

Hunter Bila Guraa



Enviro-Stories

Enviro-Stories is a literacy education program that inspires learning about natural resource and catchment management issues. Developed by PeeKdesigns, this program provides students with an opportunity to publish their own stories that have been written for other kids to support learning about their local area.

www.envirostories.com.au

Hunter Local Land Services

Hunter Local Land Services works with land managers and the community to improve primary production within healthy landscapes. We help people make better decisions about the land they manage and assist communities and agricultural industries to be productive and sustainable into the future.

Hunter Local Land Services has also partnered with Hunter Water Corporation since 2014 to provide education programs which engage school students and teachers in projects to improve water quality and catchment health.

www.lls.nsw.gov.au/hunter

Hunter Water

Hunter Water provides drinking water, wastewater, recycled water and some stormwater services to a population of almost 600,000 people in homes and businesses across the Lower Hunter. We work with contractors, stakeholders and the community to build our water resilience capabilities and ensure a sustainable water future for our region. Now, more than ever, we need to Love Water. It's our most valuable resource, and like all the things we love in life, we want to protect and treasure it.

www.hunterwater.com.au

Hunter Bila Guraa

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School: St Brigid's Primary School, Raymond Terrace

Acknowledgement of Country

St Brigid's Primary School would like to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands of the Hunter River region. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of NSW.

This book has been published as part of the Every Bit Counts Enviro-Stories program. The aim of this program is to make students aware that caring for our land, water resources, wildlife and biosecurity is a shared responsibility and every bit we can do to improve our region counts towards protecting it for the future.

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Enviro-Stories is a PeeKdesigns initiative, www.peekdesigns.com.au.

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The story behind our story

Our story is written using some of the Gathang language of the Worimi people, on whose land our school is built. We have been taught these words by Justin Ridgeway, the Cultural Heritage and Education Manager at Murrook Cultural Centre.

Gathang words used in this book

bathu = water, *bila* = river, *wati* = tree, *barray* = land,
watha = fire, *guri* = man, *guraa* = turtle

The names of our turtles have been derived from the scientific name for the Hunter River turtle, *Emydura macquarii gunabarra*.

Emydura is derived from the Greek 'emys' (freshwater turtle) and the Greek 'aura' (tail) or Latin 'ura'.

Macquarii refers to the turtle's type locality, the Macquarie River.

Gunabarra (pronounced goona-barra) is the modern-day spelling of the Aboriginal name given to the Hunter River.

(Freshwater Turtles of Australia, John Cann and Ross Sadler, 2017)

Our story reflects just some of the current threats to the Hunter River turtle, including poor water quality from habitat destruction, rubbish in the waterways, bushfires and natural predators such as foxes and pigs.

Our school continues to research the Hunter River turtle and raise awareness of its plight. We have raised money to donate to the Aussie Ark enclosure at the Australian Reptile Park and will continue in our efforts in supporting the Hunter River turtle.



Hi there, my name is Hunter and I'm a Hunter River turtle! You may also call me a Hunter *Bila Guraa* as *Bila* means river and *Guraa* means turtle.

I'm going to tell you a story that my grandparents shared with me. This story is about how Aussie Ark saved my family and how they are encouraging you to do the same!

Years ago, my grandparents, Emmy and Mack Gunaburra, wanted to go on a holiday. They lived in the deep, fresh *bathu* (water) of the Hunter River in Glenbawn Dam, near Scone.

Emmy and Mack desperately wanted to explore the entire *bila* (river) all the way down to Raymond Terrace.

