

Wetlands in the kanamaluka / Tamar estuary catchment

The value of wetlands

WHAT ARE WETLANDS?

A wetland is an area of land that is flooded by water, either permanently or seasonally. A defining characteristic of wetlands are the vegetation types present – plants that have adapted to wet soil. Wetlands can occur in salt, fresh, or brackish water in between.

BENEFITS OF WETLANDS

Cleaner water

Wetlands have an amazing ability to clean water. As water moves slowly through the diverse plant communities, there is time for sediments to drop out of the water, along with other contaminants that are bound to them. In particular, wetlands recycle pollutants such as nutrients, which can be buried in the sediment and later utilised by plants as they grow.

High biodiversity

Wetlands support an extremely high abundance and diversity of species. The combination of shallow water and high level of nutrients allows for high primary productivity—that is, the amount of biomass produced that forms the base of any food web.



Wetlands along the kanamaluka / Tamar estuary.
Photo credit: Sam Jack.

Abundant food, as well as shelter, means that wetlands are also important nursery sites for fish, crustaceans, and other organisms.

Less flood damage

Wetlands act as natural sponges—storing water and slowly releasing it. In doing this, wetlands have the capacity to reduce the intensity and spread of flood waters into urban areas during wet weather.

Cooler planet

Wetlands have been recognised for their effectiveness in sequestering and storing atmospheric carbon. Vegetation removes atmospheric carbon, and temporarily stores it. When the plant dies, carbon is then transferred to the soil, which can provide long-term storage. Carbon stored in this way within coastal and marine ecosystems is termed 'blue carbon'.

Coastal management

With the ability to combat climate change, provide flood management, and clean water, wetlands are a fantastic and natural option used in waterway management. Engineered and restored wetlands are increasingly important to coastal communities in managing the effects of flooding, storm surge and sea level rise.



Shore birds can be found in high abundance in the wetlands that fringe the kanamaluka / Tamar estuary.
Photo credit: St John Pound.

Recreation

Wetlands offer many recreational opportunities: bird watching, hiking, photography, kayaking, and canoeing are just a few of the activities that can be enjoyed in and around wetlands.

As well as recreation, there are additional opportunities within wetlands for volunteering and citizen science initiatives.

LOVE YOUR LOCAL WETLANDS

Along the kanamaluka / Tamar estuary, and within the catchment area, there are numerous freshwater, tidal, and saltmarsh wetlands. Many of these are accessible to the public from boardwalks and pathways - the Windsor Park precinct in Riverside offers views of a beautiful freshwater wetland, while further downstream at Swan Point and George Town, you can

find examples of saltmarsh wetlands. The Tamar Island Wetlands, located near Launceston, is a wonderful example of a diverse and abundant tidal wetland, supporting vulnerable and rare species of bird, reptile, amphibian and plant.

The Tamar Island Wetlands Reserve is within an internationally recognised Important Bird Area, as well as being a biodiversity hot spot. Migratory birds travel from the other side of the world along the East Asian – Australian flyway.

Community members can volunteer at the Tamar Island Wetlands Centre through the Wildcare volunteer program, and in the Launceston area, members of the community can also become involved in citizen science activities. Keen bird watchers may wish to assist BirdLife Australia collect and report observational data on bird species in the area.



The Tamar Island Wetlands Centre offers a space for people to learn, explore, volunteer, and get involved in citizen science opportunities.