

# Rhiannon Mitchell makes waves for young Aboriginal women

**R**hiannon Mitchell, a Mununjali woman and marine science student at Southern Cross University, is making waves. She wants to change the future of Indigenous girls and women through Saltwater Sistas, a mentoring program that creates a safe, culturally appropriate place to learn about culture, wellbeing, and ocean conservation.

Based in Coffs Harbour on Gumbaynggirr Country, Saltwater Sistas conduct group beach clean-ups, mentoring, DIY workshops, Elder conversations and any activity where nature and culture is at the forefront.

"We grew up swimming in the rivers, climbing trees, playing in the bush, and coming to the beach on the weekends. Then I started Saltwater Sistas because I thought so many Aboriginal children haven't seen the ocean the way that I've been able to see it and be inspired by it," Rhiannon said.

The tight-knit group partake in numerous marine adventures, exploring local coastal environments, learning from Elders and ocean warriors and even collaborating with a museum on a marine-themed art exhibition.



Rhiannon Mitchell, a Mununjali woman, is studying Marine Science at Southern Cross University.

Rhiannon also offers one-on-one mentoring where Indigenous girls can participate in yarning, walks on Country, cultural programs, and activities that focus on achieving their goals and aspirations. The 29-year-old conservationist decided to start

studying a Bachelor of Science (Marine Systems) at Southern Cross University to enhance her knowledge about the marine world and be able to bring comprehensive expertise to her business.

"I started Saltwater Sistas

before I started studying, and then I thought, I want to do a degree to be really knowledgeable in this. It's something that I'm super passionate about, so it's really cool when you can study something that you really love.

"The National Marine Science

Centre is great, I spend a lot of time in the aquarium there and the facilities are amazing."

Now in her third year and on the way to achieve her dream of becoming a marine biologist, Rhiannon has been recognised for her work in numerous ways, including as an ABC 2021 Trailblazer. The award celebrates young people bringing about change in their communities.

"I feel very lucky as a young Aboriginal woman to be supported and to have a business because 20 years ago that wouldn't have happened - it wasn't long ago that Indigenous people didn't even have rights," she said.

"We are in a place where I feel like the country is changing and young Aboriginal people are standing up and saying hey, we want to have a business and share our culture and our knowledge. I think the wider community is listening, and I find that super powerful."

You can catch Rhiannon on the SCU Buzz Podcast and keep up to date with all of Rhiannon's work at [saltwatersistas.com.au](http://saltwatersistas.com.au) or follow their Instagram page @saltwater\_\_sistas



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