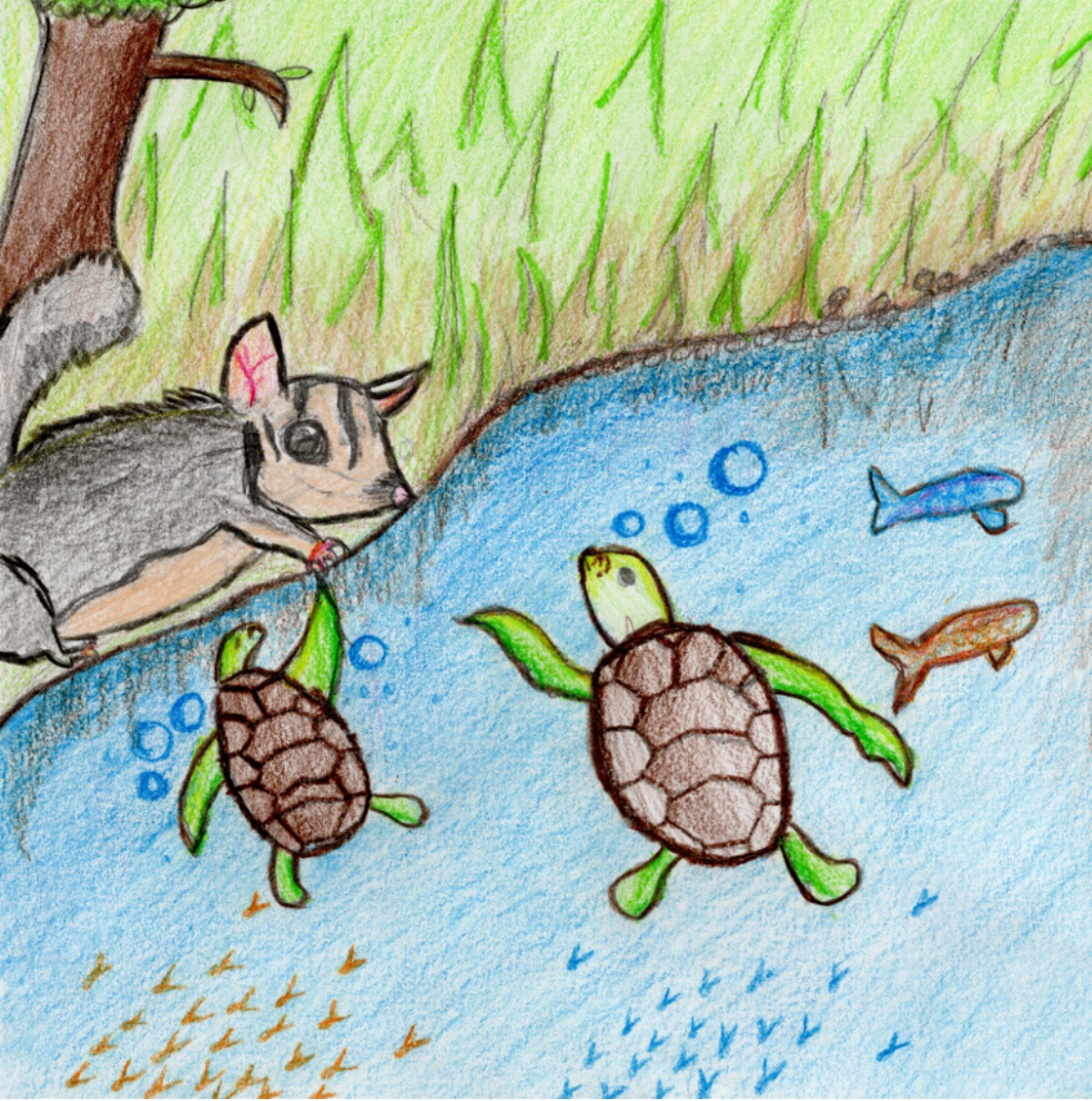


The first stop on their journey was Aberdeen, where they came across a bushy-tailed squirrel glider in a native gum *wati* (tree) on the banks of the *bila* (river).

"Hey there," said the squirrel glider.

