



HOBSONS BAY
WETLANDS CENTRE

State of the Environment Report is an opportunity for a better future

The release of the 2021 State of the Environment (SoE) report on Tuesday 19th July 2022 by the new federal government paints a dire picture of our country and its precious natural environment. It highlights that our time for action is now, we must act in order to improve our environment for our health and wellbeing.

The report states that our 'waterways, beaches and shorelines are in generally poor condition in areas near urban centres'. Urbanisation has increased the pressure on the environment and the need for protections and restoration of wetlands and coastal habitats. The report notes that citizens' health and wellbeing is dependent on these natural areas and their biodiversity.

This report shows us the problems. Hobsons Bay Wetlands Centre Inc is focused on the solutions. We aim to establish a purpose-built Wetlands Centre in the heart of Melbourne's west by 2025 that will be a hub of research, learning, conservation, community wellbeing and connection to nature. We support a number of strategies and plans at International, Australian, State and Local Government levels. These strategies are aimed at protecting and restoring the natural environment as well as promoting community health and wellbeing.

As a not for profit charity, the Hobsons Bay Wetlands Centre (HBWC) is committed to taking actions through partnerships with the Hobsons Bay City Council, Deakin University, Melbourne Water, Greater Western Water, Ecolinc (Department of Education & Training), Cirqit Health, BirdLife Australia and Blue Carbon Lab. Together we can enhance our knowledge and support initiatives that will tackle the problems we face as identified in the SoE report.

Dr. Rebecca Patrick of Deakin University, who is a supporter of the Hobsons Bay Wetlands Centre's vision for connecting people with nature for their health and wellbeing said that the 2021 SoE report was written by diverse authors and looked at the impact the environment has on our health.

"This report goes further than its predecessors, by describing how our environment is affecting the health and well-being of Australians. It is also the first to include Indigenous co-authors." Dr. Patrick said.

Chair of the Hobsons Bay Wetlands Centre Dr. Marilyn Olliff emphasized that incorporating Indigenous knowledge was essential.

"The concept design of the Wetlands Centre that Council has on the drawing board is based on biophilic and Traditional Owner design principles, these principles create a closer connection to nature in the way in which the buildings and landscapes are designed and built. The Wetlands Centre will provide opportunities for connection with nature, education and research for the growing community of the west to take charge and make a difference." Dr. Olliff said.

Deakin University's Dr. Phillip Roös, who is a keen supporter of the HBWC said that the way we design needs to be sustainable and supportive of the environment and will shape how we interact with our world.

“A key driver behind the design of the HBWC, is that of biophilia and the application of biophilic design science. This is where we propose to put nature first, and until we as a global society do that, we will struggle to be sustainable.” Dr. Roös said.

We are focused on education and raising community awareness of the precious natural environment we have around the coastal wetlands, which extend from Williamstown to Point Cook, less than 20kms from Melbourne’s CBD. This area is internationally recognised under the Ramsar convention for its ecological significance, providing a haven for local birdlife and many international migratory species of shorebirds.

Kevin Wood, the Vice Chair for HBWC, is a conservationist and environmental scientist, and leads a monitoring program for the birdlife in all of the wetlands in this area.

“The SoE report recognises that interacting with nature benefits both the physical and mental health of coastal residents, and thus our wellbeing is closely tied to the health of the coastal environment. HBWC recently conducted its own review of the health of the coastal wetlands in our area and found that many of the impacts noted in the SoE report are also evident here. Shorebird numbers are declining, and other waterbirds appear to be falling as well.” Kevin Wood said.

These sentiments are also noted by Dr. Mike Weston of Deakin University, who is a contributing author to SoE, a local, and a supporter of HBWC, on why a purpose built Wetlands Centre in Hobsons Bay can make a difference, saying that the need for protection of this vital area is paramount.

“The declines in shorebirds are ongoing and substantial, and the Wetlands Centre could play a key role in working to protect local habitat and engender local support for their conservation. Shorebirds offer a tangible local link to the SoE report and biodiversity decline and the need for conservation.” Dr. Weston said.

Wetlands are critical eco-systems supporting diverse plant and wildlife communities. They reduce the impacts of floods, absorb pollutants and improve water quality, provide human health benefits and combat carbon emissions.

Another key program our volunteers have worked on is with Deakin University’s Blue Carbon Lab to assess the efficiency of saltmarsh plants in their uptake of carbon dioxide. This information was used in their mapping of blue carbon assets in Hobsons Bay. This mapping identified the areas we currently have and the potential for increasing our blue carbon assets in the fight against climate change.

We want the next State of the Environment report to be a success story of the actions we are taking with our communities, our partners and our governments to improve the lives of all and protect our precious environment.

Our environment deserves better from us. Become a member of Hobsons Bay Wetlands Centre, donate or become a volunteer and help us continue to create ‘a place where everyone can connect with nature to improve health and wellbeing and be inspired to care for our precious natural environment’.

Stay up to date with all that we are doing by following us on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

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