

Environmental Levy Update

January 2015

In November 2013 we adopted an Environmental Action Plan that was developed in close consultation with the community to identify local environmental issues of concern.

To help fund the projects in the plan, an environmental levy in the form of a special rate variation was also introduced in July 2014 for a period of 5 years.

The levy will raise just over **\$1.3 million dollars** each year for projects that address a range of issues grouped under the following themes:

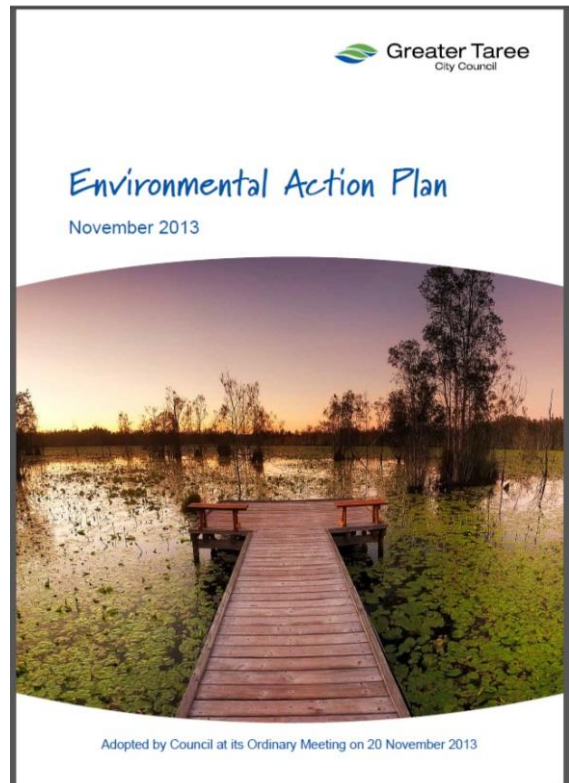
- **Estuary & Water Quality**
- **Biodiversity**
- **Sustainability & Environmental Performance**
- **Dredging & Foreshore Improvements**

One of the benefits of the environmental levy is that it enables us to attract additional funding from the State and Federal Governments, as most grant programs require matching funding from the applicant.

As of 31 December 2014 we have been successful in receiving almost **\$750,000** in external funding to assist in implementing environmental projects funded through the levy.

This update contains a summary of the achievements and projects undertaken or commenced during the first 6 months of the environmental levy works program as of 31 December 2014.

It should be noted that some of the levy funding remains unallocated as we are still waiting on the outcome of a number of grant applications.



Estuary & Water Quality

Sand tracing study – Old Bar Beach

In partnership with MidCoast Water Council received grant funding from the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage to undertake a study to trace the movement of sand from various locations of the coastline along Old Bar Beach. This data will enable a more informed and accurate understanding of the relative significance of longshore and cross-shore processes due to tidal, wind-wave and swell-wave transport and the fate of material transported and eroded from the beaches in particular.

The sediment tracing technique is an established methodology for measuring sediment transport. It has been applied in many studies in Australia and overseas (including for the US Army Corps of Engineers, Port of Townsville, North Queensland Bulk Ports, and Port Hedland) and provides a reliable means of determining sand transport. Fluorescent tracer material which mimics the size and density of the sand has been trenched into the beach at the low tide mark as shown below.



Above: Deployment of tracer material along Old Bar Beach

Samples are collected along the beach and offshore at predetermined locations using a mechanised sampling device. Fibre-optic laser equipment is then used to detect the tracer material in the samples to gain an understanding of where the tracer material is moving to along the coastline.

It is anticipated that results of the study will be available in mid 2015.

Estuary & Water Quality

Riverbank restoration



Above: Eroding riverbank at Harrington Waters

The planning and design of two projects to stabilise actively eroding sections of riverbank at Harrington Waters and Manning Waters is currently in progress, with works planned to be undertaken in early 2015. Both sites are contributing significant amounts of sediment to the river which impacts water quality and has the potential to smother important aquatic habitat like seagrass beds in the lower estuary.

