



# Maritime and Fisheries Partnership Program – Nhulunbuy High School, Milingimbi School, Shepherdson College, Yirrkala School

## Program Profile

- Northern Territory
- Very remote region
- Government
- Four-school partnership

## Program Summary

The Maritime and Fisheries Partnership program was established in 2016 as an innovative partnership between four very remote schools in the East Arnhem Land region of the Northern Territory. It focuses on providing a context-specific vocational pathway for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students living in a coastal region of Australia. The program includes the Elements of Shipboard Safety skill set, which can provide successful participants with the first four units towards a coxswain course (Certificate II in Maritime Operations). The program puts emphasis on developing students' aspirations, self-esteem and sense of belonging, whilst also providing real-world job pathways through engagement with the community and local industry.

The establishment of the Maritime and Fisheries Partnership program is developing skills and capabilities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students that support the local economy in areas such as the fishing industry, charter boats and general tourism, diving, oil rig tender vessels and on-shore operations in logistics, port control and cargo. There are major economic benefits from the training, as students can qualify as deckhands and become eligible for employment with local businesses such as the freight and charter company Sea Swift, the industrial marine solutions provider Bhagwan Marine, and the Dhimurru or Yirrkala (Laynhapuy) Rangers. Many of these industries have traditionally flown in employees.

This initiative is creating opportunities for local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to stay on country in meaningful employment.

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'What we're really looking to do is allow the local students to get jobs that otherwise other people have to be flown in for ... the big driver with the Indigenous students is when you link programs to country. Going back to where the kids come from ... finding out what's going on in those areas and linking what the kids do here to back home. What we're doing here is real.'

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*Marlene Organ – ST1VET/RTO Manager, Nhulunbuy High School*  
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The coxswain course is delivered in partnership with the Australian Maritime and Fisheries Academy (AMFA). It is offered in a block, with students from all four school sites meeting in Nhulunbuy to complete training. Students from Shepherdson College and Milingimbi School travel some 180 kilometres in their own academy vessels from Elcho Island and Milingimbi to join Nhulunbuy and Yirrkala students. The voyage gives students the opportunity to practise the skills they are learning, including how to plan a route, calculate fuel and water use, cope with weather fluctuations and navigate vessels using GPS and compass. These challenging journeys also allow students to log sea hours, which is an essential component for a subsequent qualification, the Certificate II in Maritime Operations, which provides successful students with the capacity to drive much larger vessels.





Students gain vital practical experience via regular 180-kilometre sea voyages to undertake training in Nhulunbuy.

## Outcomes

The Maritime and Fisheries Partnership program is still in its infancy and, although longitudinal success metrics are not yet available, the program is addressing the key themes that consistently underpin successful vocational education and training (VET) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Flexible agreements established across each school and with the Australian Maritime and Fisheries Academy allow for the continuity of the program despite challenges such as weather, mechanical failure, illness, etc. In addition, flexibility extends to evaluation of student progress as well as course logistics. Students have varying levels of literacy and numeracy, which are taken into account in managing assessment of student learning.

‘A lot of the assessments are verbal, but we still have to get a good record of what we’ve done. We video a lot of the practical tasks that we have to observe and assess, such as the pool activities and water safety. We talk about [them] in the classroom, but then it’s about getting out in the field so the students can show that they’ve been listening, show that they’ve learned something.’

*Chris Francis – Program and Campus Manager Northern Territory Division, Australian Maritime and Fisheries Academy*



Students receive additional support in the classroom from a Yolngu trainer who explains concepts in Yolngu language.

Two-way learning is being assisted by the employment of a Yolngu trainer, who provides additional support to students by explaining concepts in Yolngu language.

Students across all four schools are now exploring career opportunities through the Australian Maritime Fisheries Academy (AMFA) program which introduces them to a range of employment pathways, including sea rangers, community police, roles in land management, or roles in transport, such as sea barges.



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'A big bonus of this program is that these kids are getting ... nationally accredited qualifications, so slowly we're building them up, starting off with the Elements course then they do a Coxswain one. It gives them a pathway into the sea ranger unit. It gives them a pathway into the fishing, the commercial jobs, barges, all sorts of roles. These kids are leaving school with a really useful qualification, so it's a pathway into the future. We're getting people that are already trained. They've got a real head start against other people that haven't completed this sort of training. It's real jobs out on communities, so it's a really exciting time.'

