

Your Environment
Levy in action

Environment Levy Annual Report 2020/21



 **Sunshine Coast**
COUNCIL

From our Mayor and Environment and Liveability Portfolio Councillors

Through the Environment Levy, which is contributed by all ratepayers, Council is delivering a wide range of projects, programs and initiatives to maintain and enhance the natural assets and liveability of our Sunshine Coast.

Importantly, much of this work is undertaken in partnership with dedicated landholders, volunteers, community groups and researchers who help us preserve our outstanding natural environment to ensure our region remains a great place to live, work and play for current and future generations. These activities continue to be a high priority for our Council and are a cornerstone of our partnership approach to maintaining the facets of our landscape and lifestyle that are so highly valued by our community.

The work that is supported by our Environment Levy is also instrumental to advancing the objectives of our Banksia award-winning* Environment and Liveability Strategy (ELS). The ELS provides a clear vision and forward plan for our Sunshine Coast to 2041 – one which is responsive to change while seeking to preserve our natural assets and creating a legacy that will benefit our community for decades to come.

Each year the Environment Levy program seeks to build on previous successes and identify new project opportunities. The 2020/21 year is no different and we are proud to highlight some of those achievements in this annual report.

*Mayor Mark Jamieson
Councillor Peter Cox
Councillor Maria Suarez*

**The Banksia Sustainability Awards are the longest-running sustainability awards globally and are regarded as the most prestigious of their kind in Australia.*

Where did your Environment Levy go in 2020/21?

Total spend: \$12.8m

Building our knowledge (monitoring and research)

\$500k

Delivering on-ground environmental projects

\$1.2m

Engaging and supporting the Sunshine Coast community

\$1.5m

\$2.3m

Sunshine Coast Council acknowledges the traditional Country of the Kabi Kabi Peoples and the Jinibara Peoples of the coastal plains and hinterlands of the Sunshine Coast and recognise that these have always been places of cultural, spiritual, social and economic significance.

We wish to pay respect to their Elders – past, present and emerging – and acknowledge the important role Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continue to play within the Sunshine Coast community.



Buying, protecting and enhancing environmentally significant land

\$7.3m

2020/21 Highlights

- Six properties, **242** hectares, **\$5.6m** invested
- **\$590k** to **20** Partnership community groups
- **\$229k** Landholder Environment Grants to **68** landholders
- **22,000** seedlings, **87** nestboxes for Land for Wildlife members
- **4** new Voluntary Conservation Agreements (bringing total to **88**-protecting **1320 ha**)
- **\$1m** coastal dunal rehabilitation and shoreline erosion management
- **\$35k** riparian restoration (**35,000+** trees maintained)
- **\$477k** pest action and community engagement
- **Over 1000** attendees at the 7th Annual Australasian Bat Night
- **\$131k** river and estuary monitoring across **4** catchments

Other environmental operational activities including invasive plant, animal and conservation estate management



LARGEST **environment reserve** CREATED

This year, Environment Levy funds supported the acquisition of an additional 94 hectares at Verrierdale.

This latest acquisition expands the Doonan Creek Environment Reserve network, establishing it as the largest environment reserve in our local government area – now totalling 450 hectares. This reserve network, largely made up of previous Environment Levy acquisitions, has been the focus of significant investment over recent years including extensive community engagement to develop the Doonan Creek Environment Reserve Landscape Plan. This plan provides a foundation to guide public access and the reserve management into the future. Since 2014, more than 40,200 native trees have been planted in this reserve network through offsets and community events.

Doonan Creek Environment Reserve is located in heart of the Maroochy-Noosa Wallum Corridor, a unique area containing diverse remnant habitats of coastal lowlands and floodplain. The newest addition to the reserve network contains very high biodiversity and ecological values. It will assist to maintain ecological connectivity and consolidate important habitat areas.

The property comprises significant remnant vegetation including threatened rainforest and wetland communities and important wallum vegetation communities. It also provides habitat for threatened species such as the eastern ground parrot (*Pezoporus wallicus wallicus*) and Sunshine Coast myrtle (Lenwebbia species 'Blackall Range').

This expanded environment reserve further consolidates Council's network of protected areas north of the Maroochy River – complementing the values of Council's Blue Heart Sunshine Coast project and providing future opportunities for conservation, recreation and education.

The reserve is located within the traditional boundaries identified for the Kabi Kabi people. The name *Doonan* comes from an Aboriginal word meaning 'leaf of a tree'. The whole reserve and surrounding landscape has evidence of past activities of the Kabi Kabi traditional owners making this area culturally and historically significant.



