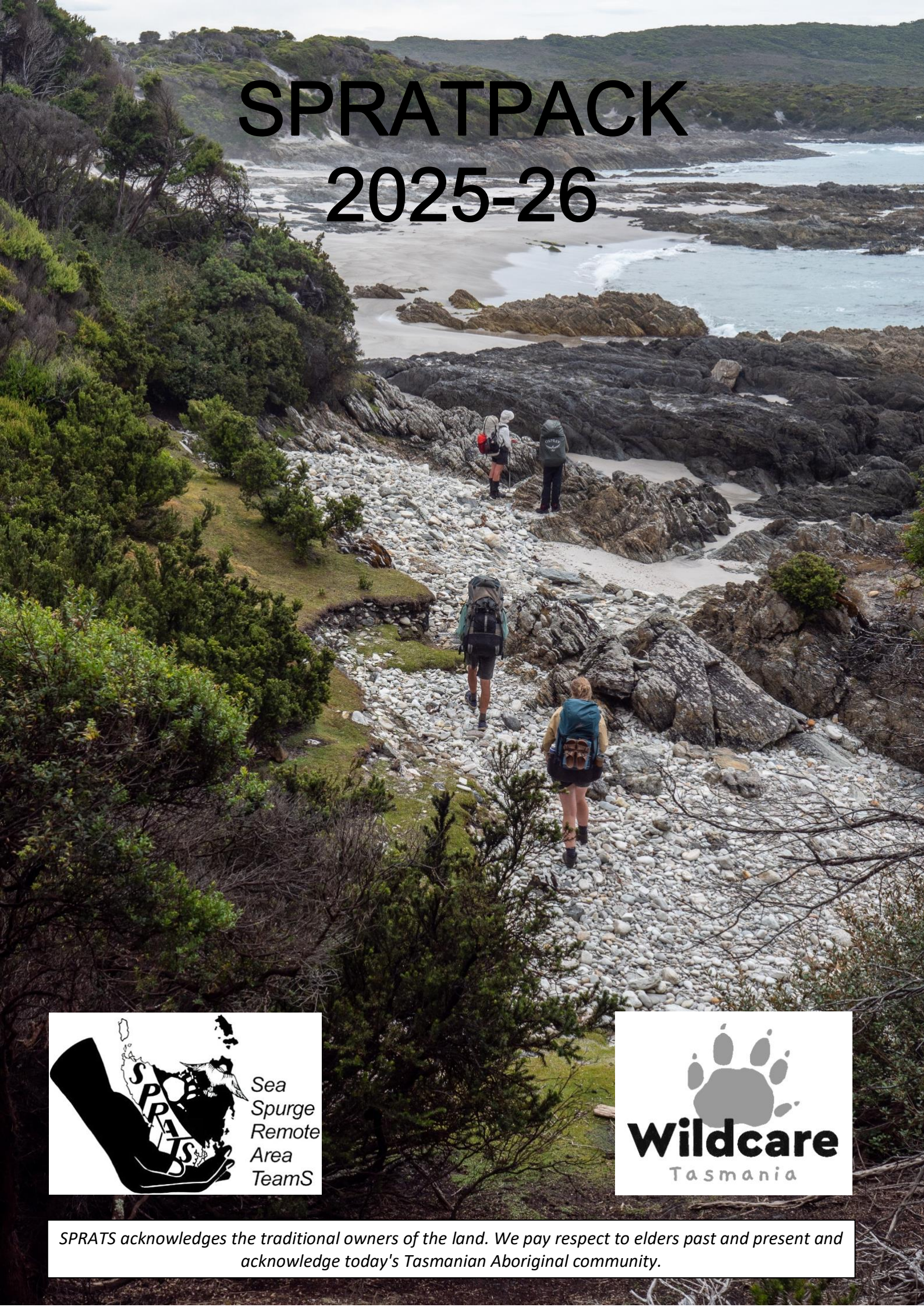
# SPRATPACK 2025-26



Sea Spurge Remote Area TeamS

Wildcare Tasmania

*SPRATS acknowledges the traditional owners of the land. We pay respect to elders past and present and acknowledge today's Tasmanian Aboriginal community.*

***If you are a bushwalker or sea kayaker who wants to help protect the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area and at the same time have wilderness fun, then volunteering with SPRATS could be for you.***

## What is SPRATS?

Wildcare SPRATS (Sea sPurge Remote Area TeamS) is a self-managing volunteer group. For the past 18 seasons SPRATS has conducted a highly successful coastal weeding program on the 850 km of Tasmania's wild and remote west and south coasts between Cape Sorell and Cockle Creek. The group operates under the umbrella of Wildcare Tasmania Incorporated and works with the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service (PWS).

