The Search For Life In The Universe As A Context For Developing Education Curriculum Material For Science Teachers In Australia.

Les Vozzo; SETI Australia Centre
Ken Silburn; SETI Australia Centre
David Tweed; SETI Australia Centre
Carol Oliver; SETI Australia Centre

One of the challenges in teaching science to secondary students in Australia is to make it relevant and exciting. This challenge has been taken up by scientists and science educators at the University of Western Sydney, Macarthur and science teachers in the south-west area of Sydney. In 1996 and 1997 over 20 science teachers introduced and evaluated a range of materials from the Life in the Universe science curriculum produced by the SETI Institute. These materials provided stimulating activities that motivated student interest in the search for extra-terrestrial life in the Universe. This paper describes the approach taken by two teams of science teachers in developing two teaching units based on the new NSW 7-10 Science syllabus. The units use SETI as a context. The Stage 4 (7-8) unit explores how life may be detected on Mars or other planetary objects in our solar system, and the Stage 5 (9-10) unit explores the nature of our universe and the possibility of extra-terrestrial intelligence beyond our solar system. The first phase of the project resulted in the publication of both units on the NSW Department of Education and Training and the UWS Macarthur web sites. A second outcome has been the production of Internet resources that gives science teachers access to up-to-date scientific research in bioastronomy. It is envisaged that the units and supporting resources will provide a framework for adapting two books from the Life in the Universe series for use in Australian schools in the year 2000.