

Bundaberg Students Experience Transformational Reef Learning at Lady Musgrave Island

10 Bundaberg regional Reef Guardian schools have united for an extraordinary place-based learning experience at Lady Musgrave Island, bringing classroom learning to life on the Great Barrier Reef.

Organised by the Bundaberg Regional Reef Guardian Council led by Tegan Flanagan, the excursion on March 26th 2026 provided students with a rare opportunity to engage directly with one of the world's most significant natural environments. The initiative reflects the strength of the region's Reef Guardian teacher network, which meets each term with Bundaberg Regional Council and The Reef Authority to collaborate, share best practice, and drive high-impact environmental education.

Students participated in a range of immersive, curriculum-aligned activities including snorkelling, guided island tours, glass-bottom boat explorations, and 'marine biologist for a day' experiences. For many students, this was a series of firsts—numerous had never been on a boat or snorkelled before. Despite initial nerves, students were amazed by what they discovered beneath the surface, encountering vibrant coral and diverse marine life. Many eagerly returned to the water multiple times, building confidence and curiosity with each experience.

Students also benefited from expert input, learning alongside CSIRO's 'STEM Professionals in Schools' coral scientist Dr Jon Moorehead, whose involvement enriched the scientific understanding of reef ecosystems and strengthened connections between classroom STEM learning and real-world applications.

"This experience represents the very best of place-based learning," said Kalkie State School Reef Guardian teacher Judith Stutchbury. "Students moved beyond theoretical understanding to meaningful connection—developing knowledge, skills, and a genuine commitment to protecting the reef."

"It was extremely rewarding as a teacher to see the excitement of students who had never snorkelled on the reef. They were so excited with all that they saw underwater and absorbed so much information and were enriched by so many excellent staff on the Lady Musgrave Experience, the scientists on board, the boat's Captain and CSIRO scientists they interviewed and through shared interactions with students from other regional schools."

Year 6 Kalkie SS Reef Guardian Leader Ryan Leeson said, “It was an amazing adventure! I just loved being in the water looking down at all the sea creatures and coral. I have never done that before and it was the best thing ever! I went back for another snorkel because I loved it so much.”

Teachers also highlighted the professional significance of the excursion, with many describing it as a powerful extension of their collaborative network work. The opportunity to engage alongside students in a real-world setting strengthened teaching practice and reinforced the value of experiential learning.

The successful coordination of the excursion ensured all students could safely and meaningfully access the reef environment, with structured rotations and expert-led activities maximising both engagement and educational outcomes.

Special thanks is extended to Tegan Flanagan for organising this opportunity, which enabled the regional schools to participate in this unique and impactful learning experience.

This landmark experience underscores Bundaberg’s leadership in environmental education and the ongoing commitment of Reef Guardian schools to fostering informed, responsible future custodians of the Great Barrier Reef.

Written by Judith Stutchbury @ Kalkie State School Bundaberg



Caption: Reef Guardians from Kalkie State School enjoying a day out on the Reef thanks to Bundaberg Regional Council.

