

Victoria wins Australian Clean Beach Challenge

Victoria's Balnarring Beach, southeast of Melbourne, has been named Australia's Cleanest Beach 2006 after winning Keep Australia Beautiful's prestigious Australian Clean Beach Challenge competition, which is proudly supported by the Packaging Stewardship Forum of the Australian Food and Grocery Council.

Keep Australia Beautiful Victoria Chief Executive Officer Andrew McLorinan said Balnarring, which had previously won the State title for the second year running, set a shining example for other beach communities.

"Our judges agreed Balnarring had it all, meeting or exceeding all of the Clean Beach Challenge awards criteria.

"Visitor friendliness, litter prevention, community-local government partnerships, resource conservation and waste management, youth involvement and community action – there's no shortage of enthusiasm or commitment at Balnarring Beach," Mr McLorinan said.

Balnarring snared the coveted Clean Beach Challenge crown after taking on the best beaches from Queensland, New South Wales, Tasmania and South Australia.

Victoria's Bonbeach on Port Phillip Bay also picked up an outstanding accomplishment award in the Community Action category for a project which saw residents of a local retirement home work with the council and community to restore the Bonbeach foreshore.

In total 317 beaches took part in the fun environmental competition, with Tasmania and South Australia taking up the Challenge for the first time.

The winners are:

Australia's Cleanest Beach Award

Balnarring Beach, Victoria

Outstanding Accomplishment Awards

Friendly Beach Award

Airlie Beach, Queensland

Beach Spirit Award

Rainbow Beach, Queensland

Litter Prevention Award

Lady Robinson's Beach, New South Wales

Resource Conservation & Waste Management Award

Darlington Beach, New South Wales

Community-Local Government Partnership Award

Port Augusta City Council for Port Augusta Eastside Foreshore, South Australia

Protection of the Environment

Cooee Beach, Tasmania

Young Legends Award

Queens Beach (Redcliffe), Queensland

Community Action Award

Bonbeach, Victoria

Packaging Stewardship Forum Chairman Alec Wagstaff congratulated the winners on being judged the best in Australia.

"The Packaging Stewardship Forum is delighted to support the Australian Clean Beach Challenge," Mr Wagstaff said.

"Our members recognise a role in encouraging community initiative to reduce litter and we are very proud to partner with the Keep Australia Beautiful organisation," he said.

Mr McLorinan said Australia's beach communities and the thousands of people who flock to the seaside every summer were the big winners of the Clean Beach Challenge.

"We all reap the benefits of a 'clean and green' beach environment and the Clean Beach Challenge, now entering its eighth year, is becoming a true Aussie institution," Mr McLorinan said.

"The Challenge is all about caring for our beautiful beaches and foreshores.

"Every year, thousands of enthusiastic and dedicated Australians from the Torres Strait to the southern shores of Tasmania take the time to weed dunes, revegetate foreshores, collect litter and improve their stretch of coastline.

"Across Australia, councils and communities work together to create public spaces that enable everyone to enjoy a day at the beach," he said.

Mr McLorinan congratulated all the winners and encouraged beach communities to get involved in the 2006 state competitions.

"It's a wonderful way to demonstrate a commitment to the environment and make a difference while having a lot of fun," he said.

For more details about the Clean Beach Challenge in Victoria, visit www.kabv.org.au.

Editor's Note:



AUSTRALIAN
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The Australian Clean Beach Challenge is proudly supported by the Australian Food and Grocery Council (AFGC) Packaging Stewardship Forum.

The AFGC's Packaging Stewardship Forum has taken over operation of the Beverage Industry Environment Council's highly visible Don't Waste Australia campaign, public place recycling programs, and partnerships, such as the Commonwealth Games Litter Campaign.

The Packaging Stewardship Forum's programs will provide infrastructure and educational support to encourage resource recovery of food and beverage packaging, including soon-to-be announced major recycling programs aimed at theme parks and shopping centres.

The Packaging Stewardship Forum has embarked on a three month consultation process to identify priorities and opportunities for improved resource recovery and litter abatement. In July 2006, the forum will re-launch with a new name, new executive officer and a refreshed approach to its important environmental and waste stewardship work.

