



## **Port Phillip EcoCentre: PestWatch! All Eyes on the Bay Project Brief**

### **Introduction**

Marine pests are a major threat to the marine ecosystems of Port Phillip Bay. For example, since 2019, several mass aggregations of Northern Pacific seastars have appeared in different locations. This attracted widespread community concern, but removal was often done by a handful of volunteers without regional strategy. In 2021-22, the EcoCentre established a cross-sectoral network to facilitate rapid community responses to pest outbreaks, and activate and support Victorians in protecting the valuable marine environment they love.

Five Community Rapid Response Teams of volunteers trained in Northern Pacific seastars identification and aggregation removal were established, and every team operates in their local area. Together, the teams cover all beaches of Port Phillip Bay.

The extension of this project builds on the previous work done, and will – among other things - upskill the existing Rapid Response Teams with identification and removal skills of the Asian shore crab and at least one other marine pest (tbc).

### **How the project will help protect the Bay**

Personal communications with senior managers from the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (DJPR) and Parks Victoria confirmed a strong need for community education and engagement around marine pests. Early detection of marine pests is essential for their successful control. While preventing their arrival provides the most effective means of managing marine pests, knowledgeable volunteers actively protecting their local marine environment can provide a critical early warning of new pest introductions, as they are more likely to spot and report invasive species when they appear (e.g. the Asian shore crab, sea urchin barrens getting out of control).

Marine biosecurity is a shared responsibility across government, industry and the community; more engaged and educated people means more trained eyes on the areas and marine assets (piers, reefs, and parks) we all love. This project will provide education and practical, hands-on engagement opportunities in environmental volunteering.

Developing community-based strategy and infrastructure for removing harmful pest species from valuable marine assets, including beloved dive and snorkel sites, will increase a sense of valuing the marine environment and promote coastal stewardship.



## Things we plan to do

- 1) Provide wider community education and training/upskilling opportunities around the issue of marine pest species in Port Phillip Bay, including designing a training module for Scouts Victoria.
- 2) Upskill the existing Community Rapid Response Teams in identification of the Asian shore crab and one other marine pest (species tbc).
- 3) Hands-on pest removal: the Rapid Response Teams will scour multiple location's intertidal zones around the Bay for the Asian shore crab, and remove them as well as collect data on distribution and numbers. Data will be made available to third parties for research and management purposes.
- 4) Foster a marine pest action network of businesses, local councils, State Government, environmental not-for-profits and community members in practical asset-based protection of Victoria's marine environment.

## About the [Port Phillip EcoCentre](#)

The EcoCentre is a leading community-managed organisation with a dedicated team of scientists, educators and volunteers who design and implement innovative environmental programs. Our expertise is the health of Port Phillip Bay and the urban ecology of Greater Melbourne, within the traditional lands and waters of the Kulin Nation.

We connect communities to their ecosystems in over 140 Melbourne suburbs, and work from our City of Port Phillip home located in the St Kilda Botanical Gardens. We bring together people of all ages and backgrounds to spark solutions and inspire environmental leadership. Each year we collaborate with over 25 Affiliate organisations, 150 schools and 250 partners from business, government, philanthropy, education and research institutions. Since 1999, our collective impact has transformed the way Melbourne understands wildlife, waterways and wellbeing in the age of climate change.

**Project start:** October 2022

**Project end:** August 2024

**For more information and to register your interest to volunteer, please contact:**

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