

Cooks River Alliance

# Annual Report 2012-2013



 **CooksRiver**  
ALLIANCE

Ashfield  
Bankstown  
Canterbury  
City of Sydney  
Hurstville  
Marrickville  
Rockdale  
Strathfield

# CONTENTS

CONTENTS	2
MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR	3
ABOUT THIS REPORT	4
THE COOKS RIVER	5
THE ALLIANCE	6
PLANS & GOVERNANCE	13
PROGRAM 1: CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAM	14
PROGRAM 2: CATCHMENT-WIDE MONITORING PROGRAM	15
PROGRAM 3: DEVELOPMENT OF AN INFORMATION PORTAL	16
PROGRAM 4: IMPLEMENTATION OF SUBCATCHMENT PLAN ACTIONS AND OTHER PRIORITY WORKS	17
PROGRAM 5: EXPANSION OF THE INTENSIVE CORRECTION ORDERS PROGRAM	20
PROGRAM 6: COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY	21
PROGRAM 7: CLIMATE CHANGE RESILIENCE PROGRAM	24
CONCLUSION	25

# MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

The Cooks River is a significant waterway that has, over the last 20 to 30 years, seen important remediation from an industrial past. The motivation for improvements to the River can largely be attributed to the work and dedication of community members and Local Government.

In late 2011, the Cooks River Alliance was launched by eight councils in the Cooks River catchment: Ashfield, Bankstown, Canterbury, City of Sydney, Hurstville, Marrickville, Rockdale, and Strathfield. The Alliance was formed to assist councils in working with each other and with communities, to increase health of the Cooks River catchment. We welcome discussions with potential new Alliance members.

This Annual Report 2012-2013 shows the Alliance maturing and growing during our second year. The Alliance worked hard during winter 2012 to conclude comprehensive Management and Action Plans, setting directions to achieve our mission for a healthier catchment. I am pleased to say that we have been recognised for the impressive work on these Plans, receiving the Local Government NSW annual Natural Environment Policies, Planning and Decision Making Award.

The Alliance has made important headway on its Action Plan. We have been creating resources, coordinating projects, organising events and assisting member councils. Two River Health reports have been published in partnership with our sister organisation, the Georges River Combined Councils' Committee. Community events were organised, such as National Tree Planting Day, which celebrated and contributed to catchment Health.

The Alliance has set the wheels in motion for significant future benefits. Numerous community partnerships have been developed to foster collaboration and people and groups already having a positive impact on the River. For example, we have established three governance Board positions for community members. Also, university students have been engaged to develop educational tools and provide communications strategies. These will help the Alliance connect with the diverse demographics and cultures of our Cooks River catchment.

Our longer-term focus has initiated a series of climate change recommendations for member councils. This works towards achieving an aligned and co-ordinated approach across our catchment region. In July 2013, the Alliance received an exciting \$2 million grant from the Australian Government's Caring for Our Country initiative. The money from this grant will form a four-year project, including significant on-ground improvements for our waterways, as well as stimulating engagement and education in communities all across the Cooks River catchment.

As Chair of the Cooks River Alliance Board, I am honoured to help direct many exciting steps being taken towards creating a healthier Cooks River catchment.



**Mayor Brian Robson, City of Canterbury**

Chair, Cooks River Alliance

# ABOUT THIS REPORT

This *Cooks River Alliance Annual Report* documents the progress made by the Cooks River Alliance over 2012-2013, the second year of operation.

The report begins with an overview of the Cooks River – describing its geography, major tributaries, history, and significance.

The next section of the report describes the Cooks River Alliance, including the recent addition of Community Representatives to the Alliance Board.

The report then outlines one of the major achievements between July and November 2012: the finalisation of the *Cooks River Alliance Management Plan* and the *Cooks River Alliance Action Plan*, and the development of a *Terms of Reference* and a *Code of Meeting Practice*.

The final sections document the progress of the Alliance in terms of the priority Programs and Performance Measures of the Action Plan.



# THE COOKS RIVER

The Cooks River is a 23 kilometre long urban waterway. The River starts at Graf Park, Yagoona and travels north-west through to Chullora. The River then turns south-west before flowing into Botany Bay at Kyeemagh, next to Kingsford Smith airport.

As the River makes its way from Graf Park to Kyeemagh, it is joined by Greenacre Creek, Cox Creek, Cup and Saucer Creek, Wolli Creek, Bardwell Creek, Alexandria Canal (Sheas Creek) and Muddy Creek.

The Cooks River catchment is highly urbanised and serves as part of a stormwater system for the 100 square kilometres of watershed. From south Strathfield to Canterbury, the River is a concrete channel and many of its tributaries have also been converted to concrete or brick-lined channels. The shared path and parks along the river are used for recreational activities, and the tidal sections support significant areas of mangroves, salt marsh and bird, and fish life. Wolli Creek flows through important remnant bushland, providing the most significant contiguous wild space in the region.

Almost since the beginning of European settlement, the Cooks River has suffered extreme degradation. Urbanisation compounded by complexities such as catchment size, a large population, and outmoded sewage and stormwater infrastructure continue to frustrate improvement. Advances in water management can greatly improve the environmental and recreational qualities of the Cooks River catchment.



