



Port Phillip EcoCentre Annual Report

2020-21



Contents

Mission, Vision, Values, Outcomes	3
President's Report	4
Connect	6
Strategies and Success indicators	6
Story of Change: How lockdowns expanded the EcoCentre's inclusive community	7
Connect: Early years, schools and youth	8
Early years education and Nature Play	8
Excursions and Incursions	9
Expert in Residence	10
Outdoor Connections	10
Story of Change: The power of finding out you're not alone in caring	11
Connect: Community	12
Corporate volunteering	12
Culture & Nature Festival	13
Multifaith and Multicultural Coastcare	14
Deep Time Walks	14
Act	15
Strategies and Success indicators	15
Story of Change: Angling for a healthy bay and healthy fish	16
Act: Schools and youth	17
Tomorrow's Leaders for Sustainability	17
ResourceSmart Schools	17
Teacher and student leadership	18
Story of change: How volunteers putting species on the map protects biodiversity	19
Story of Change: How Keith's walk across the whole United Kingdom led him to the EcoCentre	20
Act: Community	21
Port Phillip Baykeeper – Community collaborations	21
Community Coastal Revegetation	22
NatureSpot	23
Community gardening and greening	24
Global Melbourne	25
Living Water Workbees	26
Sunscreen and Bay Marine Life	27
St Kilda Repair Cafe	28
Speaking engagements and seminars	28
Story of change: Sparking global student research to stop microplastic pollution	29
Transform	30
Strategies and Success indicators	30
Story of Change: How citizen science delivers more than data	31
Port Phillip Baykeeper – research	32
Clean Bay Blueprint	33
Futureproofing the Port Phillip Baykeeper	34
Emissions Petal ratings scheme	35
Advocating for change	36
Enable	37
Strategies and Success indicators	37
Redevelopment: An EcoCentre where we all belong	38
Community investments & strategic activities	39
Membership and reach	40
Awards	41
Setting our Strategic Plan 2021–2024	42
EcoCentre Affiliates in action	43
EcoCentre Partnerships and People	50
Financial Performance	58

We acknowledge the First Peoples, in particular the Bunurong, Boon Wurrung, Wathaurong and Wurundjeri language groups, the traditional and continuing custodians of the lands and waters for EcoCentre activities. We acknowledge Elders past, present and emerging; and that sovereignty was never ceded. We uphold respect and care for the land and children of the land.





Vision:

An empowered community actively cultivating long-term environmental wellbeing.



Mission:

We build relationships to inspire, educate and demonstrate sustainable environmental practice and strengthen people's connection to the natural world.



Values:

- Respect for our First Peoples and their cultures
- Integrity
- Inclusiveness
- Reciprocity

Outcomes:

From 2018–2021, we worked to achieve four outcomes:



Connect

People are more connected with, value and interact with their local ecosystems.



Act

Individuals and groups take action that protects and restores their environment.



Transform

Our partnerships and networks influence positive systemic environmental changes.



Enable

The EcoCentre is an efficient and effective, forward thinking organisation with an excellent reputation.





With the increased threats of climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic creating a more troubled and distressed world, the work of the EcoCentre presents a point of promise and inspiration.

We at the EcoCentre are passionate about supporting people to take action together, and about the right of current and future generations to share a flourishing planet. The increasing importance of our work continues to inspire and lead the Committee of Management, staff and volunteers of the EcoCentre. The mantra of thinking globally while acting locally seems ever more pertinent.

The EcoCentre's work covers education, citizen science, community action and professional advice. We work in classrooms, on beaches, in parks, in the bush and in boardrooms, offices, laboratories and lecture halls and increasingly, we are working online. You might be surprised when you read this report by the range, scope and type of work we do as well as the outcomes that have resulted from that work.

The challenges of COVID-19 have meant that for a considerable part of the past year we were unable to work face to face. The situation demanded innovation, patience and creativity in the EcoCentre's planning and operations, yet we lost little in terms of engagement, action and collaboration:

- We had 16,515 program participants.
- Over 68,200 digital users accessed EcoCentre resources, blogs and films.
- More than 14,000 volunteer hours were worked, which included the planting of over 6,100 coastal plants.

We worked with 176 schools and early learning centres, with more than 11,100 students engaged between online and on-ground programs.

Additionally, we worked with 115 partner groups, including Scouts, universities, Friends groups, health services and government agencies.

Throughout these pages you will read about many COVID-inspired innovations in programs and in the ways in which they were delivered. I would like to highlight a few of those here.

- » Volunteers are important to our work and community and this year there were many instances of remote volunteering, including **NatureSpot** species monitoring, growing indigenous seedlings at home, and adding subtitles in a variety of languages to educational film clips.
- » The 15th **School Sustainability Festival** moved online for the first time, with teenage keynote speakers and creative workshops about biodiversity, waterways and waste avoidance, presented by young people. The format allowed wider engagement, including involving homeschool families and First Nations students from remote regional Northern Territory.
- » We ran our first **Culture & Nature Festival** – online – which comprised a week-long program of events and films, plus downloadable resources, enabling us to share nature connection practices from 16 cultural backgrounds.

An important aspect of our work is professional advice to government and other groups in a range of policy-focused arenas. This past year we have prepared written submissions and participated in consultative committees and advisory panels to contribute to positive outcomes on policy for waste, water, climate action, biodiversity, citizen science and 'green and blue infrastructure' for a growing population.

As part of planning for our **Port Phillip Baykeeper** work, during the year we conducted roundtable discussions with 29 stakeholders about the future of Port Phillip Bay. As well, our landmark report *Clean Bay Blueprint: Microplastics in Melbourne* was released and received very favourable media and other interest. We have discussed the report findings with 75 government and business leaders to date.

The big news this past year is that the Victorian Government matched the funding committed by the City of Port Phillip for a new EcoCentre facility in the St Kilda Botanical Gardens. We are excited and grateful that these two levels of government have recognised our need and the important contribution we make to the community, the environment and the goal of sustainability through the work we have been doing for 22 years and will continue to do into the future.

The new *Strategic Plan and Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for 2021–2024*, which we have developed through a detailed and consultative process this past year, will provide the framework for our work and for reporting on the outcomes of it.

As an independent, community-managed incorporated organisation, the EcoCentre relies on funding to conduct its work and each year receives funding from many sources. I would like to thank all the organisations and individuals who purchased our services and expertise, provided grants or donated funds or other resources to the EcoCentre.

We are most grateful to our primary partner, the City of Port Phillip, which supports us by providing both our premises at the St Kilda Botanical Gardens at a peppercorn rent and resources for operations and programs. Thanks also to the Australian Government for grants and JobKeeper funds, the Victorian Government, Bayside City Council, City of Stonnington, Helen Macpherson Trust, Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology University and to the many other organisations listed on page 50.

Thanks, too, to all the individual donors and to the family of the bequest we received. This has allowed us to set

up a Future Fund, which provides a buffer in the current challenging times – especially during our rebuild – and another pathway to strategic climate and environmental action now and for the long term.

I would like to thank the committed, skilled and generous members of the Committee of Management and in particular, the two members who resigned this year. Harpreet Sidhu as Treasurer expertly led us through the financial challenges of the first year of COVID-19, and Geoffrey Love, who served for a decade as a Committee of Management member and volunteered in so many other ways too, particularly within flood-prone Elster Creek communities.

I extend special thanks to the dedicated, hardworking, highly skilled and wonderful staff led by April Seymore, our brilliant Executive Officer. The flexibility, creativity and strength of the team during this year has been outstanding and highly appreciated by the Committee of Management, participants and partners.

And significantly, thanks to the participants, partners, Affiliate organisations, supporters and volunteers for your involvement and support.

Together, all of us are doing extraordinary collaborative work in our local environments. We are connecting and inspiring people to care for our land, water, wildlife and wellbeing as we work towards a healthy, thriving and resilient planet where humans live in balance with the natural world. I am proud to be a part of this team and to work with inspiring and dedicated people in the exemplary and dynamic EcoCentre, on projects that have never been more important than they are now for the environment, people and the planet.

Pam O'Neil

President





423
community events
supported

'Through my EcoCentre involvement, I have more hope for the future, and I feel others in my community care about the environment as much as me. I feel less isolated and more connected with the local community.'

– Adrienne, EcoCentre volunteer

Outcome: People are more connected with, value and interact with their local ecosystems.

Strategies

Place-based learning. Develop and deliver dynamic, place-based learning for formal and informal education.

Tailored engagement. Engage a variety of participants and groups and tailor programs to their needs.

Highlight interconnections. Highlight and demonstrate the interconnection between catchments, urban ecology, Port Phillip Bay and our daily lives.

Acknowledge First Peoples. Integrate Kulin Nation cultural knowledge into our programs.

Activities in 2020-2021

Activities this year included Nature Play, Excursions and Incursions, Help Save Sam Seadragon, Corporate Volunteering, Culture & Nature Festival, Deep Time Walks, Multicultural and Multifaith Coastcare.

Success indicators

Participants report increased knowledge and awareness of local ecosystems		Participants plan to spend more time in nature as a result of their EcoCentre experience	
89% Target	94% Actual	87% Target	97% Actual
Participants have a greater connection to their local environment		Target: At least	Actual: 4+
87% Target	92% Actual	Stories of Change	stories collected; two shared here



我们美丽的家

notre magnifique maison



nosso lindo lair

ngôi nhà tuyệt đẹp của chúng ta



Story of Change: How lockdowns expanded the EcoCentre's inclusive community

Humans are all equally dependent on a healthy planet but communities often have unequal access to nature and experience disproportionate environmental risks. The EcoCentre's value of inclusiveness has always been embodied through programs and partnerships, from creating community gardens in social housing, to leadership programs at specialist schools, our **Culture & Nature Festival** and increasing multilingual resources. We seek many cross-sectoral perspectives, collaborating to ensure effective education and action, and, since 1999, thousands of community meals and cuppas together under the EcoCentre tree have nourished deep connections between neighbours and strangers.

'I've made many friends with people I never would have met outside of the EcoCentre garden,' says volunteer Mick Meehan. 'The epidemic of loneliness in Australia is spreading and in uncertain times, the inclusiveness and acceptance of the garden group has bolstered every one of us.'

To our surprise, COVID-19 lockdowns actually further expanded our community. Regional students booked online excursions and homeschoolers tuned in for the **School Sustainability Festival** online. We facilitated Scouts meetings with MPs and mayors over Zoom to tackle the problem of microplastic pollution. Attendance for our monthly calls for Australian Waterkeepers more than doubled, enriching knowledge sharing and strategic coordination between regional and urban watersheds. Program overhauls due to the impact of COVID led to the EcoCentre facilitating workshops within the network of TAFEs, council officers and health workers specialising in migrant and multicultural communities.

New healthcare providers enrolled in programming after EcoCentre Education Manager, Dr Cécile van der Burgh, presented to Victoria's Youth Affairs Council, discussing how we adapted outdoor youth programming into online outreach. Young people and families from

Headspace Bentleigh and Eastern Health returned for multiple EcoCentre engagements, inspired by the wildlife knowledge and passion of our educators. 'I have been left with such a feeling of empowerment,' wrote Joseph Borellini from Headspace Bentleigh. 'The discussion about systemic change, intertwined with the individual choice for action, was powerful.'

Although lockdowns limited Victorians to their own backyards, restrictions also opened our opportunities for which distance is no issue: immersion in local nature, and virtual workshops. The resulting conversations launched creative new healthcare, multifaith, youth, all-abilities and multicultural projects for the year ahead. Many projects, like **NatureSpace** and **Nature & Neighbours**, will blend online sessions with EcoCentre's signature immersive, outdoor hands-on experiences. The result is a rich tapestry of mutual learning, sharing, changemaking and connecting in a more inclusive community.



Connect:

Early years, schools and youth

Early years education and Nature Play

Nature-based play helps and excites children of all ages. Research demonstrates health and psychological benefits for young people who regularly spend time playing outdoors. Designing 'managed risk' into a child's play builds coordination, confidence and resilience while developing cognitive abilities.

EcoCentre **Nature Play** activities restarted in January 2021, immersing children in sensory experiences with the living elements of their local environment at kindergartens, early learning centres (ELCs), the EcoCentre gardens or a local beach or reserve. This year, children participated in activities aligned to the Early Years Learning Framework, with our most popular being **Edible and Indigenous Gardens, Sensory Gardens** and **The Miniature World of Insects**.

The EcoCentre delivered a series of 12 on-site incursions at Poets Grove Family and Children's Centre, funded by Junior Landcare, with children learning about local nocturnal wildlife as well as building and installing 12 microbat nest tubes. We also hosted the launch of the City of Port Phillip **Seedlings Nature Playgroup** at the St Kilda Botanic Gardens.

During remote learning in terms three and four, 2020, our two free video programs, **Worm School (Online)** and **The Miniature World of Insects (Online)**, continued to support early learning teachers to explore local environments and gardens with their students. **Help Save Sam Seadragon** was a popular online incursion for kinder kids to learn about creatures in our Bay and the impact of plastic pollution on the food chain.

The EcoCentre delivered a well-received **Nature Play and Garden Design** professional development workshop to 12 ELCs. We look forward to continuing our work with ELC staff teams to build sector capacity for nature play and outdoor learning.

'Thanks for all your wonderful resources and the gentle and inspiring way you talk to children. We hear the children talking amongst themselves about collecting insect specimens and building worm habitat. I also loved being told, "I got a bug and bee hotel for my birthday" from a 4-year-old!'

— Karen Bonson, Program Leader,
Kensington Community Children's Co-operative



Excursions and incursions

Our popular **School Excursion** program was put on hold from July to December in 2020 due to COVID restrictions. To support our network of schools during remote learning, our Education team, supported by JobKeeper, developed and delivered a brand-new suite of 14 free, online programs focusing on marine biodiversity, urban biodiversity and sustainable living. Topics included **Sharks and Rays of Port Phillip Bay** with our captivating marine palaeontologist, Ben Francischelli; **Habitat for Urban Wildlife**, which had options for either a nest box or gardening focus; noticing more in your local patch through **Fantastic Fungi** or **Intro to Birdwatching**; **A Future Without Waste**, featuring zero-waste ideas for home and school; **Litter in Waterways**, tackling the problem with plastic; and a range of other subjects. In total, 7,098 students participated in online incursions in 2020–2021.

School excursions resumed in term one, 2021, navigating three lockdowns between January and June and engaging 655 students in activities unique to St Kilda Pier, West Beach and St Kilda Botanical Gardens. Our excursion activities aligned with the Victorian Curriculum and Science Technology Engineering Arts and Maths (STEAM) learning outcomes. Sessions on marine ecosystems, human impacts and species adaptations remain staple favourites, with related new curriculum being introduced for excursions at Elsternwick Park Nature Reserve.

'I really appreciated how well you spoke with your very young audience — perfectly pitched for their level and interest!'

*– Sallyanne Craig, kindergarten teacher,
Lauriston Girls' School*

'We got way more connected to nature!'

– Scarlett, Year 5/6, Port Melbourne Primary School

Victoria's marine emblem features in the EcoCentre's newest primary school and ELC incursion program, in the form of a giant puppet. The **Help Save Sam Seadragon** incursion inspires students about the extraordinary wildlife living in Port Phillip Bay and addresses the problems plastics pose to our marine life. The incursion offers solutions students can employ to reduce those impacts and promote best practice in schools as well as getting their friends and families involved. The incursion was included in our online incursions program and presented to thousands of students across Victoria.

Help Save Sam Seadragon was supported by the Victorian Government through the Port Phillip Bay Fund and will remain part of the EcoCentre school program offerings. Together with the Sharks and Rays of Port Phillip Bay, and online snorkelling, Sam the Seadragon featured in **National Science Week**, at the virtual **Day by the Bay Festival** and was also offered to mental health organisations working with youth and families during lockdown.

The EcoCentre's **Bay Leaders Program** engaged over 1,391 students and 18 schools in an action-learning leadership program that connects students and teachers to Port Phillip Bay and its catchments using STEAM curriculum, leadership training and on-ground Bay health actions. This program was proudly supported by the Victorian Government through the Port Phillip Bay Fund and was completed in November 2020.



11,117

total students engaged

176

**schools and early
learning centres involved**





Expert in Residence

Our unique **Expert in Residence** program tailors a specific school's environmental education across curriculum priorities at key year levels, drawing on local ecosystems and histories. Students and their teachers have an opportunity to explore sustainability through knowledge, values and actions across a diverse range of subjects and teaching modes.

The EcoCentre worked with Albert Park College on its Year 9 **Student Inquiry Citizen Science Program**, giving 270 students an opportunity to participate in a series of four citizen science excursions delivered on Sandridge Beach, encompassing shell surveys, fauna surveys, litter audits, beach profiling and sand sampling.

In Elwood, St Columba's Primary School students explored the unique marine ecology of Port Phillip Bay and its connection to inland waterways through their **STEAM Clean the Bay Program**, supported by the Port Phillip

Bay Fund and including an Expert in Residence program. Students participated in a range of on-site and online learning experiences. The students completed their final milestones of the program by installing tailor-made wooden signage in local Boon Wurrung language in the school grounds and highlighting iconic local wildlife species such as the short-finned eel (*iilk*).

