

# VICTORIAN MARINE & COASTAL AWARDS 2024



OFFICIAL

# Minister's Foreword



It is my pleasure to welcome you to the 2024 Victorian Marine and Coastal Awards.

These Awards recognise the incredible work being done to sustainably manage and protect the coastal and marine environment across Victoria. The Awards bring together the community, Traditional Owners, universities, Coastcare groups, Committees of Management, not-for-profit organisations, local councils, State Government, as well as industry, to celebrate Victoria's treasured coast.

The quality of nominations received this year is a testament to the expertise and drive of the exceptional people, organisations and collaborations in the marine and coastal sector. It is inspiring to see the passion and innovation of award finalists, showcasing the many decades of experience and knowledge in protecting and improving the marine and coastal environment in Victoria. It is also incredible to see so many young and emerging leaders caring for our coast.

Ninety-six per cent of our coast is public land, ensuring the coast is largely accessible to all of us to visit, work, holiday and live - from bustling city beaches to smaller seaside towns and

untouched coastline in remote areas. It provides the context for treasured memories made by Victorians for past, present and future generations, as well as being home to beautiful coastal flora, fauna and marine life.

I would like to thank the Victorian Marine and Coastal Council for hosting this fantastic event which celebrates our incredible sector. I would like to especially thank Dr. Anthony Boxshall, outgoing Chair of the Victorian Marine and Coastal Council who has served as Chair since Council's inception in 2018.

Congratulations to all the finalists and winners for the 2024 Victorian Marine and Coastal Awards.

**Steve Dimopoulos MP**

Member for Oakleigh  
Minister for Environment

# From the Victorian Marine and Coastal Council



The Victorian Marine and Coastal Awards are an opportunity to acknowledge and celebrate the many individuals, communities and organisations caring for Victoria's marine and coastal environment.

Stewardship of our coast and Sea Country goes back a very long way. The Victorian Marine and Coastal Council (VMaCC) recognises and pays respect to Traditional Owners as the oldest living culture on the planet. We acknowledge their 60,000+ years of custodianship, care and protection of Victoria's marine and coastal environment. We continue to look forward to walking together into a different and shared future.

The 2024 Awards are an opportunity for connection and reflection as we come together to showcase the passion and diversity of projects being delivered across the State. We received 43 nominations, with finalists reflecting the diversity of the sector – from Traditional Owner and community groups, local government and Committees of Management, to not-for-profit groups and research institutions. A big 'thank you' to all the nominees for your contributions to caring for Victoria's marine and coastal environment. Our thanks are also extended to the Technical Advisory Panels who had the difficult task of determining the winners and finalists.

As the state's peak advisory body on marine and coastal issues, the purpose of VMaCC is to provide evidence and stakeholder-informed advice, enabling leadership in adaptive planning and management of Victoria's marine waters

and coastal areas. Looking back over recent years there's a lot to be proud of, including the launch of *Economic Impacts from Sea Level Rise and Storm Surge in Victoria, Australia over the 21st century* (the Kompas report). This report amplified the conversation about coastal climate impacts, providing the economic costs and drivers for investment in adaption planning and action now.

Through our regional visits, VMaCC has welcomed the opportunity to meet with local marine and coastal stakeholders, engaging in rich conversations about the opportunities and challenges ahead.

Congratulations to the 2024 finalists and Award winners, and thank you to the many unsung heroes, the volunteers and caretakers along the entire Victorian coastline, whose passion and dedication is greatly appreciated and often undervalued.

**Dr. Anthony Boxshall, Chair 2018-2024**

On behalf of VMaCC

Marianne Atkinson, Dr. Anna Grage,  
Dr. Rebecca McIntosh, Mikaela Power,  
Prof. Gerald Quinn, Kylie Steel, Jacqui  
White (Deputy Chair)



# Leadership in Climate Adaptation and Resilience

Awarded for projects, programs or initiatives that embed a climate resilient approach in marine and/or coastal management, planning or operations.



## WINNER

### SOUTH GIPPSLAND SHIRE COUNCIL SOUTH GIPPSLAND COASTAL STRATEGY

South Gippsland has over 300 kilometres of magnificent coastline. It is home to several small, active communities that account for 13 per cent of the municipal population. These communities, which sustain the local fishing industry, drive regional visitation, and contribute to the local economy and culture, are at risk from increased coastal challenges.

