

creek to coast

MIDCOAST ENVIRONMENT NEWS



NEW YEAR, NEW LOOK!

Bold new look for Creek to Coast

Welcome to our new look Creek to Coast, the first edition for 2019!

The Creek to Coast is a quarterly newsletter aiming to build local community knowledge and awareness of projects being undertaken to protect and manage the environment in the MidCoast Region.

Going forward we will be looking to incorporate community stories, events information and more. If you have any ideas or suggestions for future issues please let us know by emailing environment@midcoast.nsw.gov.au.



COUNCIL WINS NATIONAL STORMWATER AWARD

MidCoast Council have won a prestigious national award for the improvements it has made to the water sensitive design policy that helps protect the health of MidCoast waterways.

The Water Sensitive Design Chapter of Councils Development Control Plan is now a concise, robust policy designed to suit our local area. Combined with updated standard drawings, mapping, education materials and guidelines, customers now have clear information to prepare the water quality aspects of their development applications.

"This award is testament to the power of collaboration. It is fitting that the success of this project was largely due to listening to feedback and working closely with leading local designers and stormwater planning consultants" Gerard Tuckerman, Manager of Natural Systems said. This project was completed in house by staff in the Strategic Planning and Natural Systems sections.

Announcing the awards, Dr Belinda Lovell, President of Stormwater Australia said "the finalists in all six categories had already been judged as the very best in their own state and so the winners really do represent the 'best of the best' in stormwater management from across Australia".



MidCoast staff members April McKay, Prue Tucker and General Manager Adrian Panuccio receiving the 2018 National Stormwater Award for Excellence.

SECRET HIDE-AWAY

New Bird Hide completed at Cattai Wetlands



Photo: Carey Molloy, Matrix Engineering

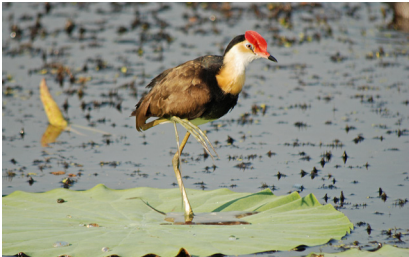


Photo: Ashley Carlson

Cattai Wetlands was once a degraded cleared landscape suffering from the effects of Acid Sulphate Soils. Since 2003 MidCoast Council have undertaken extensive rehabilitation work to restore its natural beauty, ecological values and improve water quality. The work has been successful with the Wetlands now home to a diverse range of bird species, including the threatened comb-crested jacana and the black-necked stork (jabiru), as well as other native fauna including kangaroos, wallabies and goannas, an abundance of plant species, and the endangered giant dragonfly.

With the Wetlands internationally recognised as a birdwatching hot-spot Council, in consultation with a number of community organisations have constructed a new bird-hide which allows visitors to get up close and personal with the birds on the wetland without disturbing them.

The hide was hand-built by Council staff and a local builder using a design that screens the visitor's approach and includes a number of viewing windows at a variety of heights. The hide is unique as it is built over the water rather than on the edge of the wetland allowing guests to be surrounded by birdlife.

The bird-hide is not only for local and visiting bird watchers it can also be utilised as an environmental education resource for our community. This project was funded by the environmental levy and is part of Council's commitment to supporting the local community.

WHAT IS ECOLOGICAL BURNING?

New technique being utilised at Cellito Beach

Ecological burning is the reinstatement of a fire regime that will promote and enhance ecological function, as well as protection of important ecosystems from future damage through uncontrolled and intense wildfire. It is an essential management tool designed to promote regeneration of endemic plant communities.

On 31 July 2018 MidCoast Council in partnership with Bungwahl Rural Fire Service, Worimi Elder Rob Yettica, TIDE Rangers from both Gloucester and Taree and Kleinfelder bushfire consultants undertook a low intensity ecological burn utilising cultural practices at Bald Hill, part of Cellito Beach in Pacific Palms. The effects of the fire on the restoration of coastal grasslands at the site will be monitored into the future.

Natural Systems Manager, Gerard Tuckerman said the long awaited burn commenced mid-morning on the headland once optimal conditions were reached.

"This is an exciting opportunity to examine the effects of fire on management of natural areas, many of which have been scientifically proven to require fire in order to regenerate" Mr Tuckerman said.

Unlike Hazard Reduction Burns, an ecological burn is conducted at the appropriate time of year so as to promote regeneration; and in the case of Bald Head, to support the native grasses which are an Endangered Ecological Community under pressure from woody shrub invasion due to fire absence.

MidCoast Council was the recipient of NSW Environmental Trust funding to investigate the use of fire to restore both ecological and cultural values at the grassy headland in Pacific Palms. Working with agency and community partners, Council has completed both weed control works and fire management on the headland, as well as restoring the adjacent stand of Littoral Rainforest with a comprehensive targeted bush regeneration program.

