

MEDIA RELEASE For immediate release – 4 December 2025

NSW's Leading Environmental Educators Celebrated at 44th Annual Awards Ceremony

On **Wednesday 3rd December 2025**, Environmental Education NSW (EENSX) held its **44th annual NSW Environmental Education Awards** in a vibrant online ceremony, honouring outstanding educators who are shaping a sustainable future through innovation, leadership, and community engagement.

The event - attended by educators, partners, and supporters from across the state - recognised winners and highly commended nominees across five award categories, with special guest appearances by beloved environmental advocate **Costa Georgiadis** and **Shirani Glover**, Executive Director, Communications, Engagement and Marketing of award sponsor **Return and Earn**.

Award winners for 2025 are:

Early Childhood Educator of the Year: Aimee Madden (Kensington Castle) - celebrated for embedding sustainability through child-led rituals like "Empty Happy Bowl," a dynamic Sustainability Committee, and impactful projects that diverted six tonnes of waste and raised \$1,600 for OzHarvest.

Sustainable Schools NSW Teacher of the Year: Jenny Henson (Caddies Creek Public School) - recognised for integrating environmental education across the curriculum and forging powerful partnerships with organisations including WWF, Taronga Zoo, and the Jane Goodall Institute.

Return and Earn Program Leader Award: Carol Rowe (Bennett Road Public School) - honoured for over five years of quiet dedication, turning container recycling into vital support for families in need, covering groceries, medical appointments, and camp fees.

NSW Emerging Leader in Environmental Education: Monique Bailey (Hawkesbury Regional Council) - acclaimed for her community-driven initiatives like Hills Eco Kidz, the Schools Wetland Challenge, and deep collaboration with First Nations groups to advance citizen science and cultural awareness.

NSW Environmental Educator of the Year: Christine Freeman (Rumbalara Environmental Education Centre) - lauded for over 30 years of visionary education practice, including her role as ESEC Designated Lead Principal, championing waste reduction, reconciliation and curriculum

integration. Christine's creative energy and collaborative spirit makes her a true sustainability leader.

Highly Commended recipients included:

- **Amanda Ford** (KU ANSTO Children's Centre) Highly Commended, Early Childhood Educator of the Year
- **Lucy Barbuto** (Holy Cross Catholic Primary, Helensburgh) Highly Commended, Sustainable Schools Teacher of the Year
- **Joanne Rice** (Kearns Public School), Highly Commended, Return and Earn Program Leader of the Year
- **Lynne Graham** (Toybox Early Learning, Mascot), Highly Commended, Return and Earn Program Leader of the Year
- **Granton Lee** (Berrima Public School), Highly Commended, Emerging Environmental Educator of the Year
- **Alana Rooney** (Blacktown City Council), Highly Commended, Environmental Educator of the Year.

"This year's nominees remind us that environmental education is not just about knowledge; it's about deliberate and consistent practice, care, and connection," said **Sue Burton**, President of EENSW. "We are inspired by educators who turn classrooms, playgrounds and community spaces into living laboratories for active environmental custodianship."

EENSW extends its gratitude to **Exchange for Change** for their ongoing partnership and sponsorship of the Return and Earn Program Leader Award, and to all volunteers, judges, and nominees whose work continues to drive environmental literacy across NSW.

The ceremony concluded with a light-hearted "Biodiversity Hotspot Fashions on the Field" segment judged by Costa Georgiadis, expressing the joy and creativity at the heart of environmental education.

About EENSW

Our vision: *environmental educators engaging with their communities for planetary balance*

EENSW is a State Chapter of the Australian Association for Environmental Education (AAEE), the national peak professional association for environmental educators in Australia.

We support education for sustainability in NSW, in keeping with the three major roles of AAEE:

- promoting the most extensive and effective use of education and engagement to help people live more sustainably and protect and enhance the local environment
- supporting its members and others in the sector via professional development
- building greater strength in local networks that facilitate collaboration and skill sharing
- Our members represent schools, tertiary education institutions, local councils, state government agencies, non-government organisations and private companies. Our strength rests on our ability to work in conjunction with the many different sectors involved in sustainability education.

We work in the interests of quality education and environmental change. For more than 30 years, we have been integrally involved in the development of Learning for Sustainability Plans as well as NSW school curriculum policy and support. We represent environmental educators across the state in discussions and debates, and provide submissions and recommendations on sustainability issues and directions for a sustainable future.

For more information, to become a member, or to support EENSW's work through a donation, visit www.aaeensw.org.au

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