Reducing the amount of sediment entering the river improves water quality which in turn results in positive impacts for our aquatic ecosystems, and the protection and viability of the Manning's oyster, fishing, and tourism industries.

Big Swamp project

The Big Swamp project recently received a highly commended at the NSW Local Government Environment Awards in the Natural Environment Protection and Enhancement (on-ground works) category. The Big Swamp project commenced in late 2011 and is being undertaken in collaboration with the University of NSW (Water Research Laboratory). With funding assistance provided by the Federal and State Government, significant earthworks have been undertaken in a bid to remediate over 700 hectares of land recognised as one of the worst acid sulfate soils 'hotspots' in NSW.

The project's aim is to improve the water quality of the lower Manning River estuary by reversing the effects of drainage which had caused the soil to become acidic and leach into the waterway. Acid runoff can have serious impacts on the river system and can result in fish kills and poor oyster production. This can be overcome by restoring the area's natural hydrology, reintroducing tidal flows through the removal of floodgates, and resurrecting the original wetland community that once thrived here.

An additional grant recently awarded to us through the NSW Estuary Management Program with matching funding provided by our environmental levy will see the continuation of this project and further improvements to the health of the Manning River.



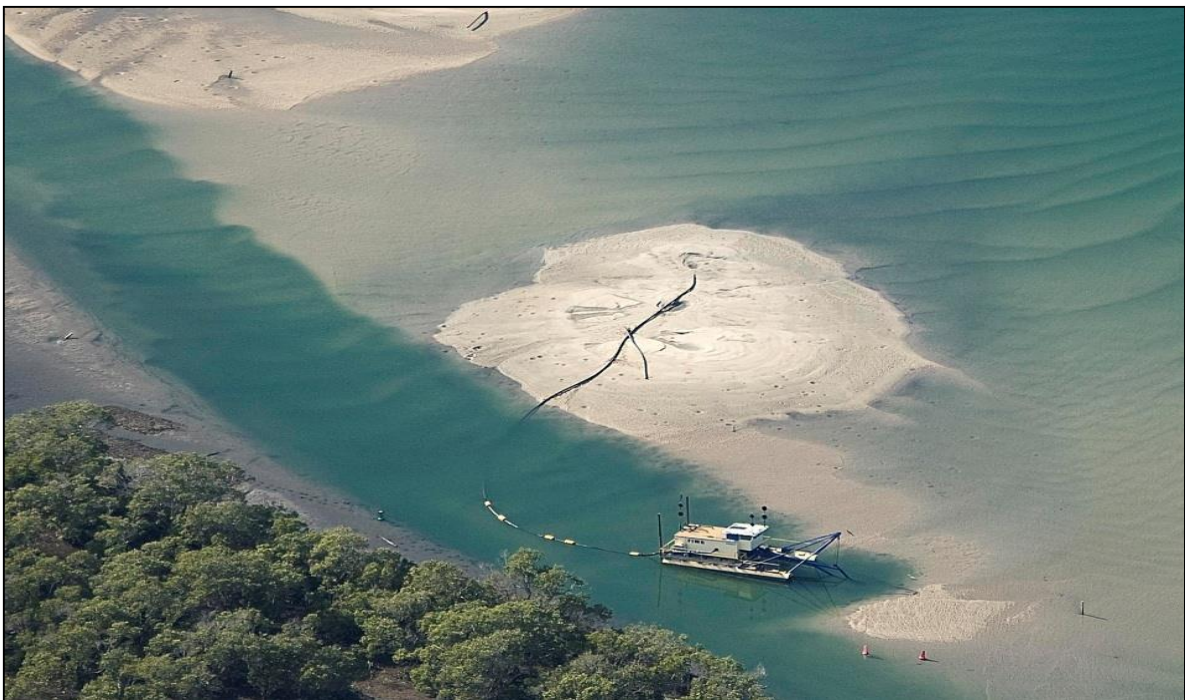
Left: Council's Environmental Officer, Bob McDonnell (middle) accepting the award from the NSW Minister for the Environment Rob Stokes (left) and the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage Chief Executive Terry Bailey (right).

