



Port Phillip EcoCentre: Community Rapid Response Task Force Project brief

Introduction

Northern Pacific sea stars (NPS) are a nationally significant marine pest and a major threat to the marine ecosystems of Port Phillip Bay. Since 2019, several mass aggregations of NPS have appeared in different locations. This attracted widespread community concern, but removal is often done by a handful of volunteers without regional strategy. We aim to establish a cross-sectoral network to facilitate rapid community responses to pest outbreaks, activate and support Victorians in protecting the valuable marine environment they love, and determine if this strategy can be scaled for other marine pests.

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 community education and training/upskilling opportunities around the issue of marine pest species to established community groups already protecting marine assets in Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in the Bay.

We will provide community education and training together with DJPR and Parks Victoria, including amplifying Park Victoria's existing marine pest education materials to relevant groups.



- 2) Establish several, trained and localised community-based Rapid Response Teams that can train and mobilise volunteers to respond to mass NPS aggregations appearing around the Bay, including outside of MPAs.
Community engagement and upskilling of community groups will be done in collaboration with VNPA's ReefWatch program, Earthcare St Kilda and Jawbone Marine Sanctuary Care Group, and potentially others once the project takes off.
On-ground support for the rapid response teams will be provided in the form of bins and NPS waste management by participating Councils like City of Kingston and others.
- 3) Bring together business, local councils, State Government, environmental not-for-profits and community members in practical asset-based protection of Victoria's marine environment. We will engage our existing networks as well as connect with new stakeholders to combine forces and fill the gap in rapid response to pest species aggregations. This includes recruiting volunteers and interested groups who want to participate.
- 4) Investigate and document the scalability options of the rapid response team to other pest species.

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: August 2021

Project end: September 2022

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

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