Sunshine Coast myrtle (Lenwebbia species 'Blackall Range')





Eastern ground parrot
(Pezoporus wallicus wallicus)

The eastern ground parrot is a distinctive, slender parrot that is rarely seen. Unlike other parrot species and as its name suggests, the ground parrot lives almost entirely on the ground amongst heathland or sedgeland vegetation communities – feeding on a range of seeds from sedges, grasses, herbs and shrubs.

The ground parrot is a threatened species impacted by habitat loss and predation by invasive animals. They are found in scattered populations along the east coast of Australia.



Blue Heart Sunshine Coast



Blue Heart Sunshine Coast is an innovative, partnership-based project, committed to sustainable and adaptive floodplain management.

The project area comprises more than 5000 hectares in the Maroochy River catchment. At its core is more than 1400 hectares of public land.

The Blue Heart is a unique partnership between Sunshine Coast Council, the Department of Environment and Science and Unitywater. In 2020/21 the Environment Levy supported the project to:

- acquire 38 hectares of land for habitat protection and enhancement
- monitor fish assemblages and crustaceans at Coolum Creek Wetland
- engage with Blue Heart landholders to better understand their history, values and concerns for the floodplain area
- commence a two-year carbon sequestration and soil accretion research project in partnership with the University of the Sunshine Coast.



Blue Heart Sunshine Coast received \$210,000

through the **Department of Environment and Science Land Restoration Fund** to deliver a blue carbon pilot project on an Environment Levy reserve. This project will help demonstrate how land restoration projects can provide opportunities to capture and store carbon within estuarine wetland vegetation communities.

It will also bring us a step closer to understanding more about blue carbon farming for private landowners.

Awarded the **Cities Powers Partnership 2020 Climate Awards**

Regional Innovation WINNER



Restoring habitat at Currimundi Creek



Planting phase in 2017

Currimundi Creek is located to the south of the Mooloolah River Catchment floodplain – one of our five major river catchments. The Currimundi Creek sub-catchment is fed by a network of streams with their origins in the highly modified areas of Meridan Plains and Little Mountain. Currimundi Creek discharges into the ocean via Currimundi Lake, a natural, dynamic lake system important for both habitat and recreational values.

To enhance riparian habitat and support improved water quality outcomes for Currimundi Creek, in 2017 Council commenced a four-year riparian restoration project at a key site located along a northern arm of the creek. A wide variety of native trees and plants have been established on the site including broad-leaved paperbark (*Melaleuca quinquenervia*), cheese tree (*Glochidion sumatranum*) and blue gum (*Eucalyptus tereticornis*).



Eastern sedgefrog (*Litoria fallax*)

In addition to reducing nutrient and sediment runoff, the site is now home to a number of key species such as the eastern sedgefrog (*Litoria fallax*), northern brown bandicoot (*Isodon macrourus*) and the red-backed fairy wren (*Malurus melanocephalus*).



Variegated fairy wren (*Malurus lamberti*)

Supporting community conservation initiatives

Since 2005, long term Land for Wildlife members Kevin and Kerryyn have worked to restore and enhance habitat areas of their Ninderry property. Their property adjoins Mt Ninderry Bushland Reserve which forms part of an important core habitat area that links to protected areas in Eumundi and Verrierdale to the north. These habitat areas are essential for wildlife movement and refuge across the landscape.

Committed to enhancing their properties biodiversity values, Kevin and Kerryyn have undertaken extensive invasive plant management, targeting species such as lantana (*Lantana Camara*) and broad-leaf privet (*Ligustrum lucidum*).

Private landholders play an important role in the protection and enhancement of our region's natural areas. Environment Levy funds contribute to conservation partnership initiatives such as Land for Wildlife and Voluntary Conservation Agreement programs, providing native plant seedlings, nest boxes and education to landholders to support them in their conservation efforts.


Over time, thousands of native plant species endemic to the Ninderry area have been re-established across the property and natural regeneration has further enhanced habitat restoration efforts.

The property now supports a growing abundance of native wildlife including the variegated fairy wren (*Malurus lamberti*), eastern sedge frog (*Litoria fallax*), swamp wallaby (*Wallabia bicolor*) and short-beaked echidna (*Tachyglossus aculeatus*).

Educating our future leaders

300 students from 25 schools

took part in the 2021 Kids in Action Program – Council's award-winning environmental education program for school-aged children. The program aims to grow a culture that values caring for the natural world. The 2021 theme explored new ways of understanding, appreciating and engaging with hopeful sustainability concepts, models and wisdoms that are both traditional and contemporary.



