

# AUSTRALIAN TIDY TOWNS SUSTAINABILITY AWARDS 2026



## Award Winners



**Keep Australia Beautiful gratefully acknowledges the  
following organisations for supporting the  
2026 Australian Tidy Towns Sustainability Awards**



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**Cover photo: 2026 Australian Tidy Towns Sustainability Awards Overall Winner - Williams, Western Australia**

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# About the Tidy Towns Sustainability Awards



The Keep Australia Beautiful Tidy Towns Sustainability Awards began in Western Australia in 1968 and have been running nationally since 1990. Over the decades, the awards have evolved to reflect the growing importance of environmental sustainability, resource recovery and community-led action in shaping vibrant and resilient communities across Australia.

The Tidy Towns name has long been synonymous with community pride, connection and action. Today, the awards celebrate the sustainability achievements of grassroots rural and regional communities, recognising projects and initiatives that protect and enhance the natural, built and social environments in which Australians live, work and visit.

The finalists in the Australian Tidy Towns Sustainability Awards, many of whom are volunteers, represent some of the most passionate, dedicated and inspiring people involved in the Keep Australia Beautiful network across the country. Year after year, communities continue to demonstrate an extraordinary commitment to environmental stewardship, innovation and collaboration, setting an example for communities nationwide.

Each year, state and territory winners are announced through the Keep Australia Beautiful network between August and November, before progressing to the national awards program. Finalists then take part in the national judging process, with the Australian Tidy Towns Sustainability Awards presented annually between March and May.

The awards event, often hosted over several days, provides an opportunity for finalists and delegates from across the country to connect, share ideas and celebrate community achievement. The program typically includes finalist presentations, networking opportunities and tours of local sustainability initiatives and projects, allowing attendees to experience firsthand the innovation and collaboration taking place within host communities.

More than a competition, the Australian Tidy Towns Sustainability Awards bring together community leaders, environmental champions, volunteers, young legends and waste warriors from every corner of the country to learn from, inspire and support one another.

This is the true spirit of Tidy Towns.

# Judges' Reflections

As the 2026 Australian Tidy Towns Sustainability Awards celebrate another remarkable year, we are once again reminded of the passion, resilience and community spirit that continue to shape towns and cities across the country. From large regional centres to small rural communities, these awards showcase the extraordinary efforts of people committed to creating more sustainable, connected and vibrant places to live.

This year's judging process highlighted not only the exceptional quality of projects submitted, but also the incredible diversity of initiatives taking place at a local level throughout Australia. From environmental and resource recovery initiatives to projects strengthening community connection, celebrating local identity and protecting natural and cultural heritage, every finalist demonstrated a genuine commitment to making a positive difference within their community.

The judging panel was deeply impressed by the calibre of entries received this year. In many categories, the scores were incredibly close, reflecting the outstanding standard of work being undertaken nationwide.

What stood out most throughout the process was the strong sense of collaboration behind so many projects. Across the country, volunteers, councils, local organisations, businesses and community groups are working together to achieve shared goals and create lasting outcomes for future generations.

Importantly, these awards recognise the people behind the projects. The ideas, dedication and countless volunteer hours invested into communities across Australia are what truly make these initiatives so inspiring. Much of this work happens quietly, driven by individuals and groups who simply care deeply about the places they call home.

On behalf of the judging panel, we extend our sincere congratulations and thanks to every community, organisation and volunteer who participated in this year's awards. It has been a privilege to witness the extraordinary work happening across the country. Your passion, innovation and commitment are helping build stronger, more sustainable communities for generations to come.



Jessica Nesbit, Lindsay Weaver and Lacey Webb

2026 Australian Tidy Towns Sustainability Awards Judging Panel



# Congratulations 2026 Finalists

**Ikuntji**

**Williams**



## **Orange**

NSW

Population: 44,610

Orange is known for its cool-climate wines, vibrant food culture and beautiful seasonal landscapes. Set against Mount Canobolas, its high-altitude vineyards, rich volcanic soils and heritage architecture shape a region celebrated for fresh local produce, scenic outdoor experiences and a thriving arts scene.