Dredging & Foreshore Improvements

Maintenance dredging – Manning River

The dredging of priority navigation channels identified within the *Manning River Maintenance Dredging Strategy* has continued with funding support provided through the NSW Rescuing our Waterways Program. These areas include Scotts Creek and Cowans Chanel, which are both located within the Farquhar Inlet near Old Bar. The dredging is being undertaken in partnership with the Farquhar Inlet Management Group, a not-for-profit community group who purchased their own dredge to assist Council and the State government in maintaining safe waterways for boaters.

Council has also been successful in obtaining matching funding of \$30,000 from the State government to undertake further maintenance dredging within the Harrington Backchannel, which is planned to take place in early 2015.



Above: Dredging of the Farquhar Inlet

Harrington Lagoon Facelift



Above: Turfing of the Harrington Lagoon foreshore

Further improvements have also been made to Harrington Lagoon following the dredging of the lagoon earlier this year. The dredging was undertaken in partnership with FIMG with funding provided through the State Government to reinstate a popular swimming spot.

In December around 1,300 square metres of grass turf was laid on the foreshore of the lagoon to improve the recreational amenity of the area in readiness for the busy holiday season.

Biodiversity

Regeneration of our bushland reserves

Bush regeneration works involving weed control and revegetation are currently being undertaken to improve the condition of our public bushland reserves including sites at Hallidays Point, Old Bar, Taree, Wingham, Tinonee and Harrington.

Many of these areas contain endangered ecological communities and provide habitat for threatened plants and animals including the Koala and the Brush-tailed Phascogale.

Improving our urban waterways

A project to improve the condition of vegetation communities located along some of our urban waterways commenced in October 2014. Project sites are located on the Manning River at Manning Waters and Kendall Reserves, on Browns Creek at Butea Drive Reserve, and on the Dawson River behind the Taree Recreation Ground.



Heavy weed infestation at Manning Waters Reserve

All of these sites currently have heavy infestations of environmental weeds that limit the vegetation's ability to function as a stormwater filter and to provide habitat for local wildlife. The presence of weeds also restricts the ability of the community to access and explore these popular foreshore areas. Ongoing weed control and the replanting of native species will enhance the resilience of these areas to cope with the increasing pressures of urban development.

Biodiversity

Cattai Wetlands

Council's application to the Federal Government for a Green Army Team for Cattai Wetlands has been approved. The Green Army program provides opportunities for young Australians aged 17-24 years to gain training and experience in environmental and heritage conservation fields and explore careers in conservation management, while participating in projects that generate real benefits for the environment.

The project involves weed control across all vegetated areas of the site by manual removal or using techniques such as cut and paint and spraying. Other activities include maintaining assisted revegetation areas. These actions will help support the natural regeneration of the site by reducing weed competition, enhance threatened species habitat and endangered ecological communities including coastal wetlands, and strengthen the resilience of the site to function as a major wildlife corridor. The team of 9 participants and 1 supervisor will commence in March 2015 and run for a 6 month period.

Another exciting project currently in development for the Cattai Wetlands is the construction of a bird hide. Cattai Wetlands is a popular bird watching area which is gaining international recognition. Over 170 bird species have been recorded at Cattai to date including the endangered Jabiru and Comb-crested Jacana. These sightings are regularly recorded by our local bird observer clubs who believe the provision of a bird watching facility would greatly enhance their ability to view the local birdlife without disturbing them and provide a great educational resource. There are currently no specialised bird watching facilities in the region with the closest bird hide approximately 2 hours drive away at the Hunter Wetlands Centre at Shortland.



Sustainability & Environmental Performance

Improving our environmental performance

To ensure we are meeting our statutory obligations and properly considering the impact of our activities on the environment, we recently engaged consultants to conduct training of staff in Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Assessment, and a refresher course on Erosion and Sediment Control.

