Year of health check-ups for our mangroves

MANGROVEWATCH will discuss its findings and the future of the initiative at a series of public workshops in June.

Marking the first birthday of the Burnett Mary region’s MangroveWatch, the workshops offer local participants and supporters the opportunity to hear how their support for the program generated real scientific data on the health of their local estuaries and coasts.

This Caring for Our Country-funded initiative with the University of Queensland is enhancing local awareness of mangrove ecosystems.

In the past year, local mangrove watchers have notched up more than 30 hours of video of more than 163 kilometres of coastal waterways from Bundaberg to Tin Can Bay.

The video is then taken back to the university hub, where student scientists assess the health of the mangroves and look at indicators such as vegetative condition, erosion and other signs of natural and human damage to measure the overall health of each estuary or coastline.

The plan is to score the health of each area and compare scores from year to year.

Participants have been given feedback throughout the year with 12 workshops but a new website, mangrovewatch.org.au, which will include a resource centre, a forum for groups to communicate, and the latest results, is also in the pipeline.

University of Queensland Mangrove Hub director Norm Duke said he had been overwhelmed by the interest and offers to join up.

“We not only have the active participation of 76 locals from 13 affiliated organisations, but we have postgraduate students supporting our own efforts at the university,” he said.

“Our challenge has been to come up with a useful and practical way to help people contribute to the better management of their local coastal environments.”

The program has been supported by some commendable individual efforts such as Lindsay Titmarsh, from Tandora Station at the mouth of the Mary River, who has been on the hunt for older and older mangrove trees after discovering a 700-year-old specimen.

Workshops will be held on Friday in Hervey Bay from 3.30pm to 5.30pm at the Neighbourhood Centre in Taylor Street, Pialba, on Saturday in Howard from 9am until noon at Tim Thornton’s house at 16 Jacqueline Drive, Pacific Haven, and on Sunday in Tin Can Bay from 9am until noon at Tin Can Bay Library rooms.