OurRiver Newsletter | October 2009

OurRiver – the Cooks River Sustainability Initiative is about communities, businesses and councils working together in a new way for long term improvement of the Cooks River Catchment.

OurRiver is a project funded by the NSW Environmental Trust through the Urban Sustainability Program. OurRiver is a partnership of 8 councils within the Cooks River Catchment (Ashfield, Bankstown, Canterbury, City of Sydney, Hurstville, Marrickville, Rockdale, Strathfield), the Cooks River Foreshores Working Group and Monash University. The goal of OurRiver is to establish the Cooks River Catchment as a leading model of collaborative urban water management. It will show how communities and councils, working jointly in varied and highly urbanised contexts, can improve their social and water environments. Partner councils are changing the way they operate, internally and with each other, to create long-term sustainable water management plans.

What makes OurRiver unique?

- OurRiver is based on rigorous research on how to manage water in the ultra-urbanised Cooks River Catchment and on a planning process trialled in Marrickville LGA;
- OurRiver focuses on small, local planning areas (known as subcatchments) that allow for greater community ownership and involvement in decision making;
- OurRiver is developing strong relationships with local communities and stakeholders through genuine engagement and partnership; and
- OurRiver is multi-disciplinary, utilising the skills and knowledge of a range of practitioners working across social, technical and political aspects of urban water management.

Jargon Buster

What is a **catchment**? A catchment is an area bounded by high points such as hills that funnel rain and run-off water to a particular waterway such as a river, lake or ocean. Creeks and streams carry much of the water in natural catchments, but in urban catchments creeks and streams have often been replaced by stormwater drains.

What is a **subcatchment**? Subcatchments are smaller catchments within a catchment. The water flowing from many subcatchments comes together into the river, lake or ocean that the entire catchment drains to. OurRiver is focusing on six subcatchments within the Cooks River Catchment.

Upcoming Events:

28th Oct. 6-9pm: Rookwood Road Planning Forum
28th Oct. 6-8pm: Ashbury Community Meeting
7th Nov. 10am-12pm: Ashbury Water Use/re-use Tour
Late Nov.: Upper Wolli Creek Water Use/re-use Tour

Details on upcoming events available on our website: www.ourriver.com.au or by calling 9748 9635.

To receive newsletters via email, email ourriver@strathfield.nsw.gov.au

eight councils with one vision for a healthy cooks river

OurRiver
cooks river sustainability initiative

Project Update

OurRiver is wrapping up the first half of the project during which the focus was on gathering information about each subcatchment (context mapping) and collaborative planning. In the second half of the project the focus will be on the development of subcatchment management plans and on-ground works.

Context Mapping:

Because of different natural features and communities along the river, there is not a one-size fits all solution for the entire catchment. To develop appropriate solutions for each subcatchment, research into their physical, social and organisational characteristics was undertaken to understand the local settings.

Physical Context

OurRiver examined physical features relevant to water in the subcatchments, including how much area is covered by paved surfaces, land-use (e.g., residential vs. industrial), soil characteristics, upcoming developments and current water use.

Social Context

Census data was used to identify features of people living in each subcatchment such as their age, employment status, how long they have lived there, and education level. OurRiver surveyed local residents and businesses on their knowledge, attitudes and behaviour related to water. Many residents said that their daily activities affect the health of the Cooks River and many said that individuals, rather than just governments, have a responsibility to the river.

Organisational Context

OurRiver partners at Monash University are conducting surveys, interviews, and discussion sessions with all partner councils. The goal of these activities is to understand how different parts of council influence water management and to identify opportunities for improving how councils manage water resources.

Subcatchment Planning Booklets containing context mapping results are available on request or on the Publications page at www.ourriver.com.au.

Collaborative Planning:

OurRiver is conducting vision sessions and planning forums in each subcatchment. These are an opportunity for residents and other stakeholders to work together to develop a community water vision and long-term management plans for their local area (front page image is from a Munni Street Subcatchment Vision Session held in April 2009).

> "Our Catchment has more native vegetation which requires less water. There are less hard surfaces and more roadside gardens which slow down and clean stormwater runoff. The local streets are clean and well maintained and public land is respected by all. The waterways are pristine and the Wolli Creek is safe to swim in."
>
> Vision statement developed by Upper Wolli Creek Subcatchment residents.

Subcatchment Management Plans:

The visions and goals developed by the community along with the physical, social, and organisational information are being used to develop management plans for each subcatchment. As a part of the process, OurRiver Project Officers are developing concept designs for potential on-ground works to improve the quality of water reaching the Cooks River and to reduce the amount of potable water required from outside the catchment. The OurRiver project has funds to put towards one on-ground project in each council area. The OurRiver team is working with partner councils and residents to prioritise which on-ground projects will go ahead.

Upcoming Activities:

OurRiver will be providing information to residents from all subcatchments on potential on-ground works and ways community members can stay involved in the implementation of the Subcatchment Management Plans.