## **Ikuntji**

NT

Population: 200

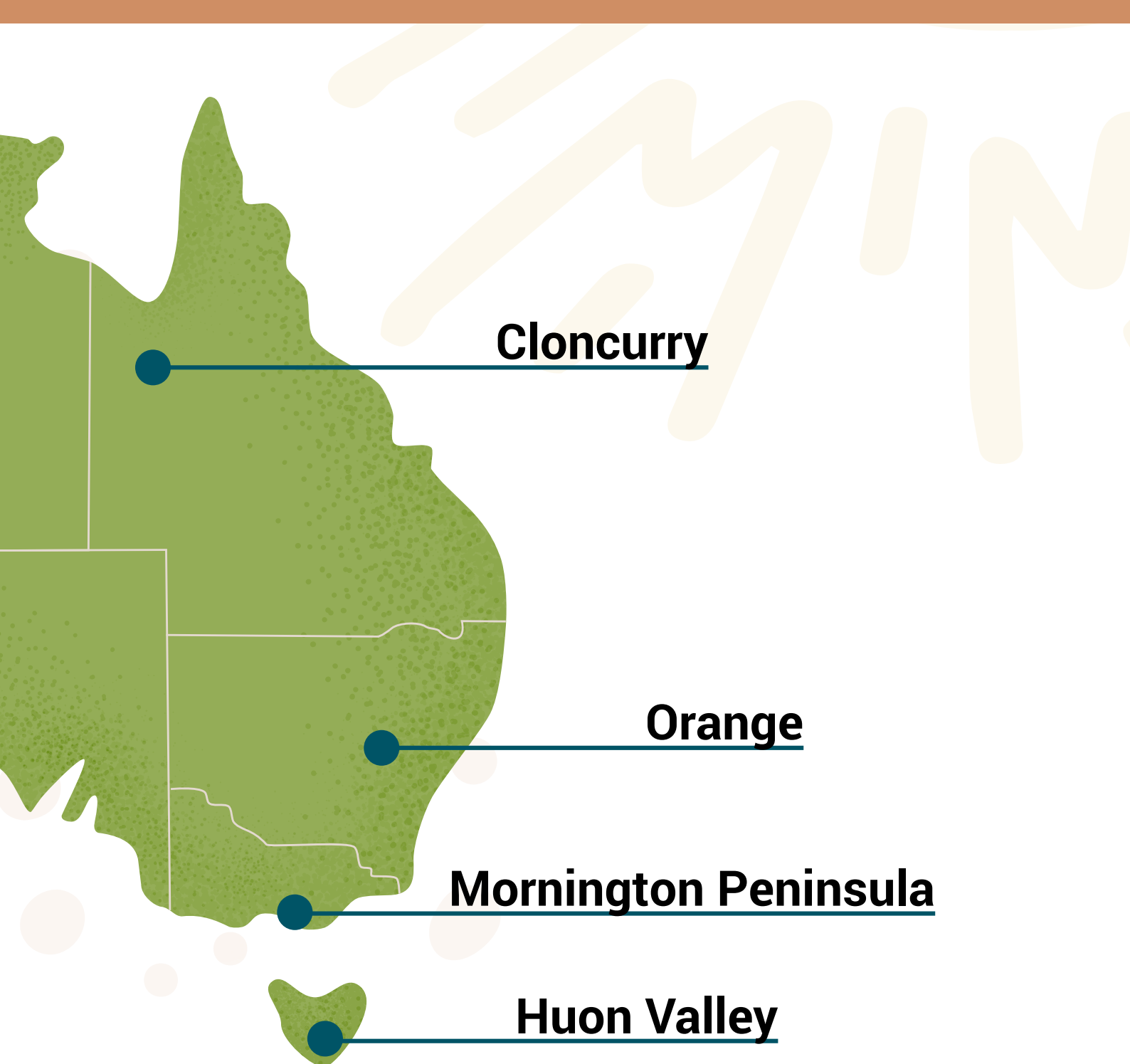
A few hours west of Alice Springs, Ikuntji/Haasts Bluff sits along the stunning West MacDonnell Ranges. A community dedicated to preserving and sharing its past while shaping the future, it has strong ties to culture and Country. Residents are committed to improving liveability and opportunities for all.

## **Cloncurry**

QLD

Population: 3,882

Cloncurry, in Northwest Queensland, is known for its welcoming, tight-knit community and strong outback spirit. Life here blends resilience with friendliness, where locals look out for each other. Surrounded by natural landscapes, the town offers a relaxed lifestyle, a sense of belonging, and a genuine connection to the region.



## **Cloncurry**

## **Orange**

## **Mornington Peninsula**

## **Huon Valley**

### **Huon Valley**

TAS

Population: 19,742

The Huon Valley stretches from kunanyi/Mount Wellington to Tasmania's southern tip, encompassing World Heritage wilderness and productive farmland. Known for natural beauty and community spirit, it is one of Tasmania's fastest-growing regions, balancing environmental stewardship with development while maintaining its rural lifestyle.

### **Mornington Peninsula**

VIC

Population: 171,450

The Mornington Peninsula, south-east of Melbourne in Victoria, is renowned for its beaches, bushland and wineries. Framed by Port Phillip Bay and Bass Strait, it features seaside towns, national parks, hot springs and a thriving food, wine and arts scene, making it ideal for relaxation.

### **Williams**

WA

Population: 1,040

Williams is a historic rural community in Western Australia, known for its rose-lined main street, agricultural roots and growing tourism. With friendly locals, family-focused services, sporting opportunities and scenic surrounds, it offers a country lifestyle just two hours from Perth in the Great Southern region.

