

UnderStories

INSIGHTS INTO RESTORING NATURE - FEBRUARY 2026

Welcome to Nyadinang Najung

Learn more about this beautiful property beside the Murrumbidgee and an important agreement on its cultural and ecological restoration

Why frogs?

Summer is breeding season for endangered Green and Golden Bell Frogs and Growling Grass Frogs - find out how we're supporting them in the Gippsland Lakes

Also...

Opening the floodgates for wetland restoration in central Queensland

Helping a river in Adelaide's southern suburbs help itself

 **Greening Australia**

Our vision

Healthy and productive landscapes where people and nature thrive

Our mission

To rebuild nature by connecting community, economy and environment in ways that benefit all

Front cover image: Close to 150,000 seedlings have been planted at Nyadinang Najung - but there's a lot more to the story of this property's renewal (see page 6). Photo credit Richard Snashall.

This image: A Narrow-leaf Bitter-pea (*Daviesia mimosoides*) seedling, one of the thousands planted as part of the restoration project at Nyadinang Najung. Photo credit Richard Snashall.

Opposite page image: Deb (Yuwi) standing with Dan and Col (Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service) on the bund wall as an excavator works to create a gap.

DESIGN AND LAYOUT

Leanne Bilyard
Karin Holzknrecht

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Greening Australia sincerely acknowledges all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across this Country where we live and work. We honour the deep continuing connection they share with the lands and waters, and pay our deepest respects to Elders and Leaders past, present and emerging.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples should be aware that this publication may contain images or names of people who have since passed away.

Sharing from the heart

The work we do can be complicated to explain – as complex as the ecosystems we are striving to help. But as the stories in these pages show, it isn't hard to share the feeling of seeing a long-laid plan to save a wetland come to life, of finding common ground with others on helping people and Country heal, of knowing the weeds you're clearing or the frog ponds you've built are helping make a corner of the world a better place. As a science-based organisation, we dive deep into the data sometimes. That's important: the work we do must be firmly grounded in best practice and carefully monitored to be sure we're delivering measurable outcomes. But there's also a lot of heart in what we do: love and care for the landscapes we live and work in, curiosity about the world and its myriad lifeforms, excitement in finding practical solutions for tricky problems. That's what we want to share with you, from our experiences at the frontline of restoring nature.

Heather Campbell
Greening Australia CEO



How this project is opening the floodgates for coastal wetland restoration

WORDS by Karin Holzknrecht; PHOTOS by Greening Australia

A tongue of saltwater inches forward, a gleaming sheet ebbing and flowing with the swell of the rising tide. Standing on the bank above, a group of people watch its progress with avid attention. It's taken years of work to reach this moment; they intend to savour it.

The group – which includes representatives from Yuwi Aboriginal Corporation, Yuwi People and Queensland Parks & Wildlife – are gathered on Yuwi Country in Cape Palmerston National Park.

This 7,200-hectare national park about 115 kilometres south-east of Mackay in central Queensland is significant for the variety of lowland coastal ecosystems that it protects, including mangroves, dunes, swamps, grasslands and rainforest.

These habitats are home to a vast array of birdlife and other animals, including one of Australia's rarest rodents, the Water Mouse (*Xeromys myoides*). The park also protects undeveloped coastline adjacent to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. In the right season,

the cape is a great place to spot passing humpback whales.

But there's a problem spot. Before this land became a national park in 1976, some parts were used to graze cattle. Sometime in the 1960s, a bank (or bund) was constructed, blocking tidal flows of saltwater into a wetland area, to create a freshwater-only system for 'ponded pasture'.

How 'ponded pasture' works is that the closed off wetland area is then planted with introduced pasture grasses that grow well in freshwater floodplains. When the water evaporates in the dry season, the cattle can graze the high-quality fodder left behind.

One of the pasture grasses used, introduced from South America, is Olive Hymenachne (*Hymenachne amplexicaulis*). It's now considered one of the worst weeds in Australia.

Olive hymenachne is highly invasive and grows in dense stands that block waterways,

threaten fish habitat, and exclude all other plants. It is very hard and expensive to remove or control. New plants can grow from any small fragments left behind, and its tiny seeds spread easily by water, or in mud transported by animals, birds, and vehicles.

The Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service have wanted to do something about this seven-hectare hymenachne ponded pasture in Cape Palmerston National Park for over 20 years. The Yuwi People have wanted to bring this country back to health for a lot longer.

So when Yuwi Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC and Greening Australia won funding from the Australian Government's Reef Trust for the Yuwi Blue Carbon Wetland Restoration Project, this spot was a priority.

The partners put their heads together to come up with a wetland rescue plan.

After an exhaustive combined effort by 11 organisations over 16 months to model, design and obtain government approvals, a seven-metre gap was excavated in the man-made bund at the end of November 2025.

The first high tide in December sent saltwater flowing through the breach.

You see, hymenachne doesn't do well in saltwater. Turns out, controlling the invasive weed in a coastal wetland like this one, can be as simple as restoring tidal flows.

Now you can imagine what it means for the group standing on the bank to see that rising tide begin to stream through the gap they'd made. They are seeing their long-laid plans for saving this weed-choked wetland finally in action.

The hymenachne will die off, and the wetland area will gradually transition back into vital coastal ecosystems like mangroves, saltmarsh, and supratidal forest. By 2057, the anticipated area of saltwater inundation will be approximately six hectares.

Within a few short years, all the diversity of wildlife eerily missing from this wetland before, will begin to return.



Earthworks to remove the seven-metre section of the bund wall underway.

Even better, this success goes beyond one wetland. It's laid the groundwork for Yuwi Aboriginal Corporation and Yuwi People to keep building up coastal restoration and blue carbon projects throughout their Country – and strengthened a vital connection between them and the Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service team.

It's also increased Greening Australia's understanding about effective co-design and ways to support other First Nations groups to start up blue carbon projects too.

All in all, that seven-metre gap in a manmade wall represents a big step forward (opening the floodgates, if you will) for recovering coastal ecosystems, and for many more partnerships helping people and nature. •

Yuwi Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC and Greening Australia co-designed the Yuwi Blue Carbon Wetland Restoration Project, funded by the Australian Government's Reef Trust.

The project is being developed and delivered with the support of Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service, James Cook University, Civil IQ, Koumala Excavation, Douglas Partners, EcoSure, Everick Heritage, BMT, and Sarina Landcare.



Top Image: Yuwi Elders and other Yuwi representatives breaking ground on the coastal wetland restoration project.

Bottom Image: The tidal flows into the wetland have been successfully reinstated. The new bank walls have been stabilised with jute matting and planted with native seedlings.



Scan QR code to learn more, or visit <https://youtu.be/zPJtwceEvcQ>

Welcome to Nyadinang Najung

Wolgalu Nyadinang Najung corporation representatives welcoming Greening Australia and impact investors to Country, overlooked by the old Candelbark Gums.



The Caddigat Rd property has officially been given its Wolgalu name

WORDS by Karin Holzkecht; PHOTOS by Richard Snashall

Within metres of the entrance to Greening Australia's Caddigat Rd property on Wolgalu Country in the NSW Snowy Monaro region, stands a grand old group of Candelbark Gums (*Eucalyptus rubida*). Judging by the hollows in their branches, they are hundreds of years old.

There's additional proof of their longevity. One of them is a scar tree. Before colonial settlement dispossessed the Wolgalu Nation of this land, part of the tree's bark was carefully cut and peeled away, then put to use as a tool, or for a shelter, or perhaps to ceremonially mark the tree as significant.

Recently these trees bore witness to a very

different kind of ceremony: the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).

It happened late last year, during a visit by investors from Conscious Investment Management, whose support made it possible to purchase the Caddigat Rd property for restoration in the first place.

With these important partners looking on, Wolgalu and Wiradjuri Elder Aunty Alice Williams (representing Wolgalu Nyadinang Najung corporation) and Greening Australia CEO Heather Campbell took turns to sign on the dotted line.

It can be hard to get excited about paperwork, but the applause from the people

gathered appropriately marked a pivotal moment in what both organisations hope will be a much bigger story.