Council will monitor the effects of the burn and implement appropriate fire regimes into the future to assist in the maintenance of the grassy headland community as well as follow up with maintenance weed control programs on site.

"Ecological burning is a new tool in Council's restoration works program, which traditionally may only have involved the use of weed control and revegetation. It has broad application across a range of ecosystem types in our area."

HOW HEALTHY ARE OUR WATERWAYS?

Healthy waterways and catchments keep our local towns and communities thriving. So how do we know how our waterways are faring? Every year, MidCoast Council teams with experts from the Office of Environment and Heritage to assess the health of our local waterways. The result is the MidCoast Waterway and Catchment Report Card, a way of checking that the work that Council undertakes with our communities and partners is making a difference.

The 2018 Report Card was presented to Council by Dr. Peter Scanes from the Office of Environment and Heritage in Bulahdelah with over 50 community members in attendance enjoying breakfast by the beautiful Myall River. Attendees then joined the Natural Systems team on a guided walk through the nearby Bulahdelah Plain Wetland, a Council managed site with high conservation significance.

As part of this year's release a Catchment Celebration was held throughout the MidCoast region allowing residents to learn more about the important projects being undertaken to help protect water quality in our catchments. These events included walks through Cattai, Pacific Palms and Arlington Wetlands as well as a boat cruise along the Wallamba River and a marine debris clean up in the Browns Creek area in the Manning Catchment. The events were a great success with over 250 residents in attendance.



Official results released on the banks of the Myall River.



Walking through the Pacific Palms Wetland.



Marine debris clean up event at Browns Creek



HOW DID WE DO IN 2018?

This year's results showed stability within our catchments with all but three sites maintaining or improving their grade from 2017.

Mid-Wallamba and Wallis Lake improved their grade while Khappinghat, Coolongolook and Myall Lake dropped a grade.

Small changes in condition are to be expected in natural systems. Rainfall in particular can play a large role in the results and low rainfall levels within the sampling period lead to improvements in water clarity and additional algal growth.

PROTECTING THE MANNING RIVER

Work begins on Manning River Estuary Coastal Management Program

We believe rivers need people, and people need rivers. As such the health of the Manning River, surrounding lands and waterways are integral to the health of our communities that live, work and visit the Manning.

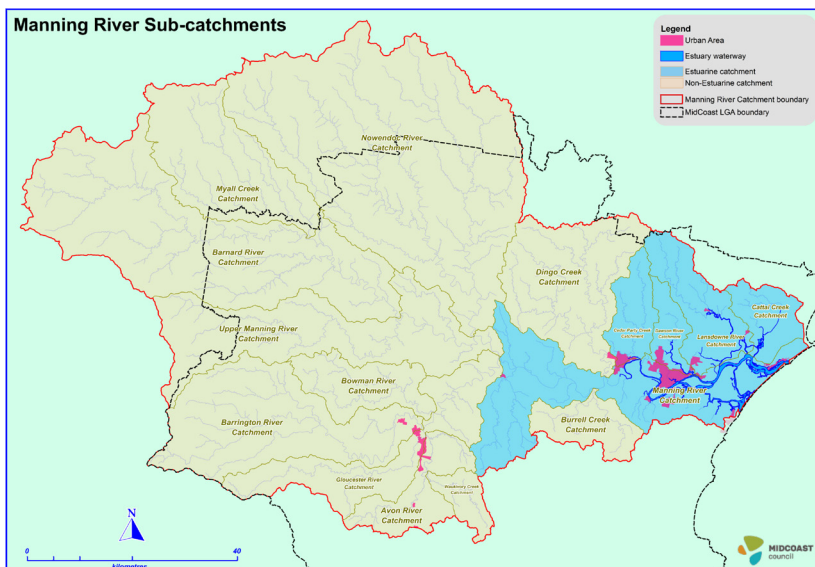
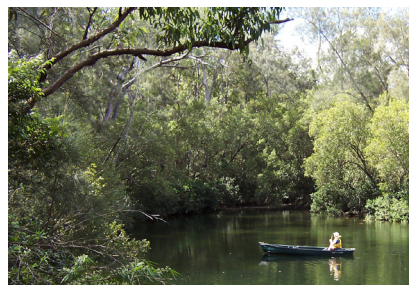
The Manning Catchment is the largest catchment in MidCoast Council's (MCC) region covering an extensive area of about 8,420 km². The Manning Estuary is 32.3 km² with complex inter-connecting channels and a double river delta entrance. The Manning River Catchment is bounded by the New England Tablelands to the north, to the west by the Mount Royal Ranges, and to the south east by the Barrington Tops. The catchment's vast and productive landscape and natural environment support our region's economy, and a long history of spiritual, cultural and recreational uses.

