

Beach Energy gives thousands to Bay of Islands Coastal Park protection program as it begins \$1b drill in Otway Basin



Kyra Gillespie



Crofts Bay: Lyndell Driscoll, Helen Langley, Linda French, David Smurthwaite, Andrew Irvine, Jeremy Pike and Amelia Handscombe take part in the coast wattle project.

Oil and gas exploration company Beach Energy has gifted \$90,000 to a local land care group to carry out a three-year vegetation control program.

It comes as it kicks off its \$1 billion gas drilling project in the Otway Basin.

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The agreement will see the cash filtered out to the Heytesbury and District Landcare Network (HDLN) to help bolster local efforts to try and control the damaging coastal wattle.

"The Friends of Bay of Islands Coastal Park, other local volunteers and Parks Victoria have been working at this problem for a long time and Beach's contribution aims to give them much needed additional resources to continue their fight," Beach Energy community relations manager Linda French said.

The project, which kicked off July 22, will focus on the mapping and control of coast wattle in the Bay of Islands Coastal Park near Peterborough.

The HDLN also received financial backing from the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) to link the coast wattle project with a wetlands protection program.

"The wetlands project aims to protect and restore valuable wetlands in the land adjoining the Bay of Islands National Park," land care coordinator Geoff Rollinson said.

"The wetlands are located on private land and consist of ephemeral and permanent wetlands in a wider area that provides vital habitat for vulnerable species such as lewins rail and the hooded plover."

Both projects will be led by Heytesbury District Landcare Network, working in partnership with Friends of Bay of Islands, Timboon Field Naturalists, Parks Victoria and supported by Beach Energy.



Threat: The spread of coast wattle has been listed as a threat under the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988.

Volunteers, landholders and staff will undertake fencing, re-vegetation, monitoring and educational activities.

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Mr Rollinson said he is confident that the project activities will build resilience in the landscape with increased species biodiversity, enhanced habitat and will help reduce the impacts of increasing tourism.

"We're expecting some of the long-term outcomes will include improved wetlands and increased habitat for the many flora and fauna species that are in some cases vulnerable and in all cases a vital part of this fragile and diverse landscape," he said.

"Over the past few years Parks Victoria have been working on control programs as the invasive coastal wattle is impacting on species such as the metallic sun orchid."