# THE ALLIANCE

Councils have long been collaborating on the health of the Cooks River, the catchment and tributaries. A history of Cooks River activity (Figure 1) gives an overview of many of the initiatives and impacts on the River and catchment since the early 1990s, up to the development of the Cooks River Alliance.

In 2011, the Cooks River Alliance was formally established through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding by eight member councils.

The Alliance councils are: Ashfield Council, Bankstown City Council, City of Canterbury, City of Sydney, Hurstville City Council, Marrickville Council, Rockdale City Council, and Strathfield Council.

The Alliance is made up of eight of the thirteen councils who have Cooks River catchment lands, and welcomes discussions with potential members.

The Alliance secretariat is hosted generously by Strathfield Council. The Alliance operates at four levels: Board, Executive Management, Steering Committee and staff.



## Table of Cooks River Activity from 1990s

- 1991 - NSW Minister for Land and Water Conservation establishes the Cooks River Catchment Management Committee
- 1993 - Sydney Water begins restoration works at Eve Street Wetlands in Arncliffe. Other restoration works commence in partnership with communities e.g. Marrickville Landcare and Bankstown Bushland Society
- 1998 - Chullora Freshwater Wetlands constructed, first large scale water quality improvement project
- 1998 - Cooks River Foreshores Working Group was formed
- 1999 - Preparation of the Cooks River Stormwater Management Plan by an Association of Councils in the Cooks River
- 2000 - State government replaces the Catchment Management Committees with Catchment Management Boards that cover larger areas
- 2004 - State government match funds for the Cooks River Foreshores Improvement Program, which led to 36 regional, council and community projects
- 2005 - State government replaces Catchment Management Boards with Catchment Management Authorities with expanded areas
- 2006 - State government begins replacing failing steel sheet piling with more natural river banks
- 2007 - OurRiver project funded by the NSW Environmental Trust
- 2008 - Federal Government funds the Cooks River Urban Water Initiative and works through the SMCMA to implement \$2M worth of on-ground works
- 2011 - Cooks River Alliance formed and eight councils commit to a three-year MoU

Figure 1: Table of Cooks River Activity from 1990s

## The Board

The Cooks River Alliance Board is the key governance and decision-making body of the Alliance. The Board is made up of one councillor from each member council.

The year of this Annual Report has seen important and exciting Board additions. In June 2013, three Community Representatives were appointed and welcomed onto the Board. Organisations preceding the Alliance have had a long history of working closely in collaboration with local residents. The recruitment process for Board members was promoted by member councils to communities through media releases on member council websites and advertised in newspapers. The Alliance received a strong response from applicants all across the catchment. In a Hurstville City Council media release, Councillor Philip Sansom, Deputy Chair of the Alliance, describes how: "Only through a combined approach can we meet the environmental challenges and protect the long-term health of the Cooks River".

The Cooks River Alliance Board members are:

### **Councillor Brian Robson, Mayor of City of Canterbury (Chair of the Board)**



Brian grew up in working class suburbs of Melbourne among families of many nationalities – giving him early insight into the different cultures which make up the Australian cultural landscape. Brian was elected to Canterbury Council in 1999 and became Mayor in 2011. He has served on many Committees and Boards

both within and outside of Council. Brian has always been involved in his community and considers being a Councillor as simply an extension of that role.

Councillor Brian Robson can be contacted at:  
[mayors-office@canterbury.nsw.gov.au](mailto:mayors-office@canterbury.nsw.gov.au)

### **Councillor Philip Sansom, Hurstville City Council (Deputy Chair of the Board)**



Philip has had a long and distinguished career in local government. He has been a Councillor for 23 years, and during his time on Hurstville City Council, he has held the position of Mayor and Deputy Mayor on several occasions. A teacher for 28 years, he is now employed with the NSW Department of

Education and Training. For the past 21 years, he has also been involved in Natural Resource Management. Philip has provided Ministerial policy advice as well as assisted in the development of the Georges Regional Environment Plan and Botany Bay Regional Environmental Plan.

Councillor Philip Sansom can be contacted at:  
[psansom@hurstville.nsw.gov.au](mailto:psansom@hurstville.nsw.gov.au)

## **Councillor Lucille McKenna, Mayor of Ashfield Council**



Lucille has lived in the Ashfield area for over 17 years, and was elected to Ashfield Council in 2004. She has been on the executive of various community organisations and women's organisations over many years, and is passionate about supporting youth and women to reach their full potential.

Councillor Lucille McKenna can be contacted at:  
[Lucille.McKenna@bigpond.com](mailto:Lucille.McKenna@bigpond.com)

## **Councillor Christine Forster, City of Sydney**



Christine was elected to the City of Sydney Council in September 2012. Prior to that, she had a long history of involvement in her local community. She remains an active volunteer, mainly in the areas of homelessness and around issues related to the GLBTI community. Christine has over 25 years experience working

at Platts, as the company's most senior writer covering the Australian energy sector. Christine is committed to the principles of genuine sustainability.

Councillor Christine Forster can be contacted at:  
[cforster@cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au](mailto:cforster@cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au)

## **Councillor Khal Asfour, Mayor of Bankstown City Council**



Khal is a lifelong resident of Greenacre, and is honoured to serve the people of Bankstown as Mayor. Khal believes that, among other things, Bankstown's strength and future success will depend on the unity and individual contributions of the community.