The MoU details our shared goals for respectfully restoring this land, healing this Country, together – and doing it in a way that increases Wolgalu use of the land, and shares skills, knowledge and networks to help Wolgalu People take their place as regional leaders of restoration.

While some items listed in the MoU are longer-term aims, others have already been completed. For example, Wolgalu Nyadinang Najung undertook a cultural heritage survey of the property following purchase back in 2024, a vital task before any disturbance from groundwork.

They also provided the Greening Australia team with a list of culturally significant species including bush tucker and bush

medicine plants, and the appropriate locations for planting these, as part of the property's environmental and cultural restoration.

But as you've probably guessed from this story's headline, one of the most direct outcomes from the signing of the MoU has been giving the Caddigat Rd property a Wolgalu name: Nyadinang Najung.

What the Wolgalu People have lost through colonial settlement can't be overstated. The loss includes much of their language. The property's renaming celebrates Wolgalu resilience, in face of the odds.

Nyadinang Najung means 'river water' in honour of the Murrumbidgee River, which curls around part of the property's northern and eastern boundaries. Did you know, by the way, that 'Murrumbidgee' is derived from the Wiradjuri words meaning 'big river'?

Reaching the river on the northern boundary from the southern entrance gate takes a good 15-minute drive. That should give a sense of the size of this property and the effort required to restore it.

It's Greening Australia's biggest ever restoration project in New South Wales, with close to 150,000 seedlings hand-planted across the 755-hectare property in just one year (2025).

From the rolled-down windows as you drive along, the distinctive Weeping Snow Gum (*Eucalyptus lacrimans*) can be seen here and there in the landscape. This slow-growing subalpine tree is only found in very localised patches of the high plains of New South Wales.

A surprising bonus, given the long history of sheep grazing here, is that some of the native grassland diversity still remains. Besides the wallaby and spear grasses, there are small shrubs such as bossiaeas and scattered native wildflowers like Austral bear's ears, common everlasting, scaly buttons and sunrays.

It means we're that much closer to a healthy, self-sustaining grassy woodland – once the appropriate tree and shrub layers are restored.

The clearest signs of the restoration underway are the regular patterns of the planting furrows, carefully hugging the contours of the hillsides. The furrows loosen the soil compacted from a century of grazing, helping seedlings develop stronger root systems and letting rain soak in.

The ultimate aim is to help recover a significant area of the critically endangered Monaro Tableland Cool Temperate Grassy Woodland vegetation community – characterised by those weeping snow gums and candlebarks.

At the same time, this will rebuild habitat for nationally listed woodland birds, such as the Hooded Robin, Brown Treecreeper, Diamond Firetail and Southern Whiteface.



A better vegetated landscape means a better protected water catchment too – and that's good news for the inhabitants of the waterways here, including the nationally endangered Macquarie Perch and the ever-elusive Platypus.

Which brings us full circle to Nyadinang Najung's namesake. Parking at the property's northern end, it's just a short walk to stand beside the beautiful Murrumbidgee, rushing over its rocky bed, as it's done for millions of years.

It's easy to see why the river was referenced in naming this place. Its steady flow seems to echo what all the partners hope to see happen across the Nyadinang Najung property: slow, patient renewal, shaped by ecological expertise and deep cultural knowledge.

It's a name full of promise – that the decisions being made here and the actions being taken could have a ripple effect far beyond the boundary fences, and beyond our lifetimes. •

“ We're planting for ten, twenty generations from now. We might not see it, but at the end of the day, we're accountable. They'll ask, 'well, what did you do?' ”

Wolgalu and Wiradjuri Elder, Aunty Alice Williams



An aerial image of some of the planting area at Nyadinang Najung demonstrates the scale of the restoration underway.

Opposite page: Greening Australia CEO Heather Campbell and Wolgalu and Wiradjuri Elder Aunty Alice Williams signing the MoU.



Letting the light in at Field River

How this weed-choked urban river is being helped to help itself

WORDS by Dominic de Stefani; PHOTOS by Greening Australia

For a long time, this river that snakes through Adelaide's southern suburbs was hard to see.

