PHILLIP ISLAND LAND ALLIANCE – BIOLINKS 2025 – 2028 CONNECTING LANDSCAPES AND COMMUNITIES

WORKSHOP 2 REPORT

Figure 1 Participants networking before the workshop. Photo: PILA

DATE OF WORKSHOP: 29TH April 2026

TIME: 9.30 – 12.30

VENUE: Phillip Island Information Centre Meeting Room, Newhaven

ATTENDANCE: Kate McKenzie (WPW), Ben Cullen (Trust for Nature), Peter Maganov (BCSC), Meg Humphreys (BCSC), Austin Cram (BCSC), Gavin Brock (MW), Christine Irvine (PILA), Prue Adamson (PILA), Carmen Bush (PILA), Laura Brearley (PILA), Greg Johnson (PILA), Alison Oates (Oates Consulting), Mike Cleeland (Farmer, Landcare), Ben Thomas (PINP), Kate Adams (PINP), Lisa Wangman (BCLN), Mel Barker (WP Biosphere), James Garden (Ecology systems), David Rooks (PILA), Judy Glover (Ventnor Coast Care), Dave Martin (BCSC), Bill Cleeland (Farmer, Better Beef), Anne Davie (Farmer), Paul Jeffrey (Farmer), Tracey Jeffrey (Farmer), Steve Davie (Farmer/Accountant), Jo Castile – Roberts (Dept Transport), Jye Anderson (BCLN), Toby (BLC), Luke Phillips (BLC), Renee Sweetman (BLC), Helen Corney (Facilitator).

APOLOGIES: Simon Ruff (DEECA), Robbie Gray (BCLN), Jethro Sallmann (BLC), Helen Henderson (Landowner), Kathleen Roberts (Coast Care), Diana Whittington (BCSC)

FACILITATOR/ REPORT AUTHOR: Helen Corney

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The Phillip Island Land Alliance (PILA) is leading the Biolinks 2025–2028 project to improve indigenous vegetation connectivity across Phillip Island through collaborative planning, ecological assessment and mapping. Supported by Bass Coast Shire Council, Phillip Island Nature Parks, and the Phillip Island Conservation Society, the project aims to deliver a Phillip Island Biolinks Strategy, a Threat Abatement Plan, comprehensive vegetation and connectivity mapping, and a shared digital information platform.

Workshop 2, held on 29 April 2026, brought together a broad range of stakeholders including Traditional Owners, local farmers, government agencies, conservation organisations, planners, and community representatives. The workshop highlighted growing momentum for the project and strong stakeholder engagement, with several new participants attending for the first time, including representatives from the Bunurong Land Council, local farmers, Western Port Biosphere, Department of Transport, and Bass Coast Shire Council planning teams.

A key focus of the workshop was ensuring meaningful involvement of Traditional Owners and the farming community in project planning and decision-making. Representatives from the Bunurong Land Council expressed interest in ongoing participation and emphasised the importance of taking information back to the broader Bunurong community for consideration.

Local farming representatives stressed the need for clearer communication about the project's purpose, relationship to existing Landcare activities, and practical implications for landholders.

Discussions identified several important themes and challenges including:

- The importance of respecting private land ownership and involving landholders in planning and mapping processes.
- The need to address wildlife management issues and ensuring that these are captured in the threat abatement plan.
- Concerns about unintended consequences of mapped "corridors".
- Recognition of the long history of vegetation stewardship already undertaken by Phillip Island farmers.
- The importance of clear communication about what the project is, and what it is not.
- The importance of identifying plants that are significant to Bunurong and including them in the management plan.
- Changes to the status of Vic Roads and Rural roads – now the Department of Transport - and the focus of this organisation on safety.

Stakeholders reaffirmed that the current phase of the project focuses on planning, modelling, and collaboration rather than on-ground works. Bass Coast Landcare and other partner organisations identified opportunities to support future implementation through funding advocacy, technical support, ecological assessments, and landholder engagement.