We are also in the process of updating Council's Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Assessment Guidelines to make it easier for staff to implement the correct methods for integrating Aboriginal cultural heritage assessment and planning requirements into our current processes and procedures.

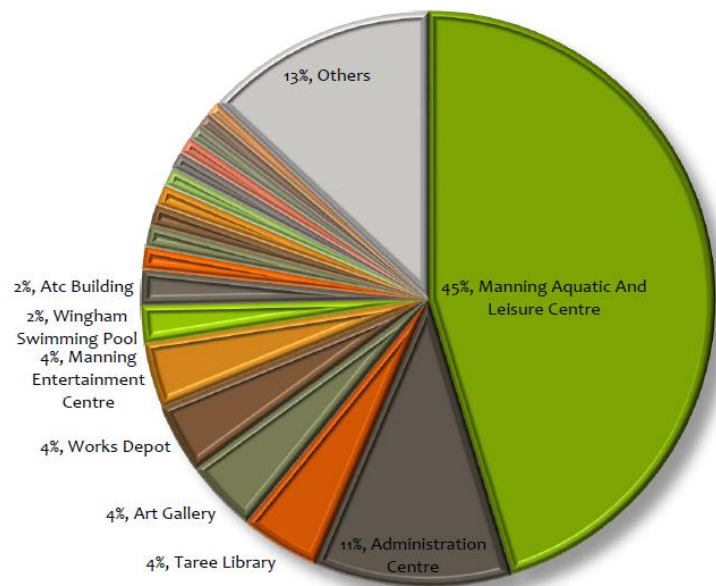
Resource Efficiency

Council subscribes to Planet Footprint's Environmental Scorekeeping Service to receive quarterly energy and water consumption monitoring and performance benchmarking reports for all of its building and facilities, street lighting and vehicle fleet. More detailed consumption reports are also provided for Council's larger sites, which includes the Works Depot, Administration Building, the Manning Entertainment Centre (MEC) and the Manning Aquatic Leisure Centre (MALC), which accounts for 45% of Council's overall electricity consumption.

Prior to each quarterly report being sent out, Planet Footprint staff review the data in consultation with staff to identify properties and assets where energy and water performance appears to be less than satisfactory.

Council's total electricity consumption for 2013-14 decreased by 496GJ or 137,777kWh, which resulted in a cost saving of \$72,000. Meanwhile Council's annual water consumption increased by 11,037kL, which can be largely attributed to the lower than average rainfall experienced this year and the resultant increase in the irrigation of Council's parks and sporting fields.

Energy audits recently undertaken at the MALC, MEC, Works Depot and Administration Building have identified a range of measures to further reduce Council's electricity consumption. Staff are currently investigating the feasibility of installing solar panels at the Works Depot, which is estimated to reduce electricity use by 40%.



Sustainability & Environmental Performance

State of the Manning

The State of the Manning Report Card was released in November 2014 and summarises the results of a water quality monitoring program undertaken in the Manning River estuary during 2013/14. Receiving an overall grade of B has placed the Manning River in the top half of all estuaries in NSW in terms of ecological health.

The report card has revealed that while overall the estuary is relatively healthy, periods of poor water quality were experienced in the mid to upper zones of the estuary, particularly following rainfall. Poor water quality can be characterised by high turbidity levels and excessive algae growth. Turbidity in the Manning River occurs as a result of sediment laden runoff from areas where vegetation has been removed and the soil is exposed, and from gravel roads and eroding riverbanks; whereas high levels of algae are caused by stormwater runoff that contains nutrients from urban areas and farmland, and from cattle accessing the waterway.