In some places, the creekline had narrowed to a dark corridor, hemmed in by invasive exotic trees. The water slowed to a trickle. Light struggled to reach the ground. Even from the walking tracks that thread through the reserve, it was easy to miss.

Now, sections are opening up. Water is visible again. Native shrubs and sedges are even returning on their own.

"You can actually see the creekline now," said Greening Australia's Deb Nagloo, who is leading this urban river restoration project. "It always amazes me. Every time I go down there, it's different."

A chequered past

The land surrounding Field River holds deep cultural significance for the Kaurna People. Its story since European settlement has been one of decline. By the mid-20th century, much of the area had been cleared for mining

and grazing. A quarry operated nearby, and aerial images from the late 1960s show little more than exposed ground. By the late 1970s, housing and roads began to encroach on either side of the river gully, creating an increasingly narrow urban corridor of green.

Some sections retained pockets of resilience – remnants of native grasses, shrubs, groundcovers and reptile species holding on – but there's heavy pressure from introduced weeds such as Desert Ash and African Olive crowding out native vegetation.

"My first impressions: hard to get in. We had to battle through the weeds," said Deb.

Full of potential

Field River sits within the newly declared 177-hectare Kauwi-marnirla ("place of two good waters") – Field River Conservation Park. It's a natural corridor linking Hallett Cove Conservation Park on the coast to remnant woodlands in Ityamaitpinna Yarta – Glenthorne National Park and other green 'stepping stones' that reach up into the foothills of the Mount Lofty Ranges.

The Field River is a significant green corridor in Adelaide's southern suburbs. The sections marked in orange, an impressive 9 kms, are under active restoration through Deb's project.



Ecologically, it offers continuity – the potential for a habitat highway allowing species to move safely and helping them adapt to climatic changes in what's otherwise a very built up environment.

Socially, it sits 'smack bang in the middle' of residential neighbourhoods. People walk their dogs or hike in the river corridor, often unaware of the ecological weight the place carries. Few urban areas have spaces this large and continuous available for restoration.

Without intervention, the degradation would have compounded: a narrowing creek, fewer native plants, less habitat complexity. Fortunately, a number of organisations recognised Field River's potential over the years, and began working to change its narrative.

Clearing the way for recovery

The Field River Waterways Recovery project being led by Greening Australia is building on this previous work by restoring an additional nine kilometres of riparian corridor habitat across 11 priority sites. On the ground, the

work so far has been hard and unglamorous. Most days have been spent clearing, not planting. It's been slow going, negotiating the rocky creekbed while strategically removing long-established, dense stands of woody weeds and thick, vigorous grasses like Kikuyu and Phalaris.

But once cleared, change has been immediate. Space opened up. Light is reaching the riverbanks. Native sedges are thickening along the water edges. In some places, planting has paused – not because work is finished, but because the river has begun restoring itself. In several sections, native plants are returning without assistance.

"Invasives like Desert Ash suppress light and prevent understorey growth," Deb explained. "Just by clearing them out, we're creating space for natives to come through."

These responses are reshaping the approach. Where natural recruitment is strong, planting can be reduced and efforts can be shifted to more degraded sections. Where planting does occur, it is dense and defensive:

sedges and grasses to stabilise banks and out-compete weedy regrowth, alongside hardy trees adapted to damp soils. Rare and threatened plants are being returned.

Maintenance will matter as much as initial works - but the structure needed to support more complex ecological relationships is beginning to return. Wildlife that will benefit from this new habitat includes woodland birds and Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos.

Rebuilding nature, together

The scale of the restoration needed has brought together many contributors. Greening Australia is coordinating restoration in the creeklines with local contractors; Green Adelaide and National Parks and Wildlife Service SA are supporting this project and other works along the river's gully slopes. Kurna people are bringing their cultural knowledge to shape the landscape approach; the Kurna Fire Team, in particular, are key players in re-igniting cultural practices in the conservation park through cultural burns.

Community planting events at Ityamaitpinna Yarta – Glenithorne National Park have helped stabilise eroding areas in the upper section of the Field River catchment, giving locals a chance to contribute to the landscape's recovery. Friends groups have formed and are actively involved in improving the Field River corridor, showing the strong community desire to help in recovery too.