Councillor Khal Asfour can be contacted at: [mayor@bankstown.nsw.gov.au](mailto:mayor@bankstown.nsw.gov.au)

## **Councillor Vic Macri, Marrickville Council**



Victor grew up in the Marrickville area, and was first elected as a Councillor in 2004. He is passionate about working with the community, and about the Cooks River. In his free time, Victor likes to make models, cycle and play touch football.

Councillor Victor Macri can be contacted at:  
[vmacri@marrickville.nsw.gov.au](mailto:vmacri@marrickville.nsw.gov.au)



## **Councillor Shane O'Brien, Mayor of Rockdale City Council**



Shane O'Brien has been a Councillor for Ward 5 since 2008. He is serving his second consecutive year as Mayor of the City of Rockdale and working closely with Council to deliver an ambitious program of new and upgraded facilities for the Rockdale community. As a member of the Alliance

he supports the need for sustainable urban water management to improve the health of our river systems.

Councillor Shane O'Brien can be contacted at:  
[sobrien@rockdale.nsw.gov.au](mailto:sobrien@rockdale.nsw.gov.au)

## **Helen Hume, Community Representative**



Helen has been a resident of Canterbury City Council for almost two years, and regularly walks, cycles, and spends family time at the parks which dot the Cooks River banks. Before moving to Sydney, Helen spent nine years overseas in Manchester where she was impressed by the significant

improvements in cleaning up the waterways. Helen believes that it is important to be proactive and act locally. Helen is currently the Faculty Manager in Science at the University of Technology, Sydney.

Helen can be contacted at: [Helen.Hume@uts.edu.au](mailto:Helen.Hume@uts.edu.au)

## **Councillor Andrew Soulos, Strathfield Council**



Andrew has enjoyed cycling the Cooks River canal for over twenty years. He is a pharmacist, and served as Deputy Mayor of Strathfield Council from September 2012 to September 2013. In the future, Andrew wants to see a healthier Cooks River with even more wildlife along the path.

Councillor Soulos can be contacted at:  
[andrew.soulos@strathfield.nsw.gov.au](mailto:andrew.soulos@strathfield.nsw.gov.au)

## **John Butcher, Community Representative**



John has lived close to the Cooks River since 1984, and has had a strong involvement with the River and Wolli Creek. He has been a part of Friends of Wolli Creek for about ten years, and since his retirement from full-time work in 2002, his level of involvement has increased. He is president of the Cooks River

Valley Association (which includes being a member of the Streamwatch group and the Mudcrabs), a member of the Marrickville Cooks River Committee, and an active participant in local sub-catchment working groups. John feels a strong connection with Cooks River and is passionate about working with the community to restore the River to health.

John can be contacted at:  
[jjspiesbutcher@optusnet.com.au](mailto:jjspiesbutcher@optusnet.com.au)

## Paul Thomas, Community Representative



Paul is keenly aware of the abundant wildlife everywhere along the Cooks River. He is a wildlife rescuer for WIRES – rescuing wildlife on the River including pelicans, egrets, swans, ibis, cormorants, spoonbill and other water birds. Paul also runs a fishing website (bragnrelease.com) which is

based on catch and release fishing with the conservation of fisheries a priority. Paul has also been cycling the Cooks River Cycleway nearly every day for the last few years. While cycling, fishing and rescuing along the Cooks River, Paul has met and kept in contact with many individuals and groups. He hopes to bring people's concerns, as well as the River's day-to-day happenings, under focus at the Cooks River Alliance.

Paul can be contacted at: [pt@bragnrelease.com](mailto:pt@bragnrelease.com)

## Board Meetings

Board meetings are attended by Board Members, member council staff and Alliance staff. In the 2012-2013 financial year, Board meetings were held on:

- ◇ 5 November, 2012 – hosted by Rockdale City Council. Board members who attended were: Cr Robson, Cr Sansom, Cr Macri, Cr O'Brien, and Cr Soulos.
- ◇ 13 March, 2013 – hosted by Bankstown City Council. Board members who attended were: Cr Robson, Cr Asfour, Cr Forster, Cr McKenna, and Cr Soulos.
- ◇ 26 June, 2013 – hosted by Strathfield Council. Board members who attended were: Cr Robson, Cr Forster, and Cr Soulos.

Council personnel who participated in the Board meetings, who were not part of the Board were:

**James Carey,**  
**Manager Sustainable Development,**  
**Bankstown City Council**

**Erika Roka,**  
**Manager Urban and Environmental Strategy,**  
**Rockdale City Council**

**Stephen Kerr,**  
**Director City Planning and Development,**  
**Rockdale City Council**



Figure 1 March 2013 – Alliance Board members with Intensive Correction Order trailer, generously sponsored by Sydney Water

## Executive and Steering Committee

The Executive Committee manages the Alliance Project Manager, monitors progress, and oversees composition of Board meeting agendas. The Executive Committee is made up of the Alliance Chair Cr Brian Robson, Deputy Chair Cr Philip Sansom, a representative from the host council Strathfield, and representatives from two other member councils.