Technical presentations provided updates on vegetation mapping and Biolink modelling methodologies. The modelling approach will assess existing landscape connectivity and be tailored to Phillip Island's (Milawul) unique ecological conditions, while incorporating community and stakeholder input. Participants highlighted the importance of considering both specialist and generalist species, cultural values, and practical land management realities in the modelling process.

Several priority actions emerged from the workshop, including:

- Developing a clear one-page fact sheet explaining the project aims and approach.
- Undertaking targeted engagement with farmers and landholders.

- Seeking expressions of interests from farmers for ecological assessments by the PILA ecological team on private land.
- Continuing collaboration with Bunurong representatives regarding cultural and ecological priorities.

Overall, feedback from participants was highly positive, with attendees valuing the diversity of perspectives, strong attendance, information sharing, and open discussion.

Suggestions for improvement included:

- creating more opportunities for smaller group discussions
- further refining communication materials.

The workshop reinforced strong stakeholder commitment to improving ecological connectivity across Phillip Island (Milawul) through a collaborative, community-led approach.

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GLOSSARY

BLC	Bunurong Land Council
BLN	Bass Coast Landcare Network
BCSC	Bass Coast Shire Council
DEECA	Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action
DPT	Department of Transport and Planning
MW	Melbourne Water
Motor GP	Motor Grand Prix
PILA	Phillip Island Land Alliance
PILG	Phillip Island Landcare Group
PINP	Phillip Island Nature Parks
TFN	Trust for Nature
WPW	Westernport Water
WPBF	Western Port Biosphere Foundation

INTRODUCTION

In response to an identified need for increased indigenous vegetation connectivity, (i.e. Biolinks) across Phillip Island, the Phillip Island Land Alliance (PILA) has secured funding to run the Biolinks 2025 – 2028 project. This project has the following aims:

- To bring multiple stakeholders together through six workshops over 3 years to produce a Phillip Island Biolinks Strategy and a Threat Abatement Plan.
- To assess and map native vegetation extent and quality across Phillip Island
- To model and map recommended priority areas for Biolinks across Phillip Island.
- To develop a digital platform to record and store information on all new planting of Biolinks and maintenance activities to record species accurately and future proof the project. This platform will be accessible by all stakeholders.

This report summarises the outcomes of Workshop 2 held on the April 29th, 2026, including the general discussion and workshop activities undertaken on the day.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Workshop Introductions:

The workshop began with acknowledging the Bunurong people of the Kulin Nation, who are the Traditional Owners of the land on which this workshop and project take place. Project sponsors Bass Coast Shire Council, Phillip Island Nature Parks & Phillip Island Conservation Society were also thanked for their support.

There were numerous new participants attending this workshop which was an exciting development including representatives of:

- Bunurong Land Council
- The farming community, including Bill Cleeland who represents twelve to fourteen farmers at the Victorian Farmers Federation.
- Westernport Biosphere Foundation
- Department of Transport
- BCSC Planners

Participants shared in a round table general introduction exercise – including who they were representing.

Figure 2 Participants undertaking the introduction exercise. Photo: PILA

Update on PILA progress

Prue Adamson (PILA Secretary) presented an update on the progress that PILA has made outside the workshop events to progress the Biolinks project. These include:

- The project is gaining momentum
- Report to partners BCSC and stakeholders on Workshop 1 distributed
- Milawul Rewilding Volunteer team launched in partnership with Phillip Island Nature Parks
- Bunurong LC Balirt biik On Country team is interested in joining Biolinks planning and implementation.
- PICS and PINP funding to support the Biolinks Project Workshops

A recap of Biolinks, how they are used and some photo examples from other Biolink projects were presented and discussed.