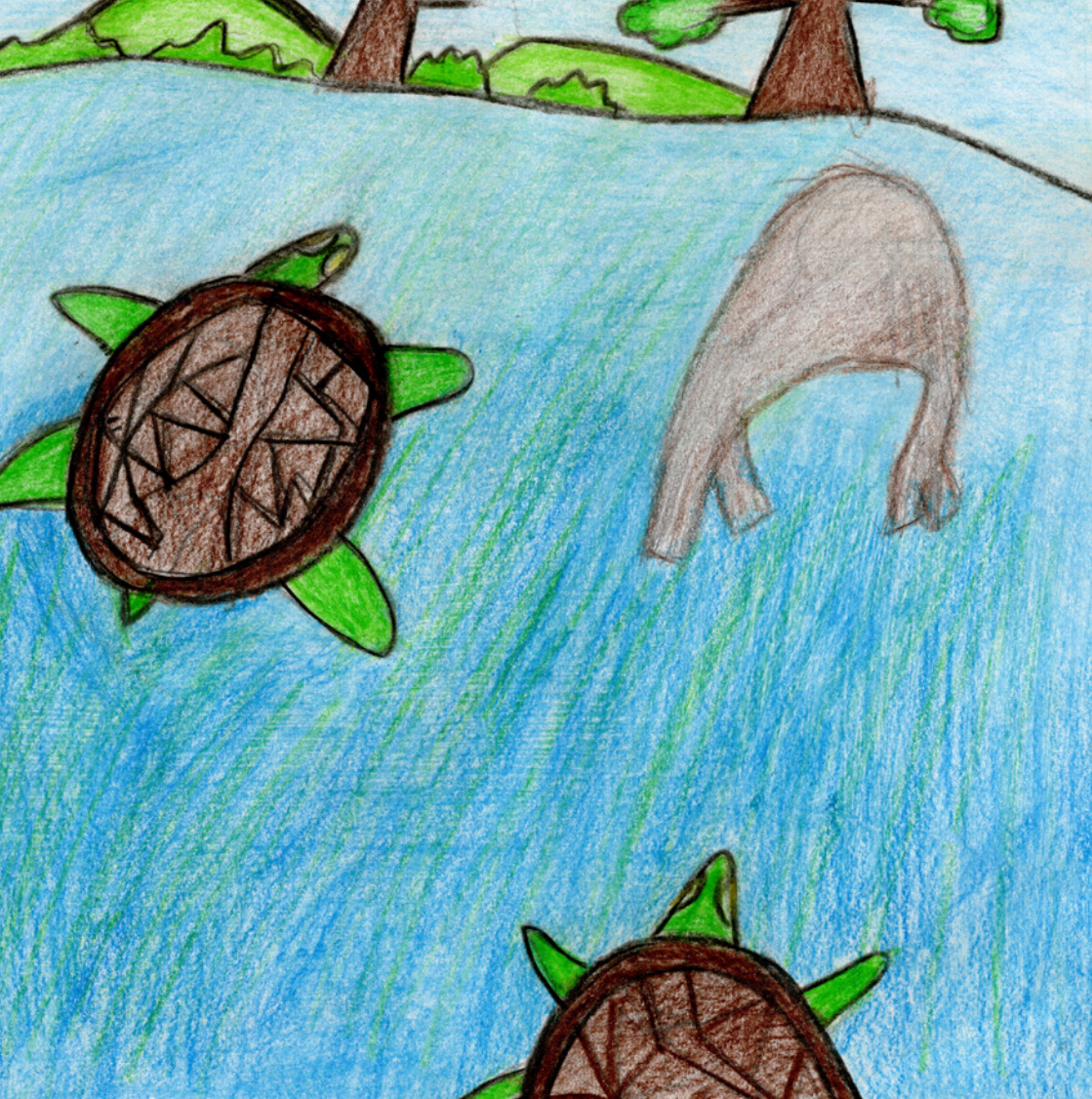
"Hi!" Emmy and Mack replied. "Do you know where a place called Raymond Terrace is?" asked Mack.

"RAYMOND TERRACE?" The squirrel glider replied in shock.



"DON'T GO THERE, IT IS TOO DANGEROUS!" the squirrel glider warned. "On the way the *bila* (river) gets too narrow in places and the *bathu* (water) is too dirty to live in, you won't be able to survive there!"