The Steering Committee meets every two months to facilitate delivery of the Alliance Management and Action Plans, direct the work of Alliance staff and action groups, and to make recommendations to the Alliance Board. The Steering Committee comprises at least one representative from each member council and all Alliance staff.

The commitment and dedication of the Executive and Steering Committee over the 2012-2013 period was the single most important driver for Cooks River Alliance achievements. The enthusiasm and expertise of member council staff has been vital for Alliance progress.

Council personnel who were part of both the Executive and Steering Committee were:

**Nell Graham,**  
Team Leader Environmental Strategy,  
City of Canterbury

**Jan Orton,**  
Manager Environmental Services,  
Marrickville Council

**Jim Fraser,**  
Acting Manager Environmental Services,  
Marrickville Council

**David Dekel,**  
Coordinator Environmental Strategy,  
Rockdale City Council

**Cathy Jones,**  
Corporate Strategy Coordinator,  
Strathfield Council

Employees who participated in the Steering Committee included:

**Hazel Storey,**  
Team Leader Sustainability,  
Ashfield Council

**Sarah Kamarudin,**  
Sustainability Officer,  
Ashfield Council

**Cherie Blackburn,**  
Catchment Management Planner,  
Bankstown City Council

**Daniel Smith,**  
Team Leader Urban Policy and Planning,  
Bankstown City Council

**Vila Gupta,**  
Catchment Management Planner,  
Bankstown City Council

**Emma Howcroft,**  
Environmental Policy Officer,  
City of Canterbury

**Jordan Moy,**  
Sustainability Officer,  
City of Canterbury

**Bhakti Devi,**  
Project Manager Decentralised Water Master Plan,  
City of Sydney

**Chris Derksema,**  
Sustainability Director,  
City of Sydney

**Peter Shields,**  
Technical Services Manager,  
City of Sydney

**Ian Curtis,**  
Manager Environmental Sustainability,  
Hurstville City Council

**Nicole Boyd,**  
Environmental Sustainability Coordinator,  
Hurstville City Council

**Damon Bassett,**  
Acting Team Leader Biodiversity,  
Marrickville Council

**Jean Brennan,**  
Coordinator Water and Catchments,  
Marrickville Council

**Victoria Currie,**  
Team Leader Biodiversity Environmental Services,  
Marrickville Council

**Alex Vandine,**  
Environmental Strategist,  
Rockdale City Council

**Jeremy Morgan,**  
Manager Technical Services,  
Rockdale City Council

**Madeline Hourihan,**  
Environmental Project Officer,  
Rockdale City Council

## Alliance Staff

The Cooks River Alliance employs a small team to manage the day-to-day activities of the Alliance, drive the implementation of the Cooks River Alliance Management Plan and Action Plan, and to maximise the efficient use of member councils' limited resources.

In 2011-2013, the Alliance Team included:

**Joanna Lamb,**  
Project Manager September 2011 – July 2012

**Chris Hudson,**  
Project Manager February 2013 – present

**Shefali Chakrabarty,**  
Environmental Engineer, October 2011 – present



## Management and Action Plans

A significant achievement between July and November 2012 was the finalisation of the *Cooks River Alliance Management Plan*, and the *Cooks River Alliance Action Plan*. The varied nature of council areas, organisational size and capacity, and residents' relationship with the River and tributaries, all contributed to extensive and robust debate.

The mission of the Alliance is:

*"Councils working together with communities for a healthy Cooks River catchment."*

The Alliance achieves the mission by focussing on six areas:

1. Sustainable Urban Water Management
2. Biodiversity
3. Community Action
4. Capacity Building
5. Knowledge Management
6. Climate Change Resilience

In November 2012, the Management and Action Plans were adopted by the Board.

### MEDIA MENTION

[Alliance reveals how we'll work towards a cleaner Cooks](#)

"The Cooks River Alliance has unveiled its blueprint for a healthier waterway, and it involved equal parts education and vegetation. The management plan, adopted at a meeting held late last year, features a push to improve the river's natural habitats, improve water management, build better connections between the community and the Cooks, and develop a smartphone app mapping the river's bike paths..."

Jessica Clement, *Canterbury-Bankstown Express*, 9 January 2013.

The Action Plan states that each year an Annual Report is to be presented to the Board, documenting progress made under the Action Plan.

This report documents the progress of the Alliance in terms of the Action Plan seven priority programs which are:

1. Capacity Building Program for councils on water management and other catchment issues
2. Catchment-wide Monitoring Program
3. Development of an Information Portal
4. Implementation of subcatchment plans actions and other priority works
5. Expansion of the Intensive Correction Orders Program
6. Communications Strategy
7. Climate Change Resilience Program

This report also highlights how each achievement addresses the Performance Measures of the Action Plan Programs.

## Governance

To provide for sound governance and administration of the Alliance, a detailed Terms of Reference and Code of Meeting Practice were developed.

The Terms of Reference "*detail the framework for collaboration between each party in relation to the operation of the Cooks River Alliance organisational and decision making roles and responsibilities*".

The Alliance Code of Meeting Practice "*provides for the convening and orderly conduct of meetings of the Cooks River Alliance Board and Executive Committee*".

The Board adopted the Terms of Reference and Code of Meeting Practice at their March 2013 meeting.