Figure 3 Example of Biolink on rural land. Photo: Prue Adamson

Recap of Workshop 1 outcomes

Helen Corney presented a brief recap of Workshop 1 with the results from each of the following activities: Opportunities and Challenges mapping, Champion Activity, and Alliance Activity. These results are discussed in the Workshop 1 report: https://www.phillipislandlandalliance.org.au/biolinks

Input from Bunurong Land Council and local Farmers

The project team are acutely aware of the need to include the Traditional Owners – Bunurong and local farmers/landholders in discussions and decision making to ensure the success of the project. As such dedicated time was provided to hear from the Bunurong Land Council representatives and local farmers.

Luke Phillips (BLC) thanked the group for the opportunity to attend the workshop along with expressing the interest that BLC has in the project. He emphasised that he would be taking information from the workshop back to the Bunurong community for their consideration. Attention was drawn to the valuable advice that Bunurong could provide on plant species that are significant to Bunurong and including these into future plans.

Bill Cleeland (Farmer) who represents island farmers at the Victorian Farmers Federation asked for further clarification on the Biolinks project, how it fitted with historical work in this space, why it was not a Shire-wide project and how it intersects with Landcare activities. Bill expressed the need for the project to be explained to the farming community so that the aims are clear, their input is sought and included any misconceptions on its purpose and implementation are alleviated.

It was acknowledged that there is a long history of Phillip Island farmers working to improve native vegetation on their properties and that wildlife management has become a key issue for farmers. Due to the increase in the wallaby population, wallaby proof fencing is required for

revegetation success. Land ownership also needs to be respected, and planning and mapping must have landholder input.

Figure 4 Local farmer Bill Cleeland provides input into the project. Photo: PILA

A general discussion between workshop participants followed:

Bass Coast Shire Council (BCSC) strategic planning team is currently investigating Biolinks across the Shire acknowledging that work in this space is ongoing. BCSC will be engaging with landholders and the community across the Shire on Biolinks and the impacts of climate change. This project supports Biolinks funding across the Shire including Western Port Woodlands and urban planting schemes. The Natural Environment Strategy 2016 – 2026 is nearing the end of its budget and a new program that will begin in July is in development. BCSC are also aiming to connect their reports to the Distinctive Landscape strategy which includes other conservation and rural lands across the Shire.

Phillip Island Land Alliance (PILA) reiterated that as this project is community led with funding sourced by PILA from BCSC, it is centred on Phillip Island. However, the project could be viewed as a pilot project which supports work on Biolinks across the Bass Coast Shire. The project is for 6 workshops, vegetation and Biolinks modelling and the development of a digital platform that can be accessed by everyone. The project does not address works on-ground in this phase and does not replace the work of Landcare in providing on-ground planting.

Bass Coast Landcare has the capacity to provide support and advice to farmers/landholders for this project and sees the final project plan as a useful tool for leveraging funding, including corporate funding, for works on-ground. Bass Coast Landcare programs will continue to be implemented unaffected by this project.

Phillip Island Nature Park (PINP) suggested that further clarification of the project – i.e. “what it is and what it is not” would be beneficial. Milawul Rewilding Team is now operational and can help provide support for on-ground work in the future. The outcomes of this project will feed into future works programs.

The challenges of current commercial farming were discussed as more complex and expensive than in the past. It is now much harder to be successful. Wildlife management (esp. wallabies, geese and possums) is required for vegetation establishment and persistence to be successful. Biolinks must not be accessible to the public as that would raise biosecurity and insurance risks.

Actions:

- The development of a one-page fact sheet to explain the project aims and objectives including types of vegetation corridors and stepping stones.
- PILA to provide clarity that Landcare projects will continue as usual and will not be impacted by this project.
- PILA to organise a team to contact farmers/landholders and visit them to discuss the project.
- Alison Oates to seek out farmers willing to have ecological assessments undertaken on their properties.