Building on St Columba's commitment to environmental care, the school worked with EcoCentre educators to deliver **Supporting Native Wildlife in Elwood**. Funded by the Communities Environment Program, this project supported arboreal wildlife habitat on the school grounds, with a planting of local native trees and shrubs and a series of incursions for students. A [self-guided wildlife walk brochure](#) was also developed for students, their families and other local schools to help them explore the local wildlife and landscape features of Elster Creek and the Elwood Canal.

Outdoor Connections

This year we partnered with Lord Somers Camp and Power House to deliver **Outdoor Connections**, a calendar of free, nature-based recreation experiences in the City of Port Phillip for young people aged 12–18 who are experiencing disadvantage. Participants are offered a unique outdoor experience to learn about our local environment and wildlife. The first three sessions, held at St Kilda Botanical Gardens, Albert Park, St Kilda Pier and West Beach, hosted 40 participants, including those involved in the Very Special Kids Siblings program, as well as migrants and refugees. Outdoor Connections is enabled by a City of Port Phillip Youth Access Grant.



Story of Change: The power of finding out you're not alone in caring

When she was a Year 9 student, Chenxin Tu joined **Be the RE-Generation**, our Baykeeper youth volunteer program. She contributed to live mollusc surveys, coastal erosion profiling, microplastic pollution audits, weed management, vegetation surveys and propagation and planting to improve penguin habitat. Chenxin often booked groups of her friends into environmental activities, and was appointed one of our inaugural **Multicultural Coast Ambassadors**. In this role, Chenxin created events and a language-free short film to help Melbourne's Chinese community connect to Port Phillip Bay.

'Days volunteering with the EcoCentre were such a wonderful part of my high school experience,' she recalls. 'I've always had a passion for the environment, and the

EcoCentre volunteer community has introduced a variety of perspectives into my life. Volunteering there has always been such a calming environment, where I can be with others who are truly passionate about making a positive change, rather than be surrounded by a world of climate anxiety.'

At school, Chenxin joined on-campus EcoCentre leadership training, ResourceSmart Schools reporting and started the Keen Green Beans garden club. She continued to volunteer at community activities, such as pest seastar removal, National Tree Day plantings and at EcoCentre's Community Enviro Fest as a panellist, alongside stalwarts like Neil Blake and Prof. John Thwaites.

Chenxin is now studying a Bachelor of Environment and Sustainability Honours degree, with a focus on natural

resource management, demography and biodiversity conservation. 'As a first-generation Asian immigrant, studying environmental sciences is not a very typical path, but having a community who shares the same passions has inspired me. For me, success would be showing others the wonders of the environment and our interconnection with it.'

Chenxin continues to volunteer remotely, from helping translate EcoCentre resources into Chinese, to international water law research.

'The EcoCentre inspired a huge part of my motivation to pursue this pathway, and I'm grateful to have made so many great friends. I think knowing that I'm not alone in wanting to make a change has been one of the most treasured experiences.'

Chenxin (second from left) aboard the SV Pelican with the EcoCentre team and youth volunteers, 2018.





Connect: Community

Corporate Volunteering

The EcoCentre's five iconic group volunteering experiences provide an enjoyable and meaningful way for businesses to contribute to the community through spending a day together in nature. Participants remove pollutants, build habitat and collect critical scientific data to protect native species. Customisable programs include:

- **Pamper the Penguins**
- **Marine Biologist for a Day**
- **Build Nesting Boxes for Wildlife**
- **Urban Wildlife Conservation Day**
- **Penguins & Citizen Science Day**

This year's volunteers focused on nest box construction for habitat creation on public and private land. Wildlife within Melbourne, especially arboreal and nocturnal species, face numerous pressures from urbanisation, shifting climates and a lack of old-growth trees with habitat hollows.

All proceeds from Corporate Volunteering help to support our ongoing marine research and citizen science initiatives, including youth scholarships. A portion is also donated to Earthcare St Kilda to facilitate penguin research.



Culture & Nature Festival

The EcoCentre **Culture & Nature Festival** was Victoria's first festival for sharing multicultural nature traditions. It digitally reconnected Victorians with nature after the challenges of extended lockdown, showcasing cultural, faith and language groups' nature-inspired customs and stories through cooking demonstrations, gardening workshops, panel discussions and multilingual nature experiences from home.

While nature is often discussed as something non-human and non-urban, we are all intrinsically a part of nature and our cultural traditions and stories are rooted in the context of seasons, plants, animals, waterways and landscapes. The Culture & Nature Festival began by acknowledging this interconnection and honouring the First Nations connection to Country, learning from Yalukit-Willam man Jayden Williams, Director of Bunjil's Biik.

Through a week of workshops, interactive events and downloadable activities, the EcoCentre community shared an array of stories, traditions and knowledge from 16 ethnic backgrounds, six faith backgrounds, and nine languages additional to English, including sessions live-translated in Mandarin and Hindi on parallel audio channels. More than 5,900 visitors have used the festival website to date, with 960 participants attending live broadcasts and replays.

This unique festival was devised and directed by Reiko Yamada, Josh Solomonsz and Didi Magtuto and funded by the Victorian Multicultural Festivals and Events Program. Thank you to the 43 wonderful volunteers who made a week-long program smooth sailing, to our production partners, and to our presenters, including Bhakthi Puvanenthiran (ABC Everyday), Julie Alkarra, who donated her speaker fees to Western Chances, and Wemba Wemba-Wergaia educator Dean Stewart (Aboriginal Tours and Education Melbourne).



Multifaith and Multicultural Coastcare

All Victorians depend on a healthy environment; however, environmental volunteers and professional organisations do not yet reflect the diversity of all Victorians. The **Multifaith and Multicultural Coastcare** project engages culturally and linguistically diverse communities who may face language or logistical barriers to joining coastcare activities. We are tackling this by co-hosting tailored events with cultural and faith groups, producing multilingual animations, training four **Multicultural Bay Ambassadors**, and collecting, applying and disseminating feedback to improve inclusive practices at the EcoCentre and our networks of coastal and marine volunteer groups. This project is funded by Coastcare Victoria.

In the first year of the project we partnered remotely with an intern team from Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI), tasked to create a series of animations for introducing local ecology. The clips aim to illustrate ecosystems and processes that take place at a physical scale, time scale or location that is difficult or impossible to show learners through real-life experience.

Four short animations tell the story of soft sediment Port Phillip Bay ecosystems, the importance of nest boxes, the migration cycle of short-finned eels, and why native pollinators are critical. Thank you to Mike, Erin, Suela and Tanner and their community for providing additional narrations in French and Arabic.

Planting bees with Port Phillip Multifaith Network were jointly coordinated with Earthcare St Kilda and CityWide, however, these are now deferred until next planting season due to lockdowns. Each event will commence with a prayer ceremony and Acknowledgement of Country, followed by a working bee to care for the coastal environment. Applications are open from October 2021 for the Multicultural Bay Ambassadors intake.

Deep Time Walks

A **Deep Time Walk** provides a transformative perspective of the 4.6-billion-year history of Earth, interpreted over a 4.6-kilometre walk. Part history lesson, part mindfulness session, this walk is all about stepping out of our own lives and gaining a sense of the really big picture.

At various intervals along the walk, the guide will point out significant developments from the perspective of physics, chemistry, philosophy, biology, history and ecology. The interval between stops may be as long as a kilometre or as short as half a millimetre. While walking, participants are encouraged to mindfully contemplate the vastness of time they are crossing. Deep Time Walks were originally conceived at Schumacher College in England.

This year, Tamara Taylor launched Deep Time Walks in Elwood with ticket prices being donated to the EcoCentre. 'I aim to convey a deep sense of wonder of our natural world, and strengthen individuals desire to protect it,' said Tamara. Deep Time Walks are offered monthly or on demand with minimum of four guests. Book in at www.steptime.com.au or via the EcoCentre website.





14,334
hours of
environmental
volunteering



6,139
indigenous tube
stock planted

27

nest boxes and
bat tubes built

2,860

coastal plants
propagated

Outcome: Individuals and groups take action that protects and restores their environment.

Strategies

Foster volunteering. Create a range of volunteering options that benefit volunteers, the environment and our organisation.

Inspire leaders. Foster skills, knowledge and opportunities for youth, adult and business leadership.

Counteract climate change. Activate and empower citizens to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

Build wellbeing. Recognise and support the interdependence of human wellbeing and environmental health.

Activities in 2020–21

Activities this year included Tomorrow's Leaders for Sustainability, ResourceSmart Schools program, School Sustainability Festival, Bayside Schools Climate Summit, Bay Leaders, Port Phillip Baykeeper, Community Coastal Revegetation, NatureSpot, community gardening and community greening, St Kilda Repair Cafe, Speaking engagements and seminars.

'I like to be involved in with as many projects at the EcoCentre as I can, to increase my environmental vocabulary and because it's important social capital and makes real-world changes. The EcoCentre's strength is inclusivity, and the manner in which volunteers are truly valued.'

– Emma, EcoCentre citizen science volunteer

Success indicators

NOTE: Targets were defined pre-COVID. Results this year were significantly impacted by public health protocols including lockdown and gathering limits.

Increase volunteer hours by 10% per annum		Target: At least	Actual:
Target: 23,123 volunteer hours	Actual: 14,334 volunteer hours	four Stories of Change	4+ stories collected; two shared here
Participants have made and sustained changes in their lives and communities to protect and/or restore the environment.		Increase in the number and the types of actions completed by EcoCentre participants and partners, as individuals and groups.	
Target: 75% of participants made a change	Actual: 89%	Target: 5% increase in actions per year total across all types	Actual: -3% decrease in actions per year total across all types
Target: 33% have sustained a change	Actual: 79% have sustained a change		

Story of Change: Angling for a healthy Bay and healthy fish

Since 1909, Albert Park Yachting and Angling Club (APYAC) has publicly expressed its concern about pollution entering Port Phillip Bay and its effect on environmental health, through advocacy and practical efforts such as supporting offshore shellfish reef restoration.

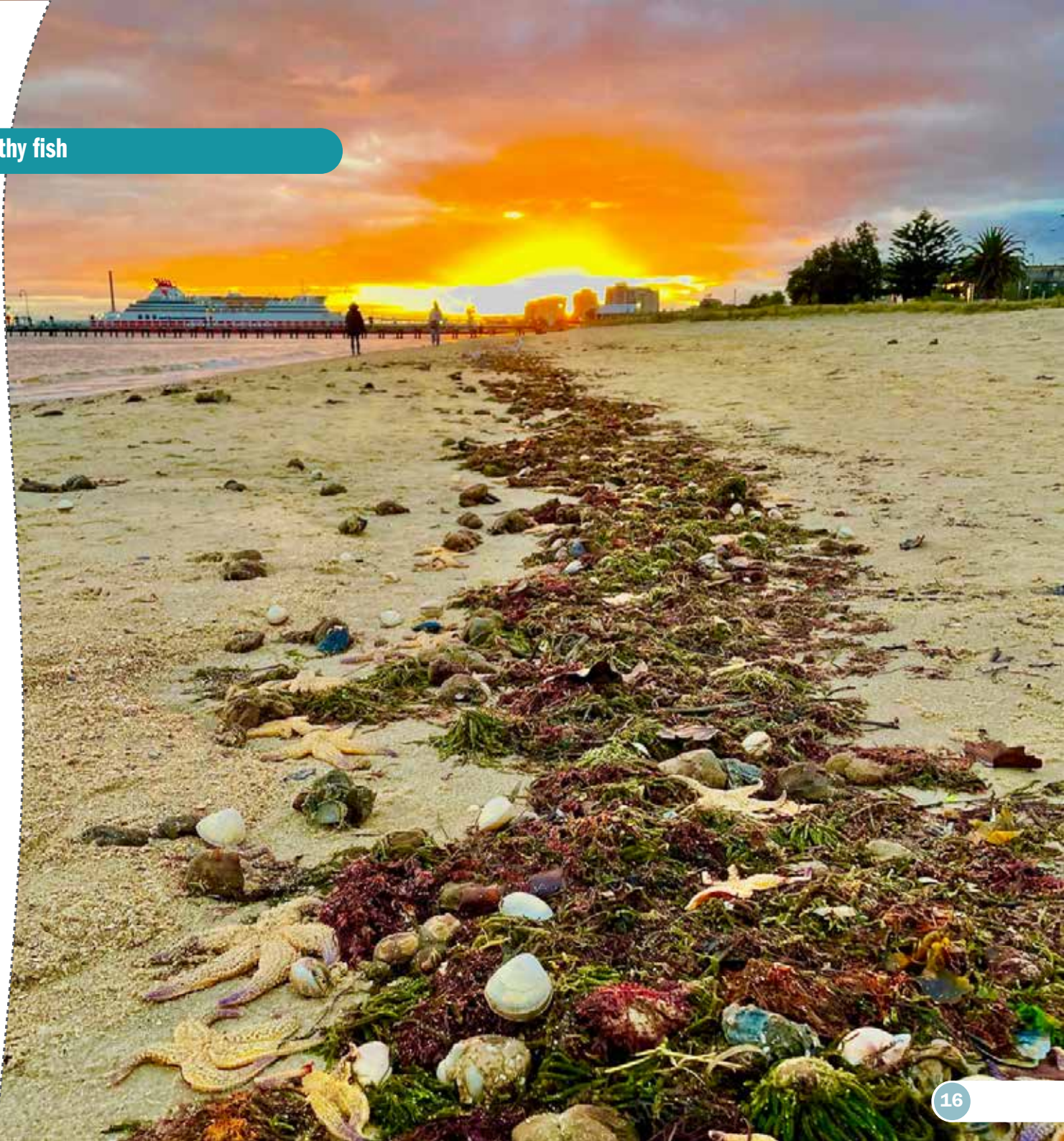
Now aware of the danger posed by pollution and plastics in the food chain to the health and safety of the birds and fish of the Bay, APYAC President, Remy Van de Wiel, and members Bob Pierce, Nick Hill, Frank Hutchinson, Robert Richter and Brian Wright, encouraged the club to form a new volunteer group called **Healthy Bay Healthy Fish**.

According to Remy, 'in the course of formulating a plan, which would include using youth ambassadors and education, we discovered that the majority of our ideas had already been implemented by Port Phillip EcoCentre. So, naturally, we decided to work with them and happily so.'

The new collaboration leapt into action, meeting to share visions, host a talk by the Port Phillip Baykeeper, support EcoCentre grant applications and data collection, and to consider how to model practices for fellow angling clubs and to offer facilities as a venue for events and education.

In March 2021, APYAC hosted the launch of the EcoCentre's [Clean Bay Blueprint: Microplastics in Melbourne](#) report and recommendations for tackling plastic pollution. The report was launched by Nina Taylor MP, with attendees including anglers, university researchers, Friends groups, Riverkeepers, citizen scientists and Melbourne Water. After presentations and group discussion, a live poll revealed the participants' top words to describe the evening were 'motivated' and 'inspired'.

'Anglers love the bay,' Brian Wright told the EcoCentre team during the event. 'We are out there seeing changes over time. We're worried and want to protect what we love.'





Act: Schools and youth

Tomorrow's Leaders for Sustainability

Our award-winning **Tomorrow's Leaders for Sustainability (TLfS)** program trained 272 students from nine primary and secondary schools this year. The students participated in a term-long program involving leadership and environmental behavioural change learning, culminating in student-led projects. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, half the schools participating in leadership training required a program modified for online delivery. Both on-ground and online programs culminated in student-led projects, including waste-reduction campaigns, building gardens for wildlife, revegetating wetlands, kick-starting compost systems and rolling out climate action plans on campus.

City of Port Phillip and Bayside City Council provide scholarships to participating schools. Both municipalities recently declared a climate emergency, and TLfS empowered local youth in devising plans and enacting projects to address the climate emergency within their sphere of influence.

Each 5-to-10-week program included guest speakers, group activities, and emphasised climate action and models of personal resilience and crisis response, including employing Joanna Macy's framework for Active Hope¹, an empowerment tool people can choose or cultivate as a best response to the crisis of sustainability. TLfS provided a solutions-focused path for students to reflect on personal values and take meaningful, tangible steps without feeling overwhelmed. Participants reported this approach buoyed teachers and students experiencing isolation, uncertainty and a sense powerlessness during months of remote learning during lockdowns.

1. *Active Hope: How to face the mess we're in without going crazy*, Joanna Macy PhD and Dr Christopher Johnstone, 2012



'I enjoyed learning about the Boon Wurrung whose land we are on, learning about leadership and about waste, because I realised that I could take part and help solve the issue.'

– Raf, Year 5/6, Port Melbourne Primary School

ResourceSmart Schools

The EcoCentre supports 19 local schools in their implementation of the **ResourceSmart Schools** program, and on their journey to five-star certification in the management of water, energy, waste, and biodiversity. We would like to thank and congratulate all schools participating in the program, their coordinators, students, parents, green teams and leadership for making a real difference to the environment. ResourceSmart Schools is supported by Sustainability Victoria and our partnership with CERES Community Environment Park.

Teacher and student leadership

Our popular **Teachers' Environment Network (TEN)** continues to provide and share environmental education information and curriculum resources and foster supportive networks among teachers embedding sustainability in early learning, primary or secondary education. This year we facilitated meetings on the topics of:

- » building green teams in schools (online)
- » designing school gardens for habitat (online)
- » tiny house tour – doing more with less
- » sustainable gardens and outdoor learning spaces

Network membership increased by 26% on the previous year, further expanding our teacher-to-teacher learning opportunities. TEN is free for participants, through sponsorship by City of Port Phillip, Bayside City Council and City of Stonnington.