In 2021 and 2023, Gippsland communities were severely impacted by volatile weather resulting in storm surge and inundation. These recent lived experiences, along with updated flood mapping and rising sea level projections, created an alarming scenario which led to the Council's proactive decision to identify coastal hazards in the region.

The resulting *South Gippsland Coastal Strategy* is the Council's key guide for responding to climate change. Supported by an action and implementation plan, the Strategy aims to aid the protection of coastal communities long into the future.

The Strategy aims to minimise population pressure and development through bold actions such as the removal of all coastal township greenfield areas from the planning scheme, and restricting development to one dwelling per lot. It seeks to preserve the marine and coastal environment through nature-based adaptation like the *Common Ground* community initiative, and support land management through a township character study. It also guides how the Council can work with the community to promote emergency safety and build social resilience.

Through actions in the Strategy, South Gippsland Shire Council has taken a proactive and courageous step to combat climate change impacts in our coastal communities.



## FINALIST

### MORNINGTON PENINSULA SHIRE COUNCIL OUR COAST OUR FUTURE

The Mornington Peninsula has 192 kilometres of diverse coastline, ranging from rocky cliffs, to coastal wetland and sandy beaches. The Peninsula's diverse landforms and ecosystems means many communities are located in low-lying coastal areas, or adjacent to rocky cliffs and beaches. Along some regions of the Shire's coastline, some communities are already impacted by coastal hazards.

*Our Coast Our Future*, a project currently underway by Mornington Peninsula Shire Council, aims to provide a long-term plan to manage and adapt to the impacts of coastal hazards across the Mornington Peninsula. This visionary project is breaking new ground as the first in Victoria to apply the State Government's *Victoria's Resilient Coast – Adapting for 2100+* Framework and Guidelines on a regional scale.

Delivery of the project is two-part. The recently completed Part A applied stages 1-4 of the Victoria's Resilient Coast Guidelines. Part A aimed to define the problem by understanding the

Shire's coastal values, predicted areas of change and how these changes are expected to impact coastal values and assets.

Part A has resulted in a state first: identification of eleven priority townships requiring coastal adaptation, derived from an evidence-based process. It has also produced:

- Identification of community values.
- Development of coastal hazard maps.
- A risk and vulnerability assessment across multiple planning horizons.
- An economic base case assessing the economic cost of non-intervention.

Part B will apply stages 5-7 of Victoria's Resilient Coasts Guidelines and determine solutions at priority locations. Part B is planned to commence in early 2025, continuing to lead regional-scale coastal adaptation in Victoria.

*Funding partner: Victorian Government's Victoria's Resilient Coast grants program.*



## FINALIST

### DEAKIN UNIVERSITY

## KELPING THE BAY: FUTUREPROOFING THE GOLDEN KELP

*Kelping the Bay: Futureproofing the Golden Kelp* is a pioneering project aimed at establishing the first kelp biobank in Victoria. The project is focused on *Ecklonia radiata* (Golden Kelp), which is the backbone of Australia's Great Southern Reef, and a keystone species in kelp forest ecosystems. These kelp forests play a vital role in supporting Australia's abalone and crayfish fisheries, as well as coastal tourism and recreational industries.

In Port Phillip Bay, kelp forests have suffered a sharp decline over the past two decades, threatening the biodiversity, cultural, social and economic value that these ecosystems provide. *Kelping the Bay: Futureproofing the Golden Kelp* addresses the need to restore depleted kelp and enhance the resilience of existing populations in the face of rapid climate change.

Through the work of Dr. Prue Francis and her team, a Victorian Golden Kelp biobank has been established at Deakin University's Queenscliff Marine Science

Centre. The project aims to protect the species from further decline and support future restoration projects across Victoria. The biobank will support research into kelp restoration and climate adaptation, allowing the selection of strains that are resilient to changing environmental conditions.

The biobank project is an adaptation strategy providing a proactive measure to safeguard these ecosystems from potential extinction. By future proofing these vital ecosystems, the project contributes to scientific knowledge and the long-term health of Victoria's marine biodiversity.

