

2018-2019 ANNUAL REPORT



www.cooksriver.org.au



Acknowledgement

The Cooks River Alliance respectfully acknowledges the Wangal, Cadigal and Gameygal, the Traditional Custodians of the Cooks River catchment, and also acknowledges other Aboriginal people who have made the river their home. The Alliance pays respect to Elders past, present and future.

For over a thousand generations, the Cooks River catchment has been home to Aboriginal people who have fostered cultural and spiritual connections to the river as it evolved over many millennia.

The Catchment

The Cooks River begins as a series of small watercourses near Graf Park in Bankstown and flows 23km in a generally easterly direction to enter Botany Bay just south of Sydney's Kingsford Smith Airport. It runs through some of the most heavily urbanised and industrialised areas in Australia.

The river's catchment covers about 100km². The care and control of the river is a complicated issue as responsibility is shared between nine local councils, Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council, Sydney Water, the NSW Government and industry.

The Cooks River catchment provides many benefits which contribute to the community's well-being and quality of life, including wetlands and bushland that provide vital habitat, as well as many parks and facilities. All people living in the catchment, regardless of their proximity to the river, can make a difference to its health and quality.



Alliance long-term outcomes

- 1 An Alliance of connected community and Cooks River catchment land managers is continuing to maintain and improve river and catchment health.
- 2 Aboriginal relationships and leadership are integral to catchment actions.
- 3 Catchment land managers are implementing water sensitive cities actions.
- 4 The quality and volumes of water flowing to the Cooks River from all parts of the catchment better reflect the natural water cycle.
- 5 Native habitats are thriving and connected across the catchment.
- 6 The catchment is resilient to climate impacts.

Message from the Chair

I'm pleased to bring you this annual report outlining the progress we have made on The Cooks River People's Plan: A strategic plan for united action on the Cooks River and its catchment 2018-2021.

The launch of the strategic plan at the inaugural Cooks River Catchment Congress last year signalled the start of a new governance structure with Cooks River Alliance member councils – Bayside, City of Canterbury Bankstown, Inner West and Strathfield – land and water managers and the community coming together to achieve river outcomes.

The strategic plan is being implemented with four working groups informing the Alliance and member council actions in the areas of coastal management, catchment education, water sensitive cities and Aboriginal culture and heritage.

The Alliance also launched the month-long Wurridjal Festival last March celebrating mullet season on the Cooks River. It is a special time of the year for the Indigenous community and is looked upon fondly as a period of plenty and of community gatherings. We look forward to growing this annual event.

I'm proud that months of consultation delivered a 2030 vision for the river - "A loved and healthy river valley enriching the heart of Sydney" - that captures the connection between our communities and the river catchment. This vision is guiding the development of the Cooks River Catchment Coastal Management Program.

The Cooks River has been the focus of \$161,000 worth of research investment from the Cooperative Research Centre for Water Sensitive Cities. Case studies within the Sydenham to Bankstown Corridor have set out best practice designs and planning principles to guide development that delivers improved outcomes for the river.

We thank all of our member councils for their continued commitment to work together towards long-term outcomes for the river and a special thank you to City of Canterbury Bankstown for hosting our valued CRA staff.



Cr Darcy Byrne
Chair Cooks River Alliance

| Council | Representative | Meeting attendance | | | |
|----------------------|--|--------------------|--------|--------|--------|
| | | Aug 18 | Nov 18 | Feb 19 | Jun 19 |
| Bayside | Clr Andrew Tsounis | | | ✓ | |
| Canterbury Bankstown | Clr Khal Asfour (Mayor) Clr Clare Raffan (Deputy Mayor) | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Inner West | Clr Darcy Byrne (Mayor/CRA Chair) Clr Colin Hesse | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Strathfield | Clr Maryanne Duggan (Deputy Chair) Clr Nella Hall | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

 Focus Area 1:

An Alliance of valued partnerships

Cooks River Catchment Congress

100 people at Cooks River Catchment Congress



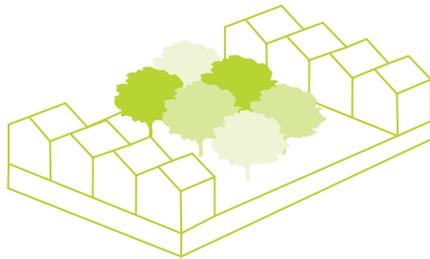
2 Catchment Congress meetings held

4 Theme Teams guiding Alliance and council actions



Planning for water sensitive cities

\$161,000+ in research from CRCWSC



12 water sensitive building typologies

10 water sensitive Planning Principles



More research in the catchment

73 university students engaged in Cooks River learning

6 sites monitored for water quality by WSU research student



1 Environmental Trust Research Grant bid





Cooks River Catchment Congress

The Cooks River's Peoples Plan: A strategic plan for united action of the Cooks River and its catchment 2018-2021 launched at the inaugural Cooks River Catchment Congress at Strathfield Town Hall in August.