719
teachers trained
and supported

We continued to celebrate and elevate student and teacher sustainability leadership with our 15th **School Sustainability Festival** in November 2020. We are proud to annually present Victoria's longest-running festival celebrating student leadership and action. This event strengthens and deepens our school sustainability network through students and teachers showcasing their achievements, networking, sharing tools and supporting each other.

This year's festival celebrated youth leadership in climate and biodiversity and was held online due to pandemic restrictions. Over 260 students from 13 schools and five homeschool families came together for an impressive and fun online event of youth-led activities, featuring three main-stage presentations and 17 concurrent workshop presentations by schools, Scouts and six special guests. Presenters as young as 10 years old provided practical,

knowledgeable, creative, inspiring and empowering actions for biodiversity and climate protection.

The online format of this year's festival allowed presenters to join us from the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales and the Northern Territory. Students were invited to 'come with purpose' through an engaging Welcome to Country by Gheran-Yarraman Steel of the Boon Wurrung Foundation. Cr Louise Crawford, Mayor of City of Port Phillip, and Kristy Green, Manager Sustainability and Transport, Bayside City Council, extended a warm welcome from the two main supporting councils.

The Youth Climate Panel discussion was moderated by Dr Sophie Lewis, ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment. We thank all our excellent main-stage speakers and youth climate panellists including Mia Eng and Lily Mayer (Firbank Grammar), Stella Wiedemeyer (Lauriston Girls' School), Marco Bellemo (Northcote High School graduate) and Veronica Hester (Graduate Kirrawee High School, New South Wales, and School Strike for Climate).

Festival funding support was provided by City of Port Phillip, Bayside City Council and Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation. We also thank our program partners Reptile Encounters, Roots & Shoots Australia, Brighton Scouts and Eventful Learning. Enjoy a highlights clip at www.youtube.com/EcoCentreTV.

The EcoCentre played a lead role in the online **Bayside Schools Climate Action Summit** presented by Bayside City Council, involving 99 students and teachers from 11 Bayside schools. Summit highlights included a welcome from City of Bayside Mayor, Cr Laurence Evans, OAM, another inspiring speech by Mia Eng and Lily Mayer, Year 11 students from Firbank Grammar sharing their climate leadership journey; a workshop conducted by the EcoCentre, and a presentation by Dr Susie Burke.

In autumn, the EcoCentre devised a local nature webinar for **City of Stonnington** schools enrolled in the global City Nature Challenge. Over 1,225 students from six schools participated, finding and documenting city wildlife during this four-day worldwide BioBlitz.

'I'm very awestruck at how incredible and accomplished some of my fellow presenters are. It definitely got me inspired and hopeful for the future and I learned new things.'
- Year 9 student,
School Sustainability Festival



Story of change: How volunteers putting species on the map protects biodiversity

The term biodiversity was adopted by scientists in the mid-1980s to describe the enormous variety of life forms on Earth, and to convey the significance of species, genetic and ecosystem biodiversity. The word is increasingly common in sustainability education such as ResourceSmart Schools, and planning frameworks like council Biodiversity Action Plans.

Despite having day-to-day planning and management responsibilities for parks and open space, local councils in Victoria have historically not been required to prioritise flora and fauna unless there was a listed threatened species present. This policy approach was supported by the assumption that the richness of nature would be successfully retained elsewhere, within a system of National Parks and reserves. However, since the 1980's community interest and action to improve local native species habitats has sharpened the focus on urban nature initiatives.

'There is a bigger pattern of people appreciating the potential that urban areas have to host biodiversity,' says EcoCentre alumnus Gio Fitzpatrick. Cities were amongst the habitat types explored by Sir David Attenborough's Planet Earth II, and Melbourne's councils are increasingly designing urban biodiversity and urban forest strategies.

Most recently, over 330 local residents contributed suburban species photos to the EcoCentre's **NatureSpot** maps, integrating with City of Port Phillip's biodiversity study and the municipality's first-ever species database, cataloguing more than 2500 flora and fauna species. (Since then, EcoCentre volunteers have recorded 31 further species.)

'One barrier to successful management planning is understanding the nitty gritty of local ecologies, often known by naturalists but rarely written up in formal studies,' said Gio.

Projects like rewilding, council forestry and biodiversity plans allow the EcoCentre team to review wildlife surveys from various platforms, and to convene local naturalists to collate knowledge into documents like the *Elsternwick Park Nature Reserve Fauna Strategy*.

Breakthrough discoveries can be made through patient observation and basic phone photos, logged to platforms where voluntary experts review photos for species identification. NatureSpot website developer Anthony Eisenberg believes working on such projects, even in a technology design role, is transformative: 'The NatureSpot project reframed how I view the flora and fauna around me.'

Community observations, uni student research placements and advocacy brought together at the EcoCentre will continue to play a key role in understanding urban ecology, recording our more-than-human neighbours, and protecting the richness of life in a changing climate.





Story of Change: How Keith's walk across the whole United Kingdom led him to the EcoCentre

Keith Badger volunteered as Treasurer for eight years on the EcoCentre Committee of Management, after being approached for the position in 2012, during a Bayside community meeting on climate change. At the time, Keith was making his first tentative steps seeking how to help face mounting environmental challenges.

'I had qualified in chartered accountancy and spent 35 years in corporate finance and chief executive work across four continents. All in all, nothing of this had prepared me for concern about environmental degradation, let alone entering the world of social activism,' Keith says.

'The change came about through a five-month, 2,801-kilometre walk across Britain's countryside with my wife, Debby. We carried our belongings in backpacks, walking through all weathers and ground conditions, our minds cleared of the clutter of everyday city living - which left me mentally "lost" and questioning why humans were doing so much damage and not appreciating the interconnectedness of all life.'

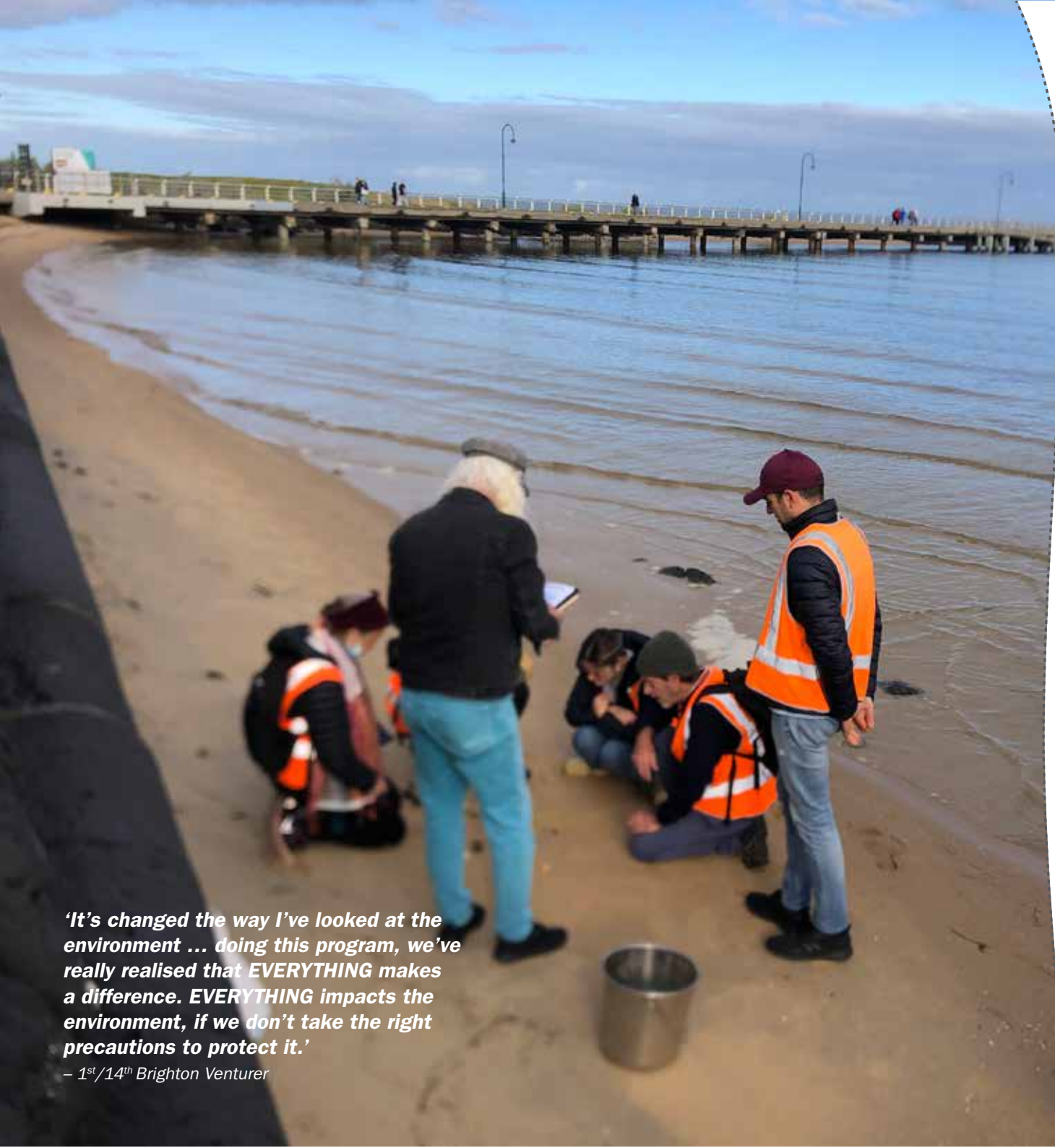
The profound effect inspired Keith's book *Joining Loose Ends*, and launched his voluntary work in the

not-for-profit (NFP) sector. 'I realised activist groups and social enterprises, like corporations, need guidance in leadership, finance and strategic matters. As a numbers man from way back, I gained a great deal of satisfaction helping an inspiring and dynamic team at the EcoCentre - I helped people understand accounting and finance, and learned so much about the environment.'

While many EcoCentre volunteers don fluoro vests or wield field equipment, the Committee of Management volunteers serve a unique role to diligently manage the vision, strategic decision-making, governance and financial planning frameworks that make our programs sustainable.

'Many well-intentioned, passionate people establish NFPs to bring change, but few have the skills, discipline and determination to have an impact the way the EcoCentre does,' says Keith. 'All nations need to unleash strategies that enable all citizens to become involved and contribute their skills to inspiring change. I've learned that collaboration is perhaps humanity's greatest strength, and it is inculcated in the EcoCentre ethos.'

*Keith Badger's book *Joining Loose Ends* - how a long walk revealed a new life, is available from keithbadger.com.*



'It's changed the way I've looked at the environment ... doing this program, we've really realised that EVERYTHING makes a difference. EVERYTHING impacts the environment, if we don't take the right precautions to protect it.'

– 1st/14th Brighton Venturer



Act: Community

Port Philip Baykeeper - Community collaborations

Your **Port Phillip Baykeeper**, Neil Blake, is an independent voice for Port Phillip Bay. The Baykeeper role is part of a global grassroots network of Waterkeepers on six continents who advocate for drinkable, fishable, swimmable water for all. For over 30 years, Neil has worked with schools, government, First Peoples, researchers, businesses and community to connect with and protect our Bay. The Port Phillip Baykeeper conducts a range of activities including community projects (below), research and evidence-based advocacy page 32.

The Baykeeper's identical cousin, **Captain Trash**, the musical anti-pollution pirate, toured his signature edutainment to ELCs and community events to spread the word about all things starting with 'aaaRRRRR' – Reduce, Reuse, Repair, Recycle and Remove Rubbish. This year's **Summer by the Sea** program focused on reducing single-use plastics and was hosted by Josh Solomonsz, and Bay Ambassador alumnae Chenxin Tu, Hilda Poloso and Saniya D'Souza, and provided accompanying resources in multiple languages. **Baykeeper Citizen Science** provided the foundation for the Albert Park College Year 9 Inquiry program, which involved over 20 field days with 270 students! The Baykeeper was a regular guest on 3RRR's **Radio Marinara** and 3CR's **Tuesday Hometown**, was also featured in *The Age* holding an esky full of synthetic turf pollution, gave many community Zoom talks, and provided advice to Sir David Attenborough's producers in their site-scouting to film *Planet Earth III*.



156
citizen science
surveys

Community Coastal Revegetation

Healthy coastal habitats support land, marine and migratory species, provide iconic cultural and recreation spaces, and stabilise climate through carbon sequestration. Unfortunately, 31% of Port Phillip Bay coastline is now classed as highly vulnerable¹. This year's **Community Coastal Revegetation** project empowered 146 volunteers to contribute to coastal health through 26 working bees, including weed removal, plant propagation and planting to create habitat for Little Penguins and seabirds.

To help the Middle Park dunes, West Beach St Kilda indigenous planting and St Kilda Penguin Colony, participants learned about indigenous ecology of the Port Phillip sandbelt, coastal geomorphology, weed identification, propagation techniques, seed saving and methods for removal of plastic and microplastic pollution. More than 4,105 plants were installed and a further 2,860 propagated for future plantings. The project inspired a new ongoing revegetation team, with working bees now running monthly, COVID-19 restrictions permitting.

'I attended two fantastic revegetation, propagation and planting days. Deb and Peter did a great job teaching us about native plants, along with weed identification at West Beach. One event was Mother's Day and we had a beautiful time with Mother Nature ... Nadav and Deb always made sure we were well-equipped, careful and enjoying our planting session.'

– Auriel Jing Xin Yeap, Volunteer



1. State of the Marine and Coastal Environment Report, Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability, 2021

NatureSpot

NatureSpot is a citizen science biodiversity project that allows anyone to contribute to the emerging catalogue of plants and animals living in our region. Local community members have submitted over 1,000 sightings of flora and fauna since November 2019 to the NatureSpot website by pinning photos of observations to the map, helping us to create a comprehensive species dataset for inner-south Melbourne. Community data helps the EcoCentre, council land managers and home gardeners identify important habitat areas to enhance food, shelter and refuge to support our beautiful urban biodiversity.

Urban biodiversity is becoming increasingly important as a growing body of research shows cities have a vital role to play in biodiversity conservation and management. Protecting and enhancing biodiversity also supports the

health and wellbeing of communities and can contribute to effective climate change adaptation actions. However, there is insufficient understanding of what flora and fauna exist as a baseline in most urban areas and there has been no systematic monitoring of biodiversity on private land, which comprises 75% of the City of Port Phillip.

This year's NatureSpot project, **BioBlitzes for Habitat Restoration**, was supported by the Australian Government Communities Environment Program and included seasonal surveys across the electorate of Macnamara, south of the Birrarung (Yarra River) from Port Melbourne to Caulfield East and surrounds.

We used our custom mapping platform by CrowdSpot, as well as the iNaturalist website for support in species identification and submission to Atlas of Living Australia.

A total of 617 fauna, flora and fungi spots were submitted by 123 citizen scientists during our spring and early winter surveys. Particular thanks to Pascale Miller and Gio Fitzpatrick for species identification work.

With many new submissions confirmed as first-time regional recordings of particular species, the two-year total is now 47 first-time records generated by NatureSpotters! Additionally, beautiful photos from the community submissions populate our free digital brochure [Grow Wild: Guide to native plants for backyard biodiversity](#). The brochure provides simple, succinct advice on garden design considerations and plant selections suitable for small spaces in the local area. Visit ecocentre.com/naturespot to download the brochure and the in-depth project report.



617
NatureSpots
mapped

47
fauna species
recorded locally
for the first time



Community gardening and greening

Growing and planting together with our neighbours offers a range of social, health and environmental benefits, particularly in a year of disruption, isolation and uncertainty. This year's Community Garden programs included **Growing Together**, funded by Transurban, and **Port Phillip Urban Fresh Food Network (PPUFFN)**, funded by City of Port Phillip.

As public health restrictions saw the world reshaping how we safely gathered and gardened, the EcoCentre facilitated 25 weeks of remote adaptations to our inclusive food and gardens network, then added a second monthly garden location upon our return to face-to-face gardening bees. This year we prioritised social inclusion and community connectedness, healthy fresh-food

practices, as well as the usual skill building and physical exercise opportunities that gardening activities offer.

The remote program was co-designed with participants, providing opportunities to continue building garden knowledge, grow plants at home and socialise through online lunches, phone trees, local exercise walks (when COVID protocols permitted) and individual check-ins.

With the return to modified on-site programming from December 2020, we split into two, smaller group gardening time options at the EcoCentre as well as at the beautiful garden at the Salvation Army Youth Crisis Accommodation in St Kilda, introduced to us by EcoCentre friend Jane Edmanson of *Gardening Australia*.

The program achieved 1,172 volunteer hours through 918 participations, including participants from social housing, healthcare referrals or social inclusion partner programs. Approximately 46% of participants were experiencing housing vulnerability, health challenges, socio-economic disadvantage and/or social isolation factors.

Participants surveyed reported:

- 100% have felt a better sense of belonging and/or wellbeing
- 92% built connections within the community, engaged with a wider group of people, broadening social connections through shared interest
- 92% learned a new skill
- 53% regularly take home freshly harvested food to use in additional meals.

