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|  | **Ted O’Brien MP.** |  |
|  | Federal Member for Fairfax. |  |
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|  | **Cr Maria Suarez** |  |
|  | Sunshine Coast Council – Div 9. |  |

**MEDIA RELEASE**18 September 2020

**CITIZEN SCIENTISTS HIT
THE SUNSHINE COAST’S FIRST ClimateWatch TRAIL**

Encouraging local families to get outdoors and become ‘citizen scientists’ is a key goal for the Sunshine Coast’s first ‘ClimateWatch Trail’ which has been unveiled just in time for the school holidays.

Federal Member for Fairfax Ted O’Brien officially opened the ClimateWatch walking trail at the Maroochy Wetlands Sanctuary, Bli Bli, this morning.

“As part of the Federal Government’s Communities Environment Program I was delighted to support this project and secure $5,750 for its delivery,” Mr O’Brien said.

“Our local communities know their local environments better than most, and they have the knowledge and the passion to take care of our beautiful places and the unique wildlife within them and this is another wonderful example of that occurring right here on the Sunshine Coast.

“This project will provide an interactive activity for visitors to the Maroochy Wetland Sanctuary and will encourage people to enjoy the outdoors while participating in a national citizen science project.”

Maroochy Wetlands Sanctuary Support Group President John Tucker explained that seventeen indicator species of both flora and fauna in the Sanctuary have been selected for monitoring over time as part of the program.

“As the first continental phenology project in the Southern Hemisphere, ClimateWatch enables every Australian to be involved in collecting and recording data that will help shape the country’s scientific response to climate change,” Mr Tucker said.

“Visitors can download the free ClimateWatch app to their smart phone and can upload photos or observations about those items whilst they are walking in the Sanctuary.

“The collected information goes into a National database providing a basis for detecting trend changes. This data is essential for understanding and managing, at a national level, the impacts of climate change particularly on local and regional biodiversity.”

Locally, the Maroochy Wetlands Sanctuary Support Group together with Sunshine Coast Council will also use the data to inform management plans and climate adaption strategies.

Sunshine Coast Division 9 Councillor Maria Suarez welcomed the Australian Government Communities Environment Program funding and thanked the Maroochy Wetlands Sanctuary Support Group for their ongoing dedication to the wetlands.

“For the past 30 years the Maroochy Wetlands Sanctuary Support Group has volunteered valuable hours conducting regular fauna surveys, bird outings, newsletter reports and guided tours,” Cr Suarez said.

“Their local observations on how different wetland species are responding to climate change – such as a migratory bird returning earlier than usual or a tree flowering before it normally does – will now be officially recorded via the ClimateWatch app.

“This will help us to understand how changes in temperature and rainfall are affecting the seasonal behaviour of Australia's plants and animals – building council’s knowledge enabling evidence-based decisions for a healthy environment and liveable Sunshine Coast.

“We also have two new trails coming soon, around Currimundi Lake and in Kawana Forest,” she said.

The Maroochy Wetlands project will complement the 86 already established ClimateWatch trails across Australia and data collected will contribute to the Atlas of Living Australia database.

ClimateWatch was developed by Earthwatch, the Bureau of Meteorology and The University of Melbourne, to understand how changes in temperature and rainfall are affecting the seasonal behaviour of Australia's plants and animals.

The [Maroochy Wetlands Sanctuary](https://www.sunshinecoast.qld.gov.au/Experience-Sunshine-Coast/Beaches-and-Parks/Maroochy-Wetlands-Sanctuary) is located at Sports Rd, Bli Bli.

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