

The Cooks River People's Plan



A strategic plan for united action
on the Cooks River and its catchment
2018–2021

www.cooksriver.org.au

The logo for the Cooks River Alliance, featuring the text "Cooks River" in blue and green, with "ALLIANCE" in grey below it.

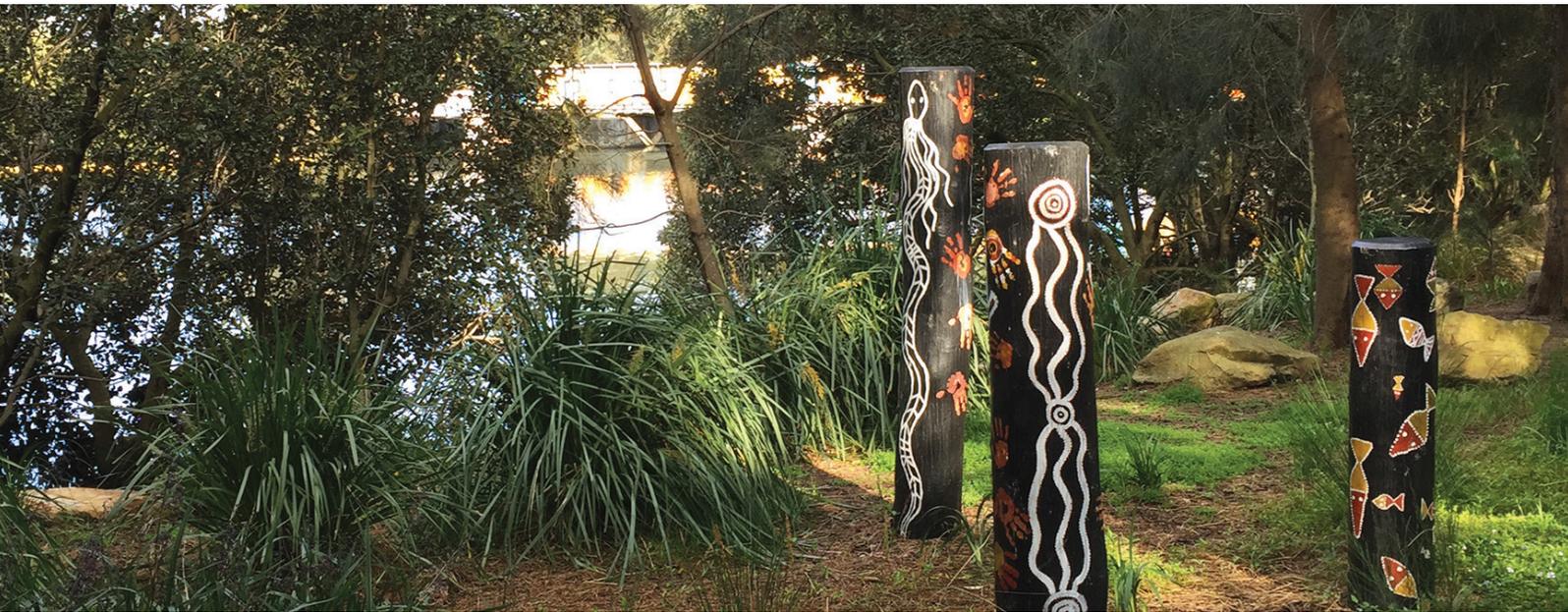




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Acknowledgement



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 Cooks River Alliance recognises that it is vital to maintain strong partnerships with Aboriginal people and organisations across the catchment.



Message from the Chair

I'm proud to bring to you *The Cooks River People's Plan*, which provides a clear statement of actions that will go a long way to rehabilitating the Cooks River and its catchment.

The Cooks River has been at the heart of this great city since its establishment. While these days we recognise rivers as environmental and community resources, in years gone by, they were very much taken for granted. Times have changed and enormous work and effort has gone into rehabilitating the Cooks River. But there is still much more to do.

We will be looking to bring residents, local organisations and State agencies together to find ways to ensure this vital waterway gets a clean bill of health. We need to work urgently to renaturalise the Cooks River's banks, prevent pollution through better design and bring people from across Sydney to enjoy the green open spaces along the catchment.

