



Bushfire and drought impacts on waterway health

Prolonged rain following a bushfire and/or drought, while a welcome relief, poses a health-risk to creeks, rivers, lakes and estuaries.

The combined effect of drought and fire has reduced groundcover and riparian vegetation in both bushland and farmland, leaving large areas of bare soil. Heavy rains have washed sediment, ash and organic matter into waterways with a number of detrimental effects.

Fine sediment blocks light in the water column, clogs the gills of fish and smothers micro-habitat for aquatic invertebrates living on the riverbed. Waterbugs, vital for river food webs, also lose their habitat.

Ash is high in carbon, phosphorous and nitrogen. Once in the water, it is consumed by bacteria which consume oxygen in the process.

Drought causes low flows and isolates refuge pools. All these conditions cause stress and mortality to fish, platypus and the Manning River Helmeted Turtle.

MidCoast Council is monitoring conditions and identifying potential risks. We are doing a risk assessment of run-off from the firegrounds using GIS mapping, as well as visual inspections throughout the catchment and working with the Department of Environment, Planning and Industry to survey for platypus and Manning River helmeted turtle.



What can you do?

- Protect refuge pools for wildlife. Fence-out cattle with temporary or permanent fencing and provide alternative water-points.
- If you have a rural property, any action you can take to slow down run-off using vegetation, mulch, logs, leaky weirs and bunds will help reduce run-off into the catchment.
- Avoid removing remaining vegetation cover, which will further expose soils, increase erosion risk and cause run-off.
- Fish kill: Report to the Department of Primary Industries Fishers Watch Hotline on 1800 043 536
- Platypus: Report stressed or injured platypus to MidCoast Council on 02 6591 7243
- Manning River Helmeted Turtle: record the location, take a photograph and call Andrew Steed at the department of Planning, Industry and Environment on 02 6659 8276
- Rescue stressed, injured or at-risk native animals and call FAWNA 24hrs on 02 6581 4141