

Coastal Saltmarsh

Historically Coastal Saltmarsh communities have been regarded as wastelands, with no viable uses. As a result many of these communities have been cleared, filled in and significantly altered to allow greater access to ports, marinas and jetties. It has only been in recent times that the valuable services these communities provide has been realised. Some of these services include:

- protecting shorelines from storm surges and coastal erosion,
- providing habitat for local and migratory bird species,
- providing nurseries for marine life.

What is Coastal Saltmarsh?

Coastal Saltmarsh is a salt-tolerant coastal plant community influenced by daily tidal inundation. These communities occur on mud-flats and are dominated by herbs and low growing shrubs¹.

Saltmarsh communities can be found along the Corangamite coast, predominantly around Port Phillip Bay (Western shoreline), Swan Bay, Lake Connewarre and Karaaf wetlands at Breamlea.



Photo: Saltmarsh at Edward's Point.

Table: Typical species of Corangamite's saltmarsh environments¹.

Scientific name	Common name
<i>Avicennia marina</i> subsp. <i>australasica</i>	Grey Mangrove
<i>Distichlis distichophylla</i>	Australian Salt-grass
<i>Frankenia pauciflora</i> var. <i>gunnii</i>	Southern Sea-heath
<i>Hemichroa pentandra</i>	Trailing Hemichroa
<i>Juncus kraussii</i> subsp. <i>australiensis</i>	Sea Rush
<i>Samolus repens</i>	Creeping Brookweed
<i>Sarcocornia quinqueflora</i>	Beaded Glasswort
<i>Sclerostegia arbuscula</i>	Shrubby Glasswort
<i>Suaeda australis</i>	Austral Seablite
<i>Triglochin striata</i>	Streaked Arrowgrass
<i>Wilsonia humilis</i>	Silky Wilsonia

Conservation Status

The Coastal Saltmarsh Ecological Vegetation Class is classified as **endangered** in the Corangamite region.



Photo: Beaded Glasswort (*Sarcocornia quinqueflora*).

Wildlife

Saltmarsh provides highly valued habitat to a range of wildlife either on the land, in the sea or in the air including an abundance of birdlife:

- Coastal species (gulls, curlews, terns, cormorants, oystercatchers, dotterels, stints, pelicans)
- Wetland species (ducks, swans, herons, ibis, spoonbills, egrets)
- Saltmarsh specific species (Orange-bellied Parrot)¹

Threats

- Increased pressures associated with urbanisation and development in coastal areas.
- Unrestricted access by humans (e.g. foot traffic and vehicles) trampling vegetation.
- Dumping of waste, especially garden waste, this leads to weed invasion and spread.
- Discharge of stormwater and fresh water run-off from urban areas increasing weed invasion.
- Grazing by livestock.
- Climate change, i.e. sea-level rise.

Why should we protect Coastal Saltmarsh?

Coastal Saltmarsh has a vital role in the ecosystem foodweb, supporting both terrestrial and aquatic species¹.

Saltmarsh provide important breeding grounds for fisheries, providing shelter, food and protection for juvenile fish .

Saltmarsh is crucial habitat for numerous migratory bird species, including the **critically endangered** Orange-bellied Parrot.

What can you do?

- Stay to defined tracks in areas of Saltmarsh, to avoid trampling vegetation.
- Keeping dogs on leads and picking up their waste to avoid increased nutrient levels.
- Recycle waste and dispose of garden waste appropriately instead of dumping it.
- Join a local community group and become a volunteer e.g. Landcare and local friends groups.



Photographs

All photographs courtesy of Corangamite CMA.

References

1. Viridians Biological Databases (2005). *Flora Information System*. Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria.
2. Saintilan, Neil (ed). (2009) *Australian Saltmarsh Ecology*. Authors: Paul Adam, Neil Saintilan, CSIRO, Rod Connelly, Pat Dale, Pia Laegdsgaard. CSIRO Publishing, Australia.