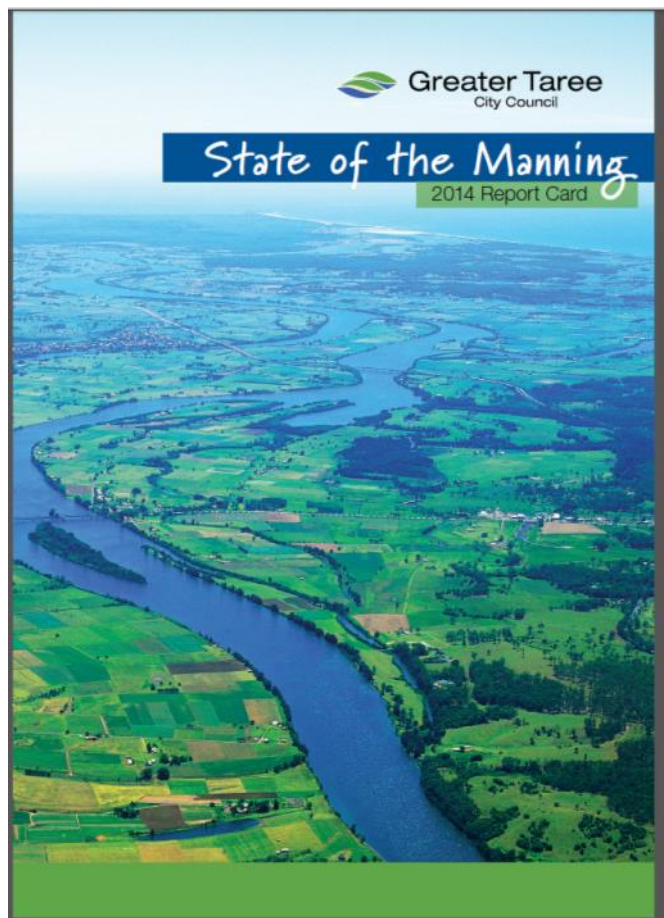
Monitoring the river provides a greater understanding of the health of the estuary and assists Council and other land managers to identify and target areas where further investigation and action is required.

Over \$550,000 of funding recently provided by the State Government through the Estuary Management Program will enable Council to implement a range of projects aimed at improving the health of the river including:

- Riparian fencing
- Riverbank stabilisation
- Roadside erosion control
- Dairy effluent management
- Acid sulfate soil remediation
- Urban stormwater management
- Weed control
- Saltmarsh protection
- Fish barrier removal

Funding through this program will also enable Council to continue the monitoring of the Manning River for an additional 2 years.

Copies of the Report Card are available at Council's libraries and Administration Centre, or can be viewed on Council's website.



Possible Future Projects

We are awaiting the outcome of funding applications submitted for the following projects:

- NSW Recreational Fishing Trust - to install a new pontoon and fish cleaning table at the Bohnock boat ramp.
- NSW Fish Habitat Action Grant - to undertake the restoration of 700 metres of severely eroding riverbank at Harrington.
- NSW Environmental Trust Restoration and Rehabilitation – to undertake wetland restoration works, construct a walking track and install interpretive signage within the Taree Recreation Ground adjacent the Dawson River.
- NSW Better Boating Program - for new and improved boating facilities within priority areas identified in the draft Manning-Great Lakes Regional Boating Plan.
- NSW Environmental Trust Restoration and Rehabilitation – to undertake acid sulfate soil remediation in partnership with NSW Fisheries at Big Swamp.



Above: Eroding riverbank at Harrington

Want to find out more?

If you would like to find out more about any of the above projects please contact Tanya Cross, Team Leader Environmental Services, on 6592 5248.