*Collaborators: The Nature Conservancy, Parks Victoria, the University of Melbourne.*

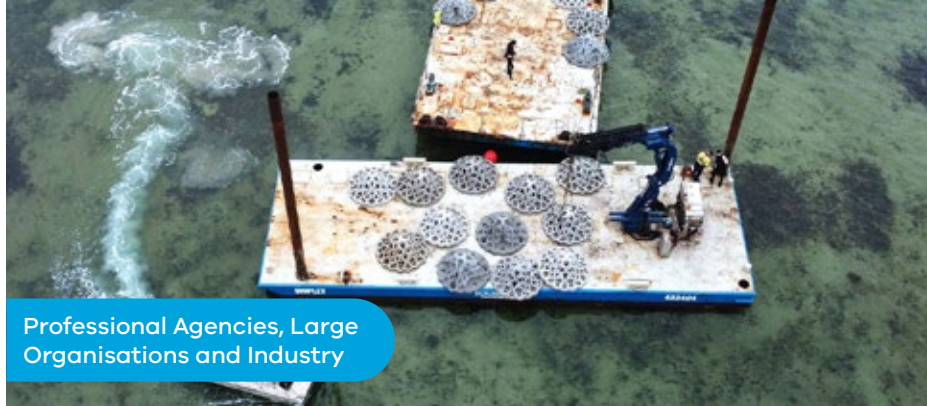
*Funding partner: Victorian Government's Port Phillip Bay Fund.*



# Excellence in Marine and Coastal Design or Development

Awarded for projects and initiatives that showcase innovative, leading practice in marine and/or coastal design or development that is consistent with the principles of the *Marine and Coastal Act 2018*.





Professional Agencies, Large Organisations and Industry

## WINNER

### CITY OF GREATER GEELONG THE DELL ECO REEF, CLIFTON SPRINGS

*The Dell Eco Reef* brings together cutting-edge technology, knowledge of intertidal ecosystems, and creativity. This project fuses elements of sculpture, technology and ecology to deliver a visually striking addition to the Bellarine. It consists of a series of modular artificial units placed together to form a permeable barrier designed to reduce the height and energy of waves.

*The Dell Eco Reef* was established to mitigate the effects of erosion and recession along the foreshore caused by winter storms and rising sea levels at the Dell Beach, Clifton Springs. The innovative design will protect and enhance the Dell Beach's sensitive coastline and provide new habitat

for vulnerable marine life, whilst also offering a unique educational and sculptural feature that draws visitors to the beach.

*Collaborators: City of Greater Geelong, The Reef Design Lab, Victorian Government, Parks Victoria, the University of Melbourne.*



# Embedding Traditional Owner Cultural Practices in Management

For an Indigenous individual, Traditional Owner organisation or group who has actively embedded cultural practices into marine and coastal management, planning or operations.





## FINALIST

### GUNDITJ MIRRORING TRADITIONAL OWNERS ABORIGINAL CORPORATION

#### NYAMAT MIRRORING PLAN 2023-2033

The Gunditjmarra have had a deep, strong and ongoing un-ceded sovereign connection to Nyamat Mirring (Sea Country) for over 60,000 years. Gunditjmarra, through Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation, have developed the *Nyamat Mirring Plan 2023 – 2033*.

The Plan asserts Gunditjmarra's responsibilities to Nyamat Mirring, identifies the ongoing harms that impact Nyamat Mirring, and barriers that limit Gunditjmarra's opportunities for enacting self-determination through power over decision-making, management, and economic interests.

*Nyamat Mirring Plan 2023 – 2033* provides a framework that describes Gunditjmarra's goals for Nyamat Mirring and identifies priority actions to achieve those goals. It aims to assist natural resource managers, researchers, local government, government agencies, industry and the wider community to better understand what Nyamat Mirring means to Gunditjmarra.

The Plan is an important Gunditjmarra contribution to management of the coastal and marine environment. It includes future management principles, a management framework and an implementation plan, intended to ensure Gunditjmarra can carry out their enduring responsibility to care for Nyamat Mirring, so their children can thrive, see their Country heal and know their stories.

Through its development with the Gunditjmarra, the Plan has increased community skills, understanding and connection with the coastal and marine environment.