Some of Australia's influential thinkers on water, catchments and culture addressed the congress including Emeritus Professor Bruce Thom AM Chair NSW Coastal Council, Professor Tony Wong CEO Cooperative Research Centre for Water Sensitive

Cities (CRCWSC), Rodd Simpson Environment Commissioner Greater Sydney Commission and Nathan Moran, CEO Metropolitan Aboriginal Land Council.

Representatives from 15 organisations attended the second Catchment Congress in March hosted by Strathfield Golf Club. It included a walking tour of the river through Strathfield Golf Course followed by a discussion on stream health and threats.

Planning for water sensitive cities

The Alliance successfully advocated for the Cooperative Research Centre for Water Sensitive Cities (CRCWSC) to lead a research synthesis project in the catchment on the Urban Growth Corridor of Sydenham to Bankstown, valued at over \$161,000 of CRC expertise. This has resulted in four workshops for member councils, NSW Government and Sydney Water. The workshops identified planning principles and building typologies that implement a water

sensitive approach to the corridor with demonstrated application in Campsie and Marrickville case study areas. These outputs are now available for planning for Councils within the catchment (and elsewhere) as well as Sydney Water, NSW Department of Primary Industries and Environment and other agencies that are realigning planning to the Greater Sydney District plans.

 Focus Area 2:

Advocacy for the health of the river, catchment and habitats

Advocacy and communications

20+ submissions and meetings to state and federal MPs for funding



88% social media growth

10 media mentions

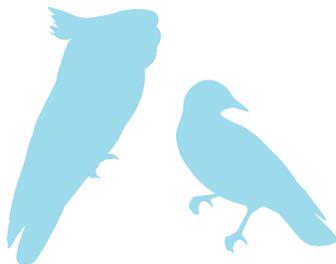
Coastal Management Program



20 organisations met 3 times as the Catchment Advisory Group to inform the Coastal Management Program

Measuring river and catchment health

20+ years of catchment monitoring activities reviewed



3-year report funded for Cooks River Catchment Aussie Bird Count

122 bird species recorded in catchment during 2018 Aussie Backyard Bird Count





Cooks River Catchment Coastal Management Program

The development of the Cooks River Catchment Coastal Management Program is a four-year process that delivers management actions for current use and future development of the coastal river and catchment in an ecologically sustainable way, for the social, cultural and economic well-being of the people of the Cooks River catchment.

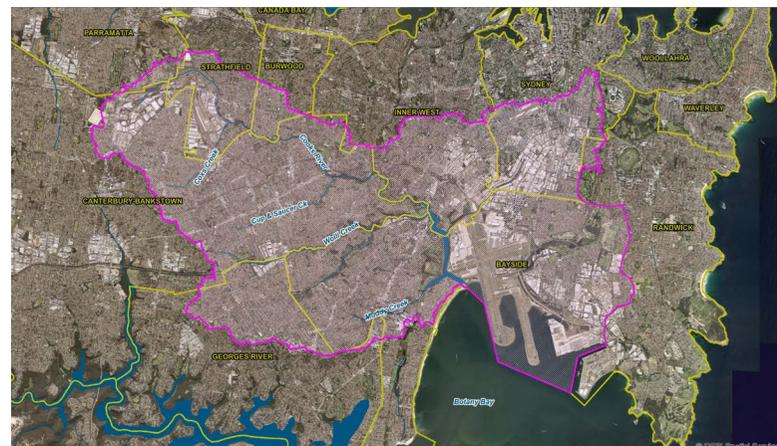
The Alliance worked on the development of the Stage One Scoping Study which identifies the vision, management objectives and risks to the coastal areas and makes recommendations for Stage Two studies. The study area of the Cooks River Catchment CMP is pictured below and includes:

- The whole of the Cooks River catchment, main river course, all the sub-catchments of its contributing tributaries, the river mouth into Botany Bay; inclusive of

- Several areas classified as either of the four coastal management areas defined in the CM Act, i.e.:
 - Coastal Wetlands and Littoral Rainforest Area (CWLRA),
 - Coastal Vulnerability Area (CVA),
 - Coastal Environment Area (CEA), and
 - Coastal Use Area (CUA); as well as,

The Coastal Management Advisory Group of 20 stakeholder organisations (including Aboriginal representatives, state government agencies and public authorities, community groups, and industry) has informed the development of the study.