# PROGRAM 1: CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAM

## Capacity Building

### Context

A central role of the Cooks River Alliance is to provide and facilitate increases in capacity and ability for member councils.

### Achievements

Following a member's workshop held 26 March 2013, it was determined that a member needs analysis would not be pursued – in favour of relevant training opportunities being created and promoted directly to members, including in association with on-ground works.

Discussions with the City of Sydney and Bankstown City Council regarding training opportunities were progressed. The Alliance began working with Arup on presenting a seminar: 'Cooks River - Adapting through Uncertainty', resulting from Arup's work with the Sydney Coastal Councils Group.

The Alliance worked closely with the Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Authority (HNCMA) to develop a joint capacity building program for councils, to be funded under the Australian Government *Caring for Our Country* initiative. As part of that funding, the Alliance has received a \$166,500 allocation for member council capacity building, over four years.

### Performance Measures

- ◇ Progression towards Capacity Building Program
- ◇ \$166,500 in savings / benefits for member councils

### Looking Ahead

Training in a software package MUSIC (Model for Urban Stormwater Improvement Conceptualisation) will to be rolled out to all members.

# PROGRAM 2: CATCHMENT-WIDE MONITORING PROGRAM

## River Health

### Context

Environmental monitoring of the Cooks River catchment is essential to measure progress towards our mission. Monitoring by member councils has taken place through two programs, Riverscience and River Health.

Riverscience was run by Canterbury, Marrickville and Rockdale councils. Starting in 2005, Riverscience monitored and tracked changes in several ecological indicators at key sites.

River Health is run by a sister organisation to the Alliance, the Georges River Combined Councils' Committee (GRCCC), who have been monitoring the health of the Cooks River Catchment since 2011.

The River Health monitoring program was grant funded federally, with the GRCCC secured monies for the program concluding mid 2013.

### Achievements

Two community sampling events were held as part of River Health, on 6 October 2012 at Coolibah Reserve, Arncliffe and 21 October 2012 at Freshwater Park, Strathfield. These events trained attendees to collect and identify macroinvertebrates (waterbugs) and provide important community exposure to the work of the Alliance.

The results of River Health monitoring were delivered to member councils in two comprehensive technical reports, and made accessible in Report Cards. The 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 River Health Report Cards were published by GRCCC in consultation with the Alliance, giving a cogent summary of River Health findings.

In June 2013, the Alliance Board approved \$70,000 for continuation of River Health monitoring in the Cooks River, when they called for agreement with GRCCC on a comprehensive review of the River Health and Riverscience programs.

Action Plan Program 2 directs the amalgamation of the Riverscience and River Health programs, and the Alliance has led this process during the reporting period. The Alliance Project Manager facilitated a key workshop with GRCCC and member councils from both organisations,

finding agreement on a review of Riverscience and River Health. This review will provide advice on the best single monitoring program for both the Cooks and Georges Rivers.



Figure 3 February 2013 – Alliance Chair Cr Robson (Mayor of Canterbury) and GRCCC Chair Cr Naji Najjar (Councillor of Bankstown City Council) celebrating the publication of the 2011-2012 River Health Report Card

### Performance Measures

- ◇ Preparation / publishing River Health reports
- ◇ All member councils participating in monitoring and review of programs
- ◇ 66 sampling events
- ◇ Progression towards reporting recommendations, under the review of programs

This achievement also contributes to Program 1 performance measures:

- ◇ Development of a Capacity Building Program for councils

### Looking Ahead

The Alliance anticipates continuing to work closely with GRCCC on monitoring. A consultant will work with member councils from the GRCCC and the Alliance, as part of an independent review of the Riverscience and River Health programs. Outcomes will include recommendations to achieve the best possible program within available resources.

The Alliance Community Engagement and Education Coordinator will work to considerably increase community involvement in this program.

# PROGRAM 3: DEVELOPMENT OF AN INFORMATION PORTAL

## UTS Shopfront – Integrated Communications students project

### Context

Action Plan Program 3 focuses on updating the Alliance website, so it can become a hub of information on the Cooks River. An integrated approach to online communications is important to create an online presence that is accessible, engaging, and produces a strong online community.

### Achievements

Through UTS Shopfront, the Alliance has been working with two teams of five UTS students to develop on-line integrated communications ideas for the Alliance, including web design and mobile app options, to unify and promote Cooks River resources. Students began working with the Alliance on developing ideas and recommendations for how to design and develop an inspiring and interactive digital platform to produce care for, and connection to, the Cooks River. Their work will focus on producing practical ideas, assisted by digital platforms, for engaging people living in the Cooks River Valley catchment on how to initiate and grow their relationship with the Cooks River.

To help the students better understand the Cooks River catchment, in August 2013 the Alliance and UTS Shopfront shared the cost of engaging Bikewise, to provide bicycles and lead a Cooks River ride for the student teams.

### Performance Measures

- ◇ Reviewing and updating of website, including website statistics tool

This achievement also contributes to Program 6 performance measures:

- ◇ Development of a communications strategy

### Looking Ahead

The Alliance will commission a new website in 2014, taking relevant ideas from the UTS student work. The Alliance will work with partners to develop an innovative online educational portal.