# 2026 Winners Table

	<b>Overall Australian Tidy Towns Award</b>	WINNER	<b>Williams</b> WA
		HIGHLY COMMENDED	<b>Ikuntji</b> NT
	<b>Behaviour Change &amp; Engagement</b>	WINNER	<b>The Williams Wildlife Warriors</b> Williams, WA
	<b>Biodiversity Conservation</b>	WINNER	<b>Huon Valley Native Plant Nursery</b> Huon Valley, TAS
	<b>Circular Economy &amp; Waste Reduction</b>	WINNER	<b>Shell Savers – From Landfill to Habitat</b> Mornington Peninsula, VIC
	<b>Climate Change Mitigation &amp; Adaptation</b>	WINNER	<b>Electrify Orange</b> Orange, NSW
	<b>Dame Phyllis Frost Local Hero</b>	JOINT WINNER	<b>Gidja Walker</b> Mornington Peninsula, VIC
		JOINT WINNER	<b>Douglas Multa</b> Ikuntji, NT
		HIGHLY COMMENDED	<b>Roger Smith</b> Orange, NSW
		HIGHLY COMMENDED	<b>Gemma Haddrick</b> Williams, WA
	<b>Heritage &amp; Culture</b>	WINNER	<b>Williams Historical Records Project</b> Williams, WA
	<b>Litter Prevention</b>	WINNER	<b>Beautification for Now and Tomorrow</b> Ikuntji, NT
	<b>Liveable Communities</b>	WINNER	<b>Cloncurry Shire Council – Community Events</b> Cloncurry, QLD
	<b>Plastic Free Communities</b>	WINNER	<b>Zest Fest - Refills Not Landfill</b> Orange, NSW
	<b>Water Conservation &amp; Protection</b>	WINNER	<b>Orange Stormwater Harvesting</b> Orange, NSW
		HIGHLY COMMENDED	<b>Huon Valley Waterwatch and Waterbug Blitz</b> Huon Valley, TAS
	<b>Young Legends</b>	WINNER	<b>Little Helpers – Wildlife Warriors</b> Williams, WA
		HIGHLY COMMENDED	<b>Ngawak Biik – Briars Junior Ranger Program</b> Mornington Peninsula, VIC

# Previous Winners

- 2026 Williams, WA
- 2025 Launceston, TAS
- 2024 Beechworth, VIC
- 2023 Gascoyne Junction, WA
- 2022 King Island, TAS
- 2021 Hastings, VIC
- 2020 Beechworth, VIC
- 2019 Ltyentye Apurte (Santa Teresa), NT
- 2018 Smithton, TAS
- 2017 Barmera, SA
- 2016 Triabunna, TAS
- 2015 Toodyay, WA
- 2014 Sheffield, TAS
- 2013 Victor Harbor, SA
- 2012 Caloundra, QLD
- 2011 Lithgow, NSW
- 2010 Beechworth, VIC
- 2009 Tamworth, NSW
- 2008 Toowoomba, QLD
- 2007 Swansea, TAS
- 2006 Collie, WA
- 2005 Mount Gambier, SA
- 2004 Port Vincent, SA
- 2003 Wyalkatchem, WA
- 2002 Soldier's Point/Salamander Bay, NSW
- 2001 Horsham, VIC
- 2000 Batchelor, NT
- 1999 Goolwa, SA
- 1998 Denmark, WA
- 1997 awards not held
- 1996 Stanley, TAS
- 1995 Kiama, NSW
- 1994 Naracoorte, SA
- 1993 Lucindale, SA
- 1992 Forbes, NSW
- 1991 Mount Gambier, SA
- 1990 Mt Tyson, QLD





# Overall 2026 Tidy Towns Sustainability Award

**OVERALL  
WINNER**

## Williams

Western Australia



With a population of just over 1,000, Williams is a small rural community in Western Australia's Great Southern region that is achieving extraordinary outcomes through collective effort, innovation and heart. Set along the Williams River and known for its welcoming spirit, the town demonstrates how strong community connection can drive meaningful environmental and social change.

Williams impressed the judges with its deeply embedded culture of sustainability, where volunteers, community groups and local organisations work hand in hand to care for their environment and each other. The Williams Community Resource Centre sits at the centre of this activity, acting as a vital hub for programs that build connection, reduce isolation and empower residents of all ages.

Initiatives such as the Williams Wildlife Warriors are fostering the next generation of environmental stewards, with almost the entire local school population engaged in hands-on learning, from water testing to

revegetation and river care. Complementing this, the Williams Environmental Group continues to deliver impactful biodiversity outcomes through restoration projects, community education and the development of assets such as the Echidna Trail.