We are extra thankful to the volunteers who included the EcoCentre as part of their lockdown exercise walk and dropped in to feed the worms or water the gardens, tending to our living garden patch until our on-site group working bees could resume. Many members of the wider community shared how special it was for them to walk through our Community Garden, exploring or meditating during the challenges of extended lockdown.

'Where else these days do people still gather and talk face to face without hesitation to new friends and strangers? With a mix of cultures and ages and life stories and no judging.'

– Janine, Garden volunteer



Global Melbourne

Our city is diverse and growing. Over 40% of residents were born overseas and about 35% speak a language other than English at home. In a typical year, Melbourne hosts 2.5 million international visitors, all sharing our landscapes and waterways. Between 2018 and 2020, as part of the **Global Melbourne** project funded by the Victorian Government Port Phillip Bay Fund, we partnered with tourism operators, recruited young professionals as Multicultural Bay Ambassadors, and produced the short documentary *Our Catchment* to feature stories of our diverse volunteers.

In 2020, our tourism partners were hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic and we had to cancel all activities after border closures. To achieve engagement goals, we extended the project until October 2020 and shifted our focus to digital engagement with local communities.

We delivered seven online virtual field trips to the Bay for adult migrant English students, two youth events and one webinar for professionals working with diverse communities. The short films produced through the project were screened at local schools during online incursion sessions, and overall, we reached over 400 students and 40 professionals with our specially adapted digital engagement.

In addition to this direct engagement, our volunteers contributed their time to translate the [Baykeepers](#) short films into 11 community languages. The clips have accumulated over 12,000 views online, and are a vital first step to improve inclusivity in our content-making. We also worked with Deakin Design Lab students to produce Bay360,

an animated dive-into-the-Bay experience for those without easy physical access. Thank you to the Bay360 team Danial, Melanie, Emily, Althea, Jonathan and Yun.

Despite the challenges of the pandemic, we began to observe some wider impacts of the Global Melbourne project. Our partners at Coastcare were inspired to add more community languages to their 2020 Summer by the Sea program, and we have formalised new project partnerships with Adult Migrant English Programs for the year ahead. We are excited to continue our engagement with culturally diverse and under-represented communities to improve our program design and inclusivity, so as to connect even more people to our beautiful natural environment.



‘Beautiful information shared – things none of us knew nothing about – we were immensely enriched by the experience. I think we are all far more conscious now as to how our actions have a profound effect on Port Phillip Bay and the marine life in the Bay.’

– TAFE instructor and Virtual Visit to Port Phillip Bay participant



Living Water Workbees

Across our city, millions of pieces of litter and other pollutants from stormwater enter street drains and are washed into local creeks, eventually ending up in Port Phillip Bay. For positive change, the community can join **Living Water Workbees** to improve water quality, remove plastic litter, create habitat for wildlife and alleviate the impacts of flood and drought caused by climate change.

The project enables volunteer hours that benefit waterways to be converted into \$25-per-hour rebate credits, which can be redeemed for an approved rainwater tank or rain garden at schools, homes or businesses. In our urban environment, this infrastructure serves a critical role in harvesting or absorbing rainwater, which reduces pollution run-off, slows stormwater flow and creates a healthier habitat within our local creeks and rivers.

The three-year project was due to end in June 2020, however, due to COVID-19 pandemic impacts, the project was extended until February 2021. While most community workbees were cancelled this year, we were able to support the Year 12 VCAL curriculum at Wyndham Central College through a student-led rain garden project. The students researched, designed and landscaped rain gardens and worked with the Werribee River Association and Landcare groups to clean up local waterways and survey biodiversity. The school earned \$14,837 to install three rainwater tanks (with a total capacity of 16,000 L) and irrigate 80 sqm, including a historic orchard, a breakout space with native plants, and raised beds for food technology subjects.

We would like to acknowledge the extraordinary work of the lead teacher and students in completing the rain garden installations, despite a very disrupted school year. The project is part of a new school curriculum developed to engage with local community organisations and enhance the Werribee River ecosystem. Well done to the students on embarking on creating a legacy for the school community and their local environment!



5,675
volunteers

9,527
working bee hours

12
community groups

9
schools

528 sqm
of rain gardens built



15,000
indigenous trees
and plants installed

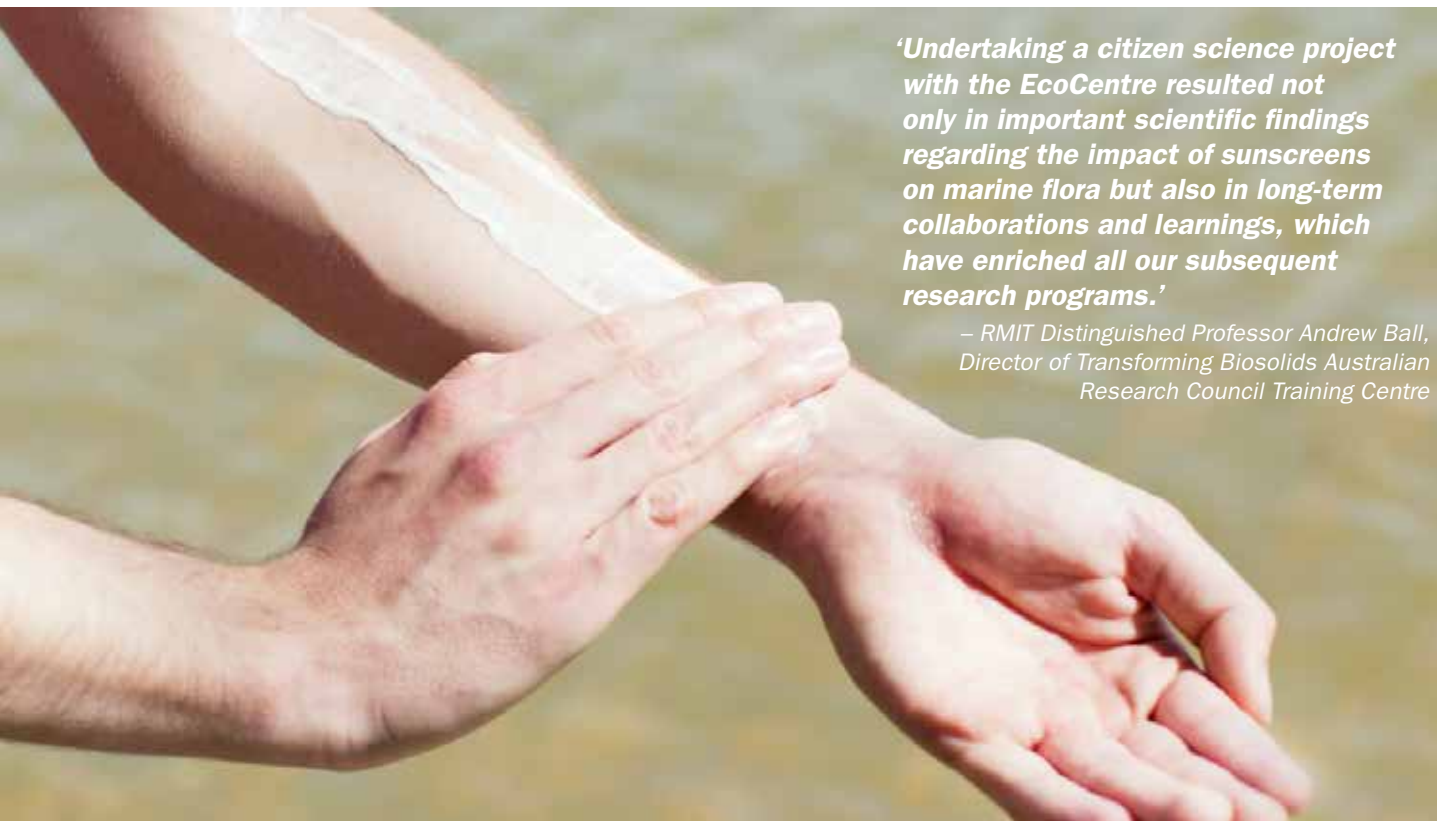
13
tonnes of litter
cleaned up

57
toilets converted to
flush with rain water

2.3 million litres
per year of stormwater
diversion capacity created

Living Water Workbees activities and infrastructure involved immediate and long-term care for the health of our rivers, creeks and Port Phillip Bay. Over its lifespan, this project activated 5,675 volunteers, contributing 9,527 working bee hours supporting 12 community groups, nine schools, and countless conversations about catchments. 528 sqm of rain gardens were built, around 15,000 indigenous trees and plants installed, and 13 tonnes of litter cleaned up. 57 toilets were converted to flush with rain water, and nearly 2.3 million litres per year of stormwater diversion capacity was created. Together, neighbours greatly improved our stewardship of the Bay, through our activities on the land.





'Undertaking a citizen science project with the EcoCentre resulted not only in important scientific findings regarding the impact of sunscreens on marine flora but also in long-term collaborations and learnings, which have enriched all our subsequent research programs.'

*– RMIT Distinguished Professor Andrew Ball,
Director of Transforming Biosolids Australian
Research Council Training Centre*

Sunscreen and Bay Marine Life

The **Sunscreen and Bay Marine Life** project was a collaboration between Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) and the EcoCentre, to research potential effects of several common sunscreen chemicals on wildlife in the Bay. This research was the first of its kind done in real-life conditions (as opposed to in a laboratory setting) and in temperate waters rather than the tropics. For three years, citizen scientists trained by the EcoCentre took water samples at Elwood, St Kilda and Rye in summer and winter. The samples were analysed for chemicals at RMIT and the effect of the concentration of chemicals on the survival of microalgae was tested.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the final round of winter sampling had to be completed by EcoCentre staff and

without the help of our beloved volunteers, some of whom had been with the project from the very start. Their help and enthusiasm for the protection of our Bay was sorely missed! We were extremely lucky that we were able to complete sample collection and deliver to RMIT the samples needed to finalise the project, just before going into a long lockdown. As the laboratories at RMIT were closed for most of the year, the analysis and reporting were delayed, but analysis to date demonstrates the presence of various sunscreen ingredients and their effect on the marine phytoplankton population. This analysis has improved the understanding of the effects of sunscreen-washoff on beach condition, and the correlation between the level of washoff and the number of people using the beach on the day sampling is undertaken.

In November, we organised an online volunteer celebration with presentations from the team at RMIT including project manager Dr Sarvesh Soni, Professor Andy Ball, Dr Lauren Rickards and Dr Pat Bonney. Researchers shared tentative results of the laboratory component, as well as discussing the social impacts and value of this collaborative citizen science project.

This three-year project has proved very valuable to the EcoCentre as a case study on the interface between community and research institutions, helping to shape the future of quality project design in Australian citizen science. It has also built our expertise to scale this type of project and to collaborate towards further funded research, particularly as we anticipate launching Australia's first community-led Citizen Science Lab in the new EcoCentre.

If you ever spotted our team collecting samples, you may have noticed we were never just in bathers! This project allowed many public conversations about sunscreen being a technology with specific application instructions to be effective – and that time outdoors is safest through using multiple modes of protection, including hats, protective clothing, umbrellas, sunglasses and time limits.

Many volunteers appreciated the potential for this project to effect policy change, to ensure sunscreens are safe for both humans AND marine life. The scientific results to date indicate that more policy attention is indeed needed to consider the environmental impacts of heavy sunscreen use in temperate waters, and we look forward to collaborative advocacy after the full findings are published.

'Citizen science is a great way to get involved, learn and gain hands-on experience. EcoCentre volunteers are always kept in the loop and engaged. I am definitely reviewing my sunscreen choices.'

– Mario Mendez, Sunscreen project volunteer

St Kilda Repair Cafe

At the St Kilda Repair Cafe (SKRC), we continued to help Melbourne to upskill and reduce landfill. The global repair café movement organises volunteer fixers and menders who offer their time and skills to help make repairs possible, free of charge. The Jewish Ecological Coalition (JECO) and the EcoCentre co-host a monthly SKRC led by skilled volunteers on the second Sunday of every month. Anyone can receive a free practical tutorial on how to repair just by bringing their broken household items to the cafe.

In our fourth year of hands-on repair workshops, despite limited ability to host events, 79 attendees worked with volunteers and successfully repaired 60 items and partially repaired 13 household items. The program included an online interactive workshop where skilled volunteers were paired with community members to work through repairs remotely.

The SKRC continued to be powered by donations and incredible volunteers who delivered hundreds of hours of repair time despite a year severely truncated by COVID-19. If you would like to volunteer your time and skills in future, please email stkilda.repaircafe@gmail.com.

'A little inner-city hub where volunteers work their magic on broken stuff.'

– Anna Sublet, writer and Repair Cafe customer



Speaking engagements and seminars

The EcoCentre **Thursday Seminar Series** ran online throughout the 2020 lockdowns. The program delivered 16 evening webinars, covering a wide range of themes, including Baykeeper Citizen Science findings, how to create wildlife-friendly backyards, cooking with edible weeds and food scraps, the role of hope in climate action, and tips to plan for Plastic Free July. These sessions were popular with local EcoCentre members as well as audiences from around Australia and overseas. More than 90% of participants reported their commitment to take new action as a result of their EcoCentre experience.

As well as hosting our own webinars and festivals online, our team was privileged to speak at more than 15 events in the year of 'going virtual' for most conferences and networks. Deb joined Costa, Bruce Pascoe and Kat Lavers online with City of Stonnington to discuss **Learnings from 2020 –A discussion on self-sufficiency**. Fam discussed science careers at the **Australian Citizen Science Career Symposium** and on the **Monash University Careers Panel**.

Story of change: Sparking global student research to stop microplastic pollution

Since 1999, the EcoCentre has aspired to act locally and think globally. Over time, our networks have opened *acting* globally as well, particularly on the issue of microplastic litter of 5mm or smaller which pervades ecosystems worldwide.

A global body of science has proven that microplastic pollution poses direct and indirect threats to water, reef and soil ecologies, climate, Australia's 'blue' economies, and food chain health due to the chemicals plastic debris accumulates. This tiny, nefarious pollutant is costly but preventable from many of its source points. However, mapping litter backwards from hotspot to source requires widespread, methodical data collection and analysis – so collaborations play a vital role.

Our partnership with Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) – a science and engineering university in Massachusetts, USA – has allowed a range of citizen science methods to carry far and wide. Since 2017, WPI has regularly sent teams of students who work full-time on an initiative with the EcoCentre as part of a project-based learning

requirement at the university. With WPI represented at about 50 other international project locations in addition to Melbourne, the projects initiated through the EcoCentre-WPI partnership have opportunity to reach a wide audience. In particular, the EcoCentre's groundbreaking work on microplastics has influenced projects at other WPI centres around the world.

The first EcoCentre-WPI project was completed in May 2017 on *A Citizen Science Platform for Long-Term Monitoring of Microplastic Pollution in Port Phillip Bay*, grounding our methods within a global best practice review. Since then we have completed 10 joint projects, with five focused on aspects of microplastics, including a pump-based method to sample midwater microplastic pollution, data visualisations to communicate the sources of microplastics, and a current project helping to identify a significance threshold for the concentration at which microplastics present danger to aquatic ecosystems.

WPI teams provide immeasurable contribution to EcoCentre science and strategy. The students likewise value the experience. Mike Savoie, a Biotechnology and Biology graduate, said 'The impact the EcoCentre had on me was paramount. I am so happy for the time I got to spend there to learn.'

The insights and project strategies developed through the EcoCentre-WPI projects on microplastics are influencing projects at other WPI project centres. The project centre in Reykjavik, Iceland, has now conducted three studies mirroring the monitoring methodologies introduced by the EcoCentre. WPI project centres in Thessaloniki, Greece and in Hong Kong, China, have similarly conducted projects inspired by the EcoCentre-WPI projects on microplastics. The importance of understanding and managing microplastic pollution in coastal cities has now led WPI to explore a global initiative, cutting across its many international project centres to study microplastics. The effort will allow the citizen science protocols and marine management efforts developed at the EcoCentre to have worldwide influence.

The first WPI interns with EcoCentre staff in 2017.





Outcome: Our partnerships and networks influence positive, systemic environmental changes.

Strategies

Drive research. Conduct research and citizen science with community and research institutions.

Build networks. Support groups and networks to continually enhance community-led and cross-sector initiatives.

Advocate for change. Forge partnerships, and consult and advocate on local and Victorian policies, legislation and practices.

Amplify voices. Aggregate and share knowledge, evidence and stories to citizens and decision-makers.

Activities in 2020–21

Activities this year included: Global Melbourne, Clean Bay Blueprint, Port Phillip Baykeeper Research, Futureproofing Port Phillip Baykeeper, Elster Creek Catchment Community Reference Group, Emissions Petal ratings scheme, Advocating for change.

Success indicators

Maintain the number of members, partnerships, research programs and participation in networks.

Target:
Sustain
79
prime
partnerships

Actual:
95
prime
partnerships

Target:
Sustain
5
research
projects

Actual:
7
research
projects

Target:
Sustain
participation
in
10
networks

Actual:
12
networks
and
reference
groups

Target:
Grow
membership
by
10%
per year

Actual:
51%
growth

Maintain number of submissions advising on policy, legislation and regulation across all levels of government.