Update on stakeholder capabilities and commitments

This activity asked participants to revisit their capacity to *'champion'* the project and provide information on how they and/or their organisation could support the project aims. The responses included:

- Shared goals across organisations/groups
- Stakeholder connections/relationships
- Traditional owner advice On Country
- Historical, technical and specialised knowledge and experience
- Access to reports, data and other on ground resources
- Support and advocacy for the project
- Funding for activities
- Assistance relevant to specific organisations/participants e.g. access to recycled water (WPW), funding for on-ground works along waterways (MW), Advocacy (WPBF), established relationships with landholders/farmers (Bill Cleeland and others).

Presentation from Alison Oates – Vegetation Mapping

Alison Oates, Director at Oates Environmental consulting, provided an overview of the methodology she is using to assess and map the vegetation across Phillip island. The presentation included a summary of the project tasks, an example of mapping and the Ecological Vegetation Communities (EVC's) identified for the project:

Project Tasks

Consortium:

- Oates Environmental Consulting (Alison Oates) –review of existing biolinks plan, project management, ground-truthing modelled habitat, planting guidelines
- Ecology Systems (James Garden) –biolinks model/creation of a heat map
- True South Mapping Services –preparation of spatial layers for input to model
- Gidja Walker –threat abatement plan

Steps in the process

- Creation of a habitat spatial layer which has now been completed
- Ground truthing of habitat layer has just commenced
- Once ground-truthing completed, land use layer created and connectivity will be modelled using Linkage Mapper
- Heat map will be produced showing priority biolinks areas
- Presentation of findings to be discussed with stakeholders
- Final biolinks model created
- Planting guidelines and threat abatement plan

Figure 5 Alison Oats presenting data collection methodology. Photo: PILA

Presentation from James Garden – Biolink modelling

James Garden, Principal Ecologist and Director of Ecology Systems Pty Ltd. presented an overview of the Biolink modelling methodology. A summary of the modelling work was provided by James for this report:

Using the GAP-CLoSR framework, we will employ connectivity modelling based on core habitats, stepping stones, and dispersal parameters for up to three fauna species guilds (see attached figure). The aim of the project is to identify key habitats and corridors/linkages across the island to inform future conservation and management. The project is being undertaken by Alison Oates, James Garden and Gidja Walker.

To date, project consultants have prepared a detailed map of potential fauna habitat using existing datasets and aerial imagery (e.g. Bass Coast Shire's vegetation mapping, State Government modelled vegetation extent data, PINP EVC mapping and aerial imagery). The consultants are currently ground-truthing these habitat patches (where access permits) to record structural information (e.g. EVC type and strata cover) and specific habitat features (e.g. large trees, shrub density and ground height).

Modelling is expected to commence once ground-truthing is completed in June/July, with preliminary model outputs expect in September/October 2026.