A strong commitment to circular economy principles is evident through the Op Shop and Tip Shop initiatives, which divert significant volumes of waste from landfill while strengthening social connections and supporting those in need. At the same time, projects preserving local history and enhancing liveability ensure that Williams' identity and community wellbeing remain strong.

What sets Williams apart is its people. With an extraordinary level of volunteer involvement across all initiatives, the town exemplifies what can be achieved when an entire community shares a vision for a sustainable future. Williams stands as an inspiring example for communities across Australia.



# Overall 2026 Tidy Towns Sustainability Award

OVERALL  
HIGHLY  
COMMENDED

**Ikuntji**  
Northern Territory



Ikuntji (Haasts Bluff), a remote Central Australian community of around 150 people, is a powerful example of what can be achieved through strong cultural leadership, innovation, and community-driven action. Set against the West MacDonnell Ranges, the community is deeply connected to Country, with residents committed to preserving culture while building a sustainable future.

Despite its size and isolation, Ikuntji has delivered an impressive range of initiatives across environmental sustainability and community wellbeing. A standout animal management program achieved a 30% desexing rate in a single visit, while a pioneering desert beekeeping project is enhancing biodiversity and strengthening food security.

Innovative waste management infrastructure, water conservation practices, and climate adaptation initiatives demonstrate forward-thinking planning. Litter prevention efforts—supported by strong youth engagement—have

created visible improvements in community pride, alongside initiatives such as chilled water refill stations and reduced single-use plastics.

Central to Ikuntji's success is its focus on local decision-making and leadership, empowering residents to shape their future. Projects like Memory Mountain reflect both cultural significance and economic opportunity, supporting tourism, employment, and community pride.

Ikuntji's achievements highlight the strength of community spirit, cultural knowledge, and determination, offering inspiration to communities across Australia.



## Behaviour Change and Engagement

CATEGORY  
WINNER

# The Williams Wildlife Warriors

Williams, WA



The Williams Wildlife Warriors program was established in response to a need for accessible, hands-on environmental education for local children and to strengthen connection with the natural environment and Country. Delivered free by the Williams Community Resource Centre, the program is supported by a strong partnership network including the Shire of Williams, Williams Primary School, environmental groups, and government and industry stakeholders.

Each term, children from pre-primary to Year 6 participate in after-school sessions held along the Williams River and surrounding bushland. Through guided exploration and expert-led activities, they learn about local flora, fauna, soils and waterways while actively engaging in environmental care, including revegetation, weed control, water testing and litter removal.

A key strength of the program is its accessibility and inclusiveness, enabled through strong collaboration that allows it to

be delivered free of charge. This has resulted in exceptional engagement, with almost the entire school population participating.

The program has built environmental knowledge, curiosity and confidence in young people while fostering intergenerational learning and community connection. It also supports social wellbeing by encouraging outdoor activity, reducing screen time and strengthening relationships within the community.

Through sustained participation and strong partnerships, Williams Wildlife Warriors is nurturing a generation of environmentally aware young people committed to caring for their local environment into the future.





## Biodiversity Conservation

CATEGORY WINNER

# Huon Valley Native Plant Nursery

Huon Valley, TAS



The Huon Valley Native Plant Nursery was established in 2024 in response to the loss of affordable native plant supply, which had placed long-standing community revegetation programs at risk. In partnership with Landcare Tasmania, the initiative was designed to create a sustainable, locally driven solution for biodiversity restoration while improving ecological outcomes through locally sourced and climate-adapted plant stock.

In its first year, the volunteer-led nursery far exceeded expectations. More than 4,000 native plants across 52 species were propagated by 31 volunteers, representing 160% of the original target. These plants supported the revegetation of more than nine hectares across the region, alongside Council street plantings and community-led conservation projects.

A key strength of the program is its emphasis on local provenance seed sourcing and climate resilience, ensuring plants are well

adapted to their intended environments and improving long-term survival outcomes. Strong monitoring processes, including follow-up surveys with recipients, help track planting success and inform future improvement.

Supported by Landcare Tasmania, Huon Valley Council and a wide network of Landcare groups, schools and landowners, the nursery has created a self-sustaining model for biodiversity conservation. Beyond environmental outcomes, it has strengthened community capacity, delivered significant cost savings and built a highly engaged volunteer base supporting long-term ecological restoration.





## Circular Economy and Waste Reduction

CATEGORY  
WINNER

### Shell Savers - From Landfill to Habitat

Mornington Peninsula, VIC



Shell Savers tackles an often-overlooked element of the circular economy by transforming hospitality shellfish waste into thriving marine habitat. In partnership with OzFish, Mornington Peninsula Shire, local businesses and the Bunurong Land Council, the initiative diverts tonnes of oyster, mussel and scallop shells from landfill and repurposes them into new shellfish reefs in Port Phillip and Western Port Bays.