This strategic plan is led by four councils, Bayside, City of Canterbury Bankstown, Inner West and Strathfield, which all understand the benefits of collaborative action. It is important that we continue to build on this partnership and make it a priority to find ways to reconnect our communities with the Cooks River.

So, on behalf of the Cooks River Alliance, I would like to thank everyone who helped shape the Cooks River People's Plan 2018-2021.

We now look forward to working with you all in the implementation of this plan.



Cr Darcy Byrne, Mayor Inner West Council
Chair Cooks River Alliance



Cooks River 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.

Over recent years, the health of the river and catchment has improved considerably. This is due to the ongoing efforts of these stakeholders and local communities. However, there is much more to be done.

Information on the activities along the river is at cooksriver.org.au.





Alliance Governance



Since 1997, councils and others along the river and across the catchment have worked together to improve the health of the Cooks River. Over this time the Alliance governance structure has adapted to changing priorities and circumstances.

The Cooks River People's Plan outlines a new Alliance governance structure to June 2021 (Fig. 1). It provides opportunities for members to combine efforts on issues that require a whole of catchment approach to contribute to the long term viability of the Cooks River catchment, where

working together increases the impact.

In this new Alliance governance structure the role of the Secretariat is to support participating organisations to work together and to lead on river and catchment wide strategies.

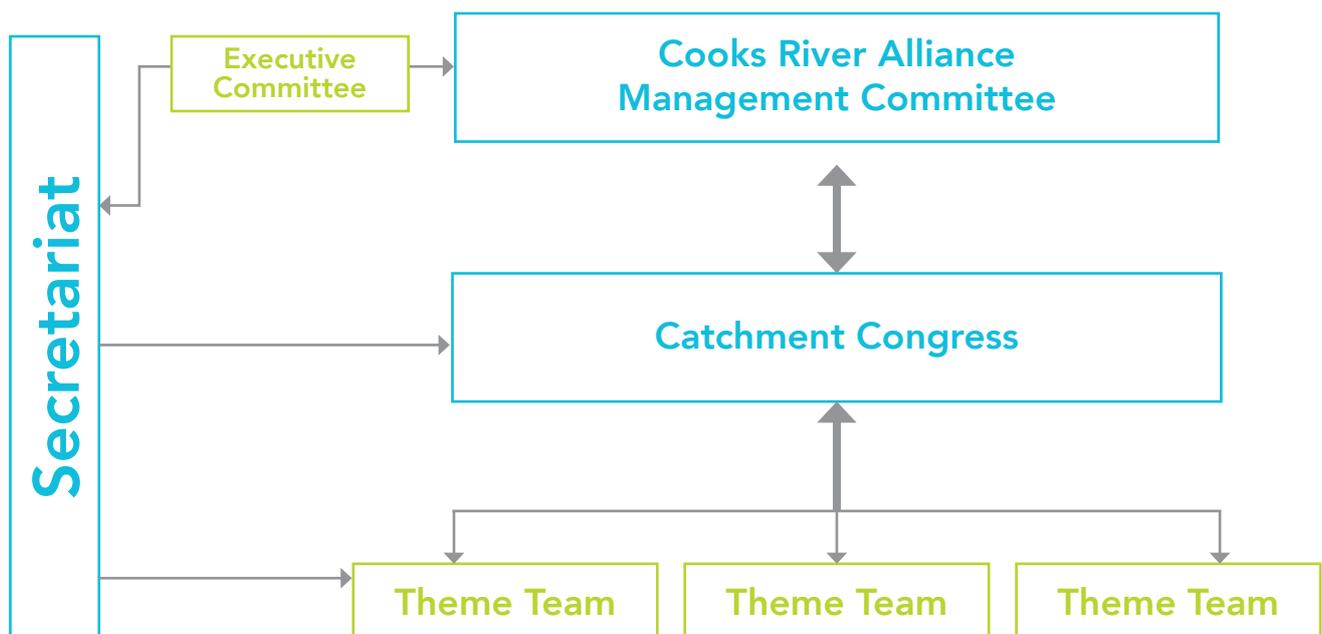


Figure 1 – Cooks River Alliance governance structure



Cooks River Alliance Management Committee

The Management Committee provides strategic direction and makes decisions on Alliance activities. The Committee consists of nominated Councillors from Councils that have made an agreed financial contribution to the Alliance. In 2018 these are Bayside Council, City of Canterbury Bankstown, Inner West Council and Strathfield Council. The Management Committee may invite other organisations onto the Committee either as a financial or non-financial voting member.