Approximately 50,000 people call this catchment home, with most of the population living near the estuary and the coast. Thanks to funding from the Office of Environment and Heritage, and MCC's Environmental Levy, Council are developing the 'Manning River Estuary Coastal Management Program' that will inform management and investment decisions to help improve the health of the river and estuary. Whilst there have been plans for parts of the Manning River in the past, this approach is holistic and will consider the state of the entire catchment, and its influence on the estuary - bringing together science and local knowledge as one.

This year, our focus is to listen to what people are interested in, concerned about, and what their aspirations are for the Manning. We are committed to taking the time needed to make well informed decisions, build relationships and develop a participative decision making process that encourages involvement and ultimately a wider sense of custodianship of our rivers and landscapes.

We are seeking local knowledge, stories, and opinions. If you wish to know more, get involved or just share information with us, please call Catchment Officer Alisha Madsen on 02 6591 7187 or email alisha.madsen@midcoast.nsw.gov.au.

Keep an eye out for friendly staff members from MidCoast Council's Natural Systems team – we will be out and about talking to locals, community groups, farmers and local businesses in the Manning River Catchment and Estuary throughout 2019.



PROTECTING THE WALLAMBA RIVER

Restoration and revegetation works in Darawank

Works to restore wetland and foreshore habitat in the Lower Wallamba River are in full swing with the second stage of a 3 year Environmental Trust funded project recently wrapping up.

Bush regeneration contractors have implemented follow-up weed control works targeting priority invasive weeds including morning glory, ground asparagus, lantana and camphor laurel across 165 hectares of public land adjoining both sides of the Wallamba River between Darawank and North Tuncurry.

Council's Environmental Officer, Peter Goonan said "Bush regeneration works have achieved excellent results with a substantial reduction in the level of weeds across the landscape. Native vegetation is now regenerating which will have positive long term benefits for the water quality and biodiversity values of this area".

Native wildlife have also benefitted from a month long fox control program. In May 2018 fox control occurred across the project area and surrounding lands including the Tuncurry Waste Management Facility, Halliday's Point Wastewater Treatment Plant and Council lands at the southern end of Minimbah Road.

Council's nesting box program continues to show great results with monitoring undertaken during August showing consistent use by hollow dwelling native animals including sugar gliders and both brush-tailed and ring-tailed possums.

The project now moves into the final stage which will include further bush regeneration works, feral pest animal controls and awareness raising events.



Before and after bush regeneration works.



BUSHLAND FRIENDLY GARDENS

The Backyard Bushcare initiative is well underway in Pacific Palms, as locals and Council work together to protect the environment and enhance the bushland of this beautiful area.

Weeds are a serious threat to the Australian environment. They reduce biodiversity, displace native species, create soil disturbance and erosion issues affecting water quality and once established become difficult to remove. 65% of the weeds currently invading bushland areas have escaped from urban gardens.

Since commencing the program in Pacific Palms, Council has inspected 999 backyards and found an impressive 237 weed free properties. A range of weeds were found on the remaining properties with Asparagus the most common, making it a target weed over the next two years.

Backyard Bushcare is about making sure that what happens in our backyards protects the natural environment that we all love. Council is asking residents to make just a few simple changes to help create a more Bushland Friendly garden.

- Pull out Bitou Bush, pull out Asparagus weeds!
- If you are getting new plants for your garden, make sure they are either native or non-seeding!
- Control other environmental weeds.

For further information on the Backyard Bushcare Program go to www.midcoast.nsw.gov.au/backyardbushcare



SECRET LIFE OF SQUIRREL GLIDERS

Protecting their habitats in Forster

Squirrel gliders are tree-dwelling, nocturnal mammals. They have a flap of skin that extends from their wrists to their ankles and allows them to glide long distances between trees. Unfortunately, the species is listed as threatened as a result of loss of habitat and impacts from exotic animals, such as cats.

On-ground works to enhance habitat for the squirrel glider within Council Reserves through south-east Forster are underway with funding assistance from the NSW Government through its Environmental Trust.

These funds are being utilised for bushland restoration works consisting of weed removal, pest animal controls, nesting box installation, food tree plantings, rubbish removal, as well as the delivery of community education programs.

The Forster area currently holds a significant population of these special animals. Mat Bell, Senior Ecologist with MidCoast Council said, "We know that numbers are quite good and that they are breeding, but the area of habitat that the Forster gliders live in is very restricted. Past clearing and development has fragmented the habitat and we know that we need to take special action if we are to preserve gliders in the long-term in Forster."

The first stage of the project has seen bush regeneration works carried out across 53 hectares of public land between The Lakes Way near the Great Lakes College Forster Campus and Karloo Street.

