

DRAFT RURAL STRATEGY

Our Land Use Planning team is currently seeking feedback on its draft Rural Strategy which proposes a consolidated platform for considering how land and water resources outside our towns and villages are expected to be used and developed in the coming decades.

What does this actually mean for you?

The simplest answer is to head to the website below and look up your farm on the mapping. Is there an issue with your current zoning for your property? Is this zoning proposed to be changed and if so how will that affect you? Are you in a priority water catchment?

If any of this raises some questions, contact the Land Use Planning team to find out more:

- email your questions including your property address and contact details, to rural@midcoast.nsw.gov.au
- arrange a personalised appointment, either by phone or in person, by calling 7955 7777

Phone appointments are available during business hours, and the team is visiting rural locations across the region for in-person appointments. Check the locations and dates on the website.

Find out more about the draft Rural Strategy and use online mapping here:

www.haveyoursay.midcoast.nsw.gov.au/draft-rural-strategy

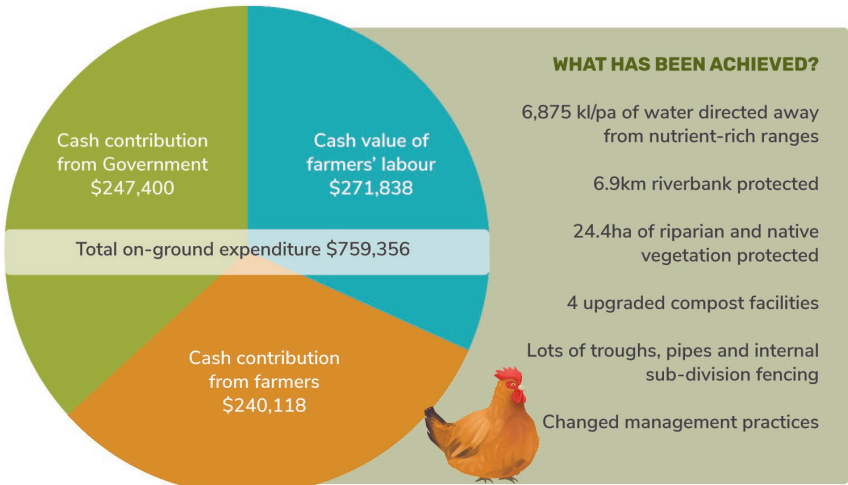


Several projects have used a portion of their funding to install fencing to manage stock along creeks.

PROJECT UPDATE

Beyond the Shed is now into its third year of funding and to date over 200 soil tests have been undertaken across 29 participating farms to profile their nutrient levels.

We've subsequently met all 29 farmers onsite to discuss their results, provide agronomic advice and work up potential projects. Following these initial meetings, almost \$700,000 has been invested onground to reduce the risk of environmental impacts on the Karuah, Myall and Wallamba Rivers and to improve these farmer's grazing businesses. This includes contributions from Government, and over \$500,000 from the farmers themselves through cash and labour contributions.



The result:

A whole suite of improvements to the local environment, including almost 7km of riverbank being protected. Internal sub-division fencing, installation of off-stream water troughs and guttering on sheds have also benefited farm productivity.

ADDITIONAL FUNDING for farmers through the Marine Estate Management Strategy

To date, funding available through the Beyond the Shed project has provided an incentive to try a few small initiatives around the farm. If everyone's happy with the results, then we'll look to work on bigger projects in the future.

In the meantime, two farms involved in the Beyond the Shed project have since undertaken larger projects through the Marine Estate Management Strategy program, being run through Local Land Services (LLS). These projects are improving the health of the river and have generally had a focus on fencing to manage stock around creeks and provision of off-stream watering.

If you're interested in expanding on your existing Beyond the Shed project with something bigger, contact us, or visit the LLS website to find out more:

<https://www.lls.nsw.gov.au/regions/hunter/grants-funding-scholarships>

CAPTURING ROOF WATER FROM YOUR SHEDS

The ranges on a free-range property (not-surprisingly) often have some of the highest Phosphorus levels on the farm. The closer to the shed, the higher the concentration of Phosphorous in the soil.

Stormwater flowing across these ranges can wash the Phosphorus into nearby rivers, particularly when there isn't much of a buffer between the range and waterway. Water pooling in holes and divots in the range has also been raised as an issue.

Maintaining good ground cover is recommended to reduce sediments and nutrients being washed off these ranges – but can be difficult to achieve while the ranges are in use, particularly in areas closest to the sheds where the birds congregate.

