

NOOSA: Leading environmental innovation – again

The Noosa River is recognised for its high water quality. But as with other river systems under development pressures the system's marine species are in decline – oysters long prolific are gone; annual prawn catches are a fraction of their peak; mega-fauna (e.g. groper and sawfish) are no longer in the system. Today's catches may seem reasonable, but only because those with knowledge of phenomenal past catches (e.g. of flathead and whiting) have passed away. Reduced 'baselines' are now accepted as normal.

Noosa is internationally recognised for its successes in protecting its terrestrial environment, and a significant tourism industry thrives on these achievements.

It was this knowledge, and shared ambition for the aquatic system's future, that brought the Noosa Parks Association and The Thomas Foundation together. **Bring Back The Fish** is the result - a long-term program to further enhance Noosa's environmental credentials, restore the river system as a fishing mecca, and set nation-leading marine conservation standards for coastal communities.

Bring Back the Fish (BBTF) has three facets

- Better managing the upper Noosa River catchment which over the past seven years bled over 2.3 million cubic metres of soil into the system, threatening its health;
- Ensuring the sustained health of the system's remaining prawn stocks and
- Restoring oyster beds in the lower estuary.

Why this approach?

Prawns clean up the beds of rivers and lakes, oysters filter water (a single oyster sieving a bathtub of water daily). Both species secrete essential food for fish, and themselves are fish food. They are fundamental to a healthy marine environment – and **Bring Back The Fish** aims to ensure these fundamentals are maintained.

Project origins

A workshop of Australian and international marine experts was organised by the globally recognised The Nature Conservancy.

Marine history

A study of the abundance of marine species historically found the river and lakes were once phenomenally productive, but now in decline.

Our response

The Thomas Foundation and the Noosa Parks Association committed to co-funding BBTF and invited Noosa and District Landcare, the University of the Sunshine Coast and University of Queensland, and Ecological Service Professionals, to join them. When the Noosa Biosphere Reserve Foundation (NBRF) called for 'big ideas' **Bring Back The Fish** was proposed and won its support. NBRF became its largest funder.

With final approvals granted for the construction of 15 oyster reefs, the program is now able to move ahead.



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NPA and TTF are co-proponents of BBTF, advised by The Nature Conservancy

Organisations co-sponsoring the BBTF initiative:

- NBRF – key funder
- NPA and TTF - funders
- The University of the Sunshine Coast, University of Queensland, Ecological Service Professionals and Noosa Landcare – project funding and implementation.

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An Honour Board of more than 100 individuals from more than 20 organisations contributing to this achievement follows.

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