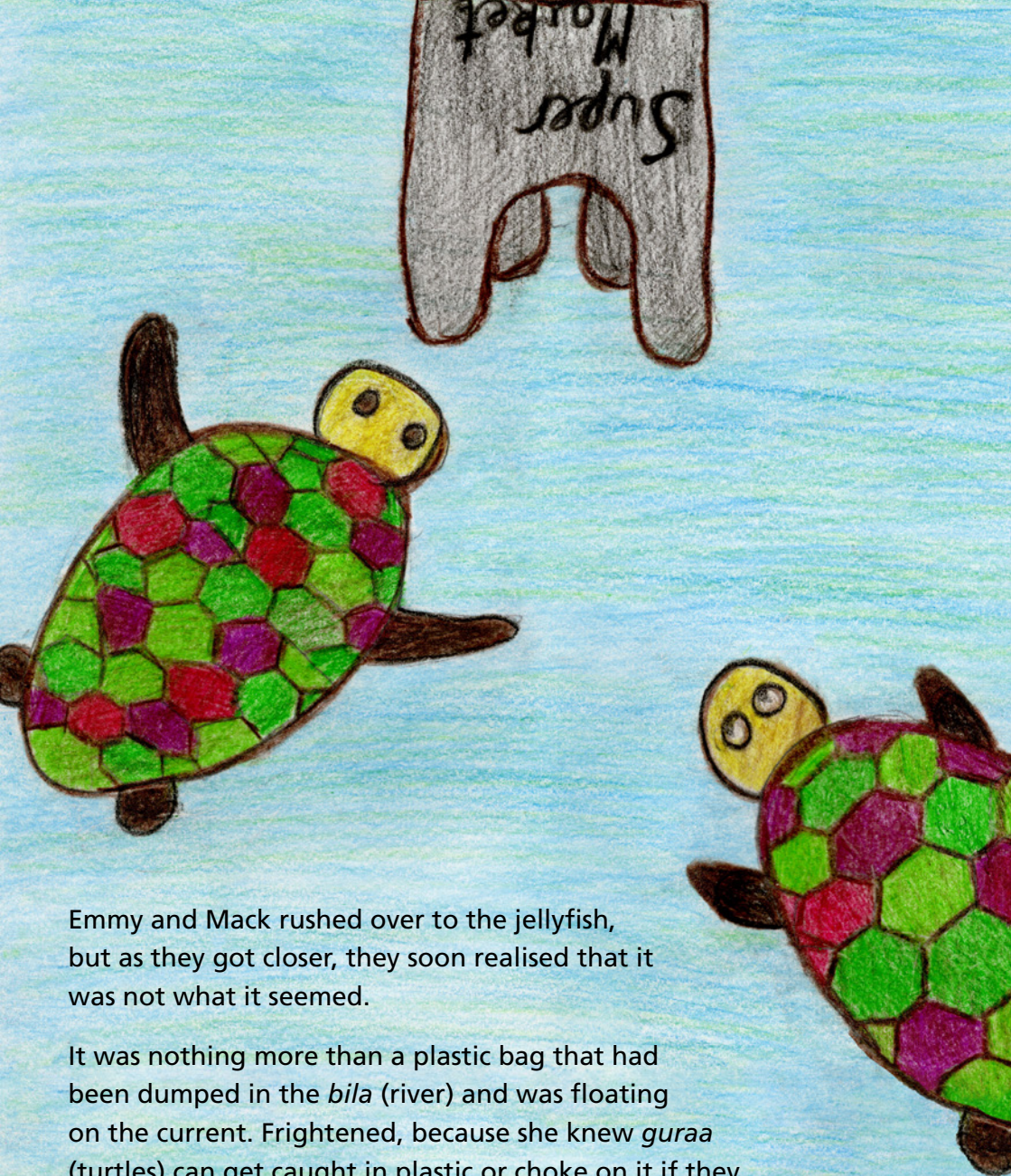
Emmy and Mack wanted to explore the length of the Hunter River so they were not deterred. They thanked the small squirrel glider for the warning, said goodbye and kept going on their journey.



Emmy and Mack made it to Muswellbrook, and they were very hungry. They looked around to see what they could find to eat.

They spotted something floating in the water, so they went to investigate.

"Mack, look over there!" Emmy yelled in excitement. "Is that... a JELLYFISH?"