SPRATS has greatly reduced the occurrence of sea spurge (*Euphorbia paralias*), marram grass (*Ammophila arenaria*) and blackberry (*Rubus fruticosus* aggregate). However, ongoing weeding is still needed in order to maintain control of these weeds and prevent their re-establishment.

The coastline of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area and its northern buffer in the Southwest Conservation Area is one of the few remaining areas in Australia with low human induced conservation threats and is globally important for shore nesting and migratory birds. If left unchecked, the growth of sea spurge and marram grass will threaten geodiversity, Aboriginal cultural sites, coastal herbfields, grasslands and shrublands, as well as the habitats for several rare and threatened species. Other than the target weeds, the region has a low weed incidence and is the Tasmanian stronghold for a number of shore-nesting and feeding birds, including the eastern hooded plover, red-capped plover, pied oystercatcher, sooty oystercatcher, various terns and the orange-bellied parrot. These bird species are at risk due to sea spurge and marram grass' potential to transform the coastline's geomorphic structure, making it less suitable for breeding and/or feeding.

SPRATS has developed a range of effective remote-area weed management and control strategies, which have resulted in a greater than 98% reduction of targeted weeds. All weeding groups are supplied with detailed 1:50,000 maps and handheld map-enabled GNSS units (aka GPS), which show weed sites, walking routes and established campsites. Geo-referenced data on all weeds removed, time taken to weed sites and research into the most effective treatment is collected. This data is used plan and enhance the weeding, locate previously recorded weed sites, assist with navigation and demonstrate the program's effectiveness.

SPRATS also assists government and university bodies with their ecological and land management research. SPRATS' volunteers have done extensive collections of Tasmanian devil scats for genetic and diet research, assisted with research into plant genetics, performed extensive surveys of Tasmanian Aboriginal cultural sites and provided on-the-ground management information to the PWS. In addition to this, volunteers collect data on location and number of shorebirds for BirdLife Tasmania. For all this work, as well the successful weeding program, SPRATS has received numerous environmental awards over the years.

### *Current SPRATS' objectives:*

Stage 1. To finalise weed control at all sites:

1. Continue the program along the entire coastline between Cape Sorell and Cockle Creek;
2. Check all potential sites for sea spurge, marram grass, great mullein and / or blackberry;
3. Fully weed all sites each season until residual seed banks are exhausted.

Stage 2**.** Once stage 1 objectives have been achieved, continue to survey for new weed occurrences and/or missed populations:

4. Perform biennial or triennial surveys of all recorded sites;
5. Fully weed all target species found.

### *What are sea spurge and marram grass?*

Sea spurge is a leafy European shrub which has invaded much of the southern Australian coastline between Geraldton in WA and the NSW Central Coast north of Sydney. The plants colonise sand, cobble and rocky shorelines along with dune systems, transforming their geomorphology.

Sea spurge produces large numbers of saltwater-tolerant seeds which can float to infest new sites. Once established, colonies increase in size rapidly, swamping entire beaches and the foredune within a few years, which reduces potential nesting sites of shorebirds. It has an overall yellow-green colour, grows to about 70 cm in height and has multiple stems covered in small, closely packed leaves. On the west and south coasts of Tasmania, sea spurge starts flowering from mid-December and typically has seeds present by early February. It can produce seed by early January following warm and/or dry weather in spring. When broken or crushed, sea spurge stems produce a white, caustic sap. This is an important identification tool as sea spurge is the only coastal plant in Tasmania to do this. Gloves and protective glasses are supplied to SPRATS volunteers, as extreme care should be taken to avoid contact with the sap.