Figure 4 August 2013 – Bike ride tour of the River with UTS students



# PROGRAM 4: IMPLEMENTATION OF SUBCATCHMENT PLAN ACTIONS & OTHER PRIORITY WORKS

## Quadruple Bottom Line Assessment of Subcatchment Management Plans On-Ground Works

### Context

Prior to the formation of the Cooks River Alliance, OurRiver was a project undertaken to improve the health of the Cooks River catchment. The OurRiver project ran from 2007 to 2011 and produced six subcatchment management plans for: Ashbury Subcatchment, Rookwood Road Subcatchment, Upper Wolli Creek Subcatchment, Munni Street Subcatchment, Eastern Channel East Subcatchment, and Strathfield South Subcatchment.

Program 4 of the Alliance Action Plan involves the development and presentation of a Prioritisation Report for the implementation of Subcatchment Management Plans.

### Achievements

One of the Alliance's most significant achievements between July and October 2012 was the Quadruple Bottom Line (QBL) assessments of the subcatchment management plans, developed as part of the Cooks River Sustainability Initiative. Quadruple Bottom Line assessments consider environmental, social, governance, and economic factors.

A custom-built QBL decision support tool was created by the Alliance Environmental Engineer, to enable member councils to comprehensively assess the water sensitive urban design (WSUD) projects that were identified in subcatchment management plans. The support tool provides for weighting and assessment of multiple variables, including: environmental benefits, cost/benefit analysis, maintenance requirements, institutional capacity and local community support.

Five of the member councils elected to participate in the QBL assessment workshops between July and October 2012. Sixty-nine WSUD projects were assessed from six subcatchment management plans. Out of these, twenty projects were identified as feasible for further design.

Geotechnical investigations and surveys for three on-ground project sites (Emery Avenue, Butler Reserve and Madeline Street) was commissioned and completed

between January 2013 and May 2013. An expenditure of around \$31 000 to complete these investigations was funded from the Alliance reserve funds. Functional design for the rain garden at Emery Ave (Bankstown Council) and Butler Res (Hurstville Council) is currently underway, and work for locating the Sydney Water water main at Madeline St (Strathfield Council) has been completed.

### Performance Measures

- ◇ Presentation of Prioritisation Report to Board

The achievement also contributes to Program 1 performance measures:

- ◇ Working towards mentoring partnership

### Looking Ahead

The top seven WSUD projects were selected for the Alliance's successful \$2 million Caring for Our Country grant application.

# PROGRAM 4: IMPLEMENTATION OF SUBCATCHMENT PLAN ACTIONS & OTHER PRIORITY WORKS

## Caring for our Country grant applications and funded project

### Context

The Management Plan identifies the seeking of grant funding as a core Alliance function. Program 4 of the Action Plan seeks the implementation of on-ground works identified in subcatchment management planning.

### Achievements

In 2013, the Alliance invested considerable time and energy undertaking a series of grant applications to the Australian Government under their *Caring for our Country* initiative. In July 2013, the Alliance was very pleased to report that the final and largest of those applications had been approved, with \$2 million granted over four years for the project titled: *We Are All Cooks River People: Realising Community Waterway Visions*.

The four year project will deliver eight on-ground works across the Cooks River catchment area, which will filter stormwater and remediate wetlands. Bio-retention systems (rain gardens) will reduce pollutants at seven priority sites across the catchment, and Landing Lights Wetlands in Rockdale will be remediated.

The Cooks River Alliance, together with member councils, will work closely with local communities to engage and educate: especially on how residents can help the health of the Cooks River and tributaries such as Wollie Creek. A place-based water sensitive homes program will work to change household behaviour.

*"For many years the Cooks River councils have demonstrated the value of a united approach to the River, especially when applying for significant grants for significant works"* – Cooks River Alliance Chair, Councillor Brian Robson.

This project builds on existing community partnerships, and combines environmental interpretation with community cultural development. The project will increase connections for the Cooks River catchment population. Links will be built between communities, and with ecosystem processes and waterways. Activities will seek to include traditional knowledge surrounding catchment history and significance.

The *Caring for our Country* initiative has several themes, including 'building indigenous community capacity for natural resource management'. The Alliance envisages the realisation of this theme by working closely with Aboriginal advisory committees to member councils. Following Alliance representations, the Aboriginal advisory committees of Ashfield, Bankstown, Canterbury and Marrickville Councils have indicated interest in the project. Other partners sought during the grant application process included: the Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council, Hurstville Aboriginal Advisory Committee, HNCMA Aboriginal Advisory Committee, and the City of Sydney Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Advisory Panel.

### MEDIA MENTION

[How you can help the Cook's River survive and thrive](#)

"...the grant will also go towards extensive community education and engagement. Mr Hudson said urbanisation has taken its toll on the Cooks River and its rain gardens is a great way to clean up the river while aesthetically improve our community..."

Joanne Tran, *Our Strathfield*, 17 May 2013.

### MEDIA MENTION

"\$2M is close to the amount The Cooks River Alliance has received from the Australian Government's Caring for our Country initiative and grants program to deliver works to filter stormwater and remediate wetlands"

*Inner West Courier Inner West*, 17 September 2013.

