

History of the Port Environment Centre

2017: Consideration of a Centre

Following the establishment of the [Adelaide Sustainability Centre](#) in the CBD, Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges Natural Resources Management Board (AMLR NRM) (now Green Adelaide) was interested in setting up a new Natural Resources centre with a particular focus on coastal environments.

In November 2017, Rebecca Jenkinson representing the AMLR NRM Board reached out to local stakeholders including City Port Adelaide Enfield, Catherine McMahon (founder of the Estuary Care Foundation) and Tony Bazeley (Secretary of the Port Adelaide Residents Environment Protection Group) to discuss the potential establishment of the new centre in Port Adelaide. The discussions revealed unanimous support.

There had been several previous attempts to establish an environment-centric local community hub. The most recent in Semaphore faced problems funding its rental premises and was staffed solely by volunteers. The prospect of an AMLR NRM Centre with funding for premises and a part-time staff member was perceived as a wonderful opportunity for the community.

After considering a business case developed by NRM staff, the AMLR NRM Board supported the establishment of a Port Adelaide NRM centre, subject to there being strong interest and support from the community.

2018: Community Workshop and Planning Phase

On 13 August 2018, AMLR NRM held a public community workshop at the Port Adelaide Town Hall as a first step to 'test the waters' and start a conversation regarding the establishment of a natural resource centre. The City PAE provided the venue and local environmental organisations widely promoted the workshop which brought together around 70 people, showing a strong level of community support. Discussions from the workshop revealed that a common vision for the Centre was for it to be a physical hub that could be a meeting place for the community and local groups/organisations. The Centre was also envisioned to be a place where information about local coastal, marine and estuarine issues and the environment could be accessed and exchanged.

Clare Shuttleworth facilitated the workshop and wrote up its deliberations. The full report of the community workshop can be accessed [online here](#).

At the workshop, following small group discussions, a group of individuals volunteered to form what AMLR NRM termed a 'brains trust'. These volunteers then met regularly and formed working groups in three key areas (i) accommodation and facilities, (ii) governance and model, and (iii) programs and activities.

Steph Taylor, a volunteer in the accommodation and facilities working group suggested 27 North Parade in Port Adelaide as possible accommodation for the Centre. Renewal SA agreed to allow the Centre to use the property at no cost (excluding utilities) and to borrow the existing office furniture (since the building had been the site office for the Shared Services build). This was a generous arrangement that greatly facilitated the Centre's establishment and early operation.

Since AMLR NRM was initially offering the Centre six months of funding (1 January to 30 June 2019) the 'brains trust' considered it urgent to get the Centre up and successfully operating. They agreed to seek a suitable auspicing organisation rather than spend time and energy on incorporation.

After discussions with several organisations, it was agreed that KESAB would be the auspicing organisation, providing HR, financial and administrative services. Alex Hammett from KESAB was seconded during the first 6 months (January to June 2019) and ultimately, the Centre had a co-management arrangement with KESAB for 18 months. The 'brains trust' became the PEC Advisory Committee and Catherine McMahon assumed the role of Chair in January 2019.

Between January and March 2019, the Advisory Committee and volunteers began to prepare for the opening of the Centre which included cleaning and decorating the Centre, organising utilities, considering energy options, setting up a website, developing an initial program of events, advising key stakeholders and promoting the launch.

The Marine Life Society (SA) offered to provide its library to the Centre for public use. This contributed to the development of PEC's public library, which was then supplemented with books and magazines about sustainability, nature, Indigenous knowledge and more.

2019: Opening of Port Environment Centre

The Port Environment Centre officially opened on 30 March 2019. Felicity-Ann Lewis, Presiding Member AML NRM, opened the Centre. Local Federal MP Hon Mark Butler and City of PAE Mayor Claire Boan were special guest. The opening was a successful and memorable event. Michael O'Brien (a senior Kurna man, former Port Adelaide SANFL player and Advisory Committee member) provided a Welcome to Country. Stuart Gifford (co-manager of Sarah's Sister's Sustainable Cafe and Advisory Committee member) donated and served food made with native ingredients to the Centre's many guests and visitors.