Our special shorebirds

The Sunshine Coast provides important habitat for resident and migratory shorebirds – one of the world's most threatened group of birds. Shorebirds or 'waders' inhabit coastal shore areas such as beaches, sandbanks, mudflats, rocky areas, coastal lagoons and tidal wetlands. Our resident shorebird species include a range of oyster catchers, snipes, stilts, plovers and sandpipers who gather in important habitat areas in the lower Maroochy River, Pumicestone Passage, Currimundi Lake and Golden Beach areas.

In the summer months they are joined by thousands of migratory species such as the critically endangered bar-tailed godwit (*Limosa lapponica*), Pacific golden plover (*Pluvialis fulva*) and eastern curlew (*Numenius madagascariensis*). These migratory species visit our region's coastal areas to forage for food and rest before flying up to 25,000 km to their breeding grounds in the northern hemisphere.



Eastern curlew
(*Numenius madagascariensis*)

Through the Shorebird Conservation Action Plan, Council is seeking to raise the profile and increase awareness of migratory and resident shorebirds.


The Environment Levy has supported the project to:

- complete surveys to identify current migratory and resident shorebird habitats in our region and their species abundance to inform conservation action
- produce Shorebirds of the Sunshine Coast – a video series to educate and inform the community about key shorebird species of the Sunshine Coast
- complete a shorebird mural at the Esplanade, Golden Beach by local artist Steven Bordonaro that features five of our region's shorebird species to raise awareness of the importance of their protection.



Pacific golden plover
(*Pluvialis fulva*)

Trialling new technology to manage weeds



In partnership with the Department Transport and Main Roads, Council engaged a local start-up company to trial drone technology to undertake broad acre weed control. The trial site was 10ha of public land heavily infested with groundsel bush (*Baccharis halimifolia*). The use of drones proved more successful than traditional methods of herbicide application and slashing, making for faster, more efficient control of the restricted invasive species across the difficult to access land. The trials assisted to improve our understanding of resource requirements, limitations and regulatory parameters of this technology as Council seeks to improve weed control options for landholders.




Caring for our carers

Wildlife carers play an important role in conserving biodiversity by volunteering their time to support our injured or orphaned native animals. The nature of this work often sees these individuals experiencing significant financial, social, physical and psychological impacts.

The Environment Levy supported new 'Caring for our Carers' wellbeing and resilience workshops to provide carers with techniques and resources to better cope with burn out, compassion fatigue, stress management and other demands associated with wildlife rehabilitation during 'trauma season'. Facilitated by clinical psychologist and world leading authority in veterinary wellbeing,

Dr Nadine Hamilton, these workshops have been positively received by our wildlife carers.



Engaging our community

In 2020/21 the Coastal Discovery Van reached almost **2000 people – attending 14 schools and seven community events** to provide the community an opportunity to learn about our coastal processes and ecosystems. Environment Levy funds supported the development of learning resources for the van which has included the production of a wave flume tank to educate people about wave impacts and coastal protection, as well as various other resources including online videos on coastal processes and ecosystems.

Transforming the Sunshine Coast

The health of our environment is critical to supporting our diverse plants and animals and is fundamental to the Sunshine Coast way of life.

Maintaining the health of our natural areas is a priority for Council as we realise our vision for the Sunshine Coast: **Australia's most sustainable region – healthy, smart, creative.**

The Environment Levy Program is a key funding source supporting the delivery of our Banksia Award winning Environment and Liveability Strategy - providing the long-term strategic direction to guide growth and shape the Sunshine Coast for future generations, by delivering a healthy environment and liveable Sunshine Coast.

Council thanks its Environment Levy partners, including private landholders, community groups and research organisations for their contribution to protecting and enhancing our natural areas.



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August 2021 edition.

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Acknowledgements

Council wishes to thank all contributors and stakeholders involved in the development of this document.

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G. Mattner – Pied oyster catcher,
Pumicestone passage.

Page 3:

S. Bignell – Autumn sunrise over Mount
Coolum, Maroochy River.
P. Evans – Kingfisher, Mooloolaba.

Page 5:

D. Townsend – Eastern ground parrot.

Page 6:

J. O'Connor – Eastern sedgefrog.
K&K. Marnane - Variegated fairy wren.

Page 7:

Z. Daguiar – Pacific golden plovers.
R. Inglis – Eastern curlew.