# Inspiring Community Engagement and Education

Awarded for projects, programs or initiatives making an outstanding contribution to community education and/or engagement to improve the Victorian community's understanding of, and connection with, the coastal and marine environment.



Professional Agencies, Large Organisations and Industry

## WINNER

### DOLPHIN RESEARCH INSTITUTE

#### ***I SEA, I CARE***

Since 2001, the Dolphin Research Institute's *i sea, i care* program has developed senior primary school students into Victorian coastal and marine ambassadors, who have in turn engaged nearly 2 million people across greater Melbourne.

This year-long program leverages the efforts of 500 young marine ambassadors annually, significantly extending the outreach capacity of the Institute (of approximately five full-time staff) and allowing the program to remain affordable, accessible and sustainable.

With regular workshops on Victoria's environment, young marine ambassadors are trained to peer teach the rest of their school and communities in all aspects of the coastal and marine environment – linking the choices we make way up in the catchment to the impacts on our bays through drains and waterways.

By peer teaching junior grades about Victoria's environment, the program provides a platform to engage and inspire younger students to become environmental leaders too, further developing the next generation of marine champions.

23 years ago, few schools had marine leaders championing for the Victorian coast. There are now 9000 marine ambassadors advocating for change in their communities.

*Funding partners: Mornington Peninsula Shire, City of Casey, Greater Dandenong Council, City of Kingston.*



Professional Agencies, Large Organisations and Industry

## FINALIST

### AQUATIC ENVIRONMENTAL STRESS RESEARCH GROUP, RMIT UNIVERSITY, CORANGAMITE CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY, BELLARINE CATCHMENT NETWORK, MELBOURNE WATER LITTER TRACKERS

Rivers are the primary conduits for litter to reach our oceans. Reducing the volume of litter entering waterways is crucial for protecting our estuaries, coastal and marine environments.

The *Litter Trackers* program is a pioneering initiative in Victoria. The program provides a multi-faceted immersive learning experience through a combination of hands-on activities, online teaching resources, and real-time tracking of GPS-enabled bottles. The bottles are released into waterways of Melbourne, Geelong and the Surf Coast to trace the journey of litter from catchment to coast. The program demonstrates how and where litter travels once it is dropped within a catchment. It effectively contributes to our understanding of litter transport, raising community awareness about the impact of litter on waterway health and the connections between catchment activities and receiving waters.

*Litter Trackers* was designed to engage the wider community, particularly school

children, using interactive experiences that allow litter to 'tell its story'. By engaging communities and providing a tangible sense of ownership over the litter problem, the program empowers individuals with the knowledge and skills needed to take action, fostering a proactive approach to environmental stewardship.

The project's success was rooted in its strong partnerships with stakeholders including RMIT's Aquatic Environmental Stress Research Group (AQUEST), Corangamite Catchment Management Authority, Bellarine Catchment Network, Melbourne Water, and Waterwatch Victoria.

*Litter Trackers* has laid a solid foundation for ongoing education and awareness, and is expected to have lasting impacts on how communities understand and address litter pollution.

*Funding partner: Victorian Government's Coastcare Victoria Community Grants, Port Philip Bay Fund.*

Professional Agencies, Large Organisations and Industry



## FINALIST

### ZOOS VICTORIA AND THE VICTORIAN FISHERIES AUTHORITY SEAL THE LOOP

Every year, marine wildlife (and wildlife from other aquatic environments) in Australia faces considerable threats from discarded fishing lines and other fishing waste. The *Seal the Loop* campaign was developed as a response to this environmental issue, aiming to reduce the impact of fishing waste by providing dedicated bins for anglers to dispose of fishing waste responsibly. The campaign was initiated by Zoos Victoria and is delivered in partnership with the Victorian Fisheries Authority.

*Seal the Loop* has engaged over 60 community groups, local councils, and environmental organizations. This broad network has been crucial in establishing, maintaining and emptying *Seal the Loop* bins across Victoria. By encouraging community ownership, *Seal the Loop* promotes a hands-on approach, embedding conservation values in the community and developing a collective commitment to preserving the coastal and marine environment. The installation of 360 *Seal the Loop* bins at popular fishing spots across Victoria since the campaign's inception in 2011 highlights its wide-reaching impact.

