

Communications Strategy

Eastern Curlew (*Numenius madagascariensis*)



This project is supported through funding from the Australian Governments Environment Restoration Fund.



National
Landcare
Program



Purpose

This Communications Strategy (Strategy) has been developed to support the success of the Prioritisation of Eastern Curlew habitat in the Mackay region (The Project).

The Strategy has been designed to support stakeholders to plan for and maximise all communications opportunities, and provide guidance around the project's communications approach, tools/tactics, protocols and messaging.

Plans will be based on the latest information from the project sites regarding activities, schedules and outcomes, forward project plans and a review of what internal and external communications and media activities have been the most successful. This approach will ensure continuity of purpose and will facilitate the delivery of The Projects' vision and investment.

1. Background

Announced in early 2022, Reef Catchments (Mackay Whitsunday Isaac) Limited began the Prioritisation of Eastern Curlew habitat in the Mackay region Eastern Curlew Project funded by the Environmental Restoration Fund through the Threatened Species Strategic Action Plan Priority Species. This project saw Reef Catchments work to collate historical monitoring data that has been collected by the Queensland Wader Study Group into a visual habitat prioritisation asset that overlays identified eastern curlew roost sites with mapping of human disturbance in the Mackay region. This will allow us to further understand the habitat use and distribution of individuals across our region, along with influences of anthropogenic disturbance which is fundamental to conserving this threatened species.

The eastern curlew (*Numenius madagascariensis*) is a top 20 priority bird species listed as 'Critically Endangered' and is identified as a 'Listed Migratory Species' under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. It is also identified as a migratory species in appendices to the Bonn Convention, and in JAMBA (Japan/Australia Migratory Bird Agreement), CAMBA (China/Australia Migratory Bird Agreement) and ROKAMBA (the Republic of Korea/Australia Migratory Bird Agreement).

Eastern curlews are found in coastal regions in the northeast and south of Australia mid-July to late September, during their non-breeding season. They move locally between high-tide roost sites and intertidal feeding zones and are most commonly associated with sheltered intertidal sandflats or mudflats, open and without vegetation or covered with seagrass (typically Zosteraceae), often near mangroves, on salt flats and in saltmarsh, rockpools and among rubble on coral reefs, and on ocean beaches near the tideline. The key threats impacting this threatened species within Australia, especially eastern and southern Australia, include ongoing human disturbance (such as driving on beaches and sand dunes, and unrestrained domestic dogs), coastal development, land reclamation, pollution and weed invasion. Within the Mackay local government area, eastern curlews have been recorded to disperse across the dominant intertidal flats found south of Mackay.

Many populations of eastern curlew also face direct conflict with humans and anthropogenic activities, which can greatly impact how the birds use the resources of these landscapes. Research has consistently highlighted the importance of high-quality non-breeding habitats to migratory shorebirds like the eastern curlew. Therefore, understanding the habitat use and distribution of individuals across a landscape along with influences of anthropogenic disturbance is fundamental to conserving this threatened species.

Reef Catchments has been working on a project to gather historical monitoring data into a visual habitat prioritization asset that overlays identified eastern curlew roost sites with mapping of human disturbance sources in the Mackay Region. The output will be a legacy resource for addressing information gaps regarding the impact of human disturbance on eastern curlew populations within our region. Likewise, the output has allowed the identification of recreational activities which are heavily impacting populations of eastern curlew in the region. This has consequently allowed Reef Catchments to identify strategic communication activities to help address the threats, impacts and lack of public knowledge surrounding this species for its protection into the future.

2. Communications objectives

The Strategy is an overarching plan which, by outlining the actions that will be taken to engage the community and provide on-the-ground communication about the project, supports the conservation and management of eastern curlew populations within the Mackay Local Government Area (LGA).

The communications objectives for the Eastern Curlew Project are:

- **Raise awareness:** Address the lack of community knowledge regarding eastern curlews and raise public awareness of the threats and subsequent impacts affecting them, along with why it's important to conserve them.
 - Particular focus will be put on engaging with recreational area users (e.g. beach, park and boat ramp users) where disturbance to eastern curlews is expected to be high.
- **Changing attitudes and behaviours:** Increase understanding of the impact of human disturbance on shorebird species (in particular the eastern curlew), and what the community can do to minimise this impact.
- **Promote what is being done:** Raise awareness of The Project and Reef Catchments' involvement in works to help conserve and manage threatened species.
 - Sharing accessible and engaging content about The Project goals, activities, challenges and successes.
- **Building partnerships:** Proactively engage with key stakeholders and relevant bodies so that relationships are established and enhance eastern curlew conservation into the future through more coordinated and effective approaches.

Communication goals will be achieved through:

- Improving people's understanding of the key messages
- Promoting the existence, purpose and implications of The Strategy to stakeholders and target audiences
- Promoting the actions of The Strategy to the target audience
- Influencing new programs and initiatives to include the key messages
- Using a variety of communication tools
- Assessing current levels of understanding – identifying current research and utilising project outcomes

3. Target Audiences

Table 1: Target audiences for the Eastern Curlew Project communication activities, not in any particular order.

