

10 August 2022
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Public support for UNESCO Biosphere Reserve delivers projects for French Island and Western Port reefs

The community response to the Western Port Biosphere Reserve Foundation's recent '\$50,000 in 50 days' fundraising campaign has helped get terrestrial and marine environmental projects under way in Western Port.

It has provided funding for the construction of a greenhouse to be used by French Island Landcare as part of the establishment of its Nursery and Community Garden and financial support for a collaborative research project into protection of Western Port's unique bryozoan reefs.

The Biosphere Foundation's CEO, Mel Barker, said that supporting these important projects in the heart of the reserve would have been difficult without the money donated by the community.

"These are projects with significant environmental merit that our campaign enabled us to we support. We have been very pleased to be able to notify our donors so quickly about how their money is being put to good use in promoting biodiversity and developing strategies to protect our most valuable natural assets," Ms Barker said.

French Island project

The greenhouse for French Island will be a polytunnel which will be used by the French Island Landcare Group to grow indigenous tube stock, bush foods, vegetable seedlings, ferns and local orchids. This will support French Island Landcare's revegetation and shelter-belt projects.

It will also make a substantial contribution to Landcare's community and educational activities in and around the Nursery and Community Garden.

Western Port bryozoan reef project

Our grant will enable local scientists to expand their research into Western Port's bryozoan reefs. In a wondrous underwater environment that is out of sight of all but the most experienced divers, the bryozoa that comprise these reefs are non-photosynthetic filter feeders commonly referred to as 'lace corals'.

The Western Port bryozoans are special because they are shallow, large and form contiguous reefs providing important habitat for a multitude of marine species including fish, molluscs, crustaceans and worms. They also provide shelter for some species from the strong currents that are typical of this marine waterway. Historically, they and the marine species they have nurtured and protected have been damaged by dredging and other human activities.

The research project, spearheaded by La Trobe University and marine consulting and research firm, Fathom Pacific, will quantify the extent of these fragile reefs, the processes that threaten them and make them vulnerable and will shed light on their growth rate.

Photos:

Nicole Wilson MSc sieves fine sediment and screens the bryozoan sample for protected fauna. 'Cleaned' samples are transported to La Trobe University's Bundoora campus where they're measured for biodiversity and abundance.

Dr Travis Dutka (left) receives a bryozoan colony collected by diver Kade Mills in order to study growth rates. Collected under permit and made possible by the in-kind use of the 'Trochus' owned by the Port Of Hastings Development Authority.

For more information:

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More about the Western Port Biosphere Reserve Foundation

The Western Port Biosphere Reserve is one of 738 places in 134 countries recognised by the United Nations for the uniqueness and importance of its biodiversity. Biosphere reserves promote solutions to enable people to enjoy and live in harmony with the environment. They advocate for the protection of our most important environmental assets and for sustainable development through research, education, which informs discussion and solutions aligned with society's ability to cope with change. The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) now form a centrepiece of the advocacy and programs undertaken for the Western Port Biosphere Reserve Foundation. These programs include partnering with industry and government on projects to achieve better environmental outcomes while maintaining or improving their performance.