

Hopping into nature

KIM SMITH

FROGS and people have come a hop closer at Serendip Wildlife Sanctuary near Lara.

A new \$20,000 educational exhibit 'A Frog's World' offers a frog's eye view of the world.

It features live frogs, a sound system and an interactive Web and television system.

The exhibition was designed and developed through the Alcoa Frog Watch Program, a partnership between Alcoa and the Amphibian Research Centre.

Alcoa Victorian operations director Paul Hallam said the exhibition would give school children the chance to experience "swamp life" and learn about frogs and how to help them survive.

Mr Hallam acknowledged the input from Lara and Norlane school students, saying that without their help the new exhibit would not have been possible.

Students said they were thrilled to be involved - Amber Smith from Lara Primary School said she enjoyed painting the new exhibition; Ebony Smith from Lara Secondary College said she liked frogs and had learned much about them; and little Olivia Patterson simply nodded her approval of the green creatures.

"It is a unique frog educational exhibit and around 5000 school children are expected to visit each year," Mr Hallam said.

It was officially opened by Environment and Water Minister John Thwaites, who said the exhibition further enhanced the sanctuary.

"It's generally accepted that the presence of frogs is one of the first indicators of environmental health, so anything we can do here to encourage and conserve their populations essentially equates to helping the environment," Mr Thwaites said.

Member for Lara Peter Loney described the sanctuary as one of many environmental jewels in the area that was sometimes "under-recognised".

The opening of 'A Frogs World' celebrated a decade-long partnership between Alcoa and the sanctuary.

Alcoa also announced a further \$150,000 commitment to Greening Australia Victoria, which will benefit 140ha of farmland surrounding the sanctuary.



Green friends: Environment Minister John Thwaites with Lara Primary School student Olivia Patterson. Picture: ALISON WYND