*Seal the Loop* bins are also integrated into educational programs delivered by Zoos Victoria and the Victorian Fisheries Authority, connecting audiences to the wildlife that calls waterways home and promoting wildlife-friendly fishing practices.

The success of *Seal the Loop* hinges on its strong community and partnership foundations. From its initial inception, the program has relied on collaboration, working alongside organisations such as Replas, Parks Victoria, Fishcare, VR Fish, Coastcare Victoria and more.

Long-term, the campaign aims to influence fishing behaviour, cultivating a culture of environmental responsibility among anglers.

*Collaborators: Zoos Victoria, Victorian Fisheries Authority, Replas, Parks Victoria, Fishcare, VR Fish, Coastcare Victoria.*





## Community and Volunteer Groups/Individuals

## WINNER

### FRIENDS OF GRIFFITHS ISLAND PORT FAIRY

## SWITCH OFF FOR SHEARWATERS LIGHT POLLUTION MANAGEMENT

Griffiths Island, Port Fairy, is an important habitat for a colony of Short-Tailed Shearwaters (*Ardenna tenuirostris*). Recently, threats such as light pollution have contributed to disorientation and 'grounding' of young fledglings during April and May as the birds learn to fly on their migration journey. Over the past 20 years, their population has declined from over 40,000 birds to approximately 5,000.

In response to multiple grounding events, Friends of Griffiths Island began a project aimed at developing community education awareness and a management plan to help protect the Short-Tailed Shearwater colony. The project received funding from the *Reducing light pollution in coastal communities* program, and focused on mitigating the impact of light pollution, raising community awareness, and actively engaging volunteers and local schools.

The project partnered with Phillip Island Nature Parks to ensure it was informed by expert research. It mapped

key habitat areas on Griffiths Island, identified light pollution sources, and implemented solutions to reduce light pollution. In partnership with Moyne Shire Council the project culminated in the creation of a Light Pollution Management Plan for Griffiths Island.

Friends of Griffiths Island partnered with Port Fairy Consolidated School to develop the community education component of the project as well as the messaging, logo, and postcard artwork, fostering a sense of stewardship in the next generation. The success of this project demonstrates Friends of Griffiths Island's leadership in coastal conservation and the importance of community-driven environmental initiatives.

*Collaborators: Phillip Island Nature Parks, Moyne Shire Council, Port Fairy Consolidated School.*

*Funding partner: Reducing Light Pollution in Coastal Communities Program.*



## Community and Volunteer Groups/Individuals

## FINALIST

### EARTHCARE ST KILDA, NORTHERN PACIFIC SEA STAR TEAM NORTHERN PACIFIC SEA STAR REMOVAL PROGRAM

Earthcare St Kilda is a marine and coastal conservation charity that has been working at the forefront of community-led conservation in Port Phillip Bay since 2008. The program is focused on the removal of Northern Pacific Sea Stars, an invasive species threatening the bay's ecosystem.

Since February 2024, the Northern Pacific Sea Star Team has removed over 100,000 sea stars (more than three tonnes of biomass) from the Bay. This substantial reduction in the invasive species population has likely had a positive effect on the bay's biodiversity and ecosystem health. Continued removal efforts are expected to help restore balance to the bay's ecosystem, allowing native species to recover and thrive.

The program has directly engaged with over 500 volunteers, providing hands-on experience through small group snorkelling activities, education on species identification and marine conservation, and fostering a sense of environmental stewardship among community members. Its recent success

has created significant public interest in the effects of Northern Pacific Sea Star on Port Phillip Bay, raising awareness about marine invasive species and their impacts on local ecosystems.

Earthcare St Kilda's Northern Pacific Sea Star program has effectively engaged with the community and built partnerships to achieve greater understanding and connection with the marine and coastal environment.

*Collaborators: Frankston City Council, City of Port Phillip, Mornington Peninsula Shire, Victorian Fisheries Authority, the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action.*



## FINALIST

### GRACELYN HASTHORPE

Gracelyn Hasthorpe is a young ambassador for environmental conservation. Her leadership is demonstrated through her efforts to educate the community on the impact of balloons and plastics in the environment. Through her work, she encourages others to take action against pollution.