*Chris Francis – Program and Campus Manager Northern Territory Division, Australian Maritime and Fisheries Academy*  
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Students from the Nhulunbuy High School Maritime Academy program have been engaged in traineeships with Bhagwan Marine.

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'Most kids in communities want to be a ranger. There's not that many jobs available as rangers, so hopefully through this program we'll also get our kids working.'

*Marlene Organ – ST1VET/RTO Manager, Nhulunbuy High School*  
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The Maritime and Fisheries Partnership program provides students with a distinctly different set of experiences, including navigation, coordinating work activities, calculating fuel requirements and using electric and paper aids.

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'As the Homelands are a long way from the island, many of the kids have never seen them before, so through the program, they are being exposed to new parts of their own country.'

*David Freier – Maritime Academy Teacher, Shepherdson College*  
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The potential impact of the learning goes beyond employment pathways to the lives of the young people and their families. It is hoped that safety lessons are passed on by the students to the communities from which they come, potentially improving boating safety in the region.

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'Our students were initially very timid and quite conservative in getting on the vessels. Throughout the year I've seen them develop their confidence, become more than happy to drive the boat and to plot courses. They're more than happy to choose destinations they're going to and what sort of operations they're going to be doing in those destinations. I've seen girls who initially were not wanting to do anything, just watch. Now they're quite happy to take charge, "I'll be the one to drive. I'll be the one to make the decisions."'

*David Freier – Maritime Academy Teacher, Shepherdson College*  
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*Students are taught how to use maritime distress signals in the Elements of Shipboard Safety skill set.*

## Industry Links

Industry links are now being established with local businesses such as Bhagwan Marine and Sea Swift, and with government agencies located in the region, which will result in employment opportunities for students as they complete their qualifications.

A strong relationship has also been created with global mining group Rio Tinto's local operation, which supports students' learning through port visits and meetings with key people to inform their decisions about future jobs. The industry insight provides relevant local information into real-world job pathways.



## Why the Maritime and Fisheries Partnership Program Works

Recent research indicates that the following key themes consistently underpin successful delivery of vocational learning and VET, including career education, to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students:

- **Context:** ‘Nuanced, contextual factors will influence individual or group learning undertaken by Indigenous young people (Cuervo et al., 2015; Rigney, 2011).’
- **Flexibility:** ‘... recognition that a rigid or singular mode of education, by definition, cannot meet the needs of diverse learners (Anderson, 2009b; Bottrell, Te Riele & Plows, 2014; Te Riele, 2014).’
- **Two-way learning and community engagement:** ‘... happens in the context of an evolving relationship and structured partnership between Indigenous and school communities that supports Indigenous young people to grow their learning aspirations and stay connected to school or training.’
- **Aspiration, self-esteem and belonging:** ‘To “dream big” was seen as an essential component in a young person’s ability to have vocational ambitions and to achieve them (Mission Australia, 2014).’
- **Real-world job pathways:** ‘In assessing what motivates Indigenous young people to study, a direct link to real employment, that is, getting a job, figured much more highly than reasons connected to a plan for career or further study (Fordham & Schwab, 2007).’

Applying these themes to an understanding of the design, delivery and operation of vocational learning and VET provides insight into “what works” and “what doesn’t work” for this cohort of students.

*Source: Cultural and Indigenous Research Centre Australia (CIRCA), National Priorities: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Secondary Student Transitions Project report*

## Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) Links

The *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* from AITSL outline what teachers should know and be able to do. As part of the Maritime and Fisheries Partnership program teachers are delivering vocational learning, VET or career education that aligns with the following standards:

Know students and how they learn

1.3 Students with diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds

1.4 Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

3.1 Establish challenging learning goals

*Source: Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) (2011), Australian Professional Standards for Teachers*

## Contacts

If you want to know more about this program or think that it might benefit your community, please access the following links:

### Australian Maritime and Fisheries Academy (AMFA)

**P:** 1800 636 068

**E:** [info@afa.edu.au](mailto:info@afa.edu.au)

### Nhulunbuy High School

**W:** [web.ntschoools.net/w/nhs](http://web.ntschoools.net/w/nhs)

### Shepherdson College

**W:** [shepherdson.elcho.org](http://shepherdson.elcho.org)

### My School

**W:** [www.myschool.edu.au](http://www.myschool.edu.au)

