoongars* is the third in a three-part series of education and interpretation activities CALM has produced that focus on the woodlands of the Wheatbelt.

The others are *Exploring Wheatbelt Woodlands* and an associated teaching package that look at the natural values and the natural history of the woodlands.

CALM Executive Director Dr Syd Shea, who launched the program in Narrogin, said that while *Exploring Woodlands with Nyoongars* aimed to increase the general understanding of the Nyoongars' relationship with the land, it also would engender a greater understanding of Nyoongar culture.

"Many people are aware of Aboriginal culture through words - particularly the names of towns, places, features, plants and animals," he said.

"But this awareness doesn't translate into understanding. This is something which needs to be redressed as part of the reconciliation process between Aborigines and non-Aboriginal people."

Dr Shea said the links Nyoongars had with their environment was especially relevant to the wheatbelt given the tremendous challenges faced in overcoming problems with land degradation, particularly salinity, and the serious threats posed to the region's natural biodiversity.

"That is not to say that we return to past ways - indeed, that is clearly impossible," he said.

"But we can learn from traditional Aboriginal culture in looking for ways of redressing these problems."

*Exploring Woodlands with Nyoongars* is based on three fundamental themes.

- Food, shelter and tools
- Communication - principally language and art
- Religion and change

“These are universal themes in that they apply to all human cultures and together they form the basic human needs,” Dr Shea said.

“Understanding how different cultures meet these basic needs according to their environment and history, is something which creates an invaluable springboard to understanding not only our fellow man, but ourselves, as well.

“By using this package, it is hoped that today’s children - who are tomorrow’s leaders - will gain a greater insight into their natural environment, particularly the Wheatbelt.

Dr Shea said that for many years he had been concerned that much of the debate on environmental issues was too narrow in that it concentrated on emotional issues such as old growth forests and wilderness.

“To my mind, the real environmental priority is in the Wheatbelt, where salinisation was having a devastating impact on whole ecology of the region,” he said.

“So there is a tremendous role for *Exploring Woodlands with Nyoongars* and its two associated packages in not only creating a greater understanding of Aboriginal people and their culture, but also a greater awareness of the natural wonders of the thousands of square kilometres that make up WA’s wheatbelt.”

*Exploring Woodlands with Nyoongars* was prepared by a team led by CALM’s Wheatbelt Regional Manager Ken Wallace. Other members were Narrogin teachers Janette Huston, Kezia Cruttenden, Beth Gibb and Jill Nottle.

The team was guided by a panel of local Nyoongars - Josey Hanson, Geri Hayden, Joan Hill, Noel Nannup, Trevor Penny, Lang Williams and Joyce Winsley.

CAPTION: Noel Nannup (left) from CALM’s Aboriginal Tourism, Education and Training Unit and CALM Executive Director Syd Shea with East Narrogin Primary School teacher Jill Nottle and students celebrate the release of *Exploring Woodlands with Nyoongars*.