Target:
10
per year
for local
government

Actual:
3
submissions
and
consultations

Target:
6
per year
to state or
Commonwealth

Actual:
10
submissions
to state or
Commonwealth

Target: At
least
2
Stories of
Change

Actual:
2
stories
collected;
one shared
here

Story of Change: How citizen science delivers more than data

Science belongs to everyone. It benefits us all, underpins our daily lives and sparks joy and wonder. But as researchers tackle increasingly complex and interconnected questions, it is difficult to summarise sophisticated insights and reduce them to a sound bite. The response 'It's complicated' may be succinct and accurate, yet unsatisfying to a layperson. As a result, a recent crisis of trust in science has been widely reported.

Solutions to complex problems like climate change must involve new and creative ways of thinking, working together and sharing knowledge. How do you best foster credibility and trust in systems that non-scientists do not have the time to understand in detail?

The EcoCentre's citizen science partnerships provide popular opportunities for everyday people to ask questions of scientists, to contribute to unique findings, and socially distribute new knowledge. Many EcoCentre projects like microplastic analysis, sunscreen research and Drain Detectives have linked volunteers, students and Scouts with scientists from the EcoCentre staff, RMIT University and Environment Protection Authority (EPA) Victoria.

'EPA Victoria is still gaining experience and expertise in citizen science, so working in partnership with Port Phillip EcoCentre allows us to achieve aspects of scientific monitoring that we currently can't do ourselves,' says Darren Cottam, Program Coordinator of Recreational Water Quality.

Citizen science is often considered important for volunteers to learn about science and environmental issues, but research documenting what learning occurs among the scientists is sparse.

'Without the EcoCentre our sunscreen project would not have been successful,' says Distinguished Prof Andrew Ball at RMIT University. 'All our subsequent research programs have been enriched and shaped by this venture. We learned to build an interdisciplinary team, the power of the three-way conversation between the EcoCentre, community scientists and researchers to refine the research question, and to



ensure all team members are aware of the implications and potential impacts beyond the research program itself.'

Successful citizen science may result in published papers, but also wider conversations and policy or practice changes. Dr Sarvesh Soni coordinated RMIT's research into the environmental impacts of sunscreen in Port Phillip Bay. He contrasts citizen science research to traditional lab research, where the latter culminates in a journal paper but little dialogue. 'But for the sunscreen project, over three years I saw information disseminated into society directly. Community and media were contacting me proactively, asking about results.'

Dr Pat Bonney (Federation University) and Dr Lauren Rickard (RMIT) conducted concurrent social research to

study the process and experiences of RMIT, the EcoCentre and community volunteers in their collaboration for the sunscreen and marine life project (page 27).

'Community-based organisations like the EcoCentre sit as an intermediary between scientists and community members and can hear concerns from both and act as a bridge,' says Dr Bonney.

'Through this unique position, they can improve the relevance of data collected by volunteers, provide a space for learning and interaction, and also improve the stability of the project — because they have a group of volunteers who are dedicated not just to the specific project but also to being part of the EcoCentre... The EcoCentre plays a critical role in building effective and lasting citizen science.'

Port Phillip Baykeeper – research

Read more about Baykeeper community collaborations on page 21.

It was extra rewarding after lockdowns to participate in Baykeeper Citizen Science activities, enabling community members, secondary school and tertiary students to contribute data to enable an increased understanding of Port Phillip Bay. A total of 99 activities were conducted at reference sites on the City of Port Phillip foreshore, to deliver the **Baykeeper Monitoring** project funded by the Australian Government Communities Environment Program. These included **Baykeeper Shoreline Shell Surveys, Beach Profiling** and street and beach **Baykeeper Microplastics Surveys**.

Two existing Baykeeper data collection methods were enhanced to capture additional information, which will likely inform management strategies for the Bay. The shoreline shell survey method now includes recording 'intact' bivalve species, which are the likely prey of Northern Pacific seastars. This was informed by the project **Surveys to Identify Probable Prey of Northern Pacific Seastars**, completed in partnership with Deakin University's Bachelor of Science students. The beach profiling method now includes recording dune plant species and the elevation levels at which they are found.

New citizen science activities developed and conducted during the year, included **Moon Snail Egg-mass Surveys** to identify if egg-mass presence is related to a particular phase of the moon; and monitoring sports fields through **Synthetic Turf Leakage Surveys** to quantify the shedding of plastic fragments into adjacent drains.

As well as engaging local residents in monitoring and understanding key threats to their local environment, Baykeeper research enabled engagement with EcoCentre community members, a tertiary institute, a secondary college and 27 local Scout groups, totalling more than 1,300 Baykeeper volunteers. Most participants had only minimal previous exposure to the concept of citizen science.

Particular learnings for the year relate to previously under-reported threats that present a risk of long-term decline in the Port Phillip Bay ecosystem. These include the fact

that pest seastars have preyed on bivalve species in Port Phillip Bay since 1996 with minimal attempt to identify the mollusc species being preyed upon, or the longer-term implications for biodiversity in the Bay; and that most litter in the Bay comes from suburban streets, contributing to concerning amounts of microplastics (practically unnoticed) entering our waterways.

The use of data for advocacy was most ably demonstrated by members of the 25 local Scout groups that contributed to the **Street2Bay** litter audit project. With Victorian Government funding and in collaboration with Port Phillip EcoCentre, Scouts Victoria groups from Geelong to Mornington Peninsula conducted 546 street litter audits to investigate the source and types of plastic pollution that enter Port Phillip Bay.

The project used the Baykeeper street audit method to systematically record litter on six different street usage types, and zones within them. Data is collected in measured areas to allow extrapolation of what is found. In all regions, the Scouts' audits consistently found that lawn and mulch areas contain the most litter and microplastics, highlighting the need to remove rubbish before mowing, because the cutting action results in more microplastics.

Young Scouts confidently presented their findings in separate Zoom meetings with seven mayors and seven state and federal parliamentarians, and discussed practical local solutions guided by the data.

All participants expressed their appreciation of EcoCentre's commitment to monitoring aspects of the local environment and advocating to relevant government agencies to find solutions to reduce threats. This demonstrates that the opportunity to contribute to ongoing data collection fosters enhanced understanding of local environmental threats, a sense of community identity and belonging and encourages personal stewardship of the environment.

The Baykeeper benefits from a wide network of community and scientific expertise and the team participates in a range of knowledge-sharing forums and

alliances. Each month Waterkeepers across Australia meet to share expertise, discuss water management issues and strategies to protect waterways; and every second month we join a Zoom to exchange updates with Waterkeepers from Africa, Europe, the Middle East and the Caribbean. Other forums this year, included participating in the Scientific and Technical Advisory Group for Victoria's Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability, joining the Australian Coastal Society, and presenting to the Association of Bayside Municipalities.

Major milestones for the year included completion of the **Clean Bay Blueprint** project and rollout of the **Futureproofing Port Phillip Baykeeper** initiative, each detailed below. Both projects centred on extensive collaboration and liaisons with a wide range of community, government and industry partners, with a view to establishing strong relationships to support solutions-driven issues forums. These discussions, ably documented by WPI intern teams, provided a state-of-play analysis for priority work areas for the next five years.



Clean Bay Blueprint

After three years of Baykeeper beach litter audits, 5.5 years of monthly trawls, nine Bay trawls and over 8,800 volunteer hours, the [final research report](#) for **Clean Bay Blueprint** was launched at the Albert Park Yachting and Angling Club (APYAC) in March 2021. Nina Taylor MP opened the event and we presented an overview of the six recommendations made in the report. It was fantastic to celebrate with our project partners, community groups and volunteers.

The Clean Bay Blueprint project quantified microplastic pollution in the Bay by measuring microplastic loadings in the Maribyrnong and Yarra rivers over time, and investigating microplastics on nine beaches around Port Phillip Bay. One of the project goals was to set a pollution baseline, which can be used as a yardstick by government to measure the success of future litter-reduction programs. This goal was reached when the project results led to the establishment of the first-ever official baseline for microplastic pollution in the Bay in Victoria, which is documented in the *State of the Marine and Coastal Environment Report 2021*, soon to be published by the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability Victoria.

In the meantime, the information about the results and recommendations is being shared with stakeholders through presentations at events and industry network training days. Around 75 decision- and policy makers and waste/litter officers from state and local government and government agencies – such as Sustainability Victoria and Melbourne Water – have attended our presentations so far.

Building partnerships was a huge part of this project and this will continue as we use the data to advocate for change in the coming years. Our partnership with RMIT University's Plastics Lab has resulted in a collaboration on a scientific journal paper, a draft of which will be submitted in the coming year. We will also be looking to continue our collaboration with the Yarra Riverkeeper Association by applying for funds to continue our monthly trawls. A new partnership was forged with the APYAC, which is striving to set an example of environmental stewardship for other angling and boating clubs in

Victoria. We are looking forward to collaborating with them and the opportunity to engage the angling community in citizen science and education.

We have secured funds for the Microplastics Collector With A Pump (MCWAP) – developed and built last year by a talented team of WPI student interns. This project aims to use citizen science sample taking and analysis to provide robust evidence for litigation of plastic polluters under the EPA Victoria's General Environmental Duty (GED), which is at the centre of the [Environment Protection Act 2017](#) (Vic). Partners for this project are EPA Victoria, Environmental Justice Australia and RMIT Plastics Lab. It is funded by the Ryan Cooper Family Foundation and Pool of Dreams.

A big thank you goes out to all our volunteers and community groups who have put in a herculean effort over the past few years. We could not have gotten here without you! You are making a huge, positive difference to the protection of our waterways.



2.5 billion

**litter items on
Melbourne's river
surfaces**

85%

**of riverine
surface litter are
microplastics**



Fam, April and Neil discussing strategies for a plastic-free Port Phillip Bay with MP Brad Rowsell



Futureproofing the Port Phillip Baykeeper

The Baykeeper team and stakeholders completed phase two of the **Futureproofing the Port Phillip Baykeeper** project, supported by the Helen Macpherson Smith Trust. The project ensures a smooth transition from the founding Baykeeper Neil Blake OAM to the next generation Baykeeper, by transferring and consolidating existing Baykeeper knowledge and information resources within the organisation, and engaging our vast networks to identify issues affecting the health of the Bay. All this contributed to a [Baykeeper Program Framework](#), which sets out the strategic aims of the Baykeeper program for the next five years.

As our WPI interns from the United States were not able to travel to Australia this year, they remotely helped facilitate three virtual stakeholder roundtables centred on the topics of waste management, microplastics and spider crabs. We are very grateful to the community members, businesses and organisations who contributed to sharing their expertise on these topics; and to WPI team Charlie, Hayley, John and Julia for their capable collaboration.

The information gathered through stakeholder surveys and roundtables was used to produce a series of *Baykeeper*

Position Papers. Each paper outlines the Baykeeper's evidence-based, expert guidance on an important topic relating to Bay health. Position papers are written with specific stakeholders in mind (e.g. state government, local governments) and provide knowledge, insights and recommendations to shape best practice, management and policymaking. A suite of position papers will be available for download from our website in the coming year.

Some of the deep knowledge and experience held by the current Baykeeper was consolidated and shared with the rest of the EcoCentre team, through staff trainings and digitising rare historical documents. We built curriculum-aligned citizen science kits for our education staff to take on school excursions and community fieldwork, and refreshed our citizen science datasheet design. These various resources will be available for equipment loan or materials download from summer 2022.

The forthcoming and final project phase involves recruiting and training a new Port Phillip Baykeeper, and a community event to celebrate the current, legendary Baykeeper Neil Blake's incredible legacy.

Find out more at ecocentre.com/baykeeper



Emissions Petal ratings scheme

While appliances are labelled with water and energy consumption, and food packages include health star ratings, there is no tool to calculate, score and disclose the immediate or accumulated emissions impacts of community-scale environmental programs. When facing a climate emergency, it is critical to design programs that demonstrably reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

To date, the emissions impact of EcoCentre programs is only known for activities directly reflected in energy bills, such as thermal retrofits and renewables installations at schools. Calculating exact emissions for individual projects can be time-consuming, because published CO₂e emission datasets focus on large-scale emissions *generation* processes, rather than community-scale activities with an emissions *reduction* outcome. Despite the limits to precision, generating cumulative impact and relative impact measures is still helpful for prioritising program options.

The EcoCentre wanted an easy-to-use scorecard to calculate accurate and relevant carbon emission values for various activities, allowing evaluation of a program's emissions impact without the need for complex technical knowledge. To create this scorecard, we collaborated with a remote intern team from WPI in the United States, and we thank the talented Brigitte, Kaitlyn, Zachary and Adrian, who worked with us from March to May 2021.

A three-phase process (Brainstorm, Estimate, Calculate) provides a program score on a scale of one to five 'petals'. The petal count reflects the net effect of a



program's activities on emissions reduction, prevention or sequestration. A selection of pre-defined actions in an Excel file can be combined and scaled to match the components of an EcoCentre program – the more petals, the larger the scale of direct climate health benefits.

Understanding emissions generation and reduction attributable to any given activity is crucial to honest program evaluation. We hope to model use of the tool and share it with other environmental NGOs to assist effective climate action plans.



Port Phillip EcoCentre's President, Secretary and staff members meeting with Josh Burns MP, David Morris MP, and Tim Wilson MP to discuss Port Phillip Bay health.

Advocating for change

As part of our strategic commitment to advocate for change, EcoCentre staff proactively share original research and topic expertise with decision-makers through a range of policy submissions, surveys, consultation panels and parliamentary hearings each year.

This year's eight written submission topics included environmental infrastructure, waste and recycling (including container deposit legislation), citizen science, and ecosystem decline in Victoria. Visit ecocentre.com/submissions to read the centre's key submissions in full.

The EcoCentre is a committee member of the Port Phillip Emergency Climate Action Network, which also produced detailed joint submissions regarding the Council Plan, the Victorian gas substitution roadmap, and 'the Green Line' proposed vegetation and walking corridor abutting the railway from Alma Park to Elsternwick.

Over video calls and in person, we were able to meet with a number of decision-makers and elected leaders this year, including new local councillors, government policy writing teams, Victorian and federal MPs from four parties. In winter 2020, Baykeeper Neil Blake facilitated Scout conversations over Zoom with 14 mayors and parliamentarians about microplastic pollution. In late 2020, we joined a Port Phillip Bay health roundtable with Josh Burns MP and Tim Wilson MP, and in February 2021, we hosted a range of local environment groups to meet the Hon Chris Bowen MP to discuss climate policy aspirations. Our [Clean Bay Blueprint: Microplastics in Melbourne](#) report on study results were so far presented to 75 decision-makers, with a target of 100 conversations by year end.

We continued expert involvement in the Elster Creek Community Advisory Panel for flood management across four municipalities, as well as participation in

the development of the remarkable Elsternwick Park Nature Reserve, a 13-hectare rewilding of a former golf course in lower Elster Creek. A presentation to the cross-sectoral Port Phillip Bay Environmental Management Plan Project Officer Group was well received, and advisory contributions made for Volunteering Victoria's new *Youth Ready Volunteering* resources and the Victorian Government's first-ever *Citizen Science Strategy* (forthcoming in 2022). Baykeeper team Neil Blake and Fam Charko accepted roles in the Scientific and Technical Advisory Group for the Victorian Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability, contributing our citizen science datasets (and providing introductions for other data holders) to the next *State of the Environment* reports. It is quite exciting to share community-collected data for real-world management applications, and to help model and codify robust, inclusive citizen science practices for the state of Victoria.



Outcome: The EcoCentre is an efficient and effective, forward-thinking organisation with an excellent reputation.

Strategies

Outstanding people. Recruit, retain, manage and develop skilled and diverse staff.

Best practice. Ensure best practice through high-quality planning, monitoring and evaluation.

Strong finances. Maintain financial security via a range of sources.

Robust systems. Consolidate systems and policies including HR, IT, membership, communications and marketing.

Excellent governance. Maintain a strong Committee of Management and best-practice governance.

Inspiring Facilities. Develop and implement a strategy for a new fit-for-future community building that enables our innovation and growth.

Activities in 2020–21

Activities this year included EcoCentre Redevelopment, Community investments and strategic activities, Membership and reach, Awards, Strategic Planning 2021–2024.

‘Being part of the EcoCentre community is important to me because it connects me to my local environment in a way that inspires practical action, in the face of global problems that can otherwise seem overwhelming.’

– Stephen Sholl, EcoCentre member

Success indicators

Maintained high levels of satisfaction with funders, government agencies, project partners and Affiliates	
Target: 90% of stakeholders report a high level of satisfaction with the quality and conduct of our work	Actual: 98% of stakeholders highly satisfied
Redevelopment strategy is progressing against milestones	
Target: 90% of milestones met	Actual: Fully funded to commence FY22

Redevelopment: An EcoCentre where we all belong

Our new community hub is happening!

At a time when Australians are increasingly seeking ways to connect and create tangible change, the EcoCentre's team, with its growing volunteer force and expert network, is equipped to scale up community-led recovery for the climate, health and economic challenges ahead. However, our cottage facilities were no longer fit-for-purpose for demonstrating sustainable practice, meeting capacity demands or accessibility requirements. Last year the EcoCentre worked closely with City of Port Phillip to complete shovel-ready designs, with more than 90% community support evident through multiple consultation processes.

In May 2021, full redevelopment funding was confirmed with joint matching funds from City of Port Phillip and the Victorian Government. Construction will commence in summer 2022, with the EcoCentre operating temporarily from across the road on Blessington Street. With support from Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation, robust change management will ensure the high quality of EcoCentre programs, networks and community support will continue during this time of change and expansion.