Project Summary 2014/15

Theme	Major Projects	Levy	Grant	Project Cost	Target Date	Status
Estuary & Water Quality	Cattai Wetlands Restoration Project	\$50,000	-	\$50,000	June 2015	Bush regeneration works in progress
	Big Swamp Acid Sulfate Soil (ASS) Remediation Project	\$170,000	\$150,000	\$320,000	Dec 2015	Discussions with landholders commenced
	Manning River Floodplain ASS Management Plan	\$44,000	\$54,000	\$98,000	Dec 2015	To commence in early 2015
	Marine Debris Clean up & Education Project	\$7,000	\$13,000	\$20,000	June 2015	In progress in partnership with Local Land Services & TIDE
	Manning River Riparian Rehabilitation Project (inc. Harrington Waters foreshore restoration)	\$77,000	\$77,000	\$154,000	Dec 2015	To commence in early 2015
	Improving the Health of the Manning River (inc. Browns Creek water quality & dairy effluent management)	\$72,000	\$72,000	\$154,000	Dec 2015	To commence in early 2015
	Manning River Riparian Fencing & Roadside Erosion Control	\$55,000	\$55,000	\$110,000	Dec 2015	To commence in early 2015
	Racecourse Creek Remediation Works, Old Bar	\$15,000	-	\$15,000	June 2015	To commence in early 2015
	Sand Tracing Study, Old Bar Beach (Stage 2)	\$20,000	\$135,000	\$155,000	June 2015	Sampling in progress
	Totals	\$505,670	\$533,000	\$1,076,000		
Biodiversity	Bush regeneration projects within Councils bushland reserves	\$100,000	-	\$100,000	June 2015	Works have commenced at 30 sites across the LGA
	Aboriginal cultural heritage interpretative materials – Cattai Wetlands	\$10,000	-	\$10,000	June 2015	Design in progress in consultation with Aboriginal groups
	Manning Coastcare Littoral Rainforest Regeneration Program	\$20,000	-	\$20,000	June 2015	Works in progress
	Landcare Support	\$10,000	-	\$10,000	June 2015	William Wynter Park tree planting in progress
	Dyers Crossing Weir – Fish Barrier removal	\$116,600	\$116,600	\$233,200	Dec 2015	Note: variation to funding required which will reduce project cost significantly. Planned to commence early 2015 in 2 stages
	Totals	\$256,600	\$116,600	\$373,200		

Project Summary 2014/15

Theme	Major Projects	Levy	Grant	Project Cost	Target Date	Status
Sustainability & Environmental Performance	Energy & Water Monitoring Program	\$5,000	-	\$5,000	June 2015	Ongoing quarterly reports provided
	Sustainable Manning Valley Website	\$2,500	-	\$2,500	June 2015	Hosting fee
	Hunter Regional Environmental Management Strategy	\$22,000	-	\$22,000	June 2015	Participation ongoing
	Energy Audits	\$3,500	-	\$3,500	Dec 2014	Completed for Admin, MEC, MALC & Depot
	Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Assessment Guidelines	\$6,450	-	\$6,450	Jan 2015	Staff training & draft guidelines completed
	Installation of solar panels at the Works Depot	TBD	TBD	TBD	Mar 2015	Quotations in progress
	Protecting the Health of the Manning Project (Yr 2)	\$20,000	\$20,000	\$40,000	June 2015	Water sampling in progress
	Totals	\$59,450	\$20,000	\$79,450		
Dredging & Foreshore Improvements	Maintenance Dredging of Farquhar Inlet Old Bar (in partnership with FIMG)	\$40,000	\$30,000	\$70,000	March 2015	Dredging of Cowan & Scott Channels completed. Mud Bishops channel to commence in early 2015
	Maintenance Dredging of Harrington Backchannel (in partnership with FIMG)	\$40,000	\$40,000	\$80,000	June 2015	Environmental assessment in progress – planned to commence in early 2015
	Harrington Lagoon Foreshore Improvements	\$8,000	-	\$8,000	Dec 2014	Completed
	Manning Waters Foreshore Restoration	\$15,000	-	\$15,000	June 2015	Design in progress
	Wingham Wharf Foreshore Upgrade	\$12,000	-	\$12,000	Dec 2014	Completed
	Taree foreshore pathway extension	TBD	-	TBD	June 2015	Design & costing in progress
		Totals	\$115,000	\$70,000	\$185,000	
	OVERALL TOTALS	\$936,720	\$739,600	\$1,713,650		