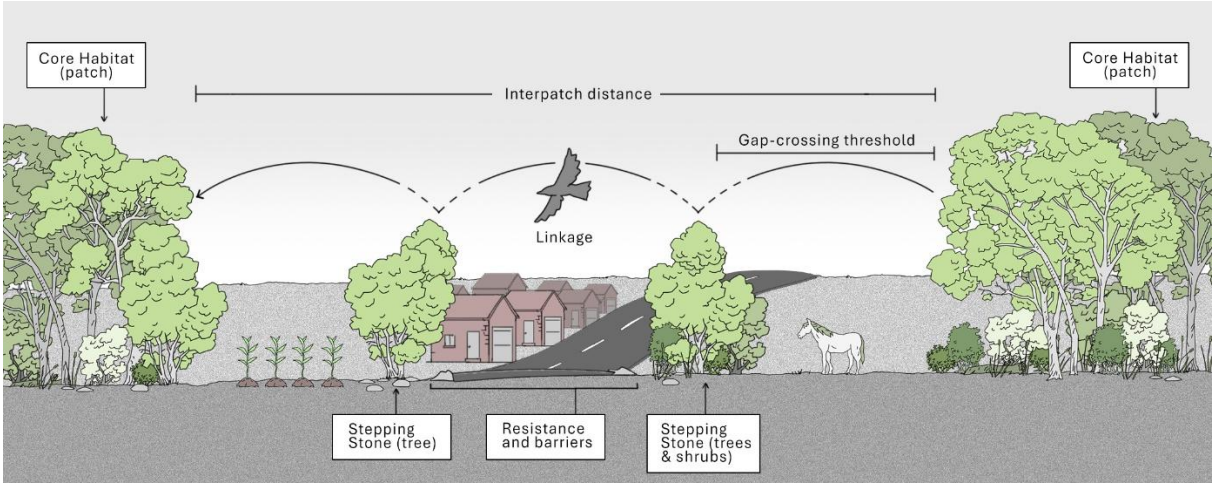

Figure 6 Connectivity involves the use of core habitats, stepping stones, and dispersal parameters. Ecology Systems, 2025

Workshop reports, photos and presentations can be found here: [Biolinks 2025-28 | Phillip Island Land Alliance]

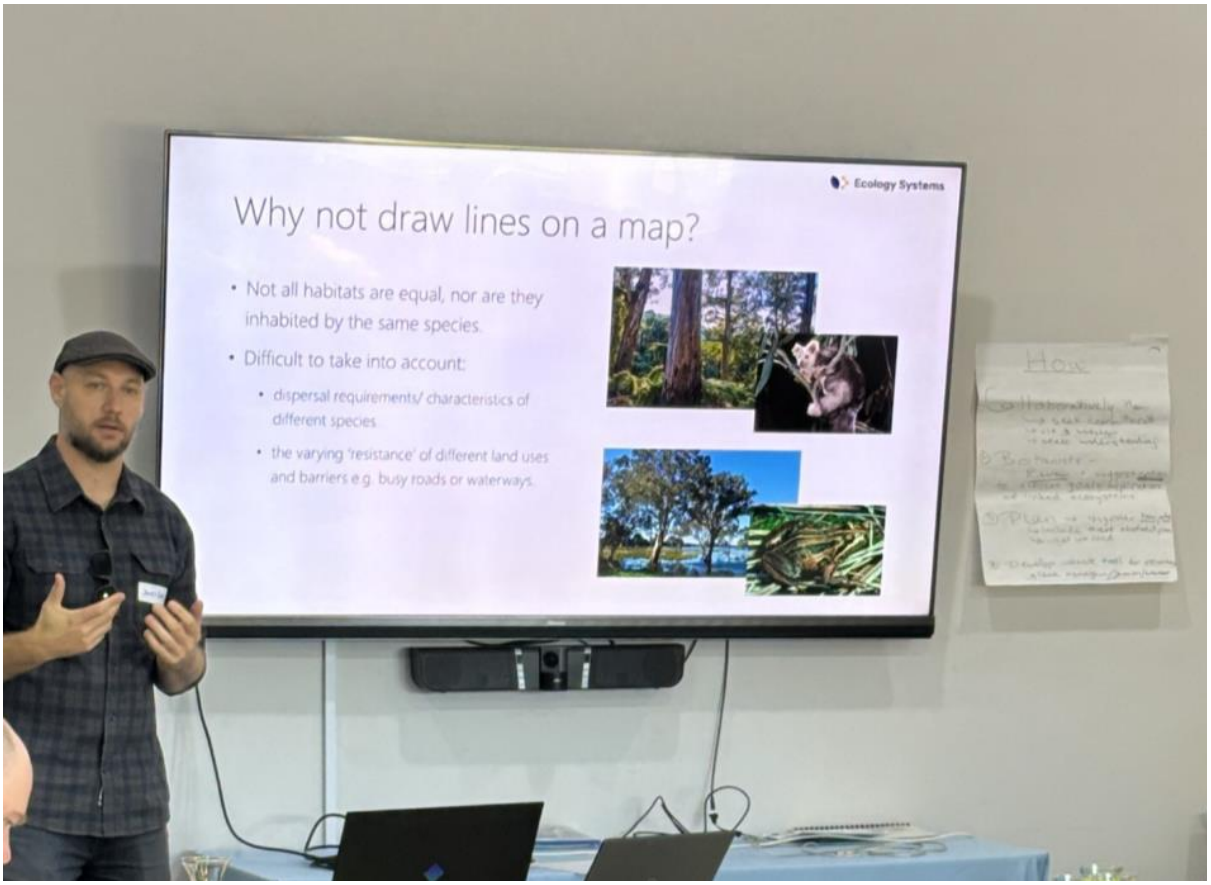

Figure 7 James Garden Ecology Systems presenting modelling methodology. Photo: PILA

