

OurRiver

cooks river sustainability initiative

Communities and councils working together in a new way for the long-term improvement of the Cooks River Catchment





OurRiver – Cooks River Sustainability Initiative

Who: OurRiver is a partnership between Ashfield, Bankstown, Canterbury, City of Sydney, Hurstville, Marrickville, Rockdale and Strathfield councils, and Monash University, that was initiated by the Cooks River Foreshores Working Group.



What: OurRiver is a three year project (ending March 2011) funded by the NSW Environmental Trust's Urban Sustainability Program that aims to improve the health of the Cooks River, a severely degraded natural resource in a highly urban area. OurRiver has developed strategic management plans for six local areas (known as subcatchments) and is working with councils and communities to increase their capacity to successfully implement the plans.



How: OurRiver applies pioneering, research-based approaches to the complex problems associated with a degraded river in a highly urbanised catchment. OurRiver is designed to utilise lessons learned from NSW stormwater planning in the 1990s to successfully develop plans and procedures that improve stormwater management and river health. OurRiver addresses research-identified barriers by working:

- On a subcatchment scale

Each of the six project subcatchments represents a unique area that drains to a creek or channel that flows into the Cooks River.

- With multi-disciplinary teams

Working with people from different disciplines (e.g. engineering, parks, community services and waste management) helps to identify cost-saving opportunities and any problems early, and to find solutions that address multiple issues.

- Using collaborative planning

Participatory planning methods that involve stakeholders early in the planning process provide councils with the opportunity to learn from the local knowledge of residents and other stakeholders, and provide community members with the opportunity to be informed about and take part in their council's decision making process.

- Developing a regional Cooks River Alliance

In the Cooks River catchment, a large number of stakeholders (approximately 500,000 residents, more than 20 community groups, 13 councils, 10 state departments) impact on stormwater quantity and quality and therefore river health. OurRiver developed a proposal for consideration by all catchment councils to form a Cooks River Alliance that would ensure long-term, coordinated management and provide resources for councils to implement sustainable practices.



What is happening as part of the OurRiver project?

Planning and policy

Collaborative planning sessions x 28

Subcatchment residents developed community water visions and worked with council staff and other stakeholders to identify goals and actions to achieve the visions. More than 400 people attended the planning sessions.

Collaborative implementation x 14

Residents, council staff and stakeholders worked together through community meetings, information days for construction projects and planting days for raingardens and swales. More than 300 people attended these sessions.

Subcatchment management plans x 6

The plans are based on results from collaborative planning sessions. They provide a road map for councils and communities to work together to conserve water and improve the health of the Cooks River through education, policy initiatives and innovative stormwater management practices.

Education and training

Community workshops x 2

Workshops provided information on how residents can help keep local waterways clean, including information about rainwater harvesting and reducing the area of paved surfaces on your property.

Council staff workshops x 36

OurRiver hosted workshops and provided registration fees for council staff to attend training related to water sensitive urban design and sustainable urban water management.

Stormwater drain marking project x 1

Colorful signs on stormwater drains help people understand that stormwater drains are connected to local creeks and rivers.

Water wise tours x 4

Tours of local water sensitive urban design sites where raingardens, rainwater tanks, stormwater harvesting schemes and gross pollutant traps have been built.

Construction projects

Concept designs x 100

OurRiver is providing councils with concept designs for construction projects including raingardens, stormwater harvesting and swales across the six OurRiver subcatchments.

Permeable paving x 1

Removes stormwater pollution and reduces high flows during storms.

Raingardens x 6

Removes stormwater pollution, increases biodiversity and reduces high flows during storms.

Stormwater harvesting x 2

Removes stormwater pollution, conserves water and reduces high flows during storms.

Vegetated swales x 3

Removes stormwater pollution, increases biodiversity and reduces high flows during storms.

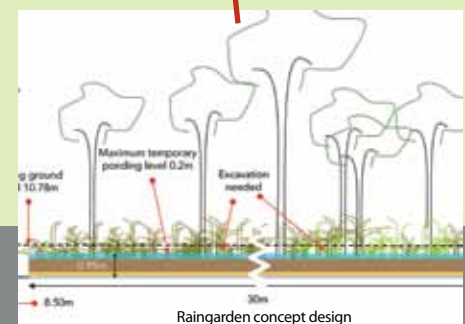
STRATHFIELD SOUTH SUBCATCHMENT

- Collaborative planning sessions
- Collaborative implementation
- Subcatchment management plan
- Council staff workshops
- Water wise tour
- Concept designs
- Raingardens at Drew Street, Greenacre