Gracelyn engaged with groups across Victoria such as Phillip Island Nature Parks, Zoos Victoria, schools, Rotary Clubs, Girl Guides and Scouts, Tangaroa Blue, wedding celebrants and churches, as well as Members of Parliament in her efforts.

Gracelyn has used her initiative to encourage people to stop the pollution at its source by reducing their consumption of plastic products. She has demonstrated the impact that one person can have on the health and wellbeing of coastal waterways and inspired numerous others to follow her lead and take action.



## FINALIST

### FRIENDS OF THE BLUFF BARWON HEADS LIVING ON THE EDGE – RE-IMAGINED

Initially developed in 2004 as an online education resource for the newly established Barwon Bluff Marine Sanctuary, the *Living on the Edge* initiative has been the foundation theme for Friends of the Bluff's extensive coastal and marine education programs. The initiative has been a model for developing volunteer led community education and engagement resources that support local land and sea managers through the provision of high-quality education resources and delivery of a far-reaching engagement program.

In preparation for a celebration of twenty years since the establishment of Barwon Bluff Marine Sanctuary, Friends of the Bluff and many partners undertook a comprehensive review of website content and design, and the activities that support it.

With the assistance of a Coastcare grant, *Living on the Edge – Re-imagined* aimed to provide a contemporised one-stop online resource supported by a range of on-ground activities and events promoting protection of the marine and coastal environment.

Friends of the Bluff sought wide-reaching input into the review

from local environment-focussed groups, Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation, local schoolteachers, the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, Parks Victoria, Victorian Fisheries Authority, Deakin University and Barwon Coast Committee of Management.

The reimagined website continues to recognise the importance of Wadawurrung heritage and marine and coastal knowledge. It hosts a comprehensive guide to marine life of the Barwon Bluff Marine Sanctuary and the animals and plants of the Bluff and the Barwon River estuary. The website includes a range of the marine and coastal education resources and a wealth of online activities for site visitors of all ages to enjoy.

*Collaborators: Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation, Parks Victoria, Victorian Fisheries Authority, Deakin University, Barwon Coast Committee of Management, the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action.*

*Funding partner: Victorian Government's Coastcare Fund.*



# Recognising Individual Achievement and Emerging Leadership

Awarded for an individual in recognition of their significant and long-term contribution to the protection and improvement of Victoria's marine and coastal environment or an emerging leader or youth showing potential and promise in marine and coastal leadership in Victoria.



For an individual in recognition of their significant and long-term contribution to the protection and improvement of Victoria's marine and coastal environment

## JOINT-WINNER

### NEIL BLAKE

Neil Blake OAM is renowned for his commitment to collaborative partnerships, capacity building and community engagement over many decades. He is a community leader, author, advocate, citizen scientist, media spokesperson, and occasional musical anti-pollution pirate named 'Captain Trash'.

Neil has spent decades inspiring young people, forming novel partnerships, pioneering best-practice citizen science and launching community organisations like Port Phillip Baykeeper and Port Phillip EcoCentre. He has transformed our understanding and care of coastal landscapes using his trademark 'guide beside' leadership style.

His beard is iconic but so are his values: inclusion, reciprocity, plain language science, turning anecdotes to evidence, and rolling up his sleeves for on-ground action. Neil embodies the belief "without fun it can't be done."

In the past decade, Neil has:

- Continued to serve as the Port Phillip Baykeeper (from 2008 in a voluntary capacity until retiring as EcoCentre Director in 2015).
- Developed citizen science programs to monitor erosion, coastal vegetation, microplastics, molluscs and shoreline shells (as bio-indicators).
- Been a spokesperson for the marine and coastal environment through radio, TV, film, public events and conferences.
- Initiated projects like Baycare, Nairm Catchment Network, Be the RE-Generation, Clean Bay Blueprint, PestWatch! marine biosecurity network, Scouts Street2Bay, Baywide Data Pioneers, Once As It Was maps/ tours (with Indigenous historians and designers), and Beachkeepers.

Neil may hold the title Port Phillip Baykeeper and an Order of Australia medal for volunteering for the environment, but his legacy will always be his ability to inspire and connect people to care for and protect our marine and coastal environment.





## JOINT-WINNER

### MARK RODRIGUE

Mark is a champion of marine conservation and education in Victoria.