About the winners

Australia's Cleanest Beach - Balnarring Beach, Victoria

The Cleanest Beach Award takes into account a beach's geographic, environmental and economic circumstances, and assesses how efficiently and effectively the beach community uses the resources available to it against a range of criteria, including visitor friendliness and hospitality, resource conservation and waste management, community-local government partnerships, youth enterprise and activity, community action, litter prevention and management, and fauna and flora protection, including dune protection.

Balnarring Beach is situated southeast of Melbourne on the western coast of Western Port Bay. This area boasts abundant fauna and flora, with many endemic species within Balnarring and its surrounds. Koalas, birds and dolphins are commonly seen, with dolphins joining swimmers in the surf. There are two ongoing projects at Balnarring, the first is carried out in conjunction with the department of Sustainability & Environment and is called the Koala Coast Project. This project was set up to propagate 9,000 indigenous trees from local seeds. These trees are supplied to the Balnarring Foreshore Committee to encourage koalas to return to the area. The second project is with Melbourne Water to clean up and beautify Merricks Creek. The creek was previously in a bad state and the area was overgrown with weeds. Work has commenced, with the clearing of weeds and planting of indigenous plants and the development of a forest sidewalk. Balnarring consists of a large camping ground with a surrounding local population of 2,800 and many holiday houses. The camping grounds accommodate between 1,400 and 1,600 people every summer. Amenities include toilets with security lighting and electric barbeques. All camp sites have four bin rubbish stations. Three of the bins are general purpose and one is for recyclables. To ensure that they do not overflow during peak periods, bins are emptied daily. There is a large rotunda that has power that automatically turns off at 8pm every night. A lot of thought has gone into energy saving around the Balnarring foreshore. The local yacht club has programs that involve youth and volunteer police for water based training and beach conservation. The community takes great pride in its foreshore, with regular clean ups a norm. There is a yearly risk assessment for trees and local wildlife in the area to ensure that no impulsive removals occur. A park ranger is always working to improve the surrounds. With the local fauna and flora blending with the houses right down to the beach, you would think that you are in the bush until you feet hit the sand. The local community is very friendly and this makes Balnarring a place where one can camp and enjoy the natural environment unhindered.

Friendly Beach Award - Airlie Beach, North Queensland, Queensland

This award recognises a commitment to, and active promotion of, visitor friendliness.

North Queensland's Airlie Beach is a mecca for backpackers, international tourists and Australian holidaymakers. For most visitors, it is the entry point to the Whitsunday Islands. The Airlie Beach foreshore and swimming lagoon have prominent signage advising visitors about beach safety, including the threat of stingers. The Whitsunday Shire Council maintains all facilities and signs. As a major tourist destination, Airlie Beach has a number of accredited information centres. A walkway extends the length of the foreshore and while most of it is paved, it also includes a wooden boardwalk. This cleverly designed structure of varying width has been built around the original trees and includes bench and individual seating. An attractive entrance from Shute Harbour Road invites people to enter the coconut palm-studded foreshore. A step or two from the grassed and shaded parkland, the beach is chiefly used by sun lovers and swimmers preferring the safety of the patrolled and stinger-free lagoon. Handrails assist the disabled and elderly into the shallow section of the lagoon. Council staff clean the beach and foreshore daily. Ample rubbish bins with built-in cigarette butt sections encourage visitors to care for the clean and tidy environment. The foreshore of Airlie Beach is well-presented with modern facilities, a sophisticated children's playground, mature shady trees and well tended gardens. Sidewalk cafes and park seating invite visitors to stay a while and enjoy the friendly ambience of Airlie Beach.



Beach Spirit Award - Rainbow Beach, Sunshine Coast, Queensland

This award recognises coastal communities that are facing or have faced difficult times, but that show outstanding commitment to solving problems by turning them into opportunities.