Most SPRATS sea spurge weeding is done using the *pull and drop* method. Occasionally however, large plants or plants rooted in rocks need to be treated by cutting and painting with the herbicide glyphosate. Where sea spurge plants carrying seed are weeded, the plants are carried a short way inland and dumped under coastal scrub where SPRATS monitoring has shown that sea spurge will not typically survive.

Marram grass is a perennial grass, growing from an extensive underground runner system. It was originally widely planted for stabilising coastal dunes. Unfortunately, this resulted in steepening of dune faces, making them less suitable for shorebird nesting. The main way marram grass now colonises new areas is via vegetative runners which float in on ocean currents.

Marram grass is considered to be a highly-invasive weed and is weeded by SPRATS' volunteers using two techniques. Small clumps may be dug out which, while slow, is effective provided care is taken to get as many of the small roots as possible. Where large numbers and/or large clumps occur, the only practical eradication technique is multiple herbicide applications over several seasons. SPRATS uses the monocot-specific herbicide haloxyfop-R methyl ester. Although advantageous, it is not essential to have spraying experience and / or qualifications to participate in SPRATS.

**Young sea spurge (left); marram grass (right);**

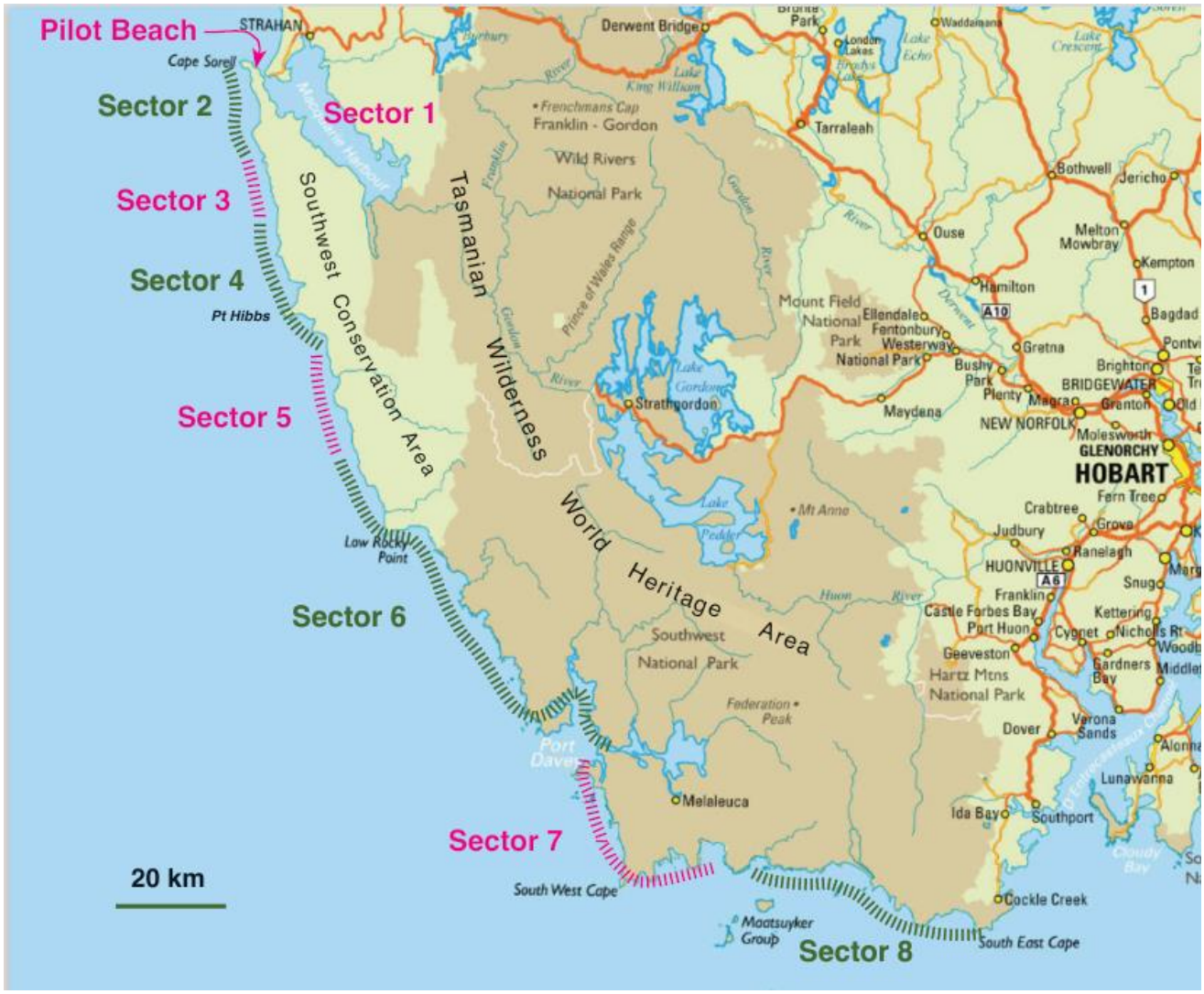
***Pilot Beach***

A new multiyear project for SPRATS is eradication of several introduced plants species dispersed from the shacks and lighthouse keeper's houses across the Napier/Pilot Beach/Cape Sorell precincts on the southern headland of Macquarie Harbour. Foxglove is of particular concern as a declared pest under Tasmania's *Biosecurity Act 2019.* This project differs from the main SPRATS program because: 1) these escaped garden plants are concentrated in one area so all weed removal activities can be done from base camps; 2) diverse species require multiple weed removal techniques and twice-yearly visits.

## SPRATS program for 2025-26

The main SPRATS program will continue its emphasis on both sea spurge and marram grass eradication and will run in January 2026. This season, bushwalking and kayaking teams, comprising three to five people each, will deploy to sectors 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7 and 8.

