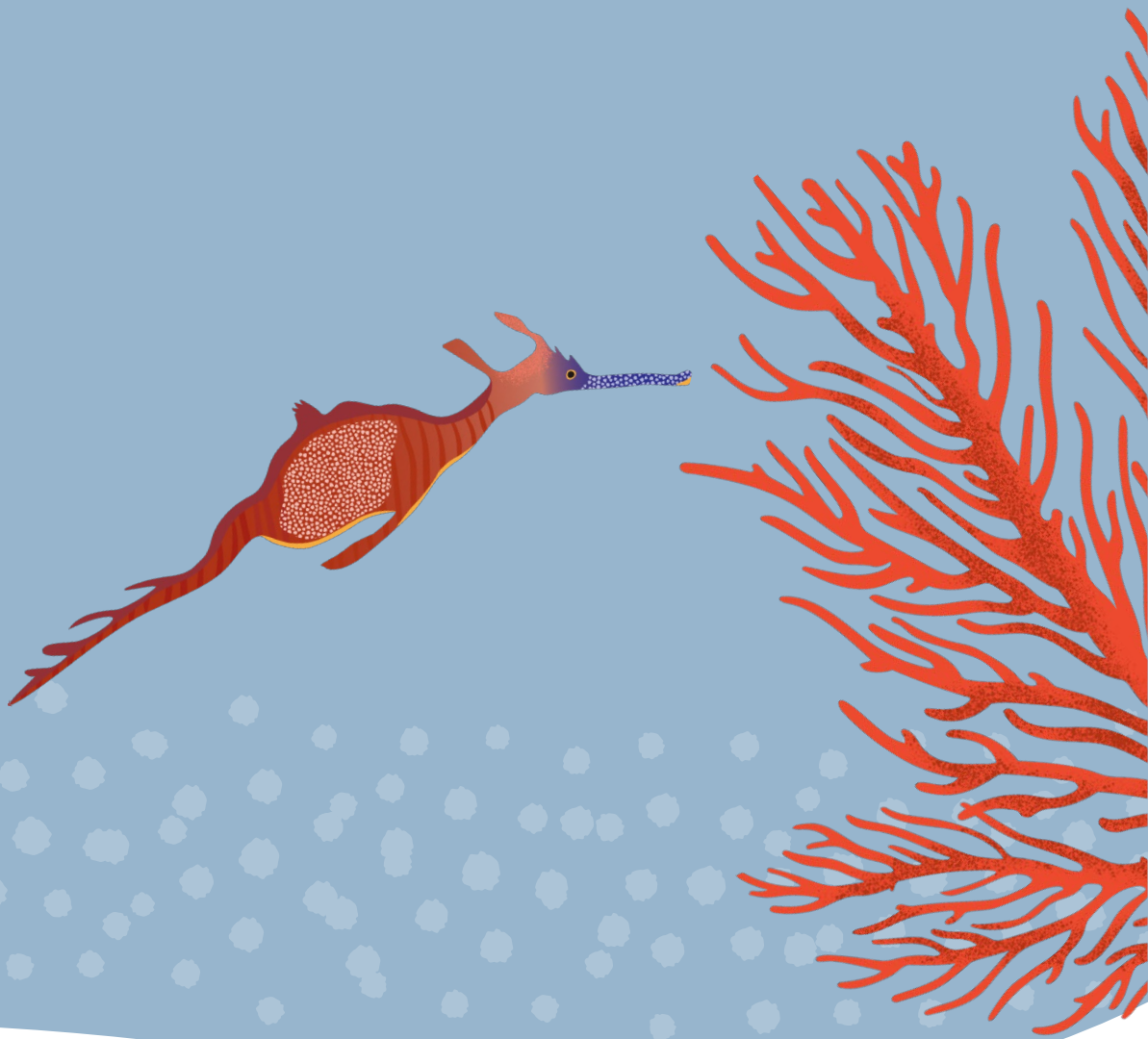




Barwon Coast Closing the Loop Report

Barwon Coast Biodiversity Strategy
2025-2035 & Mature Tree Strategy



Acknowledgment

Barwon Coast acknowledges and respects Wadawurrung People as the Traditional Owners of Wadawurrung Country, including the stretch of coastline between Breamlea and Collendina. We acknowledge Wadawurrung Elders, past and present, whose knowledge and wisdom has ensured the continuation of culture and traditional practices. We honour Wadawurrung People's unique ability to care for Country and deep spiritual connection to it. We are committed to working with the Wadawurrung people to care for the coast.

Background

Barwon Coast worked with expert consultants to develop the Mature Tree and Biodiversity strategies during 2025. The draft strategies were open for community feedback for a four-week period, from Wednesday 8 October to Wednesday 5 November 2025.

The Barwon Coast Biodiversity Strategy aims to clearly define Barwon Coast's goals, identify key biodiversity values and areas of concern, and develop practical actions to protect and improve natural habitats.

The Barwon Coast Mature Tree Strategy sets our vision, objectives and actions for protecting and managing the mature trees that define our coastal reserves.

