



Nature Positive Bass Coast Strategy 2026–2036 – Consultation Draft



Acknowledgement of Country

Bass Coast Shire Council acknowledges the Bunurong as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands and waters, and pays respect to their Elders past, present and emerging, for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture and Lore.

Bass Coast Shire Council celebrates the opportunity to embrace and empower the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Island Communities in their diversity.

Bass Coast Shire Council will create opportunities for future recognition and respectful partnerships that will honour the Traditional Owners and Custodians, and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

Diversity and Inclusion

Bass Coast Shire Council celebrates the diversity of our communities. We acknowledge and respect the skills, insights and life experiences of all community members irrespective of gender, ethnicity, ability, religious belief, sexuality or age.

Child Safe Statement

Bass Coast Shire Council is committed to child safety and wellbeing, actively working to prevent abuse by identifying and addressing risks early. This work is underpinned by Council's Child Safe Statement, which guides our commitment to ensuring the safety, inclusion and wellbeing of every child.

Gender Impact Assessment

In accordance with the Gender Equality Act 2020, a Gender Impact Assessment (GIA) has been undertaken when developing this strategy.

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Community Consultation Draft

Foreword

Nature is at the heart of Bass Coast. Our beaches, coastlines, woodlands, waterways, wetlands and marine environments support the plants and animals that make this place unique, contribute to our wellbeing, attract visitors from around the world, and help sustain our local economy.

The purpose of this strategy is to enact the Community Vision 2045 and outline what Council wants to achieve long term, including establishing a shared vision for a Nature Positive Bass Coast. This includes identifying how Council, Traditional Owners, businesses, landholders, community groups and residents can work together to protect, enhance, restore and regenerate nature for current and future generations.

PART 1: Understanding Nature Positive

1. What is Nature Positive?

Nature Positive in Simple Terms

Nature Positive means halting and reversing the decline of nature so that biodiversity, ecosystems and habitats are healthier and more abundant in the future than they are today.

Nature Positive recognises that nature underpins strong communities, thriving economies and healthy environments. It encourages us to not only protect what remains but also restore and regenerate nature wherever possible.

Why Nature Positive Matters

Around the world, biodiversity is declining due to habitat loss, climate change, invasive species and other pressures.

Taking action now can help:

- Protect native plants and animals.
- Improve ecosystem health and resilience.
- Support clean air, water and healthy soils.
- Strengthen community wellbeing.
- Support sustainable economic activity.
- Leave a healthier environment for future generations.

Global and National Commitments

Nature Positive is supported by a range of international and national commitments, including:

- The Global Biodiversity Framework 2022¹.
- Australia's Strategy for Nature 2024-2030².
- Australia's commitment to protect and conserve 30% of land and marine environments by 2030².

- Recognition of the rights, knowledge and leadership of First Peoples in caring for Country and Sea Country².

¹ Global Biodiversity Framework, source: [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework | UNEP - UN Environment Programme](#)

² Strategy for Nature 2024-2030, source: [Australia's Strategy for Nature 2024–2030 - DCCEEW](#)

2. Understanding Nature in Bass Coast

Nature is the Foundation

The natural environment is the system that supports all other systems.

Healthy ecosystems provide clean water, healthy soils, climate regulation, food production, recreation opportunities, cultural values and habitat for wildlife. They also support community wellbeing, local businesses and our visitor economy.

Nature Has a Right to Exist

Nature has value in its own right. Plants, animals, ecosystems and natural processes are important not only for the benefits they provide people, but because they are an essential part of life on Earth.

Recognising nature's right to exist means acknowledging that all species have a place in our natural environment and should be able to survive and thrive. It encourages us to protect and restore biodiversity, support healthy ecosystems, and consider the needs of nature alongside the needs of our community.

Bass Coast's Natural Assets

Bass Coast encompasses a rich diversity of interconnected environments, including:

- Coastal ecosystems
- Marine ecosystems
- Inland waterways and wetlands
- Native vegetation and woodlands
- Agricultural and rural landscapes

Together these environments form the natural systems that underpin life and prosperity across Bass Coast.