Also, teams of 6 - 8 volunteers will deploy to Pilot Beach in mid-November 2025 and again immediately following the main program in mid-January 2026.




**SPRATS weeding sectors between Macquarie Harbour and Cockle Creek**

| Sector | People | Days | Field dates* | Transport | Difficulty |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pilot Beach 1 | 6 -8 | 8 | 23 to 30 Nov 25 | From Strahan, boat in, boat out | Moderate: base camping. |
| Pilot Beach 2 | 6 - 8 | 9 | 15 to 23 Jan 26 | From Strahan, boat in, boat out | Moderate: base camping. |
| 1 | 3 to 5 | 5-6 | 4 to 9 Jan 26 | From Strahan, own kayaks | Experienced open water kayakers only. |
| 2 | 5 | 12 | 4 to 15 Jan 26 | From Strahan, heli in, boat out | Hard: mostly easy walking but with some rock scrambling with and without packs. |
| 3 | 5 | 12 | 4 to 15 Jan 26 | From Strahan, heli in, boat out | Moderate: mostly easy with minor scrub; 12km walk-out at end. |
| 4 | 5 | 12 | 4 to 15 Jan 26 | From Strahan, heli in, boat out | Hard: extensive scrub and rocky coast, 25km walk-out at end |
| 6 | 4 or 5 | 23 | 4 to 26 Jan 26 | Heli in from Strahan, plane out to Hobart | Very hard: thick scrub and river crossings, long duration. |
| 7-8 | 4 or 5 | 18 | 4 to 21 Jan 26 | Heli in from Strahan, walk out | Hard: thick scrub, river crossings, large steep hills, muddy track, long duration. |

**Note:**

- **Both November AND January Pilot Beach team members must attend an online briefing in the days leading up to the November deployment.**
- **All participants in Sectors 1- 8 must attend a briefing in Strahan on 3rd January, 2026.**
- **If you cannot attend a briefing, we will not be able to deploy you to the field.**
- **Deployment and extraction dates may change due to weather.**

## Sector details

***Pre-season and post-season spray teams - Pilot Beach***
Teams of 6- 8 will be deployed for 8 days in November and 9 days in January. Even though the work is done from base camps and does not require bushwalking with heavy packs, the site is fairly remote so teams still need to be self-reliant. Weeds of principal concern this year are foxglove, blackberry, arum lily and pine wildings.