Shells are collected from local hospitality businesses, then cleaned, cured and prepared by volunteers before being used to construct reef structures that support long-term ecological restoration. This process turns a waste stream with no prior value into a critical building block for ecosystem regeneration.

The initiative addresses the historical loss of more than 70% of the region's shellfish reefs, restoring habitat complexity and laying the foundation for improved biodiversity,

water quality and coastal resilience. A strong volunteer base and cross-sector collaboration underpin the program, with community members actively involved in shell preparation and reef building.

Beyond waste diversion, Shell Savers demonstrates a true regenerative circular economy model, where materials are not only recovered but returned to nature in a way that rebuilds ecological systems. The project is now expanding across additional sites, with strong potential for future reef restoration across Victoria.



MORNINGTON  
PENINSULA  
Shire





## Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation

CATEGORY WINNER

### Electrify Orange

Orange, NSW



With the majority of homes in Orange reliant on gas, rising emissions and energy costs highlighted the need for a practical, community-led transition to cleaner energy. The Electrify Orange campaign was developed to support residents to shift toward efficient, all-electric homes powered by renewable energy—reducing emissions while improving household resilience.

Council partnered with Electrify 2800, local trades, energy experts, community groups and the library to deliver a targeted behaviour-change campaign. A suite of accessible tools was created, including a dedicated webpage, podcasts, community videos, a Go Electric Action Plan and energy-efficiency toolkits. A well-attended community information night further connected residents with trusted local expertise.

The campaign successfully increased awareness and confidence, with strong engagement across all channels and high levels of participant motivation to electrify. Local businesses also reported increased enquiries, demonstrating broader economic impact.

A key strength was the use of trusted local voices and practical, hands-on tools, which helped overcome common barriers such as cost concerns and uncertainty. The project showed that framing climate action around comfort, affordability and resilience can drive meaningful change. These learnings will inform future programs as the community continues its transition to a low-emissions future.





## Dame Phyllis Frost Local Hero

JOINT  
CATEGORY  
WINNER

## Douglas Multa

Ikuntji, NT



Douglas Multa, a respected senior Elder and Traditional Owner of Ikuntji, has played a pivotal role in guiding his community through change while keeping culture and Country at the centre. Addressing the challenge of balancing economic opportunity with cultural and environmental protection, Douglas has been instrumental in shaping initiatives that honour both.

Through his leadership with Ngurratjuta/ Pmara Ntjarra Aboriginal Corporation and his vision for the Memory Mountain project, Douglas has supported the development of low-impact, culturally respectful tourism that creates employment while safeguarding sacred sites. He works closely with community members, local organisations and government partners to ensure decisions reflect cultural law and long-term sustainability.

Douglas has also championed practical environmental action, encouraging community pride through improved waste management, clean-up initiatives and strong expectations around caring for shared spaces. These efforts have contributed to visibly cleaner surroundings, increased participation in training and employment, and a growing sense of community ownership.

Despite the challenges of remote governance and limited resources, Douglas leads with humility and persistence. His legacy is a community empowered to care for Country, uphold culture, and shape its future with confidence.





## Dame Phyllis Frost Local Hero

JOINT  
CATEGORY  
WINNER

## Gidja Walker

Mornington Peninsula, VIC



For more than 30 years, Gidja Walker has dedicated her life to protecting and restoring the natural environments of the Mornington Peninsula, responding to the ongoing challenge of habitat loss and biodiversity decline. As an ecologist, educator and founding member of the Southern Peninsula Indigenous Flora & Fauna Association, she has led significant conservation and restoration efforts across wetlands, woodlands and coastal ecosystems.

Gidja has been instrumental in protecting areas such as Tootgarook Swamp and securing endangered status for Coast Moonah Woodland, while also leading threatened species recovery projects, including work to safeguard the Frankston Spider Orchid. Her efforts extend beyond on-ground conservation, developing vegetation assessment tools and long-term monitoring programs that guide landholders, agencies and community groups.

A passionate educator, Gidja has engaged thousands of people through workshops, field programs and the long-running Habitat Course, blending science, art and respect for First Nations knowledge to inspire environmental stewardship.

Despite pressures from development and environmental decline, her collaborative and resilient approach has delivered lasting outcomes. Her legacy is one of protected landscapes, strengthened community capability and a deep, enduring connection to nature.



MORNINGTON  
PENINSULA  
Shire





## Dame Phyllis Frost Local Hero

CATEGORY  
HIGHLY  
COMMENDED

## Roger Smith

Orange, NSW



For nearly three decades, Roger Smith has been a quiet force behind Orange's environmental transformation, addressing the challenge of long-term biodiversity decline and community engagement in natural resource management. As Natural Resources Coordinator with Orange City Council, Roger led a wide range of initiatives including large-scale revegetation, woody weed control, and hands-on education programs designed to build local capability.