Q & A /General discussion

Q: Where was the vegetation assessment process at?

A: Vegetation assessments have begun however the island is large and assessments are only in the early stages.

Q: How does the model account for different needs of animal species?

A: The model differentiates between generalists and specialist's requirements.

Q: Can the modelling account for the ecological needs of native vegetation rather than just wildlife?

A: Vegetation is harder to model due to its stationary nature – although plant population movement does occur through environmental factors such as wind and animal dispersal.

Q: How were landholders/farmers going to be approached for the ecological assessment on their land?

A: Landholders/farmers would be contacted by Alison – with Bill Cleeland discussed as a possible intermediary. Also, a presentation to the farmers group along with expressions of interest would be a positive approach.

James emphasised the need for input from the Phillip Island community to inform the modelling outcomes. He also discussed his preference for a heat map of Biolinks rather than the use of lines drawn between vegetation patches. The need to clarify that some of the generalist wildlife species are considered pests on the island was reiterated.

Feedback and Close

Participants were asked to provide feedback on the workshop by answering the following questions:

- *What went well?*
- *What could be done better next time?*
- *What did you get out of today's workshop?*
- *After I leave this workshop, I will….*

Results from the feedback can be found in Table 1 below:

Table 1 Workshop feedback summary.

PILA BIOLINKS WORKSHOP 2 - FEEDBACK			
What went well	**What could be done better next time**	**What did you get out of today's workshop**	**After I leave this workshop, I will…**
Information Sharing	Workshopping ideas rather than certain individuals taking up a lot of floor time	Info on the biolinks mapping	Communicate further on this very well thought out and planned partnership project deliverables
Agenda and speakers/presentations	Nil - very good	Great understanding of project purpose; intentions of approach to deliver on outcomes; partners involved and their views	
Great representation of people	More small group discussion- the louder voices were heard but not necessarily others	The level of interest and commitment is large - strong buy-in	Report back to relevant WPW staff
Discussion about the danger of alienating landowners with 'lines on maps'; Need for collaboration with landowners. Problem with certain species; wallabies, geese, rabbits		Excellent attendance and engagement. Very good time management	
Hearing from Bill Cleeland and Bunurong	Talk to Bunurong about how they want to participate and contribute before the workshop	More understanding of what the project wants to achieve; Hearing from farmers	Report back to my team and think about how I can support the project
Well run, great discussion with Bill	Fact sheet - what the project is and is not	Project still lacking focus but progressing, Continued focus on connectivity is a little misguided. Would prefer focus on expansion of existing remnants	Get in touch with James and Alison to help refine modelling
The discussion from people in the room		Better informed about the project	Want to be kept informed
Chance for discussion; James presentation on the habitat and connectivity modelling	A larger room; some group activity to input to the plan	Really useful to hear the farmers perspective	Review how the projects I am involved with are meeting landowner requirements
Great attendance and diverse views/perspectives; Great suggestion to seek from Bunurong species of cultural value significance that could be used in the model		Great to hear what is going on	Continue scoping work to do this modelling across Bass Coast

NEXT STEPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Workshop Report to be distributed to all participants and relevant organisation representatives
- **Workshop 3** to be held on the **7th Oct 2026** at Phillip Island Information Centre, Newhaven
- Continue to grow a common understanding of Biolinks e.g. width/ lengths, plant diversity, quality and extent.