

Blue carbon partnership an Australian first

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Minister for Environment and the Great Barrier Reef, Minister for Science and Minister for the Arts

The Honourable Leeanne Enoch

Wetlands along the Maroochy River on the Sunshine Coast are set to become a world leading showcase for environmental innovation, after the Palaszczuk Government has formed an Australian-first partnership with Sunshine Coast Council and Unitywater.

The 'blue carbon' project focuses on the natural floodplain in the river catchment, an area known as the Blue Heart, and will help protect local infrastructure from flooding.

Announcing the historical partnership today, Minister for Environment and the Great Barrier Reef Leeanne Enoch said blue carbon – the carbon stored in the plants and soils of wetlands and coastal areas – is a priority for the Palaszczuk Government's \$500 million Land Restoration Fund.

"That is why today I am also pleased to announce more than \$4 million for a number of projects in the next round of funding, known as the Catalysing Action Grants, under our flagship \$500 million Land Restoration Fund," Minister Enoch said.

"The Land Restoration Fund is a key plank of the Palaszczuk Government's commitment to take action on climate change and meet our target of zero net emissions by 2050, and today's partnership is helping us achieve this goal."

This blue carbon project will focus on the more than 5000 hectares of natural floodplain in the Maroochy River Catchment, and will demonstrate how land can be managed to improve water quality, biodiversity and carbon sequestration, while providing more places for recreation.

"Blue carbon is a potential new carbon-farming method where Queensland has an advantage," Minister Enoch said.

"We know there are job and economic opportunities in carbon farming; research has shown that Queensland's emerging carbon farming industry could contribute up to \$8 billion to the economy by 2030, helping to generate new jobs, revenue streams and market opportunities, especially for regional, rural and First Nations communities."

Sunshine Coast Mayor Mark Jamieson said outcomes of the partnership would further strengthen the adaptation and resilience of the Sunshine Coast.

"Through the Blue Heart we're continuing to demonstrate our commitment to sustainability and enhancing our natural assets," Mayor Jamieson said.

"In particular, this initiative is another tangible demonstration of how our Sunshine Coast Council is working with its partners to strengthen our region's climate

resilience and taking real action to assist our communities adapt to a changing climate.

“The Blue Heart will support landholders and local communities to adopt new land management practices that build future economic and environmental resilience, while retaining a focus on flood hazard management.

“It will not affect the existing land use entitlements of current private landowners, but through a coordinated and supported approach, will enable them to explore new land management options for the use of their properties.

“The Sunshine Coast, and our Blue Heart area, is the ideal location to investigate blue carbon opportunities.

“Importantly, it is an opportunity to work with representatives of the Kabi Kabi First Nations peoples to examine new opportunities for the future, which celebrate and respect their heritage and recognise the cultural significance of the Maroochy River catchment to their community.”

Unitywater’s Yandina Creek Wetland, in the vicinity of the Blue Heart, is a ‘green engineering’ solution and a lower-cost alternative to sewage treatment plant upgrades.

Unitywater Chairman Jim Soorley said the wetland used the natural environment to remove sediments and nutrients from the Maroochy River.

“The Blue Heart has great environmental potential and will significantly boost what our wetland is already doing, to improve water quality,” Mr Soorley said.

“By contributing to this project, Unitywater will be able to take advantage of these natural processes to offset the cost of our sewage treatment processes and keep our customers’ bills as low as possible.

“The Yandina Creek Wetland will remove about 5.3 tonnes of nitrogen and 0.5 tonnes of phosphorous each year from the Maroochy River. The Blue Heart has potential to substantially increase this amount and will contribute to offsetting the impact of future population growth in our region.”

Minister Enoch said there are many ways in which carbon farming activities can deliver a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and create significant social, cultural and environmental benefits.

“More than \$4 million has been allocated to six successful projects throughout the state in this round of the program,” Ms Enoch said.

“These grants provide funding to on-the-ground carbon farming projects that will have environmental, social and economic benefits.”

Successful projects include Bush Heritage Australia, which is receiving \$735,000 to assess a new way to farm carbon in the Rangelands and Brigalow Belt, and the Yambangka Aboriginal Cultural Heritage and Tourism Development Aboriginal Corporation who are receiving \$742,000 implement a rotational grazing program and cease the clearing of regrowth to allow the traditional forest to regenerate and absorb carbon.

A full list of projects funded is below.