

INDIGENOUS STEM AWARDS 2017

Statement by Minister for Education and Training

HON SUE ELLERY (South Metropolitan — Minister for Education and Training) [10.01 am]: I rise to congratulate some of the best and brightest students, teachers and scientists in our schools and universities, who have been recognised today for their achievements in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, or STEM. The CSIRO has today announced the winners of the 2017 Indigenous STEM Awards, supported by the BHP Billiton Foundation. The awards recognise the achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, teachers and scientists, with a view to inspiring greater participation by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in STEM studies and careers. There were 32 finalists across seven award categories. Western Australia did well, with four very worthy award recipients.

Wiluna Remote Community School won the School Award for its work in engaging with the Martu rangers and the Wiluna community to use traditional knowledge to teach science to students. The school uses science and traditional knowledge to develop competency in English as an additional language or dialect and cross-cultural communication. Teachers apply an inquiry-based learning approach to meet the learning, cultural and engagement strengths of their mostly Martu students, incorporating local knowledge that can be linked to the curriculum.

Shailyn Isaac was awarded the Tertiary/Undergraduate Student Award. Shailyn is studying a Bachelor of Science in anatomy and human biology at the University of Western Australia, and tutors and mentors high school students who reside at Aboriginal hostels around Perth. She is pursuing medicine to become a rural health doctor, to help improve health equality and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Fifi Harris from Leonora District High School won the STEM Champion Award. Fifi is an Aboriginal and Islander education officer and two-way language educator at the school, where she also runs the Bush Rangers program. Fifi is a passionate advocate for the sharing and intergenerational transfer of Indigenous knowledge. She is a leader in ensuring students' local language and culture is combined with western science into school plans, teaching practice and regular community events.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student Science Award was shared by two students, one being Western Australian primary school student Boyden George, also from Leonora District High School. Boyden is passionate about everything outdoors and on-country learning. Last September, he found a spider while on an outdoor discovery program and went to great lengths to have it photographed and submitted for verification by an expert, who told Boyden he had likely found an undescribed species that had not yet been formally described and named.

We know it is vital for today's students to understand the concepts taught in science, technology, engineering and mathematics for their future job prospects. That is why the McGowan government is committed to a range of STEM initiatives, including the provision of science laboratories and equipment in primary schools and professional learning for teachers around coding and teaching practices. Each one of our winners should be extremely proud, not only about their own achievements in STEM subjects and careers, but also for leading by example in inspiring and encouraging broader interest in the field.