Tackling a large steep slope overgrown with lantana is not for the faint-hearted but the determined community of Rainbow Beach has banded together to stabilise and rehabilitate the foredune area outside the Rainbow Beach Surf Club, with assistance from the Australian Government Envirofund. Cooloola Coastcare is coordinating the project and, as with many small communities, it seems almost everyone in town is offering a helping hand. Cooloola Shire Council sprayed the area and cleared the weeds, the Surf Club held a mulching working bee and then the young people of the Rainbow Bay Boardriders Club pegged out a massive area of jute matting – this job was completed in record time due to the great surf break that day! The Tin Can Bay City Farm Nursery collected local seed from Rainbow Beach and propagated seedlings with the support of Gympie Rotary and Cooloola Shire Council. Coastcare taught the students of Rainbow Beach State School about dune plants and reinvigorated an old shade house set up at the school some years ago. The school's P&C now sells the plants at a beachside stall. Beach goers who buy a plant are given the chance to plant it themselves and contribute to the project. Proceeds from the plant sales go to Rainbow Beach State School. Nippers attending this year's Surf Club sign on day all planted plants and the entire bank is slowly being transformed. Not content to rest on its laurels, the Surf Club is now applying for a community water grant to get an underwater tank so that rainwater can be captured from the Surf Club roof and used at the Surf Club and to water dune plants. The beach spirit shown by the Rainbow Beach community is truly inspiring.

Litter Prevention Award - Lady Robinson's Beach, Sydney, New South Wales

This award recognises outstanding accomplishment in litter prevention, management and education.

Lady Robinson's Beach is located along the western shore of Botany Bay. The Cook and the Georges rivers mark the northern and southern boundaries of the beach and these river systems are responsible for bringing a lot of litter to the region from outside the Rockdale Council area. Rockdale Council runs a comprehensive anti-litter education and awareness program. Every school student in the area will have taken part in at least one anti-litter, reuse, conserve workshop conducted by the council before they leave school. Litter management strategies ensure that most litter is recovered from the area's waterways before it reaches Botany Bay and consequently Lady Robinson's Beach. This is achieved through the use of numerous very effective pollutant traps, including boom traps, netted stormwater pipes and centrifuge collectors. Some of these traps have been purpose-built by the council and are a first of their kind. Durable, enclosed rubbish bins are well placed along the beach, reserves, adjoining roadsides and business districts. Bins are clearly signed, with newer bins containing ashtrays replacing old bins as required. Bins are serviced daily or more often at busy times. Local businesses take it upon themselves to clean their own precincts. A landscape architect is being employed to determine the positioning of beachside recycle bins. Dogs are prohibited on the beach and are to be on leash on the foreshore at all times. The beach and its surrounds are cleaned daily. Graffiti and chewing gum are removed within hours of their detection. The council's gum removal machine (which was imported from Italy) uses high-pressure hot water and is the only one of its type in use in Australia.

Resource Conservation & Waste Management Award - Darlington Beach, Upper North Coast, New South Wales

This award recognises outstanding accomplishment in resource conservation and waste management.

Darlington Beach and caravan park has the only full time environmental officer position in Australia. The innovations and positive outcomes through this officer are remarkable. Visitors come away with a wealth of practical knowledge and experience in environmental issues and conservation. Darlington Beach caravan park has been awarded the first Gold Gumnut Award, a national award which recognises a demonstrated commitment to environmental sustainability and social responsibility. The park has been able to achieve a 90% reduction in landfill waste due to the introduction of a reuse and recycling program and a \$15,000 saving on energy bills over a two-year period with the retrofitting of energy saving items such as shower heads, lighting, dual flush toilets, heat extracting equipment to heat outdoor pools and energy efficient front loading washing machines. There is a 'swap-a-weed' program – where residents can swap a weed for a native flora species to plant. All trees in the vicinity are maintained four times each year and there is a 20:1 ratio for plantings - when one tree is removed, 20 are planted to replace it. A happy camping brochure has been produced, highlighting ways in which campers can reuse and recycle and have an environmentally responsible holiday.

Community-Local Government Partnership Award - Port Augusta City Council for Port Augusta East Side Foreshore, South Australia

This award recognises outstanding partnership achievements by a local government and its community.