The new community environment centre includes community spaces triple the size of the EcoCentre's current meeting room. The hub will house excursions and educator professional development workshops as well as community workshops, meetings and volunteer training sessions; Australia's first community-led Citizen Science Lab; a fully equipped community kitchen; plus, distinctive gardens, nature-play nooks and accessible decks. This beautiful design will be net zero carbon in operation and construction and aims to achieve a 6-Star Green Star 'World Leadership' sustainable design rating.

Subscribe to our newsletter to hear about inspiring new programs and events launching spring 2023.

'Scientists, educators and volunteers will be brought together under one roof with a \$2.8 million investment to design and build a new Port Phillip EcoCentre in St Kilda – so more school students and locals can benefit from short courses, community gardening and give new life to old objects with a new repair café.'

– Victorian Budget 2021/22





Community investments and strategic activities

Some activities conducted each year are outside funded projects. These are selected to provide strategic value on behalf of our members. These activities involve knowledge sharing, network building and practical support that accelerates sustainability in our daily lives, business best practice and government systems. They typically involve a mix of work funded by donations and expertise volunteered by our tireless team.

This year, staff and committee members strategically contributed their time to:

- » **Affiliate and partner support:** attending partners' annual general meetings and events; facilitating strategic planning workshops for community groups; supporting project development; writing letters of recommendation; and co-signing advocacy letters to protect waterways and climate
- » **Building the next generation of advocates:** mentoring students and pre-service teachers; participating in research projects; hosting 18 internships; speaking at career symposia; and providing professional references
- » **Building community connections:** community radio and podcast interviews and radio program hosting; attending ceremonies and celebration events; speaking at film screenings; and providing volunteer support and social inclusion activities, including lockdown adaptations
- » **Community outreach initiatives:** advocating for waterway protection during reforms to environmental laws; partnering with local artists; responding to community enquiries and reports of dead or injured wildlife; and peer reviewing citizen science
- » **Cross-sectoral relationship building:** collaborative consulting for government and government agencies by attending events and co-design workshops; science communication support to research labs; serving on consultation panels, brainstorming sessions and forums (considering a range of topics, including coastal management strategies, environmental infrastructure, spider crabs, Australian climate curriculum, and inclusive volunteer coordination)
- » **Ecosystem-scale thinking:** mapping current and potential wildlife corridors with community naturalists; providing expert testimony; advocating for integrated water management and biodiversity in the Elster Creek catchment; serving on Melbourne Water's Customer Council; and aligning citizen science methods between various groups
- » **Knowledge gathering and research on key issues:** literature reviews and leveraging networks to design informed position statements and background papers for community and decision-makers; hosting and attending round tables; sharing data to the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability
- » **Providing equipment and space:** hosting the St Kilda Repair Cafe; securing a grant for marquees to help facilitate COVID-safe outdoor events; rehoming near-new solar panels; sharing tools; providing meeting rooms, Zoom tech support and advice

Membership and reach

Together with direct membership registration, the EcoCentre implemented complimentary lifetime membership offers for donors and regular volunteers in recognition of the diverse, vital contributions made by our community towards our mission. The EcoCentre currently has 1,016 lifetime members.



662,000+
people reached through
digital platforms and
media

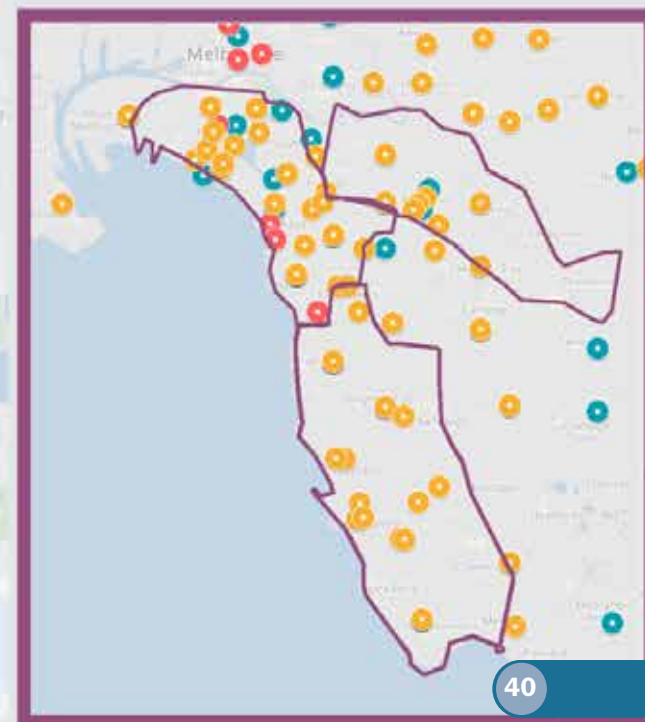
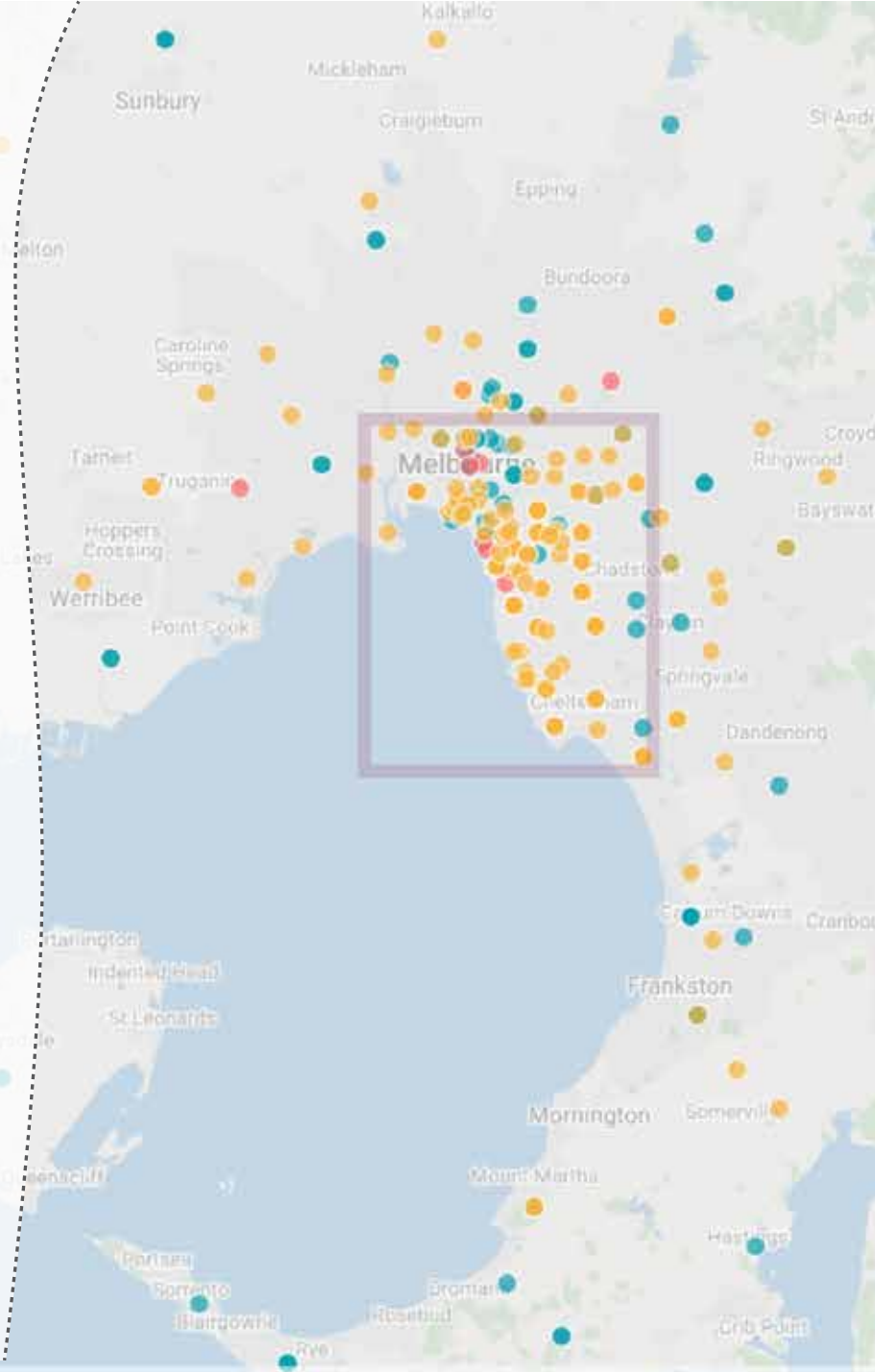
140
suburbs reached by
EcoCentre programs,
projects and partnerships



● **176 Schools & Early Learning Programs**
+ 5 Schools Programs within Regional Victoria,
and 4 Interstate School Programs

● **27 Affiliates**
+ 1 Interstate Affiliate Organisation

● **115 Partnered Organisations**
+ 1 Statewide Partnered Organisation,
7 Interstate Partnered Organisations and
3 International Partnered Organisations





Awards

The EcoCentre was proud to have several projects recognised this year, winning two awards and being named as a finalist in four other awards:

- » Fam Charko – Winner, **Emerging Leader Award**, Victorian Marine and Coastal Awards 2020 (Victorian Marine & Coastal Council)
- » Port Phillip Baykeeper – Winner, **Education and Engagement Award**, Victorian Marine and Coastal Awards 2020 (Victorian Marine & Coastal Council)
- » Living Water Workbees – Finalist, **Community Award**, Premier's Sustainability Awards 2020
- » Clean Bay Blueprint – Finalist, **Environmental Protection Award**, Premier's Sustainability Awards 2020
- » Living Water Workbees – Finalist, **Environment Award**, Keep Victoria Beautiful Awards 2020
- » Multicultural Bay Ambassadors – Finalist, **Young Legends Award**, Keep Victoria Beautiful Awards 2020
- » Two EcoCentre partnership projects were also Keep Victoria Beautiful Finalists: the St Kilda Repair Cafe with JECO, and NatureSpot with City of Port Phillip.

VICTORIAN MARINE &
COASTAL AWARDS 2020



Setting our *Strategic Plan 2021–2024*

The development of a new strategic plan was undertaken in the early months of 2021. Consultations were held with key stakeholders, and workshops conducted with EcoCentre staff and Committee of Management to assess the ever-changing scientific and operating contexts, and review program achievements and lessons to date. Thank you to our thought-provoking presenters, the many organisations who provided feedback through interviews or surveys, and to WPI for completing meta-analysis of three years of feedback.

Our *Strategic Plan* and *Monitoring and Evaluation Framework 2021–24* are key strategic documents that will guide EcoCentre work over the coming years and can be [viewed at our website](#).



EcoCentre Affiliation is open to not-for-profit groups engaged in environmental projects, or projects aimed at building and strengthening communities, with an environmental component. We provide a physical and virtual event hub for 27 Affiliate groups to conduct meetings and training, cross-promote events and share resources across an action network. Below, are annual highlights from several of our diverse Affiliate organisations.

BeachPatrol

BeachPatrol and Love Our Street form an organised network of volunteer-based beach and street cleaning community groups across Victoria. Each group is defined by its suburb, consists of mainly local residents and is named after its postcode.

Currently, BeachPatrol has 30 groups and Love Our Street has 26 groups, comprising approximately 5,000 volunteers. Our LitterStopper app for iOS and Android continues to enable groups and individuals to record

details of their clean-ups and upload them to our database and is becoming more and more popular.

Despite some group cleans being cancelled due to changing COVID-19 restrictions, group and individual cleans have removed 8,501 kgs of litter from the environment since January 2021. Some corporate group cleans – involving small companies to large national corporations – were undertaken during the last year, giving some of their staff an insight into the serious situation of plastic pollution in our environment.

<https://www.beachpatrol.com.au/>



Christ Church Community Centre

In partnership with Port Phillip Community Group, and when COVID restrictions permit, we have been delivering a seven-week introduction to horticulture and garden maintenance course here at Christ Church Community Centre. Our kitchen garden presents the perfect setting to run introductory training opportunities for people who are seeking to build new skills and re-engage with the community, and explore their interest in gardening.

Graduates from the introductory sessions can join our Garden Nomad team, a program that provides garden maintenance and support to local residents who cannot manage on their own due to mobility limitations. Some people like to stay involved as regular volunteers and mentors in our gardening sessions as well as maintaining our small plant nursery. Sales from the nursery help to support our gardening activities, for example, by enabling us to purchase tools and safety equipment.

www.ccm.org.au



Climate for Change

Our mission is to create the [social climate](#) for [effective action](#) on climate change.

We support our community to take impactful action that will inspire others, and we believe strongly in the power of everyday people to shape this democracy when they actively engage as citizens. Enabling this engagement is the foundation of our work across Victoria and Queensland.

We have engaged thousands of Australians in understanding the need for climate action and enabled them to have effective conversations about climate change. This has been achieved not through lectures or rallies, but in real conversation that starts around the kitchen table and grows through local gatherings with family and friends.

The effects of COVID meant that our flagship program, Climate Conversations, had to move online, which allowed us to tap into communities that we would not have otherwise been able to access. This is a very exciting prospect for the growth and impact of our conversations moving forward.

We published a climate conversation guide to help people tackle tricky conversations with friends and family about climate change, and we also produced a resource on how to engage your local MP about such issues. It matters to MPs what the mood in their electorate is and what constituents want, but many Australians never attempt to use the democratic power they have because they do not understand the political system or do not feel confident enough to contact their MP. Visit our website to find climate conversation resources, or to join our MP Engagement Groups meeting monthly on Zoom.

www.climateforchange.org.au



Earthcare St Kilda

Earthcare St Kilda works to protect the local Little Penguin colony and the natural resources of the City of Port Phillip Bay and surrounding areas. Despite the challenges COVID-19 presented, we have managed to achieve some very positive outcomes for the year.

Our research and work to care for the Little Penguins has been able to continue with limited numbers. This has helped make the experience nicer and more meaningful for our volunteers and much safer for our penguins. We have organised some fantastic community planting days at various sites around Port Phillip Bay. Approximately 40 people turned up for our Elster Creek planting activity, installing over 2,000 native plants and helping to enhance the biodiversity of this important location.

The redevelopment of St Kilda Pier is underway and we are pleased to have been involved and consulted throughout the design process. The majority of the things we requested have been included in the design. We will continue to stay involved with the project until completion.

This year we have been working on our digital infrastructure to help create a better experience for our existing volunteers as well as for new volunteers wanting to join in our activities.

We look forward to an exciting year ahead, helping to care for nature and provide opportunities for the community to take positive action and become involved in Earthcare.

earthcarestkilda.org.au



Elsternwick Park Association

The Elsternwick Park Association is a community group with a vision to create a beautifully designed and maintained wetland and parkland in the Elsternwick Park Nature Reserve. This year, despite intermittent COVID lockdowns and restrictions, our membership grew and some of our highlights have been

- development of the Chain of Ponds
- lease of the on-site shed and commencement of the Plant Lab
- multiple plantings to attract bees, inaugural Fly by Night event and litter collections
- ongoing nest box construction workshop
- approval of a new management model for the reserve

We always welcome new members and volunteers. We cannot wait until lockdown is a thing of the past and we can again learn together, and help to create and care for this incredible 13-hectare regenerated wetland, wildlife reserve and community gathering place.

<https://www.elsternwickpark.org>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/elsternwickparkassociation>



Jewish Ecological Coalition (JECO)/ Jewish Climate Network

JECO was established in 2003 to deepen Jewish commitment to sustainability and to work with individuals and organisations to prevent and repair environmental damage. In 2019, we launched the Jewish Climate Network (JCN) with the aim of catalysing the Jewish community to support and strongly advocate for action on climate change. JCN hosts climate conversations, guest speakers and panel discussion, and workshops for adults and students.

JECO's wider environmental community activities include the monthly St Kilda Repair Cafe. COVID lockdowns have severely impacted this year. We managed four face-to-face events, plus two online sessions. Statistics for that period were 79 visitors with 60 items repaired and 13 partially repaired. Between events, some of our volunteers have begun compiling a manual that will contain useful tips and discoveries shared by our fixers.

Limitations on gathering meant that whenever possible, sewing and some other repairs had to be run outdoors. Special thanks to the staff of the EcoCentre who have continued to be incredibly patient and supportive during difficult times.

JECO formed a very successful partnership with the charity Impact for Women, which provides gift hampers to women and children fleeing family violence. A group of our dedicated sewing people worked tirelessly to sew several hundred cloth bags, which will be filled with gifts and distributed to refugees in Victoria at each Christmas, and Mother's Day.

During the year there has been an increased interest in the 'right to repair' including an inquiry by the Productivity Commission. Our coordinator John Hillel represented the Repair Cafe at a seminar on the matter hosted by Macquarie University. As a result, John was contacted by *The Age* to contribute to an article on the topic.

www.jcn.org.au

www.stkildarepaircafe.org.au

Port Phillip Emergency Climate Action Network

The Port Phillip Emergency Climate Action Network (PECAN) was formed in late 2019 and comprises 12 Port Phillip community groups that have environmental and climate action missions.