Emmy and Mack rushed over to the jellyfish, but as they got closer, they soon realised that it was not what it seemed.

It was nothing more than a plastic bag that had been dumped in the *bila* (river) and was floating on the current. Frightened, because she knew *guraa* (turtles) can get caught in plastic or choke on it if they try to eat it, Emmy warned Mack to stay away.

Disappointed, Emmy and Mack continued on their journey to Raymond Terrace.

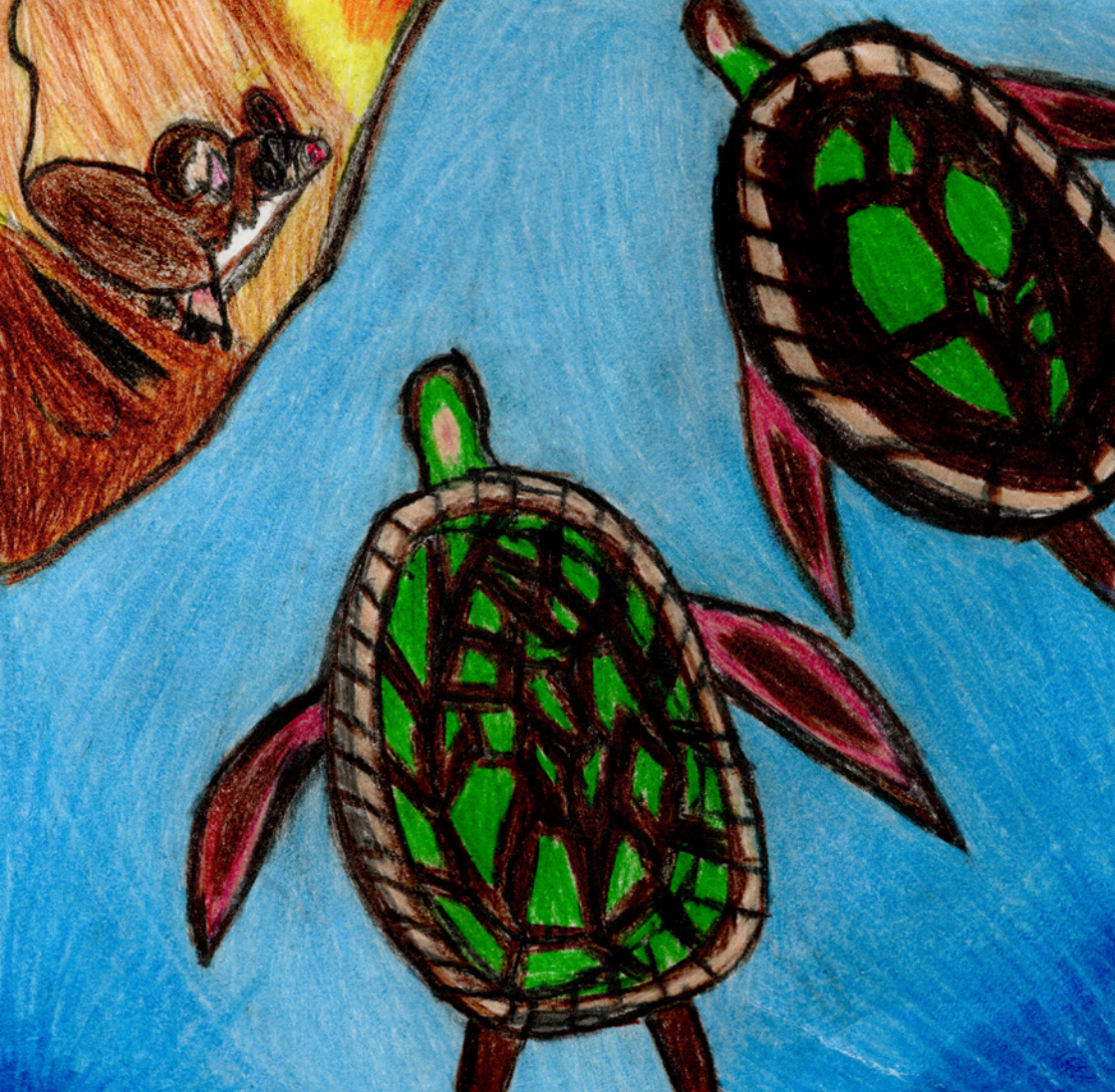


Navigating the narrow, winding *bila* (river) they made it to Denman, where they found a small eastern pygmy-possum in the banksia scrub.

