

Moreton Bay—celebrating 20 years as a wetland of international importance

The management of the Moreton Bay Ramsar site requires a collaborative effort.

Federal, state and local governments work together with natural resource management groups, private industry, Traditional Owners, universities, landholders and the community to care for the site and its amazing biodiversity. Activities outside the boundary of the site can have a big influence on the health of Moreton Bay. These activities need to be considered in any management reporting and decision making.

To mark the 20th anniversary of the listing of Moreton Bay under the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, (Ramsar Convention), achievements over the past 20 years has been documented. This list highlights some of the incredible effort that has gone into protecting and managing the Moreton Bay Ramsar site.

Twenty years of achievements

- Moreton Bay was declared a Marine Park in 1993, with a multiple use zoning plan implemented in 1997. The Zoning Plans and other management tools help with the sustainable management of the park.
- In 2009 the 'no take' Marine National Park zones grew from 0.5% of the marine park to 16%, providing increased protection to Ramsar habitats.
- The SEQ Catchments Moreton Bay Seagrass Recovery Program has replaced 100 traditional moorings with Australian designed Seagrass Friendly Moorings in the largest seagrass recovery effort ever achieved in Australia. Seagrass is expected to regrow over an area the size of 18 football fields and improve a further 120ha of marine ecosystems. For more information, see their website <http://www.seqcatchments.com.au>
- Through Seagrass-Watch and MangroveWatch, volunteers collect data that helps monitor the health of these ecosystems, and guide decision making.
- SEQ Catchments is working with landholders to improve land management practices across the landscape and reduce the amount of sediment flowing off the land. This has been a key focus in various programs across SEQ, including the award winning Healthy Country Program and SunCoast Farmflow, as well as flood recovery efforts in impacted areas.
- The Healthy Waterways Program has contributed to the continuing health of Moreton Bay through a number of programs in South East Queensland, including:
 - The Ecosystem Health Monitoring Program, which produces an annual Report Card tracking ecosystem health for waterways in South East Queensland.
 - The Healthy Waterways marine debris initiative, which has mapped 34 high priority marine debris hotspots resulting in over 2,700 kg of marine debris collected across 7,000 ha of coastal and marine environments.
 - The Water by Design Program, minimising the impact of urban land use on the health of South East Queensland's waterways and Moreton Bay, including increasing the capacity of individuals and organisations to adopt water sensitive urban design.
 - The Healthy Waterways Communication, Education and Motivation Program, which develops initiatives to engage the community on the issue of waterway health, and motivate individual and collective community action to deliver the following four main projects:
 1. Plastic Pollution Revolution: a movement of people committed to reducing their use of plastic
 2. SUCCESS Water Educators Network: capacity building for water educators
 3. Up the Creek and Down the Drain: school education unit connecting children with their local creek