In 2020/21, we continued to advocate that council funding to many environmental initiatives be maintained and that council establish a Climate Emergency Action Plan. We encouraged Port Phillip residents to let council know how important climate action is to them, and we rated candidates in the 2020 Port Phillip Council election on their environmental policies and publicised the results.

A task we have set ourselves is working to reduce the 1.7 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions produced in Port Phillip every year. We recently joined with the Yarra Energy Foundation and other climate action groups to install community batteries in houses and apartment blocks and lobby large local industries to reduce emissions.

We are also working on making Port Phillip cooler and greener, and with more open space. We have put proposals forward to council, including harvesting stormwater from beneath Catani Gardens for use in the gardens; designating a continuous green walking path (the 'Green Line') alongside the railway line from Alma Park through to Elsternwick; and encouraging neighbourhoods with treeless streets to lobby council to plant appropriate trees.

PECAN has also joined other climate action groups to promote understanding among citizens about the multiple impacts of new gas production on climate, land, water and people, and how we can use people power to influence government at state and federal levels, particularly with the upcoming federal election.

If you are a climate connected group in Port Phillip, please consider joining PECAN.

<https://pecan.org.au>

Port Phillip Community Group (PPCG)

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, PPCG services and supports have continued to be available to the Port Phillip community. The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in lasting negative impacts and financial hardship due to unexpected disruptions in employment, relationships and social connections. Frequent lockdowns have resulted in a significant increase in requests to PPCG for food, financial assistance and supports from people suddenly unemployed, as well as international students and those experiencing family violence due to lockdowns. Most have reported exhausting all their available funds, and incurring debts, due to unemployment or frequent disruptions in work.

Since March 2020, PPCG has provided over \$1.5 million dollars' worth of food and essential items to hundreds of vulnerable community members, as well as to 65 Port Phillip community agencies to distribute to their clients. Our Share the Food initiative has also supported community and public housing residents in quarantine where some residents have tested positive for COVID-19. New volunteers are still needed to support our Share the Food program through the essential services of packing, loading and delivering food parcels.

PPCG has worked collaboratively with the community, our key partners, clients and our staff to develop our new *Strategic Plan 2021–2025*, responsive to our community's changing needs and preparation for the COVID-normal world. PPCG will celebrate 50 years of continuous service provision during the life of this strategic plan.

To volunteer, donate or view our strategic plan, please visit our website.

<https://www.ppcg.org.au/>



PORT PHILLIP
COMMUNITY
GROUP RESPONSE
TO COVID-19



'My child really enjoys Seedlings playgroup. He loves looking for worms and insects and is enjoying learning how to carefully lift and replace fallen logs.'

Seedlings Nature Playgroup

Devised in 2019 by local parent and EcoCentre committee member Dr Janie Maxwell and supported by local parent volunteers Brittany Quayle and Belinda Connane, and after a long period of COVID-19 lockdowns in 2020, Seedlings Nature Playgroup finally launched in March 2021 at the Port Phillip EcoCentre.

Seedlings brings together a community of families to connect children to nature through exploration and unstructured play. The aim is to build a sense of belonging and a love and appreciation of nature and sustainability in children. By building awareness and appreciation of the natural environment, the playgroup also aims to encourage more families to become environmentally conscious.

When COVID-19 restrictions allow, the playgroup meets twice per week and rotates between a series of four or five locations in the lovely parks, beaches and bushland in Port Phillip. Locations change each season and children are invited to play in all weather conditions. Explorations are child-led so that families can have fun with their kids at their pace. Each playgroup session starts with an Acknowledgement of Country and closes with a show and tell, nature-inspired stories or a singalong. Playgroup sessions are free and no materials are required, ensuring it is accessible to all.

Highlights this year included guest educators from the Bubup Bush program at Bubup Womindjeka Children's Centre, and being the subject of an article published by Playgroup Victoria: www.playgroupblog.org/nature-seedlings-playgroup/

A true benefit was that more than 300 families have joined, and so many were able to connect with their children, nature and the community during COVID-19 restrictions when indoor playgroups and other family services were closed.

We expect nature playgroups to continue to serve an important role in the COVID-19 recovery period.

[Find us on Facebook: Seedlings Nature Playgroup, Port Phillip](#)

South Port Uniting Church

The Simply Living Community Garden at Port Melbourne Uniting Church continued to provide a place of community connection during repeated lockdowns and restrictions.

Activities resumed under COVID-safe work plans when possible, including working bees, family gardening, Make & Mend, Kitchen Mates and our school holiday program, Grow & Eat.

Some highlights of the last 12 months were: networking with other local churches in the Christians Together for Climate campaign, establishing a community seed exchange, and adding to wildlife habitat, including insect hotels made as part of the Grow & Eat program.

www.spuc.org.au



Stop Adani Macnamara

Stop Adani Macnamara continues to work with other #StopAdani groups to oppose the construction of the Adani Carmichael coalmine in Queensland's Galilee Basin. The mine has the potential to emit up 4.7 billion tonnes of greenhouse gases during its lifetime, will endanger the future of the Great Barrier Reef, and is being constructed without the free, prior and informed consent of the Wangan Jagalingou traditional owners, whose country is currently being desecrated by preparations for the mine. We stand in solidarity with the Wangan Jagalingou people and support their right to defend their lands.

Activism is mostly focused on Adani's struggle to obtain insurance and finance. In the current lockdown, Stop Adani Macnamara has been active in calling sessions, whereby executives and staff at targeted banks and insurance companies are sent persuasive emails, texts and phone calls explaining the dangers of supporting the Adani mine. These sessions create a sense of energy, enthusiasm and camaraderie among us, as well as having an impact. When not in lockdown, with letters in hand, we have also visited local branches of the banks that financially support Adani to discuss the environmental impact of the mine.

As the federal election gets closer and as lockdown lifts, do not be surprised to see us at Port Phillip farmers markets encouraging you join us, in using our voices, votes and legislative tools to #StopAdani!

stopadanimelports@gmail.com



Tangaroa Blue Foundation

Like many organisations, we have had another year characterised by adapting to last-minute changes and challenges. We thank our partners, volunteers and supporters for having helped us continue to build on our programs and find more efficient ways of delivering outcomes.

In the last 12 months we have continued to build our ongoing Operation Clean Sweep program, with 40 industry partners having taken the pledge of Zero Pellet Loss from their business sites! We have also continued our work with government authorities, resulting in Operation Clean Sweep being recognised as industry best practice in both the Australian Government's National Plastics Plan and the NSW Plastics Action Plan, both released during 2021. We look forward to continuing to build Operation Clean Sweep into the national stewardship program that it needs to be, with high industry uptake and strong government support.

We were also successful in applying for a Sustainability Victoria 'Recycling Victoria Communities Fund' grant to expand on the successful Let's Strain the Drains project from last year. Over the next 18 months, Tangaroa Blue Foundation will work with the Cleanwater Group and the Cities of Melbourne, Wyndham, Hobsons Bay, Moreland, Kingston, Maribyrnong and Greater Dandenong as well as the Vicinity Centres in the City of Hume, and the University of New South Wales to audit 158 stormwater traps and deliver eight source reduction projects that aim to stop the flow of specific items at the source.

We look forward to announcing audit dates and inviting volunteers to participate in both the audit days and implementation of on-ground projects that will reduce the amount of litter ending up in Port Phillip Bay. A big thank you to all our volunteers, partners and supporters!

www.tangaroablue.org

Westgate Biodiversity: Bili Landcare and Nursery

Despite the challenges of a global pandemic, we had a very productive year. The number of plants leaving our nursery this financial year has almost doubled (from 85,000 to 150,000), leading to a massive number of increased biodiversity plantings around the City of Port Phillip. As a result, we have provided our community and partnering agencies with lots more giveaways and affordable access to plants.

We have also had some super-exciting discoveries this year. A local plant species called *Grevillea infecunda*, commonly known as Anglesea grevillea, is a root-suckering shrub endemic to Victoria and up until recently, was considered to be extinct around Port Phillip Bay and surrounding areas. Early records show that it was present within and around Albert Park. We have been trying to revive it, but it is notoriously difficult to grow from cuttings and cannot reproduce from seed as it has become infertile. After numerous experiments, we have finally managed to discover a growing method that has increased the survival success rate from 2% to about 25–30%. We have successfully grown 50 plants this year, which is a significant proportion of the global population given that approximately only 1,600 plants are thought to exist.

Before the millennium drought, our native parsley (*Apium prostratum*), could be found in abundance around Port Melbourne. These days, it is extremely rare. This year, we brought it back with strength in several spots around Port Phillip Bay. It can always be found alongside cushion bush – *Leucophyta brownii* – so if you are out exploring the coastal dunes and cliffs of the Bay, keep your eyes open and you might be surprised at what you see.

One great thing that came out of this lockdown was the discovery of a confirmed endangered species living at Westgate Park. A highly respected herpetologist (small reptile specialist) has been regularly visiting the parklands during lockdown and has confirmed the skink population living in the park is the endangered Golden Tussock skink.

westgatebiodiversity.org.au





Major partner

City of Port Phillip launched the EcoCentre and provides us with our council-managed building and an annual funding agreement to cover basic operational costs, enabling us to build new partnerships for diverse programming and impacts. As we work to build the future EcoCentre community hub, we value council's longstanding, substantial and collaborative support since 1999.

Projects funding

Australian Government – Communities Environment Program
CERES Community Environment Park
City of Port Phillip Youth Services
City of Stonnington
Coastcare
Junior Landcare
Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation
RMIT University
South Melbourne Community Chest
Sustainability Victoria
Transurban
Victorian Government – Multicultural Festivals and Events Program

Celebrating news of the EcoCentre redevelopment funding with Port Phillip Councillors, Victorian and Australian MPs, May 2021.

Major funding

Australian Government – JobKeeper
Bayside City Council
Victorian Government – Port Phillip Bay Fund
Helen Macpherson Smith Trust

Government agency collaborators

Coastcare Victoria
Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability Victoria
Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO)
Environment Protection Authority Victoria (EPA)
Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP)
Melbourne Water
Metropolitan Waste and Resource Recovery Group
Office for the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, ACT
Parks Victoria
Victorian Fisheries Authority

Advisers and Ambassadors

Genevieve Timmons
John Spierings
Kenneth Harrison AM KSJ
Mitty Williams, The Kimberley Foundation
Nick Moriatis



EcoCentre President
Pam O'Neil meeting
with Elsternwick
Park Association co-
presidents to share
future visions.

Affiliates

Animal Liberation Victoria
BeachPatrol Australia/Love Our Street
Brighton Playroom
Climate for Change
Christ Church Community Centre
Earthcare St Kilda
Elwood Floods Action Group
Elsternwick Park Association
Environmental Education Victoria
Global Landcare
Jane Goodall's Roots & Shoots
Jewish Ecological Coalition (JECO)
Kids In Nature Network (KINN)
Landcare Victoria Inc.
Marine Care Ricketts Point
Port Phillip Bicycle Users' Group (BUG)
Port Phillip Community Group Limited (PPCG)
Port Phillip Emergency Climate Action Network (PECAN)
RAW Australia
Roots & Shoots
South Port Uniting Church
St Kilda Community Gardens Club
Sustainable Gardening Australia
Tangaroa Blue Foundation
Veg Out Community Gardens St Kilda
WEAll Youth
Westgate Biodiversity: Bili Nursery and Landcare

Benefactors

Anne Byrne
Anonymous (East St Kilda)
Deborah Sykes
Liz Fenwick
Keith and Debby Badger
Tony Flude

Consultants

Brett de Hoedt, Hootville Communications
Carol Jadraque, Gruen Exchange
Ethical Investment Services
Gio Fitzpatrick, naturalist
Kate Jones Design
Mo Works
Russell Kennedy Lawyers
Strategy Matters
Tess Sellar Design
Wendy Brooks and Associates

Partner organisations

1st Belmont Scouts	Bunjil's Biik	Greensong Ecopsychology	Sir Dallas Brooks Rovers
1st Diamond Creek Scouts	CERES Community	Inner South	Scouts Victoria
1st Ferny Creek Scouts	Environment Park	Multicultural Network	South Melbourne Life Saving
1st Kallista Scouts	Chisholm Institute	Integral Group	Club Nippers
1st Monbulk Scouts	City of Kingston	(formerly Umow Lai)	Sunbutter Sunscreen
1st North Balwyn Scouts	City of Stonnington	Interprefy	Spider Crab Alliance
1st Red Hill Scouts	Citywide	Josie Jones – Share the World	Stonnington Youth Services
1st Seaford Scouts	Cleanaway	Kallista Scouts	Sunbury Scouts
1st Sunbury Scouts	CrowdSpot	Koorie Heritage Trust	Swivol Media
1st Tullapark Scouts	Deakin University	Lord Somers Camp	Tangaroa Blue Foundation
3CR Tuesday Hometime	Dive2U	and Power House	This Week in St Kilda
3rd Sunbury Scouts	Dolphin Research Institute	Love Our Street 3184	Tiny Non-Profit
3RRR Radio Marinara	Dromana Sea Scouts	Lutman Films	Tomorrow's Leaders for
Aboriginal Tours and Education	Elsternwick Park Love	Melbourne Polytechnic	Sustainability Inc. (TLfS)
Melbourne -A TAEM	Our Street 3186	Monash University	Tulla Park Scouts
Albert Park Yachting	Eltham Scouts	Monbulk Scouts	University of Melbourne
and Angling Club (APYAC)	Elwood Scouts	Moo Motion	Very Special Kids
Anti-Toxic Waste Alliance	Environment Victoria	National Science Week	Victorian National Parks
Australian Citizen	Essendon Scouts	Newtecpoly	Association
Science Association	Ferny Creek Scouts	Nillumbik Scouts	Victorian Pride Centre
Australian Coastal Society Victoria	Frankston Beach Association	Oakleigh and Clarinda Scouts	Waterkeeper Alliance
Balcombe Estuary Reserve Group	Eventful Learning	Polperro Dolphin Swims	Werribee River Association
Bellarine Catchment Network	Everest Le Page Rover Crew	Port Phillip Multifaith Network	Werribee Scouts
Boon Wurrung Foundation	Fieldtech Solutions	Port Phillip Youth Services	Western Sydney University
Bourke and Bouteloup Architects	FirstStep	Preston Reservoir Adult	Wurringga Scouts
BeachPatrol 3207	First Friends of Dandenong Creek	Community Education (PRACE)	Worcester Polytechnic Institute
BeachPatrol 3182	Friends of Darebin Creek	Red Hill Scouts	Work for the Dole
BeachPatrol 3198	Friends of the Barwon	Remember the Wild	Yarra Energy Foundation
BeachPatrol 3199	Footscray Scouts	Reptile Encounters	Yarra Riverkeeper Association
BeachPatrol 3941	Frankston Beach Association	Royal Melbourne Institute	
Blackburn Scouts	Hawkesbury-Nepean	of Technology (RMIT)	
Brighton Scouts	River Waterkeeper	RMIT Plastics Lab	
Brighton Sea Scouts	Hazel Glen Scouts	Rye Community Group	
		Salvation Army Youth Services	

Schools

Aitken Hill Primary School
 Albert Park College
 Albert Park Primary School
 Aldercourt Primary School
 Alphington Primary School
 Altona Green Primary School
 Antonine College
 Armadale Primary School
 Aspendale Primary School
 Auburn South Primary School
 Athol Road Primary School
 Balcombe Grammar School
 Ballam Park Primary School
 Baxter Primary School
 Beaumaris North Primary School
 Beaumaris Primary School
 Bendigo Home School
 Beaumaris Secondary College
 Bialik College
 Black Rock Primary School
 Boroondara Park Primary School
 Brentwood College
 Brighton Beach Primary School
 Brighton Grammar School
 Brighton Primary School
 Brighton Secondary College
 Brunswick Secondary College
 Camberwell Primary School
 Candlebark School
 Carnegie Primary School
 Caulfield Primary School
 Caulfield South Primary School
 Cheltenham Primary School

Cheltenham Secondary Collage
 Christian Brothers College,
 St Kilda
 Christian College Geelong
 Deer Park North Primary
 East Bentleigh Primary
 Eastwood Primary school
 Elsternwick Primary School
 Elwood College
 Elwood Primary School
 Fintona Girls' School
 Firbank Grammar School
 Galilee Regional Catholic
 Primary School
 Gardenvale Primary School
 Geelong Grammar School,
 Toorak Campus
 Gembrook Primary School
 Glen Huntly Primary School
 Haileybury College, Brighton
 Hampton Primary School
 The Hester Hornbrook Academy,
 South Melbourne
 Highton Primary School
 Holmesglen Institute
 Ivanhoe Girls' Grammar School
 Kingswood Primary School
 Knox Gardens Primary School
 Korowa Anglican Girls' School
 Lakeside College
 Lauriston Girls' School
 Lloyd Street Primary School
 Macgregor Primary school
 The Mac.Robertson Girls'

High School
 Malvern Central Primary School
 Malvern Primary School
 Melbourne Girls' College
 Melbourne Montessori
 School Brighton East
 Mentone Primary School
 Middle Park Primary School
 Montmorency primary
 Moorabbin Primary School
 Mordialloc College
 Mossfiel Primary School
 Mount Scopus Memorial College
 Mount Waverley Primary School
 Mungkarta Homeland
 Learning Centre
 Murrumbeena Primary School
 Myrniong Primary School
 Nathalia Secondary College
 Northcote High School
 Oberon High School
 Osborne Primary School
 Our Lady of the Nativity
 Primary School
 Our Lady's Primary School
 Pacific Valley Christian School
 Patterson Lakes Primary School
 Pascoe Vale North
 Primary School
 Port Melbourne Primary School
 Ripponlea Primary School
 Rossbourne School
 Sacred Heart Parish School,
 Sandringham