"Hey there *guraa* (turtle) friends, where are you heading in such a hurry?" asked the pygmy-possum.

"Raymond Terrace," answered Mack.

"WAIT, YOU'RE GOING TO RAYMOND TERRACE!" the small eastern pygmy-possum replied in shock.



"What's wrong with Raymond Terrace?" said Emmy.

"There are wild, feral foxes along the way," the pygmy-possum said, whiter than chalk. "Not only will they try to prey upon you, but they will also destroy your nests and eat your eggs."

Thinking the eastern pygmy-possum was surely telling myths, Emmy and Mack continued on their way.



Emmy and Mack paddled down the *bila* (river) until they made it to Singleton, and guess what they saw?

"EMMY, IS THAT A F-F-FOX?!" yelled Mack.

Emmy screamed in fear. All of a sudden, the fox, who had been lying in wait, leapt into the air and rushed towards Emmy and Mack.



Just in time, Mack spotted a log that was too small for the fox to fit in, but big enough for them to hide.

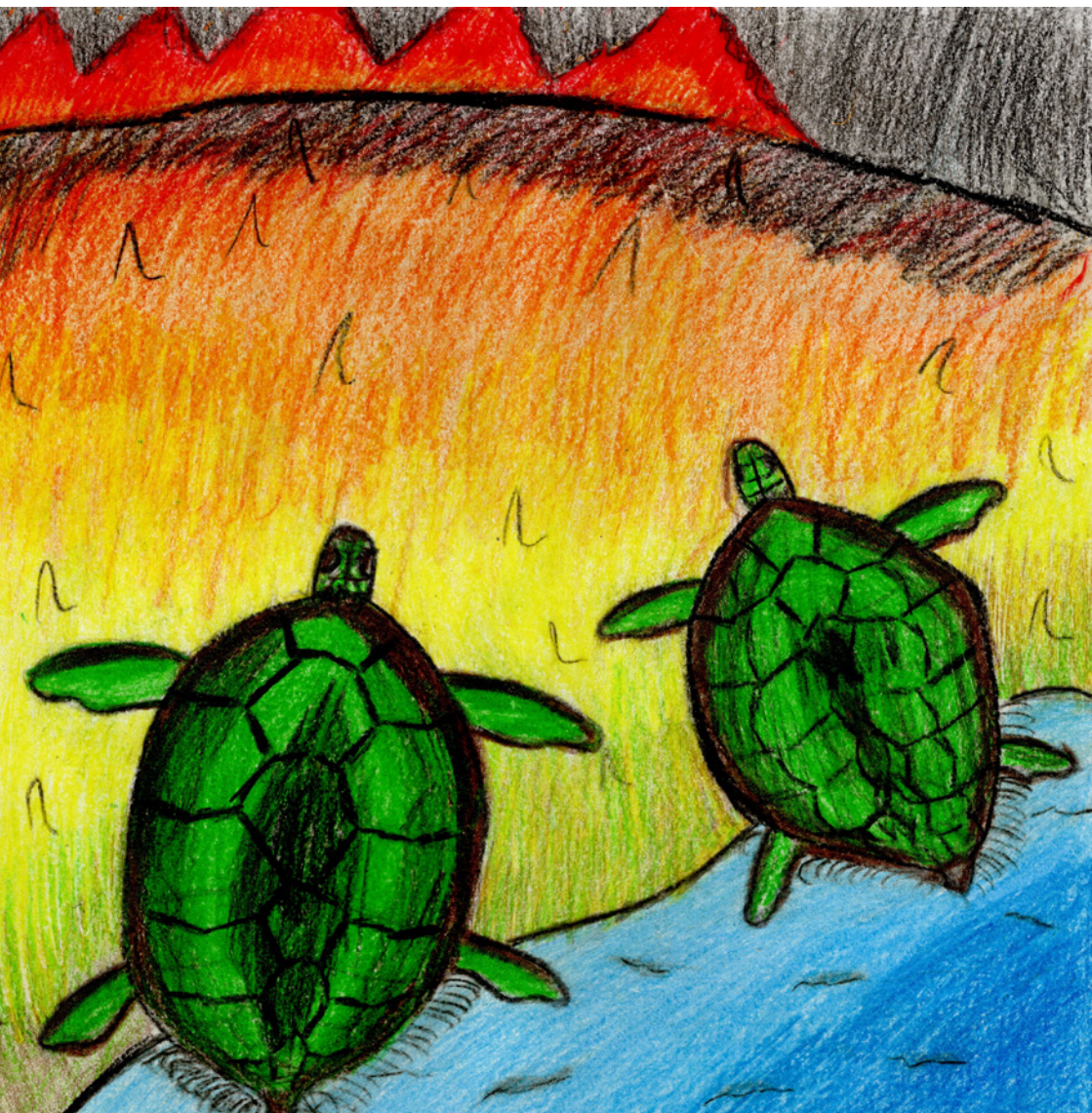
“EMMY LOOK OVER THERE!” yelled Mack and they quickly rushed to the log and hid inside.