PART 2: Why Nature Matters in Bass Coast

3. Our Community's Vision

A Naturally Beautiful Bass Coast

This strategy supports Council's Community Vision 2045 and Council Plan 2025-2029 aspiration of a Naturally Beautiful Bass Coast, where together we build resilience and protect and enhance our natural environment.

Community engagement consistently shows that nature is:

- What people love most about Bass Coast.
- What people most want protected.
- The highest rated focus area for future Council action.

Nature is central to our identity, lifestyle and sense of place.

4. Nature is Our Greatest Community Asset

Nature Shapes Who We Are

The landscapes, coastlines and wildlife of Bass Coast contribute significantly to our community's identity and quality of life.

Community consultation has consistently highlighted the value placed on:

- Access to nature.
- Wildlife and biodiversity.
- Beautiful landscapes and coastlines.
- A healthy and resilient environment.

Nature Supports Our Economy

Nature is not only important environmentally and socially, it is also a key contributor to the Bass Coast economy.

Nature supports:

- Tourism and visitation.
- Recreation opportunities.

- Agriculture and food production.
- Nature-based experiences.
- Business opportunities linked to environmental outcomes.

Nature-based tourism attractions such as coastal experiences, wildlife viewing and Dark Sky initiatives help strengthen Bass Coast's reputation as a destination that values and protects its natural assets.

Case Study: Western Port Woodlands

Dedicated efforts from community volunteers and environmental groups continue to protect and enhance the Western Port Woodlands, demonstrating the important role local stewardship plays in biodiversity conservation.

Case Study: Building Nature Stewardship Through Ecotourism

Wildlife Coast Cruises

Connecting visitors with Bass Coast's unique marine environment while building awareness of marine conservation and providing opportunities to support local habitat restoration and nature recovery projects.

Case Study: Nature Positive Business Models

SeaGen and the Fishermen's Co-op

Examples of local businesses contributing to environmental outcomes through innovation, stewardship and regeneration.

5. Everyone Has a Role

Working Together for Nature

Protecting and restoring nature is a shared responsibility.

Many groups influence environmental outcomes across Bass Coast, including:

- Traditional Owners
- Community groups
- Landholders
- Businesses
- Environmental organisations

- State Government agencies
- Council

Council's Role

Council manages less than 1% of the land area within Bass Coast. Despite its small footprint, Council-managed bushland and foreshore areas play a vital role in protecting and restoring biodiversity, while providing valuable opportunities for the community to connect with nature.

Council can also influence positive environmental outcomes through its role as:

- Provider - Deliver services, programs, infrastructure and support to individuals and groups.
- Facilitator - Facilitate outcomes for communities through building partnerships, changing regulations, promoting opportunities, raising awareness, sharing information and building the capacity of community members and organisations.
- Advocate - Raise awareness and show leadership for the interests of local communities to other decision makers, including advocating to State and Federal Governments for funding and delivery of services and infrastructure.
- Regulator - Prioritise safety and regulate compliance of activities through local laws and legislation.
- Planner - Use evidence, including community views to plan for current and future community needs and priorities.

PART 3: Challenges and Opportunities

6. The Challenges Facing Nature

Bass Coast's natural environment is facing increasing pressure from a range of threats.

Key Threats

- Habitat loss, degradation and fragmentation.
- Climate change.
- Invasive plants and animals.
- Altered water regimes and water availability.
- Pressures on coastal and marine ecosystems.
- Inappropriate fire regimes.
- Emerging wildlife diseases.

Climate Change and Nature

Climate change is expected to increase pressures on natural systems through:

- Rising temperatures.
- More frequent heat events.
- Changes in rainfall patterns.
- Increased bushfire risk.
- Sea level rise and coastal impacts.

Changes to ecosystem function can have flow-on impacts across environmental, social and economic systems.

Case Study: Building Resilience to Heat Stress in Little Penguins

Little Penguins are already experiencing heat-related impacts during extreme weather events.