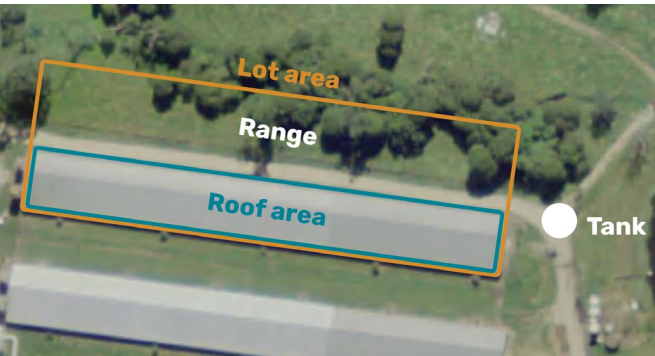
As an alternative, we looked at installing guttering on sheds on three farms to:

1. Reduce the flow of water across the ranges - in particular the first 10-20 metres adjacent to the shed
2. Reduce erosion where the concentrated flow of water off the shed roof hits the ground
3. Capture the water for use elsewhere on farm

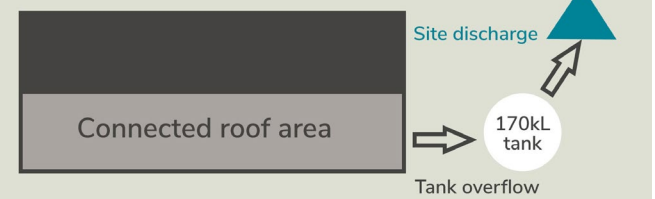
As an example, the model below shows a 600m² roof (one half of the total roof area) would capture almost 700kL per year. This 700kL will no longer be running through the the range to the river which is a good outcome for the environment, but is a lot of extra water which can now be used on farm.

Two other key findings were identified during this exercise:

- The bigger the better. With such a big roof even a heavy dew will put water into the tanks, so if you can, go bigger to provide more water-security for your farm
- Think about where the overflow will go. Particularly if the tank water isn't being used much, or an undersized tank is installed, overflows could simply flow back into the range, or cause an erosion issue elsewhere on the property



Connected roof area = 600m²
Total roof area = 1,300m²
Modelled allotment area = 2,450m²



SOLAR FARMS

Did you know the buffers you've around your sheds apparently make great solar farms? We've recently been contacted by Energy Forms looking for poultry farmers in our region for this reason.

We can't vouch for this company, but if this is something you're interested in contact Shane (details opposite).

If anyone does go through with this, please let us know and we'll be happy to share the results (for better or worse) with the wider local industry.



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UPCOMING PROJECTS

Streamlined Poultry Compost Development Approval

Initially through Beyond the Shed we looked at funding the construction of compost sheds for poultry farms to dispose of daily mortalities. However, we've found that construction of a compost shed on an intensive poultry farm requires a Development Application.

For now, we're running a pilot with one farmer who is keen to build a compost shed. They're applying for funding through the existing Beyond the Shed grants program (\$10,000) to offset the cost of building the shed, and we're hiring a consultant to develop the Development Application for the property. The consultant will also produce materials such as standard designs, factsheets and checklists to help streamline this process for farmers who want to build a compost shed, or apply for funding to do so, in the future.

If this pilot interests you, contact us to be kept directly in the loop.

Building the market for Poultry Litter: how to sell more sh*t

A common finding through the work undertaken so far is that grazing land on most poultry farms is already full of Phosphorous from historic application of poultry litter, and that applying more litter isn't hugely beneficial for pasture growth.

Selling litter to somewhere low in nutrients, or where high nutrient soils are required is a sensible alternative, but as you all know, it's not that simple.

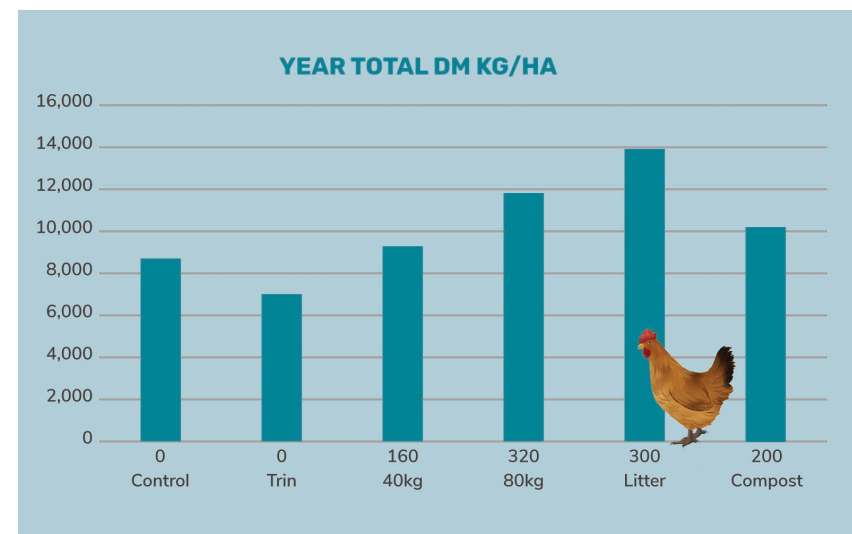
Even though poultry litter is a great fertiliser when used correctly, costs of transport, availability of litter, and other issues all reduce what it can be sold for at the farm gate. Through a partnership with Hunter Local Land Services' Sustainable Agriculture section we'll be working with a consultant to improve the information flow regarding the value of litter compared to other sources of nutrients available to farmers to improve production. The consultant will also investigate composting of litter as an additional market stream (eg for organic producers) and to reduce transport bulk. More information will be coming out on this soon.