Working alongside Council, schools, volunteers and community groups, Roger helped deliver more than 150 environmental events and supported the planting of thousands of native species, strengthening habitat corridors and improving ecological resilience across the region.

His work not only enhanced local biodiversity but also empowered residents with the knowledge and confidence to actively care for their environment.

Despite challenges such as drought, extreme weather, and complex weed management, Roger's adaptive and practical approach ensured strong outcomes. His enduring legacy is both environmental and cultural: healthier landscapes and a community deeply connected to their role as environmental stewards.





## Dame Phyllis Frost Local Hero

CATEGORY  
HIGHLY  
COMMENDED

## Gemma Haddrick

Williams, WA



Gemma Haddrick has become a driving force in strengthening social connection and environmental awareness in Williams, addressing the challenges of rural isolation and limited access to community programs. Through her role at the Williams Community Resource Centre, Gemma has designed and delivered a diverse range of initiatives that bring people together across all ages.

Her programs, including Rhyme Time, Rhyme Time PLUS and the Williams Wildlife Warriors, combine early childhood development, youth engagement and environmental stewardship. Working closely with families, schools, volunteers and local organisations, Gemma has created inclusive opportunities that foster literacy, wellbeing and intergenerational connection.

These initiatives have led to increased community participation, stronger social networks and improved environmental outcomes, including local clean-up efforts and greater awareness of conservation practices. Despite the challenges of limited resources and geographic isolation, Gemma's creativity and collaborative approach have ensured ongoing success. Her legacy is a more connected, resilient and environmentally conscious community.





## Heritage and Culture

CATEGORY  
WINNER

# Williams Historical Records Project

Williams, WA



The Williams Historical Program was established following the discovery of “lost records,” revealing that significant local history and cultural knowledge was at serious risk of being forgotten. Early Road Board records had already suffered damage from fire, water and rodents, highlighting the urgent need for preservation. As one of the oldest towns in the state without a formal archival system, Williams faced the real possibility of losing its documented heritage.

Led by two dedicated volunteers, Robyn and Judy, the program has since invested more than 2,000 hours into locating, cleaning, sorting and organising surviving materials. Working with limited resources, they carefully preserved records relating to early settlement, local families, community events and the changing landscape of the region.

The program has also encouraged strong community involvement, with residents sharing personal stories, family histories and historical items that have added depth and richness to the town’s record. These informal contributions have helped create a more complete and authentic picture of Williams’ past.

Despite challenges including fragile materials, limited volunteer capacity and fragmented historical records, the program has successfully safeguarded a significant collection of local history and established a strong foundation for ongoing heritage preservation and future archival development.





## Litter Prevention

CATEGORY  
WINNER

# Beautification for Now and Tomorrow

Ikuntji, NT



In Ikuntji, litter prevention has required more than behaviour change - it has meant building entirely new habits. As a relatively young community transitioning from traditional lifestyles, residents have embraced the challenge of establishing modern waste practices from the ground up.

This initiative focused on reducing litter through education, infrastructure and strong community ownership. Practical actions included increased bin placement and collection, elevated bin stands to prevent animal interference, and chilled water refill stations to reduce plastic waste. The local store removed glass products and reduced single-use packaging, while waste segregation and targeted education programs, particularly through the local school, encouraged long-term behaviour change.

Key stakeholders included the MacDonnell Regional Council, Ikuntji Primary School, the local store, contractors and residents. Community pride has been central, with student-designed bin artwork and local champions reinforcing shared responsibility.

The results are highly visible: cleaner streets, reduced waste volumes and a growing culture of environmental stewardship extending to surrounding outstations.

A key lesson has been the power of embedding litter prevention into everyday operations, including making Tidy Towns a core performance measure. Continued focus will strengthen data collection and further expand waste reduction initiatives.





## Liveable Communities

CATEGORY  
WINNER

# Cloncurry Shire Council – Community Events

Cloncurry, QLD



In a remote outback community where distance and isolation can limit access to services and social connection, Cloncurry Shire Council has made community participation a core priority. Through long-term engagement with residents, Council identified the need for regular, accessible and inclusive opportunities that support wellbeing, strengthen connection and ensure no one is left behind.

In response, Council delivers a vibrant annual calendar of free community events, including Australia Day celebrations, Curry Day and Clean Up Australia Day. These events are designed to be open and accessible to all residents, including those who may otherwise experience barriers to participation.

Delivered alongside a strong network of local sporting clubs and community organisations, the program represents an extraordinary volume of activity for a small population.

Council also supports broader community-led events through grants and ongoing collaboration, enabling a diverse and locally driven events landscape.

Working closely with volunteers, community groups and local businesses, these events go beyond celebration. They build trust, strengthen relationships and encourage meaningful participation in community life. Continuous feedback and improvement ensure the program remains relevant and responsive, reinforcing Cloncurry as a connected, inclusive and highly liveable community.