Seeing it through

It's good that there are willing hands, because there's still much to do. Ground crews are entering a second year of intensive weed removal. Further planting is planned, with thousands of locally appropriate native plants on order. Deb is excited about that.

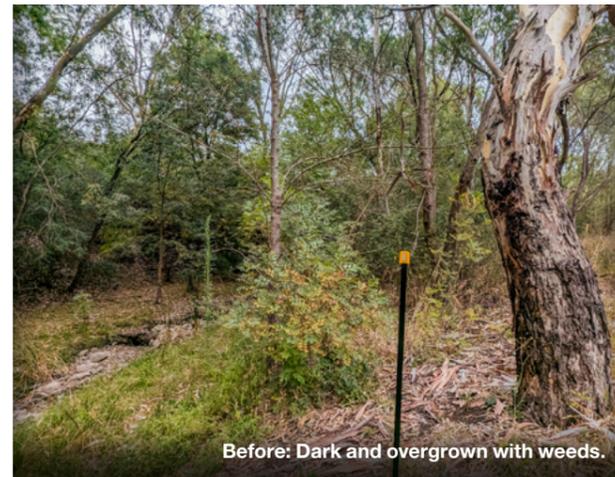
"With the woody weeds gone, we can bring back species from the nationally endangered Grey Box (*Eucalyptus microcarpa*) Grassy Woodland community that once occurred here. Less than 3% of its original extent in

South Australia is left, so anything we can do to protect the remnants and recreate this vegetation community is vital."

Restoration at Field River is not 'one and done'. Once planting is over, then monitoring becomes the priority. It's about staying with the work: removing pressure, responding to what returns, and adjusting as the system reveals what it needs next.

In places where the light has returned, the river is already answering. •

This restoration is funded by the Australian Government's National Heritage Trust under the Urban Rivers and Catchments Program, with support from Greening Australia, SA Department for Environment and Water, Green Adelaide and the City of Marion, in collaboration with National Parks and Wildlife Service SA.



Before: Dark and overgrown with weeds.



After: The creekline has room for recovery.



Why frogs?

Getting wetland restoration right for the amphibian canaries in the coalmine

WORDS by Leanne Bilyard; PHOTOS by Greening Australia

"It's really dry."

Martin Potts crouches over the cracking soil at Clydebank Morass, running a hand over the yellowing grass. He grew up not far from here, seeing the land change through the seasons of his childhood.

Wetlands like this are meant to change; dry spells are part of the rhythm here. Martin has spent a decade helping restore this system so it can endure the toughest months. And fortunately, some unlikely allies are offering the clearest sign his efforts are paying off.

This is Gunaikurnai Country. On the edge of the Bass Strait on the Victorian coast lies a mosaic of lakes, wetlands and islands,

painted with the vivid blues of the summer ocean and the dusty green of the eucalypt forests lining the shores. The Gippsland Lakes are Australia's largest inland waterway system; a 60,000-hectare network of habitats including coastal lagoons, seagrass beds, salt marshes and freshwater marshes.

The biodiversity found here is internationally significant, with the lakes listed as a RAMSAR site in the 1980s. This is home for over 400 indigenous plant species and 300 native fauna species, including the rare Burrunan dolphin. Thousands of visitors frequent the lakes each year, people and animals alike. Migratory birds such as Latham's Snipe and Sharp-tailed Sandpipers travel here from breeding grounds in Northeast Asia and Alaska, with some travelling a 20,000-kilometre round trip.

While this landscape conjures memories for Martin of hazy summer evenings and a carefree childhood, this region has faced huge challenges throughout the years.

“Unfortunately many of the Gippsland Lakes wetlands are turning estuarine in key areas,” says Martin, as he explains the complexity of Greening Australia’s work in the area.

“The system is naturally freshwater, fed from rivers that stretch across Victoria, but in the 1800s they artificially opened the entrance, letting in more saltwater. Increased salinity is a massive problem in these areas.”