# PROGRAM 4: IMPLEMENTATION OF SUBCATCHMENT PLAN ACTIONS & OTHER PRIORITY WORKS

## **Performance Measures**

- ◇ Progression towards Water Sensitive Urban Design project designs
- ◇ 3 funding applications submitted
- ◇ Progression towards concept design briefings
- ◇ Progression towards community planting days

This achievement also contributes to Program 1 performance measures:

- ◇ Funding gained for Capacity Building Program (\$166,500 from grant)
- ◇ Provision for substantial savings of training costs to councils

This achievement also contributes to Program 6 performance measures:

- ◇ Media mentions

## **Looking Ahead**

The Alliance looks forward to working very closely with member councils and community partners to deliver the project.

# PROGRAM 5: EXPANSION OF THE INTENSIVE CORRECTION ORDERS PROGRAM

## Intensive Correction Order Program

### Context

An Intensive Correction Order (ICO) is an order of imprisonment made by a court which directs that the sentence is to be served by way of supervised community service. Detainees undertake cleaning in open space areas for Rockdale, Marrickville, Canterbury and Strathfield councils, such as the Cooks River catchment.

### Achievements

The Intensive Correction Order Program proceeded well in the first half of the period, with outcomes reported in the table below. Summary of ICO outcomes from July – December 2012:

	PERFORMANCE INDICATOR	JULY 2012 – DECEMBER 2012
Rubbish	Supervised time	1444 hours
	Supervision time	130 hours
	Litter removed	7.11 tonnes
	Sharps removed	174 nos
Weeding	Supervised time	621 hours
	Supervision time	73 hours
	Branches/weeds removed	72 bags

The second half of the reporting period saw a major restructure of the Department of Corrective Services, with the Cooks River activities suffering as a result. Whilst outcomes were delivered, they were not reported to the Alliance, and efforts to regain a Departmental focus on the River commenced.

Several meetings with different staff from Corrective Services were held, without substantial results.

### Performance Measures

- ◇ Four member councils participating

### Looking Ahead

Significant structural changes within the Department of Corrective Services are requiring concerted efforts by the Alliance to bring the Program back on track, following which expansion can be considered.



# PROGRAM 6: COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

## Community Education Resource

### Context

The Alliance is committed to developing a communications strategy that engages with the culturally and linguistically diverse communities around the Cooks River Catchment.

### Achievements

The Alliance has partnered with a team of UTS Visual Communications students to create a non-language-specific, clear, and simple visual support material to help community educators communicate in person to small groups of community members by all demographics in the Cooks River catchment, particularly those who speak English as a second language.

The project is also being undertaken in partnership with UTS Shopfront, and The Ethnic Communities Council Sustainable Living Project – a community based organisation that engages people of varying language and cultural backgrounds in a variety of government initiated projects.

The educational resources developed will be about the Cooks River and the domestic water sensitive behavioural changes people can make.

### Performance Measures

- ◇ Development of Communications Strategy material

### Looking Ahead

The material provided by the UTS Visual Communications students has been of high quality. The Alliance Communications Action Group will be reviewing the material and how it might be utilised for multiple Alliance communications purposes.

## National Tree Day

### Context

Community participation at events is important to promote the Alliance, as well as contribute real environmental outcomes.

### Achievements

On July 28, 2013 Cooks River Alliance worked with member councils to celebrate National Tree Day. This event was well attended, and contributed to improving the riparian vegetation along the Cooks River.



Figure 5 July 2013 – National Tree Planting Day in Marrickville



Figure 6 July 2013 – National Tree Planting Day in Rockdale

### Performance Measures

- ◇ Working towards implementing an event using the Cooks River Alliance branding

### Looking Ahead

The newly appointed Community Engagement and Education Coordinator will survey member councils on the most appropriate annual events for Alliance involvement, and develop and promote a catchment wide events calendar.

# PROGRAM 6: COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

## Building Partnerships

### Context

The Alliance initiated and developed discussions with a wide range of groups and organisations during the reporting period. Productive partnerships are essential for the successful delivery of all the Alliance Action Plans.

### Achievements

The Alliance has worked hard on cultivating relationships with close to twenty partners across the catchment including Aboriginal committees, volunteer groups, and other river catchment groups.

Many partnerships were progressed when developing activities for submission by the Alliance as part of our *Caring for our Country* grant applications to the Australian Government.

In 2012, the Alliance joined the Boomerang Alliance, who are advocating for a Container Deposit System (CDS) in NSW. Containers form a significant part of the waste issues along the Cooks River. In March 2013, the Board determined the Cooks River Alliance would make the Boomerang Alliance a \$5,000 donation. To further the cause for a CDS, on 15 April 2013 the Alliance convened a meeting of councillors and local Members of State Parliament. The Hon. Linda Burney (Member for Canterbury) and Mr Robert Furolo (Member for Lakemba) attended an insightful presentation which was delivered by Jeff Angel, convenor of the Boomerang Alliance.

## Performance Measures

- ◇ Developing the Capacity Building Program

These achievements also contribute to Program 6 performance measures:

- ◇ Building partnerships for events using Cooks River Alliance branding
- ◇ Media mentions

## Looking Ahead

The Alliance is developing positive relationships with a wide range of organisations, so as to better achieve Action Plan outcomes.