ROOKWOOD ROAD SUBCATCHMENT

- Collaborative planning sessions
- Collaborative implementation
- Subcatchment management plan
- Council staff workshops
- Water wise tour
- Concept designs
- Raingarden at Graf Park, Yagoona



ASHBURY SUBCATCHMENT

- Collaborative planning sessions
- Collaborative implementation
- Subcatchment management plan
- Community workshops
- Council staff workshops
- Stormwater drain marking
- Water wise tour
- Concept designs
- Stormwater harvesting at Canterbury Park, Ashbury
- Vegetated swale at Canterbury Park, Ashbury



MUNNI STREET SUBCATCHMENT

- Collaborative planning sessions
- Collaborative implementation
- Subcatchment management plan
- Council staff workshops
- Concept designs
- Raingarden at Lillian Fowler Reserve, Newtown
- Stormwater harvesting at Lillian Fowler Reserve, Newtown



EASTERN CHANNEL EAST SUBCATCHMENT

- Collaborative planning sessions
- Collaborative implementation
- Subcatchment management plan
- Council staff workshops
- Concept designs
- Permeable paving at Tom Foster Community Care, Newtown



UPPER WOLLI CREEK SUBCATCHMENT

- Collaborative planning sessions
- Collaborative implementation
- Subcatchment management plan
- Council staff workshops
- Water wise tour
- Concept designs
- Raingardens at Bundara Reserve, Beverly Hills and Gilchrist Park, Kingsgrove
- Vegetated swales at Bundara Reserve, Beverly Hills



The Cooks River community has a vision...

Residents, council staff and other stakeholders from the six OurRiver subcatchments developed visions of what they want for their areas in 20 to 30 years time. Achieving these visions of attractive, safe, sustainable areas with a healthy natural environment is possible with the commitment of the community, councils and political leaders.

Excerpts from Vision Statements:

Ashbury Subcatchment (Ashfield and Canterbury)

"The naturally flowing Cooks River supports a thriving ecosystem..."

Eastern Channel East Subcatchment (Marrickville)

"We are leaders in sustainable practice and innovative design."

Munni Street Subcatchment (City of Sydney)

"Our community understands how water works and plays an active role in its management..."

Rookwood Road Subcatchment (Bankstown)

"Our parks and streets are safe, accessible and sustainable living spaces that connect the community and the environment."

Strathfield South Subcatchment (Strathfield)

"Industry and residents are sustainable water users who live in harmony with the environment..."

Upper Wolli Creek Subcatchment (Canterbury, Hurstville and Rockdale)

"Our catchment is planted with native vegetation and there are roadside gardens that clean stormwater..."



OurRiver

Why is stormwater pollution such a problem?

In a natural non-urban catchment, most rainwater soaks into the ground or evaporates from leaves and plants with only about 20% running off to waterways. However, in urban areas like the Cooks River Catchment, the large areas of paved surfaces and roofs prevent rainwater from soaking into ground. In the Cooks River Catchment, about 70% of rainwater runs off as stormwater into the River causing erosion and carrying pollutants including litter, nutrients, and oil and petroleum derivatives. These pollutants have a negative effect on the River's water quality, its appearance and on the fish and birds that use it. Other issues that affect the health of the Cooks River are artificial structures such as concrete banks, historical contamination of sediments and sewage overflows during storms.

What can I do to help?

We all have a role to play in cleaning up the Cooks River. Some things you can do at home include:

- Make sure only water goes down the stormwater drains (e.g. keep building and street gutters free of leaves, wash your car on the lawn or at a carwash, don't pour chemicals down drains).
- Minimise how much water runs off your property (e.g. minimise paved areas, install a rainwater tank).
- Carry reusable drink containers and shopping bags – plastic bags and bottles are washed into the River whenever it rains.
- Don't litter - litter travels to the River via the stormwater drains.
- Join a local bushcare group.
- Let your council know that a clean Cooks River is important to you.
- Tell your friends and family what you're doing.



OurRiver's unique approach and demonstrated results have led to its recognition through a number of awards. OurRiver won the 2010 Green Globe Local Government Sustainability Award and was Highly Commended in the 2010 Sustainable Cities Grundfos Water Conservation Award.



For more information:

Check out our website: www.ourriver.com.au

Sign-up to receive our newsletter by email: ourriver@strathfield.nsw.gov.au

Give us a call: 02 9748 9635