(SOFT GUITAR PLAYS)

SUZANNE:  
Hi, I'm Suzanne Ryan from the Balcombe Estuary Reserves Group and we're here today at the Balcombe Estuary, the most significant estuary on this side of the bay, and long with its creek line, the most unspoilt. We're here for Summer By the Sea, brought to you by Coastcare, a program of DELWP, the Department of Environment, land, Water and Planning. To begin, I'd like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners and Custodians of this land, the Bunurong of the Kulin nation and pay my respects to their Elders past and present, who still care for this land. Why are we at this spot? Well, the creatures of our story have been coming here for centuries. Shape shifters who, during their life time, change appearance five times. Snake like and nocturnal, eels are truly intriguing creatures. They spawn in remote and nutrient poor places in the seas, and no human has ever seen them reproduce. The eels of our story, first entered our estuary as tiny, little creatures, after a journey of 3,000 kilometres. They were born way up in the Coral Sea, north of Australia and helped by the ocean currents, floated and swam down the east coast of Australia. Some end up in Port Phillip Bay and they head to Balcombe Estuary at Mt Martha. This is one of the amazing mysteries, how do they know where to go? Some of them head up stream, find their way into spots way up in the catchment They climb waterfalls and dams, and they slither over the grass. Given all the effort all the effort they've gone to, to get here, we should look after them, right? A major success for BERG has been the installation of a 24 hour water quality monitor. The station gives us data on the health of the water in the estuary and will ensure a more detailed and rapid response to any environmental issues. Things like sewerage spills or overflows, events that may be harmful to the eels and you also, who may swim in the local waters. When you visit a place like this, remember to ensure that your rubbish is placed in a bin. If you see rubbish or pollutants in the estuary, use the Snap Send Solve app and report it to your local council or if you really want to get into it, become an eel friend and have fun. You don't even need to be local, just online. Join a citizen science project like Estuary or WaterWatch. All the details are available on the BERG website. Did you know that the Balcombe Estuary is one of the few naturally opening and closing estuaries in Port Phillip Bay? Why is this so significant? Because migrating eels rely on the estuary areas to adapt to salt water, before leaving on their seaward journey, returning to their spawning grounds. They take many months to adapt to the higher salinity in the lower reaches of the estuary. Any artificial opening of the estuary will interfere with the balance of fresh and salt waters at the estuary mouth, and this can be very dangerous for the eels. Researchers believe that the mature eels, once they reach the open ocean, are helped by the sea currents and swim at great depths, returning to their birth place, but it has never been proven. Now, is it about to be? BERG has contributed to an innovative citizen science program assisting researchers from the Arthur Rylah Institute with their eel satellite tracking program. Electronic transmitters were fixed to three eels migrating out of the Balcombe Estuary. This research has been undertaken to better understand the eels mysterious journey out to sea. Ecologically, eels are very important. They help regulate the population of other animals they feed on and they can be used as a bioindicator for pollution since they are long lived, spending up to 15 years in the same environment. If we continue to care for places like the Balcombe Estuary, it will ensure that the amazing life cycle of the eels continues for millennia to come.