

Restoring native vegetation and blue carbon

Blue Heart, Sunshine Coast, Queensland

Case study



Fast facts

Location: Maroochy River Catchment, Sunshine Coast, Queensland

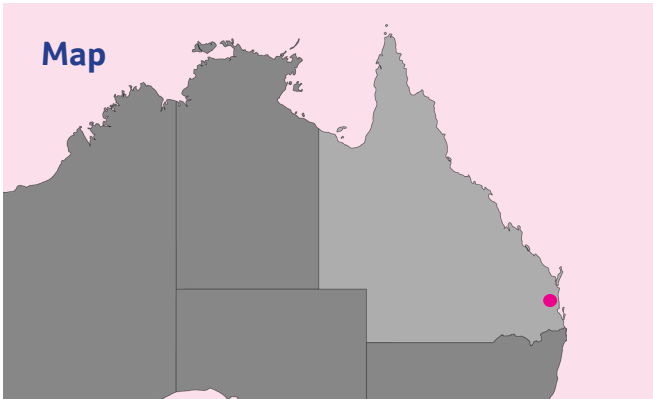
Focus area: 5,000 hectares, including 1,400 hectares of publicly-owned and managed land

Carbon farming methods: Restoring native vegetation - blue carbon sequestration

Project collaborators: Sunshine Coast Council, Queensland Government, Unitywater

Project period: Sub-projects underway, with project planning up to 2100

Map



OVERVIEW

An inspiring collaboration has led the Sunshine Coast to announce an Australian-first initiative showcasing blue carbon and land restoration initiatives as effective emissions reduction solutions.

The Blue Heart region on the Sunshine Coast spans more than 5,000 hectares within the Maroochy River catchment. It contains important environmental features and acts as a critical flood storage area to protect the catchment from flood impacts. The area is prone to periodic flooding and is becoming increasingly susceptible to incremental tidal floods. The Blue Heart project will demonstrate how land can be managed to improve water quality, protect biodiversity and sequester carbon, while providing more places for recreation.

A COLLABORATIVE PROJECT FOR FUTURE CONSERVATION

Several projects are underway within the Blue Heart, including restoration of former cane land which is delivering improved water quality nutrient offsets. A 15MW solar farm (pictured below) generates enough energy to offset 100 per cent of Sunshine Coast Council's electricity consumption, and further revegetation of wetlands (pictured page 2) will increase carbon storage and opportunities to build future economic and environmental resilience. Coastal wetlands that once covered the Blue Heart area have mostly been cleared and drained, therefore restoring native vegetation to the wetlands will increase the carbon storage. Wetland restoration will importantly improve the flood storage capacity of the floodplain.



Blue carbon is the carbon stored in coastal and marine ecosystems such as mangroves, tidal marshes and seagrasses. These ecosystems sequester and store large quantities of blue carbon in both the plants and the sediment below.

The Blue Heart project is a collaborative partnership between Sunshine Coast Council, the Queensland Government's Department of Environment and Science, and the local water and sewerage services provider, Unitywater. It is the first time three such groups have come together to protect and enhance a dedicated area for conservation and for flood mitigation purposes. It is also an opportunity to work with traditional owners of the land, the Kabi Kabi First Nations peoples, to discuss new opportunities for the future and honour cultural heritage and practices.

With support through the Queensland Government's Land Restoration Fund, the Blue Heart Project will support landholders and local communities to adopt new land management practices.

The Blue Heart project aims to protect and manage the most critical areas of the Maroochy floodplain, with the initial focus on a core area of around 1,400 hectares. It will not affect the existing land use entitlements of current private landowners but, through a coordinated and supported approach, will enable them to explore new land management options for the use of their properties. Projects in areas such as the Blue Heart are likely to be recognised as premium projects as they deliver on many significant environmental, social and cultural objectives, and could secure carbon credits via the Federal Government's Emissions Reduction Fund in the future.

PROJECT BENEFITS

The Blue Heart will strengthen the Maroochy-Noosa Wallum Area, an area of high biodiversity value as recognised at state and national level. Direct benefits include better coastal protection from storms and floods. The co-benefits of such an initiative are significant, with more and better quality wetlands providing habitat for local wildlife such as fish and birds, and in turn supporting recreational activities for the local community. The wetland restoration will enhance the ability of the floodplain to allow more water to be stored as future sea levels are expected to rise. It may also improve water quality of the connected river systems.