The City of Port Augusta's East Side Foreshore redevelopment project has created an outstanding public space, funded by grants and the city council, with the foreshore transformed into one of the most used areas of the city. An extensive public consultation program took place prior to the redevelopment to find out what residents wanted to see in the revitalised foreshore. Council staff carried out the majority of the redevelopment work, with some labour from contractors and the Port Augusta Prison's Off-Centre Works Gang. All weeds were removed from the site and the foreshore now features a playground designed to cater for all age groups. The youth of Port Augusta were asked about their needs and wants and a half court basketball and netball court has been incorporated in the development. The foreshore area features tables, seating and plenty of well-sited bins and shade structures. The council makes use of recycled water from the city's waste water system for irrigation. This initiative is the recent recipient of a MurrayCare Water Conservation Award. A sub-surface irrigation system has been installed for most turf, but one section is watered by pop-ups to allow for events, marquees etc. There have been extensive plantings of exotic and native flowering species, with themed gardens and a concrete aggregate pathway to reflect outback aspects. Landscaping and foreshore developments integrate with and complement the beach and Swimmer's Jetty. Solar lights have been installed on the footbridge across the gulf from the east side to the west side. The Swimmers Memorial has been restored, including old style lighting. Outback Surf Carnivals were held on site in January and November 2005, as well as the South Australian Regional Country Music Festival and the Port Augusta Show. The nearby visitor information centre provides friendly service to visitors. Daily clean ups are conducted by the staff of Orana Industries – a disability workshop and the community participates in Clean Up Australia Day. Local residents also take great pride in keeping the foreshore clean. The foreshore is now a favourite relaxation spot for locals and visitors alike.

KEEP AUSTRALIA BEAUTIFUL



Protection of the Environment Award - Cooee Beach, Tasmania

This award recognises outstanding accomplishment in the protection of the local natural environment and, specifically, the preservation of fauna and flora.

The Cooee to Camdale Coastcare Group is a voluntary organisation that also co-ordinates Work for the Dole programs and together with the Cooee Primary School students has undertaken major, ongoing rehabilitation and regeneration work on this large, North West Coast (Bass Strait) beach. The group convenor is an energetic and dedicated senior citizen, Mrs Lexie Paul. In addition to major flora environmental work, a successful fairy penguin conservation program is in place, with fencing erected to prevent birds attempting to nest across the busy Bass Highway. The primary school students produce artificial concrete nesting hutches to protect birds from domestic pet predators with notable success. The area is currently under intense rehabilitation and extends about six kilometres along Bass Strait.

Young Legends Award - Queens Beach, Redcliffe, Moreton Bay, Queensland

This award recognises outstanding accomplishment by youth and by a beach/community that encourages and promotes youth activity.

Queens Beach stretches from the Redcliffe jetty to Drury Point and features an expansive foreshore park. The three Year 10 Marine Science classes at nearby Southern Cross Catholic College have 'adopted' Queens Beach North under Redcliffe City's adopt-a-beach program. The beach serves as home base for the college's marine science studies and the students visit regularly to conduct experiments and learn about everything from the impact of engineering works and sand replenishment to water quality. As a Reef Guardian school, the students take their role of caring for the beach seriously and walk the shoreline to pick up litter during their visits. They even collect rubbish that has ended up in the bay when they go out snorkelling. Each year, the students participate in Clean Up Australia Day. The Year 10 classes are currently investigating the feasibility of working with Redcliffe City Council to clear micro-litter items from a drain that leads to the beach. The students have undertaken monitoring of local foreshore plants and animals and reported their findings to the council. All three classes entered the Schools Clean Beach Competition organised by Redcliffe City Council, writing short stories about life at the beach in Redcliffe. The committed students of Southern Cross Catholic College are young legends dedicated to looking after their outdoor classroom.

Community Action Award - Bonbeach, Victoria

This award recognises outstanding community organisation and pride – expressed through civic, cultural and environmental activities.

Some 30km southeast of Melbourne on the way to Frankston on Port Phillip Bay lies the small suburb of Bonbeach. Bonbeach is a small, family beach nestled just north of the Patterson River entrance to the bay. A staff member at one of the local retirement homes made contact with the local council to develop a project that would allow the residents of the home, although frail, to contribute their wealth of knowledge and experience to the local community. In 2004, the residents of North Cliff Lodge set about restoring the local foreshore after years of neglect and damage caused by visitors and the elements. The residents researched indigenous plants, cultivated local plants, liaised with school students on propagating plants for the beach area, provided regular updates to the local community through a newsletter, organised community planting days and are planning to introduce the project to other retirement homes not only in and around the area but across metropolitan Melbourne. The residents work with the local council and include their family - sons and daughters and grand children - in the program, education and planting. Recycled plastic is used for public furniture and footpath tile murals highlight the area's past.

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