Both strategies will feed into the Foreshore Master Plan, which is currently in development.

Community engagement objectives

The goals of the consultation were to:

- Help the community understand what each report covers, why they're important and how they feed into the Foreshore Master Plan.
- Seek community feedback on the Biodiversity Strategy and Mature Tree Strategy.
- Show how expert advice and community values are reflected



Scope of the community consultation

During the consultation, we sought to discover:

- What aspects of the strategies resonated with stakeholders and community members
- Where the strategies could be improved
- Anything missing or areas where we may not have enough information.

This is referred to as the 'scope' of the consultation.

The level of consultation for this project under our community engagement participation spectrum as found in our [Community Engagement Framework](#) which is in line with the International Association for Public Participation's [Public Participation Spectrum](#), is 'consult', as the community interest is medium/high, and the impact on the broader community impact is classified as 'low'.

Some elements of the strategies could not be altered because they were guided by the Coastal and Marine Management Plan (CMMP), follow established industry-standard methodologies, must be delivered within available resources and capabilities, or relate to works required for safety and risk mitigation. While we welcome community input, these components are essential and must remain in place.

All input was considered when finalising the Biodiversity and Mature Tree strategies.



Community consultation activities

We sought to provide opportunities for all community members to be involved by offering opportunities to provide feedback in a range of different ways: online, in person or via submission.

Engagement activity	Timing	Description
Wadawurrung Traditional Owners engagement	Throughout	Consulted with Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation at each stage.
Feedback survey	Open from 8 October to 5 November 2025 (four weeks)	16 survey responses
Email feedback/submissions	Open from 8 October to 5 November 2025	22 emails received
Conservation organisations workshop 1	Monday, 20 October	Invited up to 2 representatives from 11 organisations, 7 attendees from 4 organisations
Community online information session	Monday 20 October	4 attendees
Community drop-in information session	Barwon Heads Makers Market, 1 November	Approximately 30+ conversations
Conservation organisations additional workshop	11 February 2026	4 attendees from 4 organisations
Closing the Loop report	April 2026	A feedback report summarising the key themes and how the input has been reflected in the final strategies

Flexing the approach

To help build trust and show how feedback had shaped the outcome, community organisations were invited to review the updated strategies before they were finalised, providing an opportunity to confirm their input had been meaningfully reflected.

Sharing the opportunity to have your say

The engagement opportunities were shared through a broad communications program, to make it easy for the community to get involved. This included a dedicated project page and regular updates on our website, advertising in local publications such as the Ocean Grove Voice and Bellarine Times, and direct emails to community groups. We also shared information across our social media channels and internal networks to help reach a broad audience and encourage participation at different touchpoints throughout the process.

Key themes and insights

Through consultation with residents, visitors, conservation groups and partner organisations, a number of key themes emerged. These insights were carefully considered and have helped inform the finalisation of both strategies.



Caring for biodiversity and responding to climate change

You told us how important it is to protect native plants, animals and habitats, and to take meaningful action on climate change. Many of you highlighted the need to manage domestic animals to reduce impacts on wildlife, and to ensure any future development respects and protects the natural environment.



Mature trees and building trust

We heard strong concerns about how decisions are made around tree removal. Many community members asked for greater transparency, including clear, evidence-based arborist assessments and independent review where needed. There was also a strong focus on planning ahead to maintain canopy cover and the health of our coastal landscape.



Cultural heritage and community values

You told us that protecting Aboriginal Cultural Heritage and respecting long-standing community values must be central to these strategies. There is a clear expectation for stronger engagement with Traditional Owners and better protection of culturally significant areas.



Tracking progress and caring for the broader environment

Many of you asked for clear goals and better monitoring so progress can be tracked over time. Suggestions included improving how we monitor wildlife and ensuring broader environmental priorities – such as wetlands and weed management – are considered as part of the bigger picture.



Transparency and meaningful engagement

We heard concerns about the consultation process, with some community members feeling their input did not meaningfully influence outcomes. There is a strong call for clearer communication about how feedback is used, along with more transparent reporting and decision-making.

What we heard & what we did

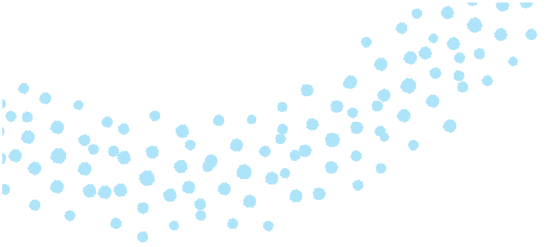
The feedback received on the draft Biodiversity Strategy and draft Mature Tree Strategy showed strong community care for biodiversity values.

The below tables demonstrate:

- A summary of what the community told us
- What was changed in response or what did not change (and why).