Seagrass-Watch training. Photo: SEQ Catchments

4. Healthy Waterways Clean Up Program: on-ground collection of waterway litter.
- The Queensland Wetlands Program has developed a suite of integrated tools from wetlands mapping, policy and assessment to monitoring and communication to help guide sustainable management, use and protection of wetlands in Queensland, including Ramsar sites. All these tools are freely available through WetlandInfo—the first-stop-shop for wetland management resources in Queensland, www.wetlandinfo.ehp.qld.gov.au
 - The past 20 years have witnessed growing collaboration between community, industry and government to better manage the Pumicestone Passage. Catchment planning activities have included an Integrated Management Strategy in 1993, which was succeeded by a Catchment Management Strategy in 2000, as well as a wealth of scientific studies and public science forums in 2001 and 2011. Activities have also included the identification and mapping of Groundwater Dependent Ecosystems in 2013.
 - Traditional Owners have worked together with natural resource management groups throughout Moreton Bay and the islands to help ensure healthy waterways and coastlines. One example includes the Quandamooka people working with SEQ Catchments to restore a culturally significant freshwater spring known as Myora Springs on North Stradbroke Island.
 - WetlandCare Australia embarked on The Coastal 20 Wetland Project in 2010, in partnership with community, government and industry bodies to undertake the restoration of 20 iconic coastal wetlands, Moreton Bay included. <http://www.wetlandcare.com.au/>
 - The Coastal 20 Wetland Project has had many outcomes in various areas of Moreton Bay, including:
 - *Lota Creek Estuary*: weed removal and revegetation, partnering with Bayside Creeks Catchment Group, Conservation Volunteers Australia and Brisbane City Council
 - *Myora Springs, North Stradbroke Island*: weed control, stabilisation works, mitigation of visitor impacts through construction of a boardwalk, signage and marine debris clean-ups partnering with SEQ Catchments, QPWS, the Quandamooka people, Redland City Council and Oceanwatch Australia
 - *South Gorge, North Stradbroke Island*: weed control and revegetation, partnering with SEQ Catchments, Redland City Council and Point Lookout Bushcare Group
 - *Jindalee Creek*: revegetation and weed control, partnered with Wolston and Centenary Catchments group, Oxley Creek Catchment Association, Jindalee Golf Club, and Brisbane City Council
 - *Coochiemudlo Island*: weed control and rehabilitation works (post Cyclone Oswald), partnered with Redland City Council, SEQ Catchments and Coochie Coast Care.
 - Gold Coast City Council has undertaken and supported a range of activities that relate to Moreton Bay including:
 - Catchment Management Plans, which assess geomorphic, riparian and ecological values and address threat management.
 - Research, restoration and education initiatives to protect and restore bushland and catchments, improving habitat and waterway health in partnership with community catchment groups, Land For Wildlife property owners and groups from Council's Beaches to Bushland Program.
 - Acquisition and management of key properties throughout the Gold Coast through the Open Space Preservation Levy which also help to maintain and restore the city's environmental values.

What is a Ramsar site?

The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (more commonly referred to as the Ramsar Convention) aims to halt the worldwide loss of wetlands and to conserve remaining wetlands through wise use and management. The Ramsar Convention encourages the designation of sites containing representative, rare or unique wetlands, or wetlands that are important for conserving biological diversity. Queensland has five Ramsar sites—Currawinya Lakes, Bowling Green Bay, Shoalwater and Corio Bays, Great Sandy Strait and Moreton Bay. Bowling Green Bay and Moreton Bay were listed as Ramsar sites on 22 October 1993.

Ecological character

As a Ramsar Convention signatory, Australia is expected to describe and maintain the ecological character of each of its current 65 Ramsar sites. An ecological character description (ECD) is an assessment of the ecosystem components, processes and benefits/ services of a site. The ECD is the benchmark against which any changes at the site are assessed for significance.

- Brisbane City Council has undertaken a range of activities to contribute to the protection,

enhancement and enjoyment of the Moreton Bay Ramsar site. These include:

- The opening of the Boondall Wetlands Environment Centre in 1996.
- The purchasing and protection of over 2825 hectares of land supporting significant bushland and wetlands in the past 20 years through the Bushland Acquisition Program.
- Supporting community members to develop the Boondall Wetlands website, www.brisbane.qld.gov.au/bccwr/assets/bccwr-op-ups/boondall-wetlands/user/Interface_content.html
- Continuing to help community groups restore natural habitats in parks, remnant bushland, wetlands and along waterways through the Habitat Brisbane Program.
- Working with community catchment groups to protect and restore catchments and improve waterway health through Council's Creek Catchments Program.
- In 1998, Brisbane City Council signed the *Affiliation Agreement between the City of Narashino, Chiba Prefecture, Japan and the Brisbane City Council, Queensland, Australia in Relation to the Yatsu Higata Tidal Flat and the Boondall Wetlands*. The agreement between the cities highlights the importance of shorebird protection through international understanding and cooperation. The agreement has brought together numerous partners in Brisbane including the community and community groups, government, regional bodies, schools and corporate partners.