Phillip Island Nature Parks is exploring ways to support species adaptation, including modifying microclimates around nesting areas and burrows to reduce heat stress and improve resilience under future climate conditions.

7. Why Protecting Nature Comes First

Protect First

Protecting existing ecosystems is often more effective, affordable and successful than attempting to recreate them once they have been lost.

The most efficient way to achieve nature positive outcomes is to prioritise:

1. Protection.
2. Enhancement.
3. Restoration and regeneration where needed.

Bass Coast contains significant environmental assets that warrant ongoing protection, including:

- Western Port Woodlands.
- Areas of national environmental significance.
- Coastal and marine habitats.
- Sites of cultural significance.

8. Opportunities for a Nature Positive Bass Coast

Healing Country and Sea Country

Supporting self-determination and respecting the cultural authority of First Peoples are fundamental to healing Country and Sea Country. By listening to, learning from, and empowering First Peoples in Caring for Country, we can strengthen cultural, environmental and community outcomes.

This includes:

- Supporting self-determination.
- Respecting cultural authority and decision-making.
- Incorporating Traditional Knowledge.
- Cultural burning and land management practices.

- Caring for Country and Sea Country.

Building Climate and Nature Resilience

Nature-positive outcomes support climate adaptation and resilience.

By enhancing biodiversity and ecosystem health we can:

- Improve landscape function.
- Increase resilience to climate impacts.
- Support carbon sequestration.
- Help deliver Council's climate objectives.

Circular Economy and Nature

Embedding circular economy principles can support nature by:

- Reducing pressure on natural resources.
- Minimising waste.
- Returning nutrients to soils.
- Supporting regenerative and resilient local systems.

Working with Rural Landholders

Rural land makes up approximately 90% of the Bass Coast landscape.

Working collaboratively with landholders represents one of the greatest opportunities to improve biodiversity and ecosystem health across the municipality.

Case Study: Restoring Nature on Rural Properties

Marjorie Scott

Restoring habitat and farm dams while supporting broader landscape connectivity and biodiversity outcomes.

Greener and More Biodiverse Townships

Implementing Council's Urban Forest Strategy can help create:

- Cooler communities.
- Increased tree canopy.
- Improved biodiversity.

- Better habitat within townships.

Regenerating Marine Environments

Important initiatives include:

- Western Port Biosphere mangrove restoration.
- Blue carbon projects.
- SeaGen kelp restoration.
- Community marine stewardship initiatives.

Regenerative Tourism

Bass Coast's ecotourism certification and nature-based tourism offerings support tourism that values and protects nature while delivering positive visitor experiences.

Investing in Nature Recovery

Additional funding streams and innovative investment mechanisms present opportunities to accelerate environmental outcomes.

Case Study: Nature Recovery Foundation

Unlocking investment and stewardship for nature recovery

In 2024, Bass Coast Shire Council partnered with Biodiversity Legacy to establish the Nature Recovery Foundation, an independent not-for-profit organisation dedicated to accelerating habitat protection and restoration across Bass Coast.

The Foundation provides an innovative mechanism to attract philanthropic investment, conservation funding and land donations for nature recovery. It can also appoint local stewardship organisations to restore and care for land over the long term, helping deliver lasting environmental outcomes for future generations.

Data and Technology

Better data, monitoring and technology can help:

- Measure environmental outcomes.
- Track restoration efforts.
- Improve decision-making.
- Report progress transparently.

9. Our Progress So Far

Bass Coast is not starting from scratch.

Over many years, Council, First Peoples, landholders, community groups, environmental organisations, government agencies and volunteers have worked together to protect, restore and enhance nature across the municipality.

The Nature Positive Bass Coast Strategy replaces the Natural Environment Strategy 2016-2026 and builds on progress already achieved through initiatives such as the Bass Coast Biolinks Plan 2018. The Biolinks Plan is not replaced by this strategy; rather, it will continue as a plan to support its implementation and will be updated to help achieve the strategy's goals.

Progress Through the Biolinks Plan 2018

Since the adoption of the Biolinks Plan, significant progress has been made toward restoring habitat and strengthening ecological connections across the landscape.