Audience type	Organisations/Group
Industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Developers - Recreational and tourism - Forestry - National parks - Fisheries
Community groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regional NRM bodies - Landcare groups

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conservation groups - Lions, Rotary etc. - Indigenous groups
Research and Educational institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Schools - Research bodies - CSIRO - Universities
Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interstate agencies (Ministers, director general, executive directors, general managers, land managers, extension staff, communication staff, call centre staff, service desk staff, policy staff, enforcement officers, field staff, planners etc.) - Department of Resources - Department of Climate Change Energy the Environment and Water - Department of Environment and Science - Department of Agriculture and Fisheries - Local government authorities and councils (Mackay Regional Council, Isaac Regional Council, Whitsunday Regional Council)
General	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Landholders - Indigenous communities - Tourists - Reef catchments residents - Media - Recreational facilities users

4. Communications Activities

The communication activities of The Strategy will be focussed on activities that have a ‘whole of plan’ focus such as:

- Website updates
- Corporate documents i.e. annual reports
- Promotional materials e.g. fact sheets and posters, banners and displays
- E-newsletters
- Interpretive signage
- Community engagement events

Table 2: Target audiences for the Eastern Curlew Project communication activities, not in any particular order.

Communication activity	Target Market	Tools and tactics	Broad key messages	Priority
Media releases	General public	Awareness about the species	Highlight the impact that humans have on shorebirds, why it’s important to minimise this and what Reef Catchments has been doing to address threats.	High

Communication framework document	Internal and relevant stakeholders	Communications strategy	A consistent approach to promote the importance of the eastern curlew, reduce duplication, and inform people of the current communication processes that can be used to promote the minimisation of disturbance to shorebirds.	Medium
Annual reports	General public	Report	Illustrates the progress of The Project and any future projects involving eastern curlew.	Low
PowerPoint presentations	Key stakeholders	PowerPoint	Raise awareness of eastern curlews, threats posed to them, highly impacted areas in the region, mitigation strategies to help conserve/manage them and their threats and potential projects for the future.	Low
Displays and posters	General public	Displays at events and posters for education	Raise awareness of eastern curlews, threats posed to them, highly impacted areas in the region, mitigation strategies to help conserve/manage them and their threats and potential projects for the future.	Medium
Fact sheets	General public	A series of fact sheets	Considerations and requirements when entering the coastal environment such as dog walking on-leash, avoiding roosting sites at certain times of the year, minimisation of disturbance and noise at boat ramps and when boating etc.	High
E-newsletter	Key stakeholders	A regular, reader-friendly e-newsletter	Highlighting the work that has been done by Reef Catchments and what they can do to assist with minimising disturbance on eastern curlews, as well as providing information about the species	High
Update to internal website	NRM Staff, interested stakeholders, future funders	Web-based	Provide details on The Project, and links to further information (e.g. storyboard) for education.	Medium
Interpretive signage	General public	Signs installed at strategic locations	Highlighting the risk that disturbance poses to eastern curlews and other shorebirds. Recommendations on how to minimise your disturbance and why it's important.	High
Social media	All audiences	Reef Catchments social media posts	Social media posts raising awareness about the eastern curlew and what the public can do to assist with minimising disturbance on them.	High

5. Key Messages

Eastern curlews are under threat, but there is hope.

- Human disturbance, including habitat loss and degradation, and disturbance from recreation and development is one of the major threats facing eastern curlews. These disturbances can disrupt their feeding and breeding patterns, as well as cause stress and exhaustion.
- Eastern curlews are under increasing pressure from a combination of local anthropogenic disturbance types (i.e. dog walkers, four-wheel driving) in the Mackay Local Government Area (LGA).
- The Prioritisation of Eastern Curlew Habitat in the Mackay Region project run by Reef Catchments was designed to help identify areas of high human disturbance for prioritisation of conservation works/activities.
- The Project found that public recreation areas (e.g. public parks) and walking tracks have the greatest impact on eastern curlew roost sites within the Mackay LGA.
- Minimising all disturbance to shorebirds at key roosting and feeding sites is critical for their survival, especially migratory species like the eastern curlew.
- Manage disturbance at important sites when eastern curlews are present (e.g. discourage or prohibit vehicle access, horse riding and dogs on beaches, implement temporary site closures).
- Raising awareness of the eastern curlew, its requirements, threats, impacts etc. with the public and key stakeholders will have an increasingly important role in their conservation.
- Collaboration between different stakeholders, including government agencies, conservation organizations, local communities, and industry, is essential to achieve effective conservation.
- Individual actions can also make a difference in eastern curlew conservation. Simple actions such as reducing plastic waste, avoiding disturbing eastern curlew habitats, and supporting conservation organizations can contribute to their protection and conservation