Boondall Wetlands. Photo: EHP

Protecting Moreton Bay's shorebirds and their habitats

- The Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service endorsed a Shorebird Management Strategy for Moreton Bay in 2005, which includes a five-pronged approach to shorebird protection and management. The objectives include protection of shorebird habitat, protection of critical roost sites, protection from disturbance, community education and research and monitoring. Achievements include:
 - Interpretive and regulatory signage.
 - Securing tenure and protection of shorebird sites outside of the marine park.
 - Protection from impacts of commercial activities and vehicles through permit conditions and closures.
 - Implementation of a compliance strategy.
 - Participation in events and production of brochures to raise awareness.
 - Collaborative partners with the Queensland Wader Study Group and SEQ Catchments in a community action grant aimed at shorebird disturbance reduction, specifically educating dog owners about shorebird protection.
 - Regular counts of roost sites.
 - Nesting census.
 - Monitoring the frequency and type of disturbance events at a number of sites.
 - Monitoring of a little tern breeding colony.
 - Support for research focussed on understanding and reversing the decline of shorebirds.
 - Data sharing agreement with the Queensland Wader Study Group.
 - Coastal bird forum held in 2011.
- The Queensland Wader Study Group has been mapping shorebird roost sites, as well as monitoring shorebird numbers, food resources and habitat usage. The group also monitors disturbance, pollution and changes to habitat sites due to adverse weather conditions.
- A range of surveys, studies and research, undertaken by the Queensland Wader Study Group include:
 - Shorebird and waterbird counts.
 - Banding, flagging and tracking of shorebirds.
 - Reporting sightings of banded/flagged shorebirds—Australia and overseas countries including Alaska, Cambodia, China (including Taiwan), Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar (Burma), New Zealand, Philippines, Russia, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand and Vietnam.
 - Funding research including analysis of data on shorebirds populations.
- The Queensland Wader Study Group also undertakes a range of engagement and education activities, including:

- Public talks, workshops and field trips.
 - Shorebird and wetland information displays, videos and activities to help celebrate World Migratory Bird Day and World Environment Day.
 - Quarterly newsletters, website and print media
 - Visits to wetlands of Moreton Bay for school students, the public and volunteers from Yatsu-higata Nature Observation Centre (YNOC).
 - Educational exchanges between Brisbane schools and Yatsu-higata Elementary School, Narashino, Japan.
 - Shorebird education kits.
 - Interpretive signage.
 - Environmental education regarding the effect of litter on our shorebirds and other wildlife.
- The Queensland Wader Study Group has also partnered with industry, government and other non-government organisations to create artificial roost sites for shorebirds. For more information visit www.waders.org.au
 - Moreton Bay Regional Council and the Queensland Wader Study Group mapped high tide shorebird roost boundaries and characteristics to inform Council's statutory planning instruments. The project resulted in 24 roost sites being mapped, five of which are available to shorebirds on higher king tides. The project outputs will enable council and other land managers to better conserve and appropriately manage important shorebird sites in the region. They are informing the drafting of Moreton Bay Regional Council's new planning scheme to ensure mapped shorebird habitat is conserved and appropriate buffers are maintained by future development.
 - Moreton Bay Regional Council and the Queensland Wader Study Group monitor shorebird numbers four times a year and holds regular Shorebird Training Workshops. The workshops cover shorebird migration, ecology, conservation, threats, species identification, and include site visits to observe birds at their high tide roosts.



Eastern curlews in Moreton Bay. Photo: EHP

Some priorities for the future

- Continue to raise awareness and understanding of the Ramsar site and its values through education initiatives.
- Identification and management of threats.
- Updated Catchment planning and reporting.
- Applying outcomes of research and targeting future research to key knowledge gaps.
- Continued collaborative action.

More information

Further detail on the Moreton Bay Ramsar site is available at:

<http://wetlandinfo.ehp.qld.gov.au/wetlands/facts-maps/ramsar-wetland-moreton-bay/>

Acknowledgements

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The Queensland Wetlands Program supports projects and activities that result in long-term benefits to the sustainable management, wise use and protection of wetlands in Queensland. The tools developed by the Program help wetlands landholders, managers and decision makers in government and industry. The Program is a joint initiative of the Australian and Queensland governments.

Contact wetlands@ehp.qld.gov.au
or visit www.wetlandinfo.ehp.qld.gov.au

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