In a career spanning over twenty years at the Marine Discovery Centre and Parks Victoria, Mark has worked tirelessly to promote stewardship and effective management of Victoria's first system of marine national parks and sanctuaries through his captivating education initiatives and engaging marine conservation programs.

Mark inspires others, bringing people and perspectives together through his passion for education and ability to engage and communicate in a way that captures the heart and soul of Victoria's marine environment.

Mark's career highlights include:

- Instrumental in the long-term success of the Marine Discovery Centre, leaving a lasting legacy by raising increased awareness and interest in Victorian marine life.
- Statewide marine program leader at Parks Victoria – forging strong relationships with government and local communities to promote and raise the profile of Victoria's marine environment and protected areas.
- 'Sharing the Love' marine volunteer forums, building connections and passion in the community for protecting Victoria's marine environments.
- Development of RAMSAR management plans, marine pest responses and Marine Program Plan in response to the Victorian Auditor-General's Office audit into the management of Victoria's marine national parks and sanctuaries.

Marine conservation in Victoria is a big job requiring strong collaboration and partnerships across government, community and non-government organisations. Mark's ability to build relationships has guided and inspired wide-scale action that will continue to benefit our marine environment for many years to come.

Mark is an exceptional advocate for marine conservation and best-practice management. His enduring dedication and leadership have made a lasting impact on the protection and management of Victoria's marine environments, and on those who have had the privilege to work with him.



For an emerging leader or youth showing potential and promise in marine and coastal leadership in Victoria

## WINNER

### JULIET BẢO NGỌC DOLING

Juliet Bảo Ngọc Doling exemplifies outstanding leadership - within her community and through her multifaceted contributions to environmental advocacy, particularly marine conservation.

Juliet started as a volunteer at the Queenscliff Marine and Freshwater Discovery centre managing marine life exhibits and leading educational tours. Recognising a critical gap in local conservation efforts, Juliet re-invigorated the *Beach Patrol 3220* in Geelong, establishing a vibrant community presence with regular events and educational initiatives focused on marine conservation.

Juliet's ability to mobilise and inspire others continued with her involvement in the Corangamite Catchment Management Authority's *Waterwatch* program. She established a new *Waterwatch* group near the Deakin Geelong Waurin Ponds campus, resulting in a valuable partnership between Deakin University and the Catchment Management Authority.

Her proactive approach in bridging gaps and fostering collaboration led Juliet to join the Port Phillip EcoCentre's Community Rapid Response Team. She also became the sole Australian Microplastic Assessment Project Ambassador in the Geelong region, advocating for increased education on microplastics and contributing to environmental monitoring efforts.

In 2023, Juliet founded the Deakin Ecological Collective, designed to bridge the gap between Deakin students, staff, and the local community, fostering a collaborative approach to environmental conservation. Through the Collective, Juliet coordinates events, educational panels and hands-on activities in Geelong's coastal and marine habitats, amplifying her impact and furthering her passion for environmental education.

Through her tireless efforts and leadership, Juliet has made a significant impact on marine conservation and environmental education in Victoria.





## SPECIAL COMMENDATION

### GEORGIA HASTHORPE

Georgia has demonstrated outstanding leadership within the community by taking action to increase awareness of nurdle pollution, and the significant environmental impacts that this plastic has on waterways and wildlife.

Georgia developed and implemented a project that aimed to collect nurdles (plastic resin pellets; the raw material used in the manufacture of plastic products) at local beaches on Boon Wurrung/Bunurong and Gunaikurnai Country (in Port Phillip Bay and Gippsland areas) as well as raising public awareness of nurdles. During her initial 10-week project, Georgia managed to collect over 66,000 nurdles and more than 40,000 pieces of microplastic.

Georgia's initial project sparked her passion for coastal conservation, and she continues to work passionately on new methods for preventing and removing nurdles and microplastics

from the ocean. Georgia's drive for public awareness has meant she has become an active leader and voice in leader her local community.

In this way, Georgia has been able to reach thousands of people with her message that nurdle pollution is a significant risk to our waterways and wildlife, and that it is not just a local issue, but a global one.