Cloncurry  
Shire Council





## Plastic Free Communities

CATEGORY WINNER

### Zest Fest - Refills Not Landfill

Orange, NSW



At Zest Fest, single-use plastic cups were replaced with a reusable system at a major Orange City Council event, marking a significant shift in how large community gatherings manage waste. With more than 5,000 attendees, the event provided a high-impact opportunity to trial a scalable, behaviour-changing approach to plastic reduction.

The initiative introduced durable, branded reusable cups available for a small purchase fee, encouraging ownership and ongoing reuse. Strong pre-event communication, vendor engagement and clear on-site messaging ensured the system was well understood and supported across all 17 drink vendors and attendees.

Across the event, an estimated 15,000 single-use cups were avoided, significantly reducing landfill waste and event litter. The system proved practical and well accepted, with

positive feedback from both vendors and the community, demonstrating that reusable infrastructure can be successfully integrated into large-scale public events.

Beyond immediate waste reduction, the initiative reinforced Council's commitment to reducing single-use plastics and modelling sustainable practice at public events. Zest Fest has now established reusable cups as standard practice for future Council events, creating a foundation for broader expansion into other reusable systems such as plates and cutlery, and supporting long-term behaviour change across the community.





## Water Conservation and Protection

CATEGORY WINNER

### Orange Stormwater Harvesting

Orange, NSW



Facing ongoing drought and high demand for drinking water, Orange has taken a proactive approach to water security through its stormwater harvesting program. Historically constrained by its top-of-catchment location, much of the city's rainfall was lost to downstream flows, prompting Council to identify alternative, sustainable sources.

Council implemented innovative harvesting schemes at Blackmans Swamp Creek and Ploughmans Creek, delivering approximately 900 megalitres annually, around 20% of the city's water supply. Building on this success, the East Orange Harvesting Wetlands will further expand capacity, adding an additional 600 megalitres per year from 2027.

The initiative has been delivered through strong collaboration between Council, the NSW Government, NSW Health, DCCEEW, technical experts and the local community. Transparent engagement and early regulatory

involvement proved critical in building trust around the use of treated stormwater for potable supply.

Key outcomes include improved water security, enhanced waterway health, reduced downstream flows and the creation of a new recreational wetland space. The project also demonstrates a scalable model for other drought-prone regions.

A key lesson has been the importance of clear communication and early stakeholder alignment. Future stages will continue refining environmental integration and system efficiency as climate pressures intensify.





## Water Conservation and Protection

CATEGORY  
HIGHLY  
COMMENDED

# Huon Valley Waterwatch and Waterbug Blitz

Huon Valley, TAS



Huon Valley Waterwatch and Waterbug Blitz is rebuilding community understanding of waterway health across the Huon Valley through citizen science and long-term ecological monitoring. Established to address a critical gap in regional water data following years of reduced monitoring, the program now tracks conditions across 64 sites, generating 447 community-contributed datasets.

Led by Landcare Tasmania, Huon Valley Council, freshwater ecologists and local Landcare groups, the initiative combines scientific rigor with strong community participation. Volunteers are trained in water quality testing and macroinvertebrate identification, strengthening local capability while deepening connection to place.

The program captures a wide range of climatic conditions, from drought-affected waterways to major flood events, providing rare longitudinal insight into catchment change.

This data is informing restoration priorities and supporting more targeted environmental management.

Key outcomes include Tasmania's first fine-scale regional monitoring network, improved community stewardship and stronger evidence to guide future restoration. The program has also fostered a growing culture of shared responsibility for waterways, where community members actively participate in their care and recovery.





## Young Legends

CATEGORY  
WINNER

# Little Helpers - Wildlife Warriors

Williams, WA



In Williams, a small rural community where volunteerism is essential, the Little Helpers: Wildlife Warriors initiative has harnessed the enthusiasm of young people to strengthen connection and community life. The challenge was to create meaningful opportunities for children to contribute, build confidence and feel a sense of belonging.

Through the Community Resource Centre, young people have been actively engaged in environmental and community activities, from Wildlife Warriors projects to supporting local events such as the Christmas Luncheon and Gateway Expo, as well as school holiday programs including bush walks and library activities.

The initiative is supported by families, schools, CRC staff, local organisations and volunteers, creating a strong culture of shared responsibility.

Young participants are inspired by the example set by their families and step confidently into community roles.

Key outcomes include increased confidence, teamwork and responsibility among participants, alongside stronger intergenerational connections and community pride.

A key learning has been the importance of flexibility and clear communication in a small community with competing commitments. Future opportunities include creating more structured leadership pathways to support the next generation of community leaders.





