

1 April 2022
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Western Port and Port Phillip Bay can play major role in achieving net zero carbon

Proper investment in marine ecosystem protection and restoration could ensure Victoria's Western Port and Port Phillip bays contribute to local and national's achievement of net zero carbon emissions.

A partnership led by the Western Port Biosphere Reserve Foundation will examine how this can be achieved through investment in local scale 'blue carbon' projects to maintain and restore mangrove, seagrass and saltmarsh ecosystems. These are capable of capturing carbon up to 30 and 50 times faster than terrestrial forests, locking it into the marine sediments for thousands of years.

The Foundation has partnered with member councils of the South East Councils Climate Change Alliance (SECCCA) and Deakin University's Blue Carbon Lab, to build on research already undertaken along Victoria's coastline to identify how future ecosystem management can optimise carbon sequestration and storage.

The new study will focus on Western Port and the eastern edge of Port Phillip Bay, both areas with existing blue carbon assets, and with potential for even greater capacity for carbon capture through the restoration of areas already damaged or lost.

Biosphere Foundation CEO, Mel Barker, said funding from seven of SECCCA's member councils, including the five existing Biosphere Foundation partner councils, would help ensure that future and more significant investments into blue carbon would yield positive returns for local communities, the climate and sustained biodiversity.

"Land clearance and degradation of the world's forests regularly hit the international news as a threat to the Earth's capacity to absorb carbon dioxide. Yet the loss of marine ecosystems on our doorstep and around the world and the equally substantial role they play in maintaining a liveable planet slips by virtually unnoticed. Globally, wetlands have already declined by 64-71% since 1900.

"This research will help build awareness that the conservation and restoration of our coastal ecosystems is indispensable to help us adapt and mitigate to climate change.

“Not only could future investment make a substantial contribution to Australia achieving net zero carbon, but it would also help enhance marine biodiversity in the bays and support sectors like recreation, tourism and fishing,” she said.

SECCCA Chair, Michael Whelan, said participating councils would derive substantial benefit from access to the evidence-based guidance for future environmental planning and programs for blue carbon ecosystems.

“Deakin University’s Blue Carbon Lab is one of the world’s leading centres for blue carbon research, focussed in quantifying the capacity of our coastal and marine environments to help offset carbon emissions, especially in the region most relevant to our bayside councils.”

Head of Blue Carbon Lab, Professor Peter Macreadie, said the project would deliver a valuable roadmap for future investment in blue carbon ecosystem restoration, supported by comprehensive maps of existing habitat, suitable areas for coastal wetland restoration and other co-benefits deriving from these ecosystems (e.g. coastal protection, fisheries, improvement of water quality).

“With the support of the Western Port Biosphere Reserve Foundation and SECCCA, this project will be crucial to understand the blue carbon opportunities at local and regional scale within the Western Port Biosphere Reserve and South East Councils Climate Change Alliance region.”

“We expect that our project will identify the areas within this region that are suitable to deliver productive blue carbon projects and biodiversity outcomes with the right level of investment and evidence-based project planning and management,” he said.

Participating cities and shires include: Bass Coast, Bayside, Cardinia, Casey, Frankston, Kingston and Mornington Peninsula.

Photo: At Deakin University’s Blue Carbon Lab (left to right): Professor Peter Macreadie (Head of Deakin University’s Blue Carbon Lab), Glenn Brooks-MacMillan (Program Manager, Western Port Biosphere Foundation) and Daniel Pleiter (Acting CEO, SECCCA).

For more information:

<https://www.biosphere.org.au/biosphere-projects/current-projects/blue-carbon/>

Mel Barker	CEO Western Port Biosphere Reserve Foundation www.biosphere.org.au	P: 0466 235 611 E: ceo@biosphere.org.au
Daniel Pleiter	Acting Chief Executive South East Councils Climate Change Alliance www.seccca.org.au	P: 03 9705 5662 E: dpleiter@seccca.org.au
Dr Micheli Duarte de Paula Costa	Research Fellow Blue Carbon Lab, Deakin University Blue Carbon Lab www.bluecarbonlab.org	P: 0484 609 644 E: micheli.costa@deakin.edu.au

More about the project partners

Western Port Biosphere Reserve Foundation

www.biosphere.org.au

The Western Port Biosphere Reserve is one of 727 places in 131 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.

South East Councils Climate Change Alliance (SECCCA)

www.seccca.com.au

Founded in 2004, SECCCA is a network of councils committed to delivering high-quality, innovative projects and research programs at a regional level. SECCCA is an incorporated association that collaborates with all levels of government to deliver regional climate change projects that benefit over 1 million residents in the south east of Melbourne. We advocate, educate and deliver targeted projects to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and build resilience to a changing climate. Its vision is for communities of the south east of Melbourne to be thriving, living a zero emissions lifestyle, and resilient to the changing climate.

Deakin Blue Carbon Lab

www.bluecarbonlab.org

Founded in 2016, Deakin University's Blue Carbon Lab is an award-winning research group offering innovative research solutions for helping to mitigate climate change and improve natural capital, while also contributing to jobs, economic growth, capacity building and community wellbeing. The Blue Carbon Labs' in-house expertise spans ecology, biogeochemistry, microbiology, environmental economics, modelling and mapping/remote sensing. The lab's effective on-ground works and translation of science into policy and practice has gained global respect and hundreds of collaborations across academia, government, industry, and broader society.