LOCAL PASTURE TRIAL

The Beyond the Shed project has included an ongoing trial of various treatments for pasture on a poultry farm with high nutrient loads. Many farmers are using poultry litter as a Nitrogen-fertilizer, but it also includes significant amounts of Phosphorous which builds up in soils over time and finds its way into our waterways. The intent of the trial was to demonstrate the hypothesis of exchanging an N-based fertilizer for the continued application of poultry litter. Urea was trialed at an application rate of 40 and 80kg per hectare as an alternative, along with the application of composted bird mortalities.

The chart below shows total dry matter (DM) per hectare taken from each trial. Over the first year it was found that poultry litter was still the most successful fertilizer. 80kg of N was useful, but not as good as poultry litter and 40kg of N showed minimal benefit. Due to the already highly productive nature of the soils, **the Control (or 'do nothing' approach) still produced significant dry matter (DM). This could make it the most attractive of all since there are significant labour and material costs to apply urea and poultry litter.**

The compost trial was also quite positive, and as this is something that all farmers have on site and are generally unable to sell, it presents an argument for further improving onsite composting of bird mortalities for farmers. The trial will continue into a second year to further assess the benefits of improving soil health through the addition of compost, using alternative pasture mixes with low bloat legumes, liming of soils and other ameliorants that improve N uptake of grasses. In our area the added nitrogen is generally only needed on winter pastures. Naturalized Kikuyu pasture dominate paddocks in the summer and thrive on the warmer conditions with available moisture.



FREE NUTRIENT PROFILING AND AGRONOMIC ADVICE

Knowing what's in your soil is the first step to making the most of your pasture and stock. Right now you can join the 29 farmers in the area (including Bulahdelah and Dyers Crossing) who have been involved in the soil sampling and nutrient profiling component of this project.

As well as developing a nutrient profile for your property, we'll return with an agronomist to talk through the results and provide advice on improving your pasture. And best of all, it's free.

If you haven't been involved contact us soon, as this part of the project will close out soon. If you've been involved and found it worthwhile, please spread the word so others don't miss out.



MIDCOAST
council

BEYOND THE SHED

Poultry, poo and pasture news

Spring
2021

Welcome...

There's been a lot happening in our region lately so I've put together a newsletter to update you on some exciting poultry (Layer, broiler and turkey) projects that are occurring locally and whats coming up in the future.

This is also an opportunity to say thanks to all farmers who have been involved to date. Read on to find out just how much they have contributed, both to environmental improvement and on-farm productivity. As an industry, we reckon the results are pretty impressive - you should be proud of the investment that's been put in as well as the on-farm outcomes.

In this edition:

- Project update
- It's not too late to get involved
- Additional funding opportunity - Marine Estate Management Strategy
- On exhibition - Draft MidCoast Rural Strategy
- Capturing roof water from your sheds
- Upcoming projects
- Free nutrient-profiling and agronomic advice
- Local pasture trial

If anything sparks an interest, please get in touch with myself or Albert to find out more.



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PROJECT UPDATE ONLINE

Council and Local Land Services (LLS) staff recently presented Beyond the Shed to the Australian Stream Management Conference.

Thanks to farmer, Clayton Hattam, who joined us to provide some info off-the-cuff on the projects he's worked on. Jump onto YouTube to view the presentation: <https://youtu.be/hPtXxO2FHws>

ABOUT 'BEYOND THE SHED'

The Beyond the Shed project started as a pilot several years ago with former Great Lakes Council, Hunter Local Land Services and seven local poultry farms.

Our focus was on improving nutrient management (eg from litter stock piles or high nutrient paddocks) while improving the farm's business - specifically the ancillary grazing business that most poultry farms operate on the side... or in other words, focusing on those areas beyond the shed.

As part of the project, soil samples were taken from paddocks on participating farms to create a nutrient profile. Results were analysed and discussed on-farm in conjunction with an agronomist, to determine how to make the most of what each farm has in their soil.

Funding was available to undertake on-ground works, such as stock fencing, water troughs or upgraded composting facilities - all aimed at reducing the impact of high-nutrient areas on the river.

In 2019 funding from the NSW Environmental Trust allowed us to extend the project to other farms in the Karuah River catchment, as well as those in the Myall River and Wallis Lake catchment areas.

IT'S NOT TOO LATE to get involved!

The project is now in its final year so opportunities to be involved will wind up soon. You can still apply for up to \$10,000 in funding to implement a project to improve your grazing business while reducing impacts on the river. Priority will be given to farmers who haven't yet undertaken a project, but we're also happy to explore opportunities with farmers who have already successfully completed a project with us.

Give me or Albert a call to find out more, or fill in the application form included with this newsletter.