# Distinction in Biodiversity and Ecosystem Conservation

Awarded for projects, programs and initiatives delivering an outstanding contribution to enhancing, conserving and protecting coastal and marine ecosystems and species, through marine and/or coastal management, planning or operations.



## WINNER

### THE NATURE CONSERVANCY AUSTRALIA REEF BUILDER

Prior to European settlement, it is estimated that shellfish reefs covered around 50 per cent of Port Phillip Bay (an area equivalent to around 1,000 square kilometres) and were also abundant in Western Port, Corner Inlet, and the Gippsland Lakes. These shellfish reef ecosystems provided important habitat, food and shelter for diverse biological communities, while also helping to filter vast amounts of water. Since this time, Victoria has lost over 95 per cent of its shellfish reefs – primarily due to destructive harvesting practices and changes in water quality – and Australian Flat Oyster reefs are now considered functionally extinct.

The Nature Conservancy Australia and partners began restoring shellfish reefs in Port Phillip Bay in 2017 and have since been on a mission to bring back these important ecosystems from the brink of extinction. In 2020, a partnership between the Australian Government and the Nature Conservancy Australia was founded to restore shellfish reefs at 13 locations around Australia.

This initiative, known as *Reef Builder*, aimed to restore Australia's estuarine and coastal ecosystems through rebuilding a critically endangered marine ecosystem – improving local biodiversity and boosting fish populations – and provide economic stimulus to shellfish aquaculture, marine engineering, construction, monitoring and ecotourism businesses in coastal and regional communities.

*Reef Builder* included two projects which together resulted in the largest marine restoration effort ever undertaken in Victoria. In Port Phillip Bay, 7.2 hectares of shellfish reefs were restored at Dromana, Margaret's Reef and Wilson Spit. In Gippsland Lakes, 2.5 hectares of shellfish reefs were restored at Nyerimilang, located between Lakes Entrance and Metung.

*Collaborators: Australian Government (Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water), RUBIX Consulting.*

*Funding partners: Australian Government, the Thomas Foundation.*



## FINALIST

### MARINE MAMMAL FOUNDATION PROJECT BURRUNAN

The Marine Mammal Foundation's *Project Burrunan* is the only research program of its kind in Australia, with a special focus on threats to the newly described and critically endangered Burrunan dolphin (*Tursiops australis*). The project was established in 2013, and for over ten years it has contributed greatly to the understanding and conservation of this iconic species. *Project Burrunan* takes a multi-disciplinary, applied research approach, using population dynamics, distribution, social structure, acoustic, genetic and genomic assessments, to provide greater understanding and protection of the species.

*Project Burrunan's* long-term research is supporting evidence-based decision-making. Outcomes have been utilised in the listing of the Burrunan under Victoria's *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988*; in the review of the *Victorian Wildlife Act (Marine Mammal) Regulations 2019*; in the Assessment of the Values of Victoria's Marine

Environment; and in the recent State of the Marine and Coastal Environment 2024 Expert Review.

The project is increasing accessibility of science to the community. Outcomes from *Project Burrunan* have been incorporated into both state and national curriculum-aligned school education programs and community presentations, with appearances of the 'BurruVan' education trailer at major events increasing the reach of the research and conservation initiatives.

Future phases of the project will include formal collaborations with Bunurong and Gunaikurnai Traditional Owners to co-design a framework for marine mammal knowledge and cultural values sharing, train Sea Rangers in research activities, and support connection to Sea Country.

*Collaborators: the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, RMIT University, Deakin University, Curtin University.*

## Thank you

The Victorian Marine and Coastal Council thanks the following Technical Advisory Panel members for contributing their expertise, knowledge and experience to the 2024 Victorian Marine and Coastal Awards judging process.

**Margaret Baird**

**Dr. Anthony Boxshall**

**Rob Gell AM**

**David Islip**

**Kathleen McInnes**

**Dr. Rebecca McIntosh**

**Daniel Miller**

**Rebecca Morris**

**Frances Northeast**

**Liz Patterson**

**Lauren Rickards**

**Kylie Steel**

**Helen Vaughan**

**Jacquie White**

## Acknowledgment

The Victorian Marine and Coastal Council respectfully acknowledges the Original Custodians of what is now known as Victoria; their rich culture, deep affinity with the land and spiritual connection to it.

## Accessibility

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