One of the key aspects of the project was to install specially-constructed nesting boxes in areas of the reserves where natural hollows are in short supply. Gliders rely on hollows for shelter and breeding. In total, fifty seven nesting boxes have been placed into trees in the project area. Other works carried out have included the removal of 653kg of rubbish from the project area and den fumigation to control foxes. Stage two of the project is now underway.



Photo: Ashley Carlson

PREVENTING EROSION

Works commence on Gereeba Island

Erosion is a significant environmental issue affecting the health and stability of our waterways. Works to address on-going riverbank erosion and enhance aquatic habitat at Gereeba Island in the Wallamba River have recently been completed.

The project utilised biodegradable coir logs made from coconut fibre to provide direct erosion control along 300m of shoreline. In December 2017, the logs were placed on the bed of the river, stacked 3 high and secured with wooden stakes and coir twine to buffer the eroding riverbank from wave action caused by boat wash. Approximately 1000 Grey Mangroves were also planted and will provide permanent bank stabilisation and increase aquatic habitat in the long term once they have established.

The logs suffered some initial damage during the busy summer holiday period due to high levels of boat activity in the Wallamba River. Some running repairs were undertaken in Autumn 2018 and the erosion wall has held up well in the period since. Council's Environmental Officer, Peter Goonan said "The project has proven successful in the early stages. Sediment is being captured behind the coir logs and mangroves are establishing well. With a direct reduction in erosive forces, we are also now seeing a natural recruitment of River Mangroves that had not been seen on this stretch of the riverbank prior to this work taking place".

The works are aimed at improving water quality and will benefit recreational fishers through enhanced aquatic habitat for fish and crustaceans. The works have been made possible with funds from the Recreational Fishing Trusts Habitat Action Grants and MidCoast Council's Environmental Levy.



Biodegradable Coir Logs provide erosion control and help mangroves establish stabilising the bank.

LAND FOR WILDLIFE

Your chance to get involved!

Land for Wildlife was initiated in Victoria over 30 years ago in response to declining numbers of birds on farms. Farmers and conservationists banded together to build a program that would help reinstate habitat for these birds, and in doing so upskill landholders to look after habitat for wildlife. In our region, Karuah Great Lakes Landcare and Manning Landcare have worked together with Council over many years to provide site visits and assessments for landholders. There are now more than sixty Land for Wildlife properties in the MidCoast Council area, with properties ranging from Bulliac and Upper Landsdowne in the north, all the way down to Limeburners Creek and Pindimar in the south.

Tallowfield, owned by Lesley and Bruce Lane is one of the most recent properties to join Land for Wildlife. Their 16 hectare property on the outskirts of Pindimar is a real jewel with paperbark swamp stretching to dry sclerophyll forest and open grassy woodlands. Squirrel gliders, phascogales as well as swamp and red-necked wallabies have all been recorded on the property. Glossy black-cockatoos frequently stop in for a feed and several large hollow bearing trees on the property show there's potential for lots of other species to be found on the property. "The property is already protected as a recognised Wildlife Refuge, but Land for Wildlife seemed like a good opportunity to build some local knowledge and meet other interested landholders in the area." Says Leslie.

Land for Wildlife is a completely voluntary program - the only cost to joining is time, a bit of effort and an interest in making the most of the 'wild' parts of your property.

The establishment of the new Biodiversity Conservation Trust also means that Land for Wildlife properties can access funding to help undertake actions that will protect native wildlife and habitat on their land. Several properties in our area have already been successful in utilising this funding program. Christine Du Fresne, whose property up in the hills near Bulahdelah State Forest, received funding to employ a bush regenerator. "Most of my property is pretty free of weeds, but there is a big patch of lantana on the northern boundary which this funding has allowed me to take care of. The bush regenerator has been out once, and will be back to follow-up after summer"

If you'd like to find out more about the program, or join up contact Drew Morris via email at andrew.morris@midcoast.nsw.gov.au.

Over 2000 hectares of agricultural land are now being managed by local landholders for the benefit of our native wildlife.



Council staff member Karen Bee, Land for Wildlife member Chris Pennington and with Land Care president Robyn Lamond.



Tallowfield is now part of the Land for Wildlife program.



TAKE A WALK IN A WETLAND

Endangered coastal wetland restoration completed

One of the most important benefits that wetlands provide is their capacity to maintain and improve water quality. A three year project to restore an endangered coastal wetland on the Dawson River is nearing completion. With funding assistance provided through the NSW Environmental Trust and Council's environmental levy, significant work has been undertaken to remove invasive weeds and encourage the regeneration of threatened vegetation communities including Saltmarsh and Swamp Oak Forest. Primary weeding was undertaken on 13.7 hectares and to prevent edge effects and erosion 567 native tubestock were planted along weeded perimeters.

To promote the ecological significance of the area and demonstrate the importance of wetlands, this project also involved the construction of a 430m raised boardwalk through the wetland down to the Dawson River, and the installation of a series of new interpretive signs.

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