Barwon Coast Biodiversity Strategy 2025-2035

Theme	What we heard (Community Feedback Summary)	What we did or did not do (How the feedback was incorporated into the final Strategy)
Fauna and species management	Requests for stronger emphasis on fauna, including small mammals, Hooded Plovers, fox control, and clearer identification of recorded species.	Fauna management has been strengthened through ongoing Hooded Plover protection and regular fox control. While no small mammals have been recorded to date, the Strategy commits to adapting management if new evidence emerges. A list of flora and fauna records has been added as an appendix using VBA and iNaturalist data.
Threat identification and monitoring	Calls for clearer identification of threats such as fragmentation, shifting baseline syndrome, island biogeography, climate change, and freshwater impacts.	A dedicated 'Threats' section has been added, including a threat matrix linking pressures to biodiversity values. Monitoring actions are embedded to track change over time and support adaptive management.
Weeds and Habitat Condition	Concerns about invasive species including Sea Wheat Grass, Marram Grass, Melilotus, and freshwater weeds impacting saltmarsh habitats.	These issues are recognised as priority threats. The strategy outlines targeted weed control and habitat management actions within available resources and clearly communicates where constraints limit broader control.
Access, recreation and pets	The need to manage informal access, domestic pets, and conflicts between recreation and wildlife protection, particularly regarding Hooded Plovers.	Informal access and recreational pressures are identified as threats, with objectives focused on education, behaviour change and enforcement. Ongoing collaboration with councils and partner agencies is included.



Landscape connectivity	Suggestions to improve habitat connectivity and wildlife corridors.	While broader connectivity is constrained by surrounding land uses, Barwon Coast management contributes to maintaining and enhancing a continuous coastal habitat corridor.
Climate change	Requests to acknowledge climate change and sea-level rise impacts on biodiversity.	Climate change is acknowledged as a significant overarching threat, with resilience-building, monitoring and adaptive management actions incorporated where feasible.
Resourcing and partnerships	Concerns regarding conservation resourcing and the need for stronger partnerships.	Resourcing constraints are acknowledged. Objectives focus on partnerships, volunteer support and collaborative management with neighbouring land managers.
Precinct planning and structure	Requests for clearer separation between strategy and implementation and clearer links between precinct actions and overall outcomes.	Each precinct now includes an overarching management objective aligned with broader strategy outcomes, with precinct plans acting as practical management guides.
Site-specific biodiversity values	Identification of missing or underrepresented biodiversity values.	Biodiversity values such as the Barwon Bluff Marine Sanctuary and remnant plantings at Ocean Grove Main Beach have been formally incorporated.
Editorial considerations	Identification of typographical and formatting issues.	All identified errors and inconsistencies have been corrected to improve clarity and consistency.
Education, training and capacity building	Regular joint training for Barwon Coast and Coastcare volunteers to support identification of priority weeds and promote best-practice management.	Periodic joint training will be used to build shared knowledge, support early identification of weed issues and promote consistent best-practice management across sites.
Smart Goals	Specific goals attributed to each region	Goals have been outlined in threats, identified in each region, prioritising tasks, allocating time and what the measurable outcome needs to be. An operational document with prescribed tasks will be developed.

What we heard & what we did: Barwon Coast Mature Tree Strategy

Theme	What we heard (Community Feedback Summary)	What we did or did not do (How the feedback was incorporated into the final Strategy)
Tree removal and risk management	Concerns were raised about unclear tree removal criteria, arborist assessments, accountability and potential loss of canopy and ecological value.	The strategy clarifies that all removals are evidence-based and require independent arborist assessment. Stronger commitments are included to transparency, risk-based decision-making and maintaining or increasing canopy cover over time.
Transparency and reporting	Requests were made for greater access to information, a comprehensive tree inventory, and ongoing public reporting on tree removals and replacements.	The strategy confirms use of a GIS-based tree inventory and includes a commitment to annual public reporting on inspections, removals, and replacement outcomes.
Replacement planting and fauna values	Community feedback emphasised the importance of replacement planting that supports wildlife, particularly winter-flowering species and appropriate species selection.	A replacement tree selection framework has been strengthened to balance safety, canopy potential, longevity and fauna habitat, with context-sensitive species selection across different sites.
Aboriginal and Cultural Heritage	Feedback highlighted the need for clearer acknowledgement of Aboriginal Cultural Heritage obligations and consultation with Traditional Owners.	Planning references were corrected and commitments strengthened to consultation with Wadawurrung Traditional Owners, with clearer guidance on when cultural heritage permits may apply.
Strategy scope and integration	Some submissions requested inclusion of wetlands, weeds, fauna monitoring, and historical land management practices.	The strategy now clearly defines its focus on mature tree risk management and explains how related environmental matters are addressed through other strategies.
Communication and trust	Concerns were expressed that previous engagement did not clearly demonstrate how community feedback influenced outcomes.	Commitments to plain-language communication, on-site signage, and clearer explanations of tree works have been strengthened.

Conclusion

Thank you to everyone who took the time to share their knowledge, perspectives and feedback throughout this process.

Your input has played an important role in shaping these strategies, helping to ensure they reflect both community values and the needs of our coastal environment.

We remain committed to ongoing engagement and transparent communication as we move into implementation, and look forward to continuing to work together to care for this special stretch of coast.