Sandringham College
 (Junior School)
 Sandringham East
 Primary School
 Sandringham Primary School
 Sholem Aleichem College
 South Melbourne Park
 Primary School
 South Melbourne Primary School
 St Agnes Primary School, Highett
 St Aloysius College
 St Andrew's Cathedral School
 St Anthony's Primary School
 St Brigid's School, Mordialloc
 St Carlo Borromeo
 Primary School
 St Cecilia's Primary School
 St Columba's Primary
 School, Elwood
 St Finbar's Primary School
 St Francis Xavier School
 St James Catholic Primary
 School, Brighton
 St Joan of Arc School, Brighton
 St John The Baptist Parish
 Primary School
 St John Vianney's Primary
 School, Mulgrave
 St Joseph's Primary School,
 Black Rock
 St Joseph's Primary
 School, Elsternwick
 St Joseph's Primary
 School, Malvern
 St Kilda Park Primary School

St Kilda Primary School
 St Leonard's Primary School
 St Leonard's College
 St Louis de Montfort's
 School, Aspendale
 St Mary's Primary
 School, Hampton
 St Mary's Primary School,
 Malvern East
 St Mary's Primary School,
 St Kilda East
 St Michael's Grammar School
 St Patrick's College Ballarat
 St Patrick's Primary School
 St Theresa's Primary
 School, Albion
 Star of the Sea College
 Stella Maris Primary School
 Somerville Rise Primary School
 Surrey Hills Primary School
 Toolern Vale and District
 Primary School
 Toorak Primary School
 Trinity Grammar School
 University of Melbourne
 University Park Primary School
 Valkstone Primary School
 Victoria University
 Westbourne Grammar School
 Wesley College
 Whitefriars College
 Williamstown North Primary
 School
 Windsor Primary School
 Wyndham Central College



Early learning centres and kinders

Altona Early Education Centre
Armadale Early Learning Centre
Bentleigh Childcare and Kindergarten
Black Rock Preschool
Explorers Early Learning, Brighton East
Friendship Square Child Care & Kindergarten
Co-Op Cheltenham
GEKA Glover Street Kindergarten
Genazzano Early Learning Centre
Gowrie Victoria Carlton North
Haileybury Early Learning Centre
Hornbrook Children's Centre
John Mackenzie Kindergarten
Kensington Community Children's Co-operative
Korowa Anglican Girls' School Early Learning Centre
Lady Forster Kindergarten
Lauriston Girls' School Kindergarten
Leap Ahead Learning Pre-prep
Leibler Yavneh College Early Learning Centre
Malvern Early Learning and Childcare Centre
Nagle Preschool
Poets Grove Family Children's Centre
Renown Kindergarten
St Peter's Kindergarten
South Melbourne Childcare Co-operative
Swanston Street Children's Centre
The Avenue Children's Centre
The University of Melbourne Early Learning Centre
Uniting Southport Kindergarten
Wilson Street Kindergarten
Winter Street Occasional Care
Leibler Yavneh College Early Learning Centre



Pam O'Neil
President



Lis Fenwick, PhD
Vice President



Harpreet Sidhu
Treasurer
(July–May)



Nick Capes
Treasurer
(Current)



Deborah Sykes
Secretary



Jan Cossar



Geoffrey Love



Isabel Robinson



Dr Janie Maxwell



Laura Grant



Elliot Costello

Committee of Management

Pam O'Neil, President

Liz Fenwick PhD, Vice-President

Harpreet Sidhu, Treasurer *(July–May)*

Nick Capes, Treasurer *(Current)*

Deborah Sykes, Secretary

Jan Cossar

Geoffrey Love

Isabel Robinson

Dr Janie Maxwell

Laura Grant

Elliot Costello

EcoCentre Public Fund Managers

Michele New

Nick Capes

Louise Kyle

Bookkeepers

Anne Dennehy and **Michelle Humphreys**,
Advantage Books

Staff

April Seymore, Executive Officer

Dr Cécile van der Burgh, Education Manager

Neil Blake OAM, Port Phillip Baykeeper

Alex Hoffman, Education Programs Facilitator

Fam Charko, Marine Biologist and Project Manager

Reiko Yamada, Project Manager for Climate Change & DEI

Nadav Zisin, Community Engagement Coordinator

Didi Magtuto, Communications and Marketing Coordinator

Deb Punton, Garden Coordinator

Ben Francischelli, Educator

Coco Riverossa, Educator

Ella Ryan, Educator

Sharron Hunter, Educator

Malcolm Dow, Educator

Matt McArthur, Educator

Peter Kelly, Educator

Kate Bulling, Educator

David Giles, IT Specialist

Zaylee Saint-James Turner,
Community Engagement Coordinator

Josh Solomonsz,
Communications and Marketing Coordinator



Interns

Adrian Orszulak, Worcester Polytechnic Institute
Brigitte Lefebvre, Worcester Polytechnic Institute
Charlie Dursin, Worcester Polytechnic Institute
Erica Lennox, Deakin University
Erin Perry, Worcester Polytechnic Institute
Evan Zhang, Deakin University
Hayley McCasland, Worcester Polytechnic Institute
John Laukaitis, Worcester Polytechnic Institute
Julia Pope, Worcester Polytechnic Institute
Kaitlyn Morrison, Worcester Polytechnic Institute
Lachlan Wiles, Deakin University
Megan Olasiman, Deakin University
Michael Bedard, Worcester Polytechnic Institute
Mitchell Kornberg, Deakin University
Sean Patterson, Deakin University
Suela Miloshi, Worcester Polytechnic Institute
Tanner McCarthy, Worcester Polytechnic Institute
Zachary Sotland, Worcester Polytechnic Institute

Above and Beyond volunteers

Adrian Black, Culture & Nature Festival
Allan Pringle, Compost engineer
Anja Schomann, Multilingual resource library
Anna Duan, Multilingual resource library
Audrey Miranda Prasetya, Multilingual resource library
Cass Kalaris, Culture & Nature Festival presenter
Catherine Deltour, Multilingual resource library
Chenxin Tu, Culture & Nature Festival presenter, film translation, Multilingual resource library
Danial Graham, Bay360
Dr Christopher Johnstone, Clean Bay Blueprint statistical analysis
Dr Meenakshi 'Meena' Bhardwaj, Multilingual resource library
Emily Hui, Culture & Nature Festival presenter
Emma Barnett, Clean Bay Blueprint statistical analysis
Fernanda Soares, Culture & Nature Festival presenter
Hannah Brooks, Culture & Nature Festival presenter

Hilda Poloso, Culture & Nature Festival presenter, Summer by the Sea

Iona Fat, Culture & Nature Festival

Isobel Booksmythe, Culture & Nature Festival

Janine Stabryla, Compost engineer

Jo Neil, Garden mentor

John Hillel, Repair Cafe volunteer coordinator

Jonathan Law, Culture & Nature Festival presenter

Julie Alkarra, Culture & Nature Festival presenter

Maisarah Azmi, Multilingual resource library

Margot Brock, Worm farm whisperer

Marinda Pattinson, Clean Bay Blueprint

Melanie Jasmine Rowe, Bay360

Mick Meehan, Garden superstar

Nhu Duong, Multilingual resource library

Noor Salman, Multilingual resource library

Pascale Miller, NatureSpot

Saniya Dsouza, NatureSpot, Culture & Nature Festival

Sebastián López Llovet, Multilingual resource library

Shohre Mansouri, Multilingual resource library

Tammy Taylor, Deep Time Walks

Trevor White, Redevelopment Working Group

Zoe Haoyue Chen, Culture & Nature Festival presenter

Treasurer's Report



Despite COVID-19 restrictions reducing every EcoCentre funding stream, our total income for the year was over \$1.1 million, as a result of receiving \$405,000 through JobKeeper grants. This Australian Government support enabled a suite of service innovations, employment stability and continuous community outreach.

Payroll costs remain our largest expenditure, including JobKeeper 'top-ups' paid to eligible casual employees. Otherwise, professional services continued to be our largest expense category, reflecting obligations under various grant terms to co-deliver specific elements of projects with partner organisations or technical experts. Our signature collaborative approach also leveraged volunteer contributions to our programs valued at over \$600,000.

Under the guidance of our auditors at Morrows Pty Ltd, a once-off extraordinary asset depreciation of \$178,488 was accounted for to reflect the imminent demolition of the EcoCentre for redevelopment, accelerating the end-of-life for EcoCentre's capitalised fixtures and features built into the current premises.

We know the environmental crisis will not be solved in the short term. The EcoCentre's reserves are designed to

ensure we can continue our vital work for years to come. In addition to an operating reserve for resilience to short-term challenges like lockdowns, extreme weather events or uninsured losses, the EcoCentre has a Future Fund created as a result of an extraordinary bequest.

Our Future Fund is held in a long-term, ethical investment portfolio aligned with the EcoCentre's strong social and environmental values. The fund backs initiatives that accelerate a low-carbon, equitable and healthy world and as a source of annual interest and dividends, will support our operations and strategic development or expansion consistent with the EcoCentre's vision and purpose.

The normal operating surplus (including JobKeeper funding) was \$93,806. but after the cost of the extraordinary depreciation the result was an operating deficit of \$84,682. Finally, after accounting for capital gains in the EcoCentre Future Fund of \$91,189, our Total Comprehensive Income for the year was a modest \$6,507.

Thank you to the outgoing treasurer Harpreet Sidhu, who ably steered the financial management through a unique and challenging year, and to the Finance and Investment Sub Committee for ensuring a strong foundation for the planned expansion in the coming years.

Nick Capes

Treasurer





Detailed income and expenditure statement for the year ended 30 June 2021

	2021	2020
INCOME	\$	\$
City of Port Phillip grants	317,181	324,000
Other grants	196,389	436,766
Commercial sponsors	-	178
Consulting Income	122,743	259,788
Donations	63,573	146,290
Investment Income	24,017	16,998
Membership	59	1,097
Seminars & Education	15,720	55,771
Product sales	210	3,139
Government Subsidies	405,100	134,000
TOTAL INCOME	1,144,992	1,378,027

LESS: EXPENSES		
EMPLOYEE BENEFITS EXPENSE		
Salaries and Wages	770,816	739,109
Superannuation	75,670	66,609
Workcover	8,660	7,414
TOTAL EMPLOYEE BENEFITS EXPENSE	855,146	813,132
DEPRECIATION & AMORTISATION EXPENSE		
Depreciation	184,367	6,201
OTHER EXPENSE		
Accounting and audit fees	23,685	21,234
Bank charges	547	849
Cleaning	3,840	5,736
Computer expenses	12,184	5,342
Consumables	3,043	5,417
Electricity	1,747	2,467
Insurance	5,037	3,577
Equipment and materials	10,140	1,336
Other operating expenses	320	-
Printing, postage and stationery	7,164	4,113
Professional services	94,090	148,911
Repairs and maintenance	44	150
Seminars and training	5,192	3,470
Sundry Expenses	14,906	12,394
Subscriptions	4,861	5,123
Telephone	3,361	4,197
TOTAL OTHER EXPENSE	190,161	224,316
TOTAL EXPENSE	1,229,674	1,043,649
Profit before income tax	(84,682)	334,378

continued...

Statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income for the year ended 30 June 2021

	2021 \$	2020\$
Revenue	1,144,992	1,378,027
Employee benefits expense	(855,146)	(813,132)
Depreciation and amortisation expense*	(5,879)	(6,201)
Other expenses	(190,161)	(224,316)
Normal operating surplus for the year - before additional depreciation adjustment due to change in estimate of useful life of the Association's building	93,806	334,378
Depreciation adjustment - change in useful life*	(178,488)	-
(Deficit)/Surplus for the year	(84,682)	334,378
Other comprehensive income, net of income tax		
Fair value gains on investments	91,189	10,359
Other comprehensive income for the year, net of tax	91,189	10,359
Total comprehensive income for the year	6,507	344,737

*The depreciation and amortisation expense for the year consists of two separate components. The first component being the annual depreciation of \$5,879 before the change in estimated useful life of the Association's building. For the current financial year, a separate depreciation component of \$178,488 exists due to the change in estimate of the useful life of the Association's building. Please refer to note 13 [in full [Financial Statements](#)] for a detailed explanation

PORT PHILLIP ECOCENTRE INC
ABN 66 852 809 680

STATEMENT BY MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

We, Pamela O'Neil and Nick Capes, being members of the Committee of the Port Phillip EcoCentre Inc, certify that:
The statements attached to this certificate give a true and fair view of the financial position and performance of the Port Phillip EcoCentre Inc during the end of the financial year of the association ending on 30 June 2021.

Dated: 12/08/2021

 Pamela A O'Neil

Pamela O'Neil (President)

 Nicholas Alastair Capes

Nick Capes (Treasurer)

INDEPENDENT AUDITOR'S REPORT TO THE MEMBERS OF PORT PHILLIP ECOCENTRE INC

Report on the Audit of the Financial Report

Qualified Opinion

We have audited the accompanying financial report, being a special purpose financial report of Port Phillip EcoCentre Inc (the Association), which comprises the statement of financial position as at 30 June 2021, the statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income, the statement of changes in equity and the statement of cash flows for the year then ended, and notes to the financial statements, including a summary of significant accounting policies, and other explanatory information.

In our opinion, except for the effects of the matter described in the Basis for Qualified Opinion section of our report, the accompanying financial report of the Association for the year ended 30 June 2021 is prepared, in all material respects, in accordance with the Associations Incorporation Reform Act 2012 and the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012.

Basis for Qualified Opinion

As mentioned in Note 3 to the financial statements, accounting records are not available to substantiate buildings and plant and equipment amounting to \$283,017 cost and \$252,393 accumulated depreciation at balance date. The fixed asset register and accounting records for these assets date back 15 years ago and detailed records were not maintained at the time. The committee of management has determined and is of the opinion that these assets exist and that the carrying value approximates the value in use. However in the absence of a valuation and stocktake we are unable to ascertain the details and carrying amounts of these assets.

We conducted our audit in accordance with Australian Auditing Standards. Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the Auditor's Responsibilities for the Audit of the Financial Report section of our report. We are independent of the Association in accordance with the auditor independence requirements of the ethical requirements of the Accounting Professional and Ethical Standards Board's APES 110 Code of Ethics for Professional Accountants (the Code) that are relevant to our audit of the financial report in Australia. We have also fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with the Code.

We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our qualified opinion.

Emphasis of Matter - Basis of Accounting

We draw attention to Note 1 of the financial report, which describes the basis of accounting. The financial report is prepared to assist the Association to comply with the financial reporting provisions of the Associations Incorporations Reform Act 2012 (VIC) and the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012. As a result, the financial report may not be suitable for another purpose. Our report is intended solely for the Association and should not be distributed to or used by parties other than the Association. Our opinion is not modified in respect of this matter.

INDEPENDENT AUDITOR'S REPORT TO THE MEMBERS OF PORT PHILLIP ECOCENTRE INC

Responsibilities of Management and Those Charged with Governance

The committee of management is responsible for the preparation and fair presentation of the financial report in accordance with the Associations Incorporation Reform Act 2012, and for such internal control as the committee of management determines is necessary to enable the preparation of the financial report is free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the financial report, the committee of management is responsible for assessing the the Association's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless management either intends to liquidate the Association or to cease operations, or has no realistic alternative but to do so.

Those charged with governance are responsible for overseeing the Association's financial reporting process.

Auditor's Responsibilities for the Audit of the Financial Report

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial report as a whole is free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance, but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with the Australian Auditing Standards will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of this financial report.

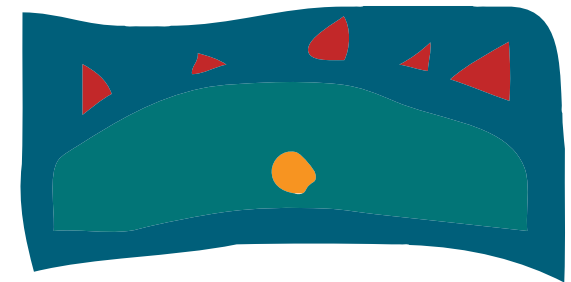
A further description of our responsibilities for the audit of the financial report is located at the Auditing and Assurance Standards Board website at: https://www.auasb.gov.au/auditors_responsibilities/ar4.pdf. This description forms part of our auditor's report.


MORROWS AUDIT PTY LTD



A.M. FONG
Director

Melbourne: 12/08/2021



P O R T P H I L L I P
ecocentre

Port Phillip EcoCentre Inc.

**55A Blessington St.
St Kilda, VIC 3182**

Located in St Kilda Botanical Gardens
(corner Blessington and Herbert Streets)

(03) 9534 0670

info@ecocentre.com

www.ecocentre.com

ABN: 66 852 809 680

Incorporated Association No. A0038897K



EcoCentre



@ecocentrestkilda



@ecocentrestk

Registered on Environment Australia's Register
of Environmental Organisations and entitled to
receive tax-deductible donations.