## Young Legends

CATEGORY  
HIGHLY  
COMMENDED

# Ngawak Biik - Briars Junior Ranger Program

Mornington Peninsula, VIC



Ngawak Biik, “Listen to Country, Understand Country”, was developed to address disengagement among First Nations students in mainstream education across the Mornington Peninsula. Limited access to culturally grounded, on-Country learning had impacted attendance, identity and connection.

Delivered through a 90% Indigenous-led model, the program brings together Traditional Owners, schools, environmental educators and wellbeing services to provide hands-on cultural and ecological learning. Students engage in land management, bushcraft, art and cultural practices, while contributing to activities such as habitat restoration and bush tucker gardens.

Participation has exceeded expectations, growing by 400% in 2025, with schools reporting improved attendance, engagement and student leadership. Pathways into

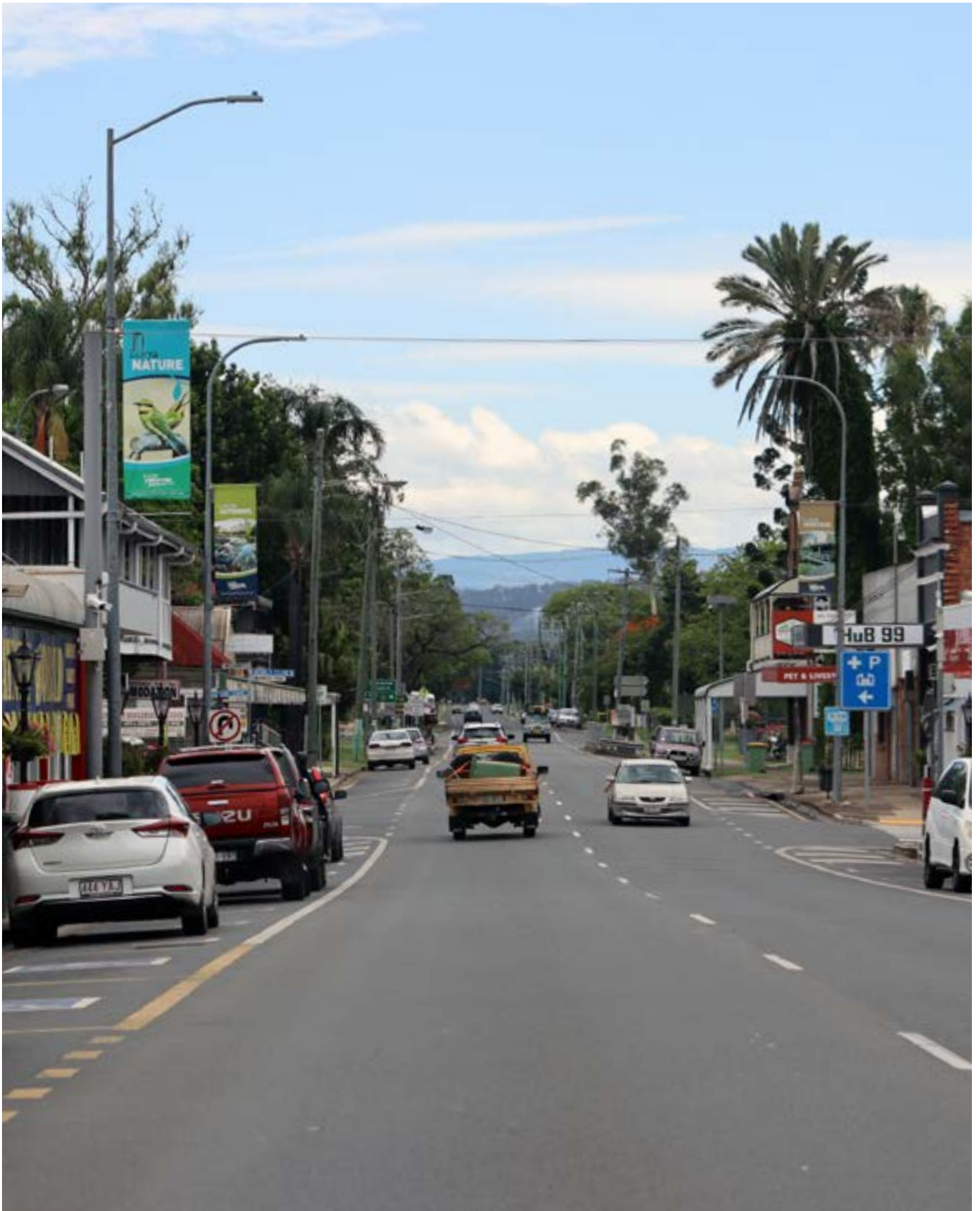
Conservation and Land Management have also been established, supporting long-term employment opportunities.

A key learning has been the importance of co-design with students and community to ensure cultural integrity and relevance. The program continues to evolve in response to student interests, strengthening its impact and long-term sustainability.



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