### MEDIA MENTION

[The flow of ideas to help an Alliance is in place to tackle Cooks River issues](#)

“Unfortunately this is an-all-too common sight bottles and rubbish clogging up what should be the beautiful surroundings of the Cooks River. But one group is out to change that. The Cooks River Alliance formed late last year, with Ashfield, Bankstown, Canterbury, City of Sydney, Hurstville, Marrickville, Strathfield and Rockdale councils pooling their talents to address the problems the river is facing...”

Laura Murada, *The Glebe*, 15 March 2013.

### MEDIA MENTION

[Breath of life for our waterway push for national bottle and can swap scheme – save the cooks](#)

“support grows for the implementation of a national container deposit scheme...The scheme has support among local environmental groups such as the Mudcrabs and the Cooks River Valley Association, as well as the multi-council body the Cooks River Alliance...”

Jessica Clement, *Canterbury-Bankstown Express*, 31 July 2012.

# PROGRAM 6: COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

## Convening of State Government Catchment Stakeholders Meetings

### Context

Organisations preceding the Alliance, such as the Cooks River Foreshores Working Group, worked hard to achieve a coordinated approach to management of the River and tributaries. With numerous State agencies having a range of responsibilities within the catchment, there is a concerning lack of catchment wide perspectives and coordination.

### Achievements

In June 2013, the Steering Committee determined that State Government Catchment Stakeholders Meetings will be held after every second Steering Committee meeting. The catchment Stakeholders meetings will be an open forum for discussion on catchment-wide issues.

Catchment stakeholders identified were: Hawkesbury Nepean Catchment Management Authority, Sydney Water, Rail Corporation, Office of Environment and Heritage, Department of Primary Industries, Environment Protection Authority, Roads and Maritime Services, and NSW Health.

### Performance Measures

- ◇ Communications strategy

### Looking Ahead

The Alliance anticipates these meetings will assist progression of a majority of the Action Plan Programs.

# PROGRAM 7: CLIMATE CHANGE RESILIENCE PROGRAM

## Climate Change research

### Context

Increasing resilience to climate change is an important focus area for the Alliance. The Climate Change Program assists council with knowledge sharing, and provides resources and skills for evidence based decision making. The aims are to improve the capacity of councils to proactively identify and implement adaptation and mitigation solutions, and to promote a consistent approach when planning for actions.

### Achievements

An initial desktop study of the existing legislation, guidelines and resources was undertaken by the Alliance Environmental Engineer. The study identified a vast array of information, as well as numerous local and national organisations providing a one-stop-shop for climate change related resources.

A review of this program was undertaken by the Action Group when it was agreed that the Alliance desktop study is to be catchment specific.

### Performance Measures:

- ◇ Report on findings of desktop study completed
- ◇ Reports to Board

### Looking Ahead

Moving forward the Alliance Environmental Engineer will review all the available member council flood studies and climate change assessment reports and make suitable recommendations to the Board based on findings of the review.

# CONCLUSION

The Cooks River Alliance is a young organisation, which is building on many past years of dedicated work by councils in the catchment area. This report on the 2012-2013 period shows the Alliance establishing sound fundamentals for significant future achievements.

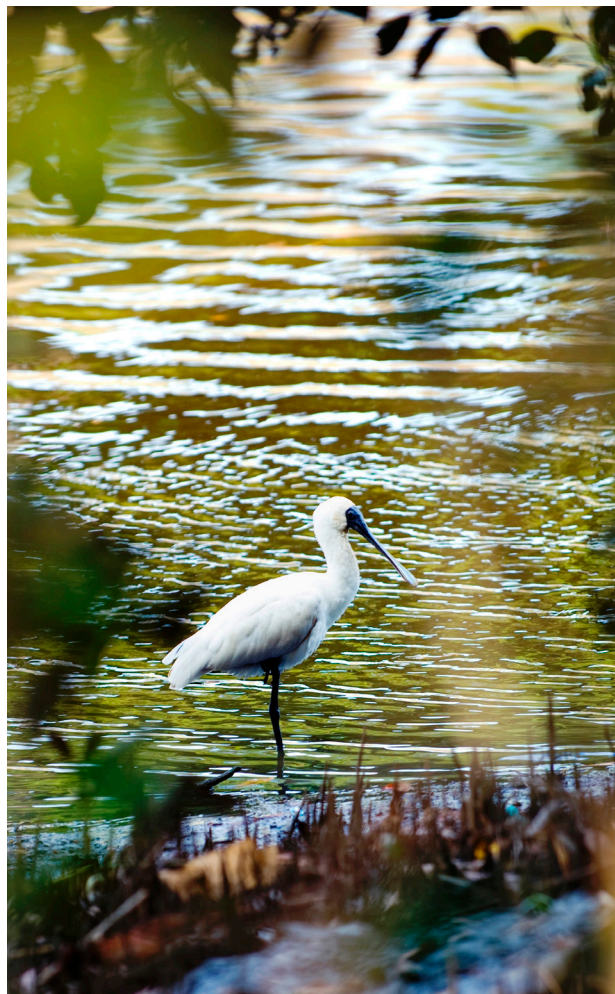


Figure 7 A spoonbill on the Cooks River