

GOAL 3: Protect and connect our natural environments

The natural environment is one of our greatest assets. While the Environmental Levy continues to target water quality, coastal erosion and bushland regeneration, more information on biodiversity is needed. Identifying important habitats and their connections, will guide future development by enabling well-informed decisions. It will also create a framework for targeting future investment to restore important habitats.

The key direction is to protect our natural environment and its biodiversity. Future projects include:

- **proactively managing Cattai Wetlands** (east of the Pacific Highway near Cooperook). What started as an environmental restoration project to address acid sulfate soils, has grown into a significant natural asset visited by over 2,500 visitors each year. Continued improvements to Cattai Wetlands include regular water monitoring, installing new facilities (bird hide, boardwalks, signage), promotion of the wetlands as an outdoor classroom (acid sulfate soils, restoration projects, local Aboriginal culture and coastal wetland ecosystems), increasing open hours, purchasing and remediating neighbouring degraded sites



- **continuing the rehabilitation of Big Swamp** (immediately north of Cattai Wetlands). The site covers around 2,000ha and includes the man-made Pipeclay Canal, which in the past had water quality similar to that of battery acid. Progressively, Council will purchase key sites and undertake remediation works to reduce the release of acid, improving the quality of water entering the Manning River

- **improving the health of the Manning River.** Extensive river bank stabilisation and restoration works will be undertaken throughout the Manning River catchment to improve water quality. In addition, a detailed Water Quality Improvement Plan to reduce sediment, nutrient and gross pollutants from entering our waterways will be undertaken.



- **protecting and enhance biodiversity in the Manning Valley** by undertaking a biodiversity strategy that will identify and assess the diversity of habitats and their connections. Priorities will be set in terms of areas in need of protection and areas to be targeted for investment to improve connectivity and resilience
- **fostering improved partnerships to manage our environment.** The environmental levy enables us to better engage, support and partner with community and industry groups, and other government agencies to address local environmental issues. Partnerships with the Green Army, Conservation Volunteers Australia, Work for the Dole, Novaskill, TIDE as well as other employment and landcare/coastcare groups will continue to provide practical hands-on experience to locals in the fields of bushland regeneration, horticulture and construction. These partnerships need to continue to grow as we move into new priority locations across the Manning Valley
- **reducing the prevalence of noxious weeds** which are increasingly a threat to our natural environment. It is important to reduce weed infestations to maintain the biodiversity of the Manning Valley by undertaking inspections of both rural and urban areas. Inspections of markets and nurseries also assists to ensure that noxious weeds are not mistakenly sold as garden plants. Continued education activities assist to keep the community informed of the extent and type of weeds present in the Manning Valley.