Key achievements include:

- **More than 1.5 million native plants established** through partnerships with landholders, community groups, environmental organisations and government agencies.
- **An increase in native vegetation cover**, demonstrating long-term improvement across the landscape.
- Improved habitat connectivity between fragmented ecosystems.
- Enhanced partnerships supporting biodiversity conservation and restoration.
- Increased community participation in conservation and stewardship activities.
- Greater awareness of the importance of biodiversity and ecosystem health across Bass Coast.

Tracking Change

Environmental recovery takes time.

While individual restoration projects can show positive results within a few years, landscape-scale biodiversity improvements often take decades to become fully visible.

Bass Coast's native vegetation cover has increased from approximately **14% to 17.2%**, reflecting the cumulative effect of many years of restoration and conservation effort.

These achievements demonstrate that sustained investment and collaboration can deliver measurable outcomes for nature.

The Next Step

The Biolinks Plan provided an important foundation for biodiversity restoration and habitat connectivity.

The Nature Positive Bass Coast Strategy builds on these achievements by expanding the focus from vegetation restoration alone to the broader health of ecosystems on land and sea, community stewardship, climate resilience, and long-term nature recovery.

Our challenge now is to build on this momentum and accelerate efforts so that nature across Bass Coast is healthier, more connected and more resilient for future generations.

PART 4: Delivering a Nature Positive Bass Coast

10. Delivering a Nature Positive Bass Coast – Our Vision for nature in Bass Coast

Our vision is for more nature in better condition across Bass Coast than exists today, with thriving ecosystems on land and sea, stronger habitat connections, and a community that actively cares for and supports nature.

What This Means by 2030

To achieve this vision, we are committed to:

- **Healthier and more connected ecosystems** across Bass Coast, with native plants, animals and habitats improving over time.
- **Restoring nature at scale**, with restoration projects underway or planned across 30% of Bass Coast's land area by 2030.
- **Supporting Protection and restoration of our coastal and marine environments**, recognising their importance for biodiversity, community wellbeing and future generations.
- **Supporting community stewardship**, empowering residents, landholders, businesses and community groups to play an active role in caring for nature.
- **Working together**, including with Traditional Owners, to create lasting positive outcomes for nature across Bass Coast.

Measuring Our Progress

We will monitor and report on our progress by tracking:

- Areas protected and restored.
- Habitat connectivity and ecosystem condition.
- Participation in nature stewardship and restoration activities.
- The health of key species and ecosystems.

While environmental improvements can take time to become visible, we will regularly review our progress, learn from what works, and adapt our approach over time. Further details on reporting will be outlined in the Action Plan.

11. Our Nature Positive Pillars

1. Protect What We Have - Protect and enhance the native plants, animals, habitats and ecosystems that make Bass Coast unique.
2. Restore and Connect - Restore degraded areas and reconnect habitats across the landscape and coast to support resilient ecosystems and wildlife.
3. Work Together - Partner with Traditional Owners, landholders, community groups, businesses, government and others to achieve shared goals.
4. Inspire Stewardship - Support and celebrate community action for nature while building awareness of the benefits healthy ecosystems provide.
5. Measure, Learn and Adapt - Measure our progress, share what we learn, and continually improve our actions over time.

12. Our Guiding Principles

These guiding principles will shape how decisions are made and actions are prioritised as we work towards a Nature Positive Bass Coast.

First Peoples Leadership - Recognise the rights, knowledge and enduring connection of First Peoples to Country and Sea Country. Support self-determination and meaningful participation in caring for nature across Bass Coast.
Protect First - Prioritise protecting and enhancing existing native vegetation, habitats and ecosystems before considering restoration or other measures.
Nature Supports Community - Protect and restore the natural systems that support Bass Coast's unique wildlife, healthy waterways, productive landscapes, community wellbeing and local economy.
Think for the Future - Plan for a changing climate by building resilience, reducing threats, and focusing effort where it will provide lasting benefits for nature and the community.