The fox scratched and pawed at the log, trying to reach the Hunter *Bila Guraa* (Hunter River Turtles). Eventually, it became bored and frustrated and went to find some other native animal to terrorise.

Once the fox had left, Emmy and Mack were safe to leave their hiding place and return on their journey to Raymond Terrace.

Keen to see more of the *bila* (river), Emmy and Mack made it to Maitland. They decided they wanted a better view over things so they climbed the *barray* (land) on the sides of the riverbank. In the distance they saw something grey and foggy.

"Hey Mack, can you smell that?" asked Emmy. "It smells like... *watha* (fire)!"



They looked up and saw a bush *watha* (fire) approaching.

"EMMY THIS WAY!" yelled Mack and they quickly returned to the safety of the *bila* (river). They swam away from the *watha* (fire) as quickly as possible, as they both knew of the damage that bushfires could do.



Finally, tired and exhausted, Emmy and Mack completed their journey and reached Raymond Terrace. It was here that Emmy laid a clutch of 20 eggs. Nestled on the sloping banks, they rested on the *barray* (land).

But that's not where this story ends...





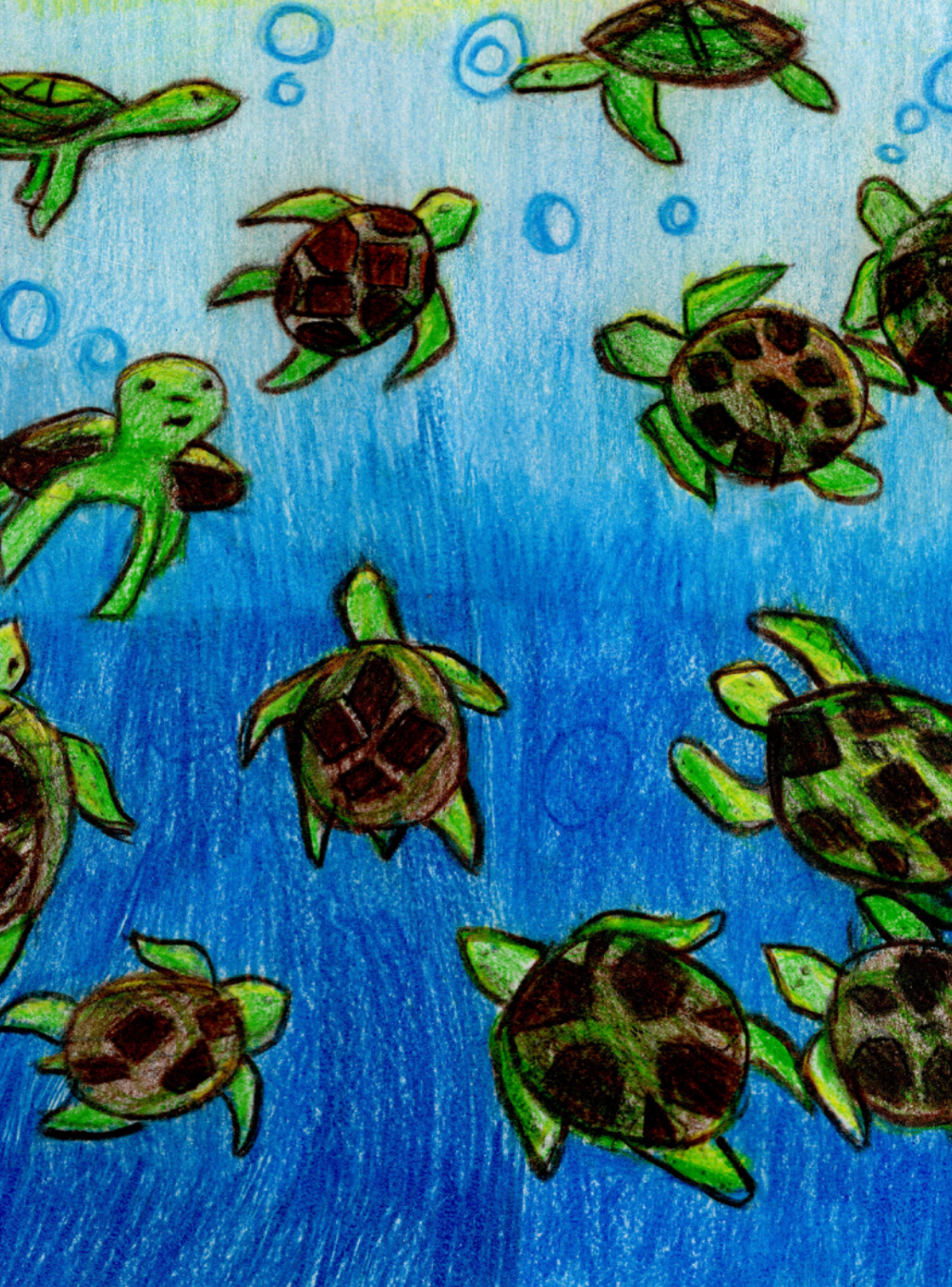
"Mack..." Emmy whispered nervously... "I can see a fox and he is going to try and eat my eggs!"

Unable to defend their eggs against the predator, Emmy and Mack could do nothing but keep their distance and watch.

Suddenly, Emmy heard another sound. "Mack, can you hear that?"

"It sounds like footsteps," said Mack.

