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Mucking around with mangroves

What can live in either salt water or fresh, is home to baby fish and sharks, breathes through upside down roots and produces a natural insect repellent?

The year eight Reef Guardian students from Northern Beaches State High School learned the answer yesterday during a presentation on mangroves.

NQ Dry Tropics' Land and Sea Coordinator, Leah Saltner, said that mangrove forests were the equivalent of the local Bunnings hardware store for early Indigenous Australians.

"Indigenous Australians used mangroves for medicinal purposes such as healing sores and infections and treating stingray stings. The leaves of one type of mangrove were even used as insect repellent," she said.

"They used the wood to construct canoes, paddles, spears and boomerangs.

"Mangroves were also important in providing a wealth of food including fish, crustaceans and mangrove worms."

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority Reef Guardian Schools Officer, Carolyn Luder, said mangroves are as important today as they were in the past.

"Mangrove ecosystems are vital to maintaining the balance between land and sea," she said.

"They provide essential habitat for marine and fresh water animals and they help filter the water that ends up on the Great Barrier Reef.

"There are around 39 species of mangroves in our region, including the myrtle mangrove which produces lemon-scented oil and is related to the eucalypt family."

While mangroves around the world are under threat from pollution and coastal development, Townsville is lucky enough to be situated near the extensive mangrove forests of the Bowling Green Bay wetland.

The Bowling Green Bay wetland near Cape Bowling Green is listed as an internationally significant site and is under government protection.

By protecting mangrove ecosystems, natural resource managers hope to enhance fish populations and help improve the health of the Great Barrier Reef for future generations.

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