Executive Committee

An Executive Committee of senior Council staff provides administrative direction to the Secretariat and advice to the Management Committee.

The Catchment Congress

The Catchment Congress is an essential function of the Alliance governance structure. The

Congress provides information, advice and recommendations to the Alliance Management Committee.

The Catchment Congress enables organisations within the Cooks River catchment to work together towards the goals outlined in *The Cooks River People's Plan 2018-2021*. Importantly, it provides opportunities for organisations to also achieve and improve their own organisational priorities for the river and catchment. Members of the Congress can be representatives from all levels of government, public authorities and community organisations, and where appropriate, industry and business.

Theme Teams

Theme teams are subcommittees of the Congress formed around specific issues and projects, such as developing the Cooks River Catchment Coastal Management Program. Teams can be long or short term and make recommendations to the

Congress around policy and actions. Membership can consist of multidisciplinary staff from across the catchment (e.g. planners, stormwater engineers, biodiversity officers) and stakeholders from relevant community organisations and industry (e.g. sports field owners/managers).

Cooks River Alliance Secretariat

The Alliance staff are a resource for all member councils, providing recommendations to the Management Committee and implementing Alliance actions. Alliance staff work to provide a whole of catchment service; and support the governance structure of the Alliance. The Secretariat is hosted by the City of Canterbury Bankstown.



Strategic Plan



Purpose of this Plan

The *Cooks River People's Plan* is a three year plan that commits the Cooks River Alliance to united action for a healthy Cooks River and catchment that improves the liveability of places and communities. It also outlines actions that meet the Alliance's long-term outcomes. It acknowledges that there are multiple organisations managing the river and catchment and invites all to continue to combine efforts to create positive change.

The *Cooks River People's Plan* was prepared under the guidance of the Management and Executive Committee comprised of Member Council representatives and other experts.

The Plan is active until June 2021. The Cooks River Catchment Coastal Management Program will be completed by June 2021 and this will inform planning beyond 2021.

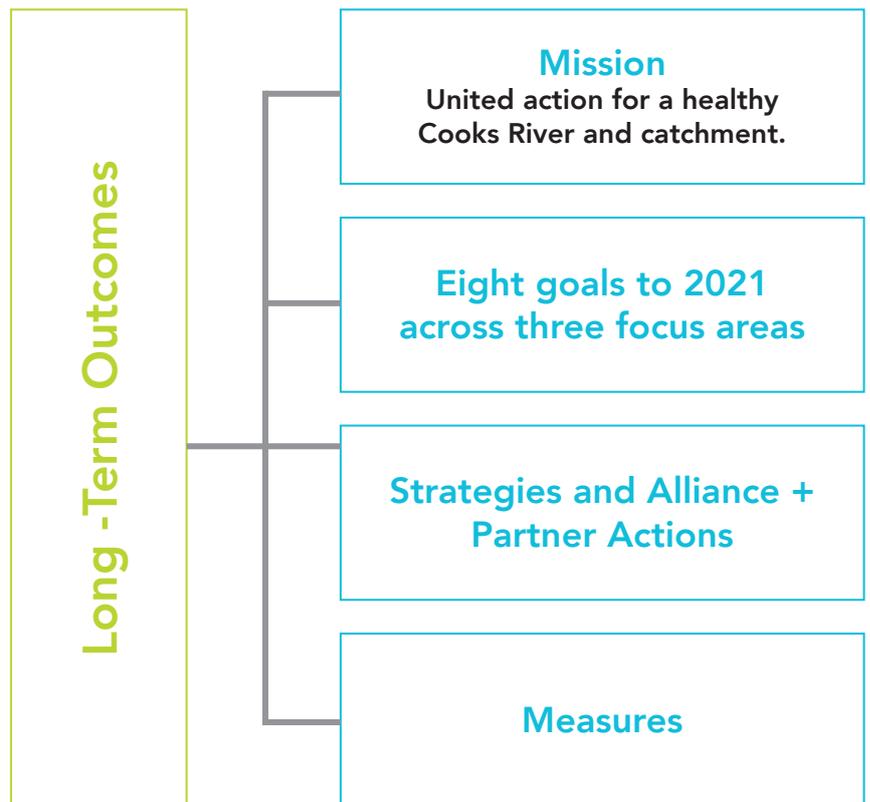


Figure 2 – Cooks River Alliance strategic plan elements



Long-term Outcomes

The Alliance will see success when the following long-term outcomes are realised:

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.