Emmy and Mack turned their short necks and saw a *guri* (man) coming towards them. He wore a shirt with a logo that said Aussie Ark. This strange Aussie Ark man called out and made lots of noise that scared the fox away.



The *guri* (man) carefully lifted Emmy, Mack and their 20 eggs and placed them in a crate, which he carried to his car. Oh no! They had just gotten here and now they were being taken somewhere else.

The *guri* (man) drove from Raymond Terrace all the way to the Aussie Ark turtle sanctuary in the Australian Reptile Park. Once they were in the building the *guri* (man) and his friends gently took out Emmy and Mack and checked them over to make sure they were okay. When they finished, they also examined every egg closely.

After their health examination the people took Emmy, Mack and their eggs into a nice clean enclosure to look after them. 53 days later my dad hatched out of his egg, along with my aunties and uncles.

My grandparents and their hatchlings learned that they had the honour of being part of a breeding program. The idea was to give them a safe home, perfect conditions and mate them with other Hunter *Bila Guraa* (Hunter River turtle) families. The *guraa* (turtles) that were saved and raised here would then be used to help restock our wild population back in our *bila* (river).

And that's how Aussie Ark saved our family and are continuing to help save our species.

ENVIRO

stories



St Brigid's Primary School,
Raymond Terrace
Year 5 & 6 2021



Harmony Grace Griffiths,
Year 5 2021

