Our mangroves are magnificent

JOCELYN WATTS

PROPERTY developers and town planners hate them; scientists, artists and environmentalists love them.

The mangrove is a protected marine plant that often grows where property developers want to build but getting approval from the State Government to remove them is next to impossible.

The reason is simple, says Professor Norm Duke from the University of Queensland.

“No mangroves – no fish.

“Mangroves are essential habitat where bountiful and beneficial fish live, feed and breed. Mangroves nurture 75 percent of Qld’s fish catch.”

The world mangrove expert, who recently launched the Mangrove and Mud photographic exhibition by Lindsay Titmarsh at Gatukers Artspace in Maryborough, is behind the birth of MangroveWatch, a community coast care project aimed at helping volunteers to monitor mangroves as indicators of environmental impact and change.

“This Caring for Our Country-funded initiative with the University of Qld is enhancing local awareness of mangrove ecosystems and is a great example of how monitoring helps preserve one of the things we value most – a healthy outdoor environment.

“In the past year, MangroveWatchers, including concerned residents, conservationists and natural resource managers, have notched up 30-plus hours of video of more than 163km of coastal waterways from Dunabar to Tin Can Bay. The video is then taken back to the university hub, where student scientists assess the health of the mangroves.

Prof. Duke said he was overwhelmed with interest and offers to join up.

“We not only have the active participation of 76 locals from 13 affiliated organisations but we have post-graduate students supporting our own efforts at the university.

“Participants feel MangroveWatch from other regional communities for their own MangroveWatch programs.”

Prof. Duke said the program had been supported by some commendable individual efforts.

“Terry Kelly, with the Burnett Heads Ratepayer Association, successfully campaigned to set aside 903ha on Barubbra Island for a new Conservation Park. Tim Thornton is enthusiastically planting mangroves along the Burrum River.

“Lindsay Titmarsh, from Tandora Station at the mouth of the Mary River, has been on the hunt for older and older mangrove trees after discovering a 700-year-old specimen, and Carolyn Bussey has been busy snapping photos of increased erosion at the mouth of the Burrum River.”
Watch is a simple, friendly way to get involved in conservation of their local estuaries and coasts and express their desire to make a difference.”

Locals’ thirst for getting involved had been unquenchable, Prof. Duke said.

“As soon as we inform people of the area covered so far, they respond by filling nearby gaps the next weekend.

“It looks like MangroveWatch could soon be expanding across Australia. There is keen interest

Results for the first year of the program will be presented at two regional events – Tin Can Bay on Friday, August 6, and Hervey Bay on Saturday, August 7; venues to be advised.

“The evening will showcase the outcomes of MangroveWatch and include a display of local mangrove art by some of our MangroveWatchers, including Lindsay’s exhibition.” For more information log into www.mangrovewatch.org.au or email mangrovewatch@gmail.com.