These long-term outcomes build on the outcomes identified in the previous Alliance Management Plan 2014-2017.



Eight goals to 2021 across three strategic focus areas

An Alliance of valued partnerships

1. The Cooks River Alliance partnership of land and water managers and community is ongoing.
2. The Alliance has supported ongoing research into river and catchment health.



Advocacy for the health of the river, catchment and habitats

3. Advocacy for sufficient resources to improve river and catchment health has been successful.
4. Planning policies and practices are supporting improvements in river and catchment health.
5. Catchment and river health is better understood, measured and communicated.
6. There is an agreed approach to the management of the river and catchment.



Communities taking action

7. Meaningful, mutually beneficial and sustainable relationships are established with Aboriginal people and organisations in the catchment.
8. The Alliance is achieving the catchment communities' aspirations for the river.



Focus Area 1

An Alliance of valued partnerships

Goal 1

The Cooks River Alliance partnership of land and water managers and community is ongoing.

Strategy

1.1 Establish, maintain and participate in partnerships that provide reciprocal benefits.

Actions

Secretariat Actions

1.1.1 Maintain services to existing Council financial members.

1.1.2 Establish a partnerships process.

1.1.3 Develop and implement a Communications Framework that promotes the actions of existing member councils and partners.

1.1.4 Establish, support and promote the Theme Teams and Catchment Congress as a forum to meet every six months.

Partner Actions

1.1.5 Commit to, promote and be active in the Cooks River Alliance Catchment Congress and Theme Teams.

Measures

At least 80% of partners are satisfied with their Alliance partnership on an annual basis.

By June 2021 there is an increase in the number of partner organisations participating in the Catchment Congress and Theme Teams.

Long-Term Outcomes



Focus Area 1

An Alliance of valued partnerships

Goal 2

The Alliance has supported ongoing research into river and catchment health.

Strategy

2.1 Attract research into catchment resilience including climate change, urbanisation impacts, liveability, water sensitive communities, biodiversity and groundwater.

Actions

Secretariat Actions

2.1.1 Continue existing research partnerships with the Cooperative Research Centre for Water Sensitive Cities, University of New South Wales and University of Western Sydney.

2.1.2 Facilitate further opportunities for applied research in the catchment.

2.1.3 Develop, launch and promote an online portal that provides access to relevant research.

Partner Actions

2.1.4 Participate in or lead research programs.

2.1.5 Share existing and new research.

Measures

By June 2021 there is an increase in active research on river and catchment health by all partners.

The Alliance is seen by partner organisations as a credible facilitator of research in the catchment.

By June 2019 an online portal that provides access to relevant research is developed and utilised.

Long-Term Outcomes



Focus Area 2

Advocacy for the health of the river, catchment and habitats

Goal 3

Advocacy for sufficient resources to improve river and catchment health has been successful.

Strategy

3.1 Attract funding for Flagship Programs and funding priorities.
3.2 Present a consistent, united and strong voice that advocates for further resources needed to improve river and catchment health.

Actions

Secretariat Actions

3.1.1 Advocate for funding for the Flagship Program priority projects: catchment actions for water quality, bank naturalisation for river health and community activation.

3.1.2 Identify funding opportunities as they arise.

3.2.1 Consolidate and communicate the current, ongoing and future funding and resourcing commitments of each Alliance partner.

Partner Actions

3.1.3 Advocate for funding and resources for Flagship Programs.

3.1.4 Participate in developing funded projects.

Measures

By June 2021 there is an increase in funding for the Flagship Program Priority Projects.
By June 2021 there is an increase in funding spent within the catchment.

Long-Term Outcomes





Focus Area 2

Advocacy for the health of the river, catchment and habitats

Goal **4**

Planning policies and practices are supporting improvements in river and catchment health.

Strategy

4.1 Integrate water sensitive cities approaches for ecologically sustainable water management (SWM) into the planning and practice of Catchment Congress partners.