**View near the camp site at Pilot Beach**.

***Sector 1 - Macquarie Harbour***
This sector calls for a team of three to five experienced sea kayakers with their own boats and safety gear. The team will inspect all beaches in Macquarie Harbour. Estimated duration is 5 or 6 days although exact dates and duration can be decided by the team (note: the briefing on 3rd January MUST still be attended). There are only small weed infestations known. A 2-litre sprayer and *haloxyfop* herbicide will be taken. Birches Inlet, Gordon River and King River, and other beaches on the western shoreline are a lower weed risk but should be checked. Although the sector is inshore, Macquarie Harbour is shallow and frequently experiences strong winds with rough water and steep breaking waves. Participants will need to have adequate previous experience to demonstrate that they can safely operate in these conditions.

***Sector 2 - Sloop Point to Cape Sorell, and Pilot Beach in Macquarie Harbour***
This sector calls for a team of five people for 12 days. Sector difficulty is rated as hard because participants need to be confident scrambling over some short rocky and scrubby sections while carrying their packs. Otherwise, walking is through relatively easy terrain and there are no significant rivers or creeks to cross. Transport will be by helicopter to Sloop Point and extraction by boat from Macquarie Heads. The team will spend the first three nights camped at Sloop Point, which will lighten the amount of food being carried north. Having checked the mostly rocky coast south of Sloop Point and sprayed Dunes Beach (using a 2-litre sprayer, which is to be carried throughout), the team will walk north. The team will conclude by spraying for 2 or 3 days at Pilot Beach, where PWS will have delivered the team's food drop and spray equipment. Walking with packs will be between base camps with weeding and searching mostly done as out and back trips.

***Sector 3 – Nielsen River to Gorge Beach, then walk out to Butt of Liberty in Macquarie Harbour***
This sector calls for a team of five people for 12 days. Transport will be by helicopter to the Nielsen River and extraction by boat from the Butt of Liberty in Macquarie Harbour. The once huge sea spurge sites in this sector have been greatly reduced, but thorough searching of large dune systems is still required. The team will carry a 2-litre sprayer throughout. The team will start at Nielsen River and work north along easy coastline to Gorge Beach. Walking with packs will be between base camps with weeding and searching mostly done as out and back trips. Although walking is mostly easy, searching for weeds on sand dunes, and the ~11km exit walk out on quad bike tracks, make the sector moderate difficulty. One food drop and a 5-litre sprayer will be left at Discovery Beach during the helicopter insertion. Multiple nights may be spent at each of Nielsen River, Discovery Beach and near Gorge Hut.

***Sector 4 - Endeavour Beach to Nielsen River, then walk out to Butt of Liberty in Macquarie Harbour***
This sector calls for a team of five people for 12 days. Transport will be by helicopter to Endeavour Beach where the team will spend two nights. The team has areas of marram grass to treat on Endeavour Beach and will carry a 2-litre hand sprayer throughout. Walking and weeding will then be northward to Nielsen River, before walking out on quad bike tracks to the boat pickup at the Butt of Liberty, in Macquarie Harbour. Some of the walking is very scrubby and there are extensive sections of difficult coastal rock-hopping. In addition, a 5-litre sprayer will be stashed near Spero River during insertion, for treatment of a marram grass patch there. The Spero River must be crossed: this is normally a shallow wade, but could involve a deep wade or conceivably a short swim, depending on tide and river conditions. One food drop will likely be located at the Modder River.

***Sector 6 - Rheuben Creek to Bramble Cove in Port Davey***
This sector calls for a party of four or five people for 23 days. Insertion will be by helicopter to Rheuben Creek and will include stops enroute to active sites in Sector 5. The Sector 7 / 8 team will put in three food drops, likely at Pophole, Wreck Bay and Bond Bay. From Bramble Cove (inside Port Davey) extraction to Hobart will be via boat to Melaleuca, then plane to Cambridge. Few weeds are expected, but finding and dealing with the remaining seedlings is extremely important. An herbicide dabber kit will be carried throughout. Although much of the sector is of moderate difficulty walking, the sector is regarded as being very difficult because it is remote, very long and committing. It has extended patches of very thick scrub and difficult rock hopping. There are four major creeks and rivers to cross with packs, some of which could require swimming. PWS may assist with the 150m Davey River crossing, but participants need to be comfortable to cross by pack-raft and carry out the rafts, if this is not possible. The reward is some of Tasmania's most beautiful beaches, bays and moorlands.