13. Implementing the Nature Positive Strategy

Turning the Strategy into Action

The Nature Positive Bass Coast Strategy sets the long-term direction for protecting, restoring and enhancing nature across Bass Coast.

Following community consultation and adoption of the strategy, Council will develop a detailed Action Plan to guide implementation through to 2029. The Action Plan will identify priority actions, timeframes, responsibilities and measures to help track progress towards our Nature Positive goals.

Actions will be grouped under each of the Nature Positive Pillars:

- Protect What We Have
- Restore and Connect
- Work Together
- Inspire Stewardship
- Measure, Learn and Adapt

The Action Plan will be informed by:

- Community feedback received through this consultation.
- Outcomes from stakeholder workshops and engagement activities.
- Existing Council plans, programs and projects.
- Opportunities for partnership with Traditional Owners, community groups, businesses, landholders and other government agencies.

Reviewing Our Progress

Environmental recovery takes time. For this reason, the strategy will be supported by ongoing monitoring, reporting and review that will be detailed in our Action Plan.

A mid-term review will be undertaken in 2030 to:

- Assess progress towards our vision and objectives.
- Review emerging opportunities and challenges.
- Consider new knowledge and learnings.
- Update priorities and develop the next Action Plan to support delivery of the strategy.

Helping Shape the Action Plan

Through this consultation, we are particularly interested in hearing community ideas about:

- How Council can support people to connect with and care for nature.

- Opportunities for community stewardship and volunteering.
- Partnerships that could help deliver nature positive outcomes.
- Education and awareness initiatives.
- Local opportunities to protect, restore and enhance nature.

Your feedback will help shape the first Action Plan and influence how the strategy is delivered over the coming years.

PART 5: Have Your Say

To deliver the Nature Positive Bass Coast Strategy, Council will prepare a detailed Action Plan for 2026-2029, informed by the feedback received through the development of this strategy. The Action Plan will translate the strategy's directions into specific actions and priorities.

Some initiatives supporting the strategy are already underway, including environmental values mapping and technical work to strengthen the protection of nature across Bass Coast. These projects may include future opportunities for community input as they are developed and implemented.

As part of this consultation, we would like to hear your views on:

- Our vision for a Nature Positive Bass Coast.
- The proposed Nature Positive Pillars.
- The Guiding Principles that will inform decision-making.
- How Council can support community stewardship and connection with nature.
- Opportunities for partnerships, education and local action.

Your feedback will help inform future priorities and the development of the Action Plan.

We also recognise the important role that rural landholders play in achieving our Nature Positive Bass Coast goals. To better understand opportunities, challenges and priorities across the rural landscape, we are seeking feedback through a dedicated engagement program:

Partnering for Nature Across the Rural Landscape

Visit the engagement page to share your ideas and help shape future initiatives that support positive environmental outcomes on rural land.

Engage Page Link: [Partnering for Nature Across the Rural Landscape | Engage Bass Coast](#)

Vision for nature in Bass Coast

1. Does this vision reflect your aspirations for nature in Bass Coast?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

2. Is there anything missing from the vision?

- Open response

Nature Positive Pillars

1. Do these pillars reflect the key areas of action needed to achieve a Nature Positive Bass Coast?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

2. Is there anything missing or would you suggest any changes?

- Open response

Guiding Principles

1. Do these guiding principles reflect the right approach for achieving a Nature Positive Bass Coast?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

2. Are there any guiding principles missing, or any changes you would suggest?

- Open response

Informing our Action Plan

- 1. What do you think Council could do to better support people to connect with and care for nature?**

- Open response

- 2. What are the biggest barriers that prevent people from participating in nature protection, restoration or stewardship activities?**

- Open response

- 3. What types of programs, activities or support would encourage greater community involvement in caring for nature?**

- Open response

- 4. Are there any partnerships, projects or opportunities that Council should explore to help achieve a Nature Positive Bass Coast?**

- Open response

- 5. What environmental topics do you think Council should focus on when educating and raising awareness within the community?**

- Open response

Final Question

What is the single most important action you think would help create a Nature Positive Bass Coast?

- Open response