NAOMI WELLS:
Hi, I'm Naomi Wells from Bellarine Catchment Network and I'm here today at Queenscliff in Victoria. I would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of this land, the Wadawurrung and pay my respects their Elders past, present and emerging. We're here today for Summer by the Sea, a program ran by Coastcare Victoria that attracts thousands of people to the coast each January. Coastcare Victoria is a program of the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning. This video will be showcasing a local volunteer group who do amazing work here in the Coastal Moonah Woodland. Before we begin, I have three simple steps that anybody can follow to protect habitats like this. Firstly, always stick to the paths, that way you can reduce your disturbance if you're walking through areas like this. Secondly, leave only footprints. Please make sure you take any rubbish or litter home with you. And finally, consider joining a local Coastcare or Friends of group. Volunteering is a great way to help protect these natural environments.

A few years ago, local residents came together to form the volunteer group, The Borough Coastcarers. They really wanted to protect their local habitat, including this beautiful Coastal Moonah Woodland. Coastal Moonah Woodland is a threatened plant community and there's not much of it left on the Bellarine Peninsula. One of the biggest threats that it faces is from invasive woody weeds, including *Polygala myrtifolia*. This woody weed drops thousands of seeds each year, and those seedlings then grow up, to compete with our native plants for light, nutrients and space. The Borough Coastcarers work so hard every single month to protect this beautiful native habitat. Let's go meet some of them now.

So why is volunteering like this so important for conservation projects?

TIM TROTTIER:
Well especially in The Narrows, this site wouldn't be what it is today without the volunteers. So, a lot of hours go into grubbing plants and pulling them out and putting them in piles and dragging the piles out. It's really important for conservation areas to have volunteers, and it really helps build that community. And as well as the mental health side of things, coming out and laughing, you know, having a chat and you're looking down, pulling your weeds out but you're still able to have a chat with the person next to you. I think that's really beneficial.

NAOMI WELLS:
Marvyn, how does it feel, when you get to a wall of Polygala, and you remove that wall?

MARVYN:
Oh, it's very satisfying. Particularly when you start seeing the small trees and shrubs that you couldn't see before. All you could see was that wall of weeds and now you can see the little ones coming up, and you also see things like the orchids in the season and you realise how many there are and how extensive they are. But only in the areas where it’s been cared for and weeded. So, it’s important to keep those areas clear because they're Indigenous and quite rare species that live just in this area. If anybody was interested in doing this sort of work, it's not difficult, it's only a couple of hours a month and we enjoy it. You know, you're getting the fresh air, see things that you would not normally see. Learn about the plants and animals that live in the area. It's good fun.

NAOMI WELLS:
So what would you say to people who are thinking about volunteering?

MEL:
Oh, look I'd say, "Come along. Join in the fun." Basically, it's a couple of hours of rolling around in the dirt, chatting and laughing. We get a lot... A surprising amount of work done and you look back at where you've been and it’s extremely satisfying to see the area that you've cleared of weeds. You can see the areas that we've already cleared, you can already start to see baby Moonahs and other native vegetation popping up in the undergrowth and that's just extremely... Makes you feel a bit warm and fuzzy to be honest. Especially on the Bellarine, where so much land clearing is happening, it's really important that we protect the areas that are left.

NAOMI WELLS:
As we've seen, volunteering is a great way to protect our natural environment, to socialise and meet other people. To improve your physical and mental health and to connect with nature. If you want to know more about groups in your area, contact your local Coastcare Victoria Facilitator. We hope you enjoy this video and are inspired to get out there and start volunteering.