***Sectors 7 and 8 – Spain Bay to Noyhener Beach then Cox Bight to Cockle Creek***
This sector calls for a team of 4 or 5 people for 18 days. Transport will be by helicopter to Noyhener Beach where the team will camp for the first four nights, while they survey and weed Hannant Inlet, Spain Bay, Norman Cove, Stephens Beach and Noyhener Beach. Afterwards, the team will walk to Melaleuca via Horseshoe Inlet, then continue out along on the South Coast track, surveying Anchorage Cove, Louisa Beach and Prion Beach on the way. The team could also elect to survey from Melaleuca to Wilson Bight, taking an additional four or five days. The sector's long duration and off-track walking to Anchorage Cove, make it harder than the standard South Coast Track walk. The sector has several large creeks and rivers to cross, including Louisa Creek, Louisa River and South Cape Rivulet, all of which can flood following heavy rain.

## Is SPRATS for you?

If you are an experienced, self-reliant remote-area bushwalker or sea kayaker who wants to spend time helping to manage our wilderness coastlines then SPRATS may be for you.

All participants must provide all their own personal equipment and food. The difficult terrain and likelihood of prolonged rain and wind, requires solid footwear and good quality tents, thermals and jackets.

SPRATS will supply weeding equipment, InReach satellite communicators, along with GNSS units and laminated 1:50,000 topographic maps which show weed locations, walking routes and campsites.

***Expression of Interest and selection of participants***
When you submit your Expression of Interest (EOI), please be realistic about your capabilities and skills. If you have any medical issues that PWS, SPRATS and other team members should know, or that could affect your ability to perform your sector, please either fully declare them in your EOI, or discuss with the SPRATS organisers prior to applying. The assessment of your capability and skills should consider possible adverse weather and / or if there is an injury in your team that requires you to assist other team members with the carrying of gear.

Apart from emergencies, early extractions are not possible, and all participants must be experienced and capable of comfortably completing their entire sector. Recent experience in multi-day trips is essential, preferably in Tasmanian conditions. Experience in botany or bush regeneration is an advantage but not essential. If you haven't been a SPRATS participant before, please carefully consider whether your skills match the requirements of the sector(s) you are applying for. Sectors 4, 6 and 7/8 require a high level of competence and experience in extended off-track walking and / or the ability to cross rivers with a pack. Sector 1 requires experienced open water sea kayakers.

If you would like to be grouped with specific people, make sure each participant specifies this grouping in their EOI.

It is essential that at least two people in each sector have experience with the identification of sea spurge and marram grass, and, if possible, at least one person has undertaken the sector before. Please be accepting when the organisers allocate you to a sector. SPRATS prides itself on being an open and fair group, and a reasonable selection process will be used.

Please return your EOI form (attached Word document), *with your name in the saved title,* by **Sunday 28th September 2025** so we can offer sector allocations in mid-October 2025. Allocation after these dates will only be possible if places become available.

If you have any questions, please contact Andy Macqueen (0429858051), Bec Johnson (0407391961), Geoff Luscombe (0418238097 before 15 August) or sprats.tas@gmail.com prior to applying.

***Safety***

SPRATS work is governed by Tasmanian Government and PWS policy. Briefing notes and a PWS approved Job Risk Analysis will be sent to all participants before deployment and will be reviewed at the briefing session. Because SPRATS operates in remote areas where access to medical support may not be readily available, one or more team members should have current first-aid training. Full vaccination for Covid-19 is also recommended. Teams will maintain back to base communication, and will receive weather forecasts, every two days, via InReach satellite communicators. At least one personal locator beacon will be carried per group.

**Accommodation in Hobart**

For the nights prior to the briefing, some volunteers in the Hobart region may be able to offer billet accommodation.

**Transport to and from Strahan**

For those who need it, carpooling to Strahan from Hobart or northwest Tasmania may be possible. This means that anyone flying from interstate will need to be in Tasmania by the evening of 2nd January. Similarly, carpooling may be available after at the end of the program. For return flights, it is prudent to allow at least two days leeway, in case extraction is delayed by bad weather. SPRATS will not be held responsible for missed flights.

**Accommodation in Strahan**

Overnight indoor accommodation on the floor in the heritage PWS 'Customs House' building will be available on the night before deployment.


**SPRATS participants and pilot in Strahan prior to deployment to sectors 2 – 8, January 2025**