

STEM woman inspires

BY TOM O'CALLAGHAN

BENDIGO'S new superstar of STEM stops cyber attacks with computer programs used around the world.

Stef Cola is among 60 women branded heroes of their science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) fields - a list that also includes a superbug destroyer and penguin science detective.

Federal science and industry minister Ed Husic revealed the Science & Technology Australia list geared to fight "huge skills shortages" convulsing the industry by drawing diverse young Australians in.

"The need to boost diversity in our science, technology, engineering and mathematics sector is urgent," Mr Husic said.

Ms Cola is a trailblazer leading a software engineering team on data security and cyber security programs, Science & Technology Australia chief executive Miha Schubert said.

"It's so exciting that Bendigo now has its very own Superstar of STEM," she said.

"Outside of the capital cities that pathway to an exciting STEM career can be harder for people to see.

"So having someone like Stef, who is a regionally-based Superstar of STEM and so passionate about

encouraging others, will be inspirational for Bendigo's young people."

Many girls are interested in STEM at the start of their teenage years but federal government tracking surveys show they often lose confidence and interest as they get older.

Girls cannot be what they can't see, Ms Schubert said.

"By becoming highly visible role models in the media, these Superstars of STEM are showing our diverse next generations of young people - especially our girls and non-binary kids - that STEM is for them," she said.

Ms Cola joins 14 other new Victorians including superbug fighter Jaclyn Pearson, who is working out how to improve antibiotics.

"We now face a situation where common infections may again become untreatable because of drug resistant bacteria," Dr Pearson said recently in media for her workplace the Hudson Institute of Medical Research.

Meanwhile, Paula Wasiak investigates the secret lives of little penguins for Phillip Island Nature Parks. She says she helps people fall in love with an animal many think is the animal kingdom's clown.

Little penguins are actually fierce apex predators and long distance swimmers who help scientists track ocean health.



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Bendigo Advertiser, Bendigo



Bendigo resident Stef Cola has been named a Superstar of STEM for her leadership and to show girls and non-binary children career possibilities. Picture is supplied.