

Turning blue is new way to be green

THE critical importance of preserving forests in the fight against climate change is well known.

And trees' capacity for capturing carbon dioxide, known as "green carbon", has made tree-planting schemes an easily graspable method of offsetting carbon footprints.

But it takes an awful lot of planting – by one estimate, more than 20 trees must be planted each year to offset the emissions of a single car travelling 20km a day.

So much so that when big polluting companies make claims of offsets via planting, it is often met with cynicism about "greenwashing".

Now, scientists and governments are realising there may be a way to get a bigger bang for our environmental buck through what is known as "blue carbon" – that which is captured and stored in the plants, soil and sediments of coastal ecosystems such as seagrass, mangroves and tidal saltmarshes.

According to the state government, such ecosystems can capture carbon 40 times faster than inland forests. What's more, plants in watery places can store more carbon and do it for much longer periods than plants on dry land.

The government and a range of partners are investing nearly \$2m in blue carbon projects, including restoration of 2000ha of various coastal wetlands.

There will also be research projects along Adelaide's coast with a range of partners, giving the government a chance to atone for the destruction of a large swath of the St Kilda mangroves on its watch.

The government says the investment, though modest at this stage, will "lead the way in establishing blue carbon as a viable carbon abatement option".

Of course, no amount of "green" or "blue" carbon projects could be enough to negate the necessity of reducing emissions. But one of the government's partners, the Nature Conservancy, says such projects can contribute "up to 30 per cent of the effort we need to make".

That figure alone justifies significant effort into unlocking the potential of blue carbon in our state.