This project is supported by the NSW Government's Coastal and Estuary Management Program.



 Focus Area 3:

Communities taking action



More than **1.3** tonnes of rubbish removed from the river Alliance-supported community events

\$265,000 value to councils through Corrective Services NSW partnership collecting **2,500+** rubbish bags & **1,000+** bags of weeds + mulching at more than **20** sites across the catchment

1,500 interactions with Cooks River Catchment Model demonstrations

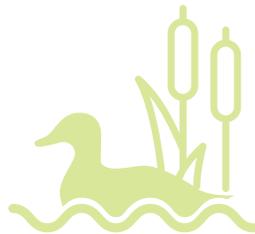
\$210,000 NSW EPA litter prevention grants completed

Cooks River 2030 Community Vision

Loved and healthy river valley enriching the heart of Sydney

A biodiverse river valley supporting a clean river.

Aboriginal ways of thinking are valued from Yana Badu to Kamay.



Every community accessing and enjoying the river.

Holistic and cooperative approaches are guiding river restoration





Culture and Country

The Alliance Aboriginal Working Group was established this year and is investigating a dual name for the Cooks River. The launch of the Wurridjal Festival celebrating mullet season responded to the working group's advice to align

Alliance activities with the Aboriginal seasonal calendar. An Aboriginal-owned company designed all Wurridjal Festival event materials including the logo, programs, flyers and digital signs.

2030 Cooks River Community Vision

The Alliance also worked with the Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council this year to advocate for an Aboriginal Riverkeeper program. Community members and stakeholders shared their vision for the river at various workshops, meetings, catchment model demonstrations, community events, and

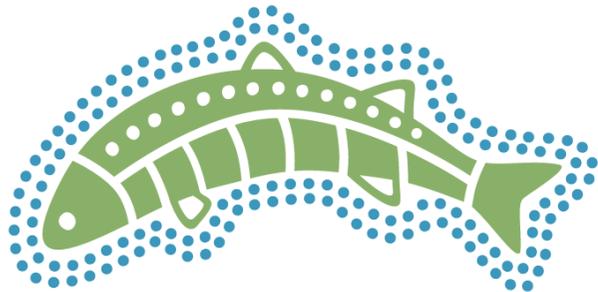
via an online survey. The Cooks River Community Assembly of 10 volunteers toured the catchment and reviewed submissions to create the final 2030 vision statement that now directs the Coastal Management Program and other planning documents.

Targeting litter in the catchment

The Alliance supported a wide range of clean-up events from corporate volunteering to signature community events. This included the Mudcrabs'

Clean Up Australia Day in Canterbury; the River Canoe Club's Paddle Against Plastic; and Sydney Water's Beat the Bottle event in Ewen Park.

Highlight Project



Wurridjal Festival

1 new festival launched

2,439 unique visitors to the website

50+ activities run by multiple organisations

2,000+ attendees

64,000 people reached through 'The story of wurridjal: Aboriginal cultural mullet tour' Facebook event page

64% growth in social media following

100% people rated events as "very good" or "good"





A month of fun and learning on the river

The river was buzzing with activity throughout March in celebration of mullet season. Community responded enthusiastically to the Wurridjal Festival's packed calendar of events with many activities, including Aboriginal cultural events, booking out. The festival also featured bushcare, birdwatching, citizen science, cycling events, kayak tours, workshops and more. The Alliance thanks the many organisations for hosting activities during the festival and making it such a great success.

What is the significance of wurridjal?

Wurridjal is an Aboriginal language word for mullet. In March, the river is brimming full with wurridjal, a significant season for traditional Aboriginal cultural fishing practices. Mullet season is recalled as one of the happiest times of the year for Aboriginal communities in and around Botany Bay. It was a time of plenty and community gathering and to this day is looked upon fondly by Elders in the area.

"Keep it up, keep making connections as the river connects us all."

- Wurridjal Festival survey feedback

Who are we?

The Cooks River Alliance is a partnership between councils in the Cooks River Catchment – Bayside Council, City of Canterbury Bankstown, Inner West Council and Strathfield Council.

Each member council of the Alliance has signed a Memorandum of Understanding and makes a financial contribution to support the day-to-day running of the Alliance.

The Alliance uses the combined resources, experience, knowledge and skills within the councils and the community to address the complex environmental problems of the Cooks River.

The Alliance operates at five levels: Management Committee, Executive Management, Catchment Congress and Theme Teams supported by the Alliance Secretariat. These groups work together to deliver on The Cooks People's Plan:
A strategic plan for united action on the Cooks River and its catchment 2018-2021. .



United action for a healthy Cooks River and catchment

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