This issue is exacerbated by water use for agriculture and industry, reduced rainfall, and increased sediments and nutrients flowing into the lakes. Alongside occasions of drought, fire and erosion, the lakes have needed a helping hand over the years.

It’s these issues that led Martin to dedicate years of effort and passion to... frogs.



A baby Growling Grass frog.

The frog problem

Over a decade ago, Greening Australia teamed up with the Love our Lakes crew to improve the health of the Gippsland Lakes. Not only were swathes of native trees planted alongside marshes and lagoons, a series of frog breeding ponds were established.

These ponds offer refuges for frogs throughout the dry season, alleviating the increasing pressures of the changing landscape.

It’s a question Martin hears regularly: “why frogs? What have they got to do with land restoration?”

Martin describes the frogs of the Gippsland Lakes, particularly the Green and Golden Bell Frogs and Growling Grass Frogs, as amphibious canaries in the coalmine.

“The frogs tell us if we’re getting it right. When the frogs are happy, we know so many other species are happy too.”

A decade ago, surveys across the Gippsland Lakes suggested the system was close to losing these species altogether. At that time, it was estimated that only around 400 Green and Golden Bell Frogs and about 80 Growling Grass Frogs remained.

Today, the situation has shifted. Populations are now well into the hundreds and continuing to build toward the thousands.

Welcome to the world, little guy

As the weeks of summer pass and the temperatures creep into the 40s, the frog ponds begin to chirp with life.

This is the time of year when monitoring these sites matters most. Summer places pressure on every part of the system. The suffocating heat of the day can cause water levels to drop and alter breeding sites rapidly.

It’s a Thursday evening in early January, and Martin has ventured out to spy on activity in the ponds. As the sun tips over the horizon,

the first call breaks through. A Green and Golden Bell Frog announces itself from the edge of a pond, followed soon after by Growling Grass Frogs becoming active across several sites. Martin slows his pace, recording what he hears and sees along the water’s edge.

A baby Growling Grass frog, no larger than Martin’s fingernail, clings to the reeds.

“Welcome to the world, little guy.”

Early breeding events like these indicate that the frog ponds and freshwater refuges are working as intended, offering stable places to breed even during the most challenging part of the year.

Community at the centre

Ten years ago, standing in these same landscapes felt very different. Because of the hard work by Martin and his fellow environmentalists in the region, the Gippsland Lakes are returning to what they once were.

On that one Thursday night, Martin recorded 35 new baby Growling Grass Frogs with large numbers of tadpoles still developing.

That’s an incredible validation of the work being done - and the work being done is thanks to a dedicated community, including the supporters of Greening Australia.

“If you’ve supported our frog work recently, I really appreciate it. It means I get to be out here doing what matters most - checking how the wetlands are holding up and how the frogs are going through summer,” said Martin.

“Summer is still the hardest time for these wetlands. Water levels drop, weeds take hold quickly, and it doesn’t take much for a breeding site to slip out of balance.”

“It’s a good feeling hearing frogs where there was silence. With ongoing care and support, we can make sure it stays that way.” •

Can you help?

Every contribution helps support our expert team to work with First Nations Peoples, landholders and local delivery partners on restoring habitat in vulnerable Australian landscapes. Please give if you are able; your tax-deductible donation will make such a difference.



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We’ve identified regions where we are needed most and can have the biggest impact. Our strategic goals and actions are focused on these areas, recognising that these may change over time if our skills are needed elsewhere.

We have multiple projects in these priority regions that are ready to go, but need funding.

To discuss funding a project with us, email info@greeningaustralia.org.au

Greening Australia is a national not-for-profit dedicated to practical, science-based environmental restoration. We've been restoring Australia's unique landscapes and protecting biodiversity for over 40 years.

We are committed to tackling Australia's greatest environmental challenges in ways that work for communities, economies and nature; planting millions of native trees and plants, protecting hundreds of native species, and supporting Traditional Owners' aspirations for restoring Country.

As a not-for-profit, our impact is made possible by strong working relationships with First Nations Peoples, landholders and regional delivery partners, and by financial support from corporate and business partners, governments, philanthropic organisations and generous individuals.

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