Following the opening of the Port Environment Centre (PEC), the Centre provided a program of community events to introduce people to the Centre. After AMLR NRM committed funds for the Centre for 2019/20 Emma Sandery was recruited as the Centre's Coordinator. In addition to organising events and projects, maintaining the Centre, and attending to visitors, Emma recruited and supported PEC volunteers and made strong connections with local environmental organisations.

In December 2019, consultant Peter Day, supported the Centre in developing its first Strategic Plan and this work became a focus for Emma and the Committee.

2020: Incorporation of Port Environment Centre

In late 2019, the PEC Committee resolved to operate independently from KESAB and to become incorporated. Catherine McMahon and Melanie Carter (volunteer), with advice from the Environmental Defenders Office developed the draft constitution. The Centre was incorporated on 27 April 2020 and began operating independently on 1 July 2020 under the new constitution ([available here](#)). The Centre also became a registered charity with the ACNC in 2020.

Following advocacy by Maggie Hine, within the City of Port Adelaide Enfield, the Centre received a Partnership Project Grant from the Council in July 2020 which allowed PEC to hire an additional part-time staff member, to develop environmental initiatives such as the In Our Street project and extend its activities and reach.

In late July 2020, PEC completed its strategic plan ([available here](#)) highlighting the Centre's focus on creating an informed, engaged and active environmental community.

[View our achievements through the first year of operation \(March 2019 – March 2020\) here](#)

PEC held its inaugural annual general meeting on 20 October 2021 and its second on 27 October 2022. As a non-profit, incorporated association, PEC relies on members to function effectively and has developed a strong membership base from which to draw its Management Committee. JulieAnn Stoll became PEC Chair at the October 2022 AGM, taking over from outgoing, and inaugural Chair Catherine McMahon.

2020 onwards: Port Environment Centre Operations

On 26 March 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Centre temporarily closed its doors. PEC shifted to supporting and engaging with their community through online platforms and events. The Centre reopened to the community on 5 August 2020.

With foundational funding from Green Adelaide, PEC has continued to operate as a community meeting place where visitors can access local environmental information and resources, plus the delivery of a broad range of events, workshops and activities. PEC also supports various local groups and organisations by providing meeting spaces, collaborating on and promoting events, and connecting volunteers.

The Centre is grateful for additional funding in the form of a City of Port Adelaide Enfield Living Environment Grant and funding from the Suzanne Elliott Charitable Trust. The Suzanne Elliott Charitable Trust has a vision to support the development of strong, healthy, connected and flourishing communities through the provision of funding support to projects that contribute to the development of connected, equitable and generous communities.

PEC is grateful for the support and shared learning provided by the broader network of environment / natural resource centres across greater Adelaide.

Thank You

Since its formation, PEC has attained some significant milestones. The Centre has successfully established itself as an independent community centre. PEC has managed to effectively engage with its community and deliver a large program of events and activities.

The success of PEC would not be possible without the efforts and assistance of the Centre's Committee, initial working groups, staff, volunteers, funding partners and the community.

A special thank you goes to our founding chairperson, Catherine McMahon, for her guidance, energy, input and dedication to the Centre through its initial years.

PEC would like to extend its deepest gratitude to the following individuals and organisations for their support in helping to build the Centre into what it is today:

Committee members (past and present):

Catherine McMahon

Tony Bazeley

Michael O'Brien

Stuart Gifford

Karen James

Cavan Newble

Steph Taylor

Andrew Winkler

Christine Gates

Alexander Coombe

Karen Holland

Kirsty Darlaston

JulieAnn Stoll

Samantha Everett

Neve Pratt

Belinda Schultz

John Phillips OAM (KESAB)

Maggie Hine (City of Port Adelaide Enfield)

Aleisa Lamanna (City of Port Adelaide Enfield)

Staff and volunteers (past and present)

Alex Hammett (centre start-up)

Emma Sandery (PEC Coordinator)

Megan Schartner (PEC Project Officer)

Charlotte Nitschke (PEC Project Officer)

Janice Vaz (PEC Project Officer)

Melanie Carter (long-term PEC volunteer)

All other PEC volunteers past and present

Supporting organisations and agencies

Green Adelaide, KESAB, City of Port Adelaide Enfield, Suzanne Elliott Charitable Trust and Renewal SA