Actions

Secretariat Actions

4.1.1 Facilitate a community of practice across the catchment to exchange knowledge, research, skills and innovations.

4.1.2 Identify and support projects that showcase the integration of water sensitive approaches.

Partner Actions

4.1.3 Participate, share and commit to implementing planning policies and practices that integrate water sensitive SWM.

4.1.4 Align funding and implementation of relevant capital works to water sensitive cities approaches for SWM.

Measures

At least four community of practice SWM events occur annually.
By June 2021 there is an increase in planning instruments that implement water sensitive cities approaches across all catchment partners.

Long-Term Outcomes





Focus Area 2

Advocacy for the health of the river, catchment and habitats





Focus Area 2

Advocacy for the health of the river, catchment and habitats

Goal 6

There is an agreed approach to the management of the river and catchment.

Strategy

6.1 Complete the Cooks River Catchment Coastal Management Program.

Actions

Secretariat Actions

6.1.1 Lead the development of a whole of river and catchment plan - the Cooks River Catchment Coastal Management Program (CRCCMP).

6.1.2 Facilitate the involvement of all relevant organisations and communicate to the community on the Program's progress.

Partner Actions

6.1.3 Participate in the CRCCMP development at all stages.

6.1.4 Commit to actions in the final Cooks River Catchment Coastal Management Program.

Measures

Stage One, a Scoping Study, is completed by February 2019.
An agreed Cooks River Catchment Coastal Management Program is completed by June 2021.

Long-Term Outcomes





Focus Area 3

Communities taking action

Goal 7

Meaningful, mutually beneficial and sustainable relationships are established with Aboriginal people and organisations in the catchment.

Strategy

7.1 Develop meaningful, mutually beneficial and sustainable relationships with Aboriginal organisations and community members that can result in Aboriginal leadership in specific actions and initiatives.

Actions

Secretariat Actions

7.1.1 Advocate for an Aboriginal Riverkeeper.

7.1.2 Facilitate partnership discussions that lead to specific reconciliation actions and initiatives.

7.1.3 Continue to advocate for co-naming of sites across the river and catchment.

Partner Actions

7.1.4 Participate and commit to a process that can result in Aboriginal leadership for specific actions and initiatives that benefit the health of the Cooks River and Catchment.

Measures

By June 2021 there is an increase in the number and quality of partnerships, reconciliation actions and initiatives with Aboriginal organisations and communities.

By June 2021 there are more co-named sites across the river and catchment.

Long-Term Outcomes



Focus Area 3

Communities taking action

Goal **8**

The Alliance is achieving the catchment communities' aspirations for the river.

Strategy

8.1 Improve the liveability of places by understanding and implementing the communities' aspirations for the river.
8.2 Develop new and promote existing community catchment health programs.

Actions

Secretariat Actions

8.1.1 Lead the development of a whole river vision from the community to inform the vision of the Coastal Management Program.
8.2.1 Advocate for a Catchment Keeper to engage the community and implement the community vision.
8.2.2 Develop and implement a Community Participation Framework that develops new and promotes existing catchment health projects.

Partner Actions

8.1.2 Contribute information to the community visioning process.
8.2.3 Contribute projects to the Community Participation Framework.
8.2.4 Support agreed community participation activities and initiatives, including in schools, clubs and interest groups.

Measures

By December 2018 a community-led vision for the river and catchment is finalised that can inform the Coastal Management Program and the Community Participation Framework.

By June 2019 a review of community participation in the river and catchment is completed.

Long-Term Outcomes

By December 2019 the Community Participation Framework is developed and communicated with 30% of projects underway.

By June 2021 every school in the catchment has been engaged and thirty community organisations have been engaged each year.





Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting



Monitoring

The implementation of *The Cooks River People's Plan* is monitored through quarterly reporting to the Management Committee on the progress of actions, and against the measures in the Plan. The many actions by other Alliance partners that contribute to the Goals may also be reported upon agreement.

This is a dynamic plan that responds to issues arising from the Catchment Congress and the Management Committee. The Plan will be reviewed annually to ensure that it remains relevant to the issues arising across catchment partners.

Evaluation

The plan will be evaluated in 2019 against the 2021 goals and long-term outcomes and again in 2021.

Reporting

The Alliance will continue to publicly report progress in the Annual Report. Additionally the Alliance will communicate the actions of partners and the Alliance Secretariat regularly through online media.



**United action
for a healthy
Cooks River and catchment**

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