

2017-2018 ANNUAL REPORT



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A L L I A N C E





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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.

WARNING: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are advised that this publication contains the images of deceased people.

I am pleased to bring you our 2017-18 Annual Report.

The Cooks River Alliance is a partnership of four councils - Bayside Council, City of Canterbury Bankstown, Inner West Council and Strathfield Council – that covers 78% of the Cooks River catchment.

Planning and partnerships were the key focus of the past 12 months. A new governance structure was developed and implemented, which will enable land managers and the wider community to work together on issues that require a whole of catchment approach.

The Alliance also began a review of all the work undertaken to date on the environmental management of the river as well as identifying the areas in need of urgent attention, as part of a Scoping Study for the Cooks River Catchment Coastal Management Program.

The finalised Scoping Study is expected soon and will outline the actions required for the future development and protection of the Cooks River.

In the context of ongoing change within all levels of government, the Alliance has continued to highlight the immense value of a coordinated and collaborative approach to river and catchment management.

By working closely with local councils, the Alliance coordinated two successful NSW EPA litter prevention grants, totalling \$210,000, which focused on Coxs Creek, a Cooks River tributary, and its bordering industrial areas.

Collaborative efforts with the Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council, the City of Canterbury Bankstown Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group and Sydney Water produced dividends and resulted in the official renaming of Chullora Wetland to Yana Badu Wetland, in honour of the river's Aboriginal history.

A new three-year strategic plan has also been developed to provide a clear statement of actions that will go a long way to rehabilitating the Cooks River and its catchment.

An enormous amount of work has already gone into rehabilitating the Cooks River, but there is still much more to do. I look forward to the year ahead.



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



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.



This project was funded by a four-year \$1.97 million grant from the Australian government as well as member council contributions to the Alliance, and member council in-kind funding. It was successfully completed in August 2017. The program of works was embedded into the Alliance Action Plan 2014-2017 and a final report, People. Place. Connections, details the program's achievements. Through this program over \$3,000,000 has been invested into improving the health of the catchment, including more than \$1,000,000 in contributions by councils. The key highlights are summarised below:

CULTURE & COUNTRY		ON-GROUND WORKS
<p>Published one Aboriginal history book</p> <p>Recorded and exhibited 12 oral histories</p> <p>Employed 35 Aboriginal contractors</p> <p>Hosted Culture & Country Day for 200 attendees</p> <p>Renaming 1 wetlands site</p>		<p>Constructed seven rain gardens</p> <p>Water quality monitoring results for two rain gardens</p> <p>Completion of three-year intensive on-ground restoration at Landing Lights Wetland</p> 
COLLABORATION & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT	INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION	CAPACITY BUILDING
 <p>Coordinated three major community events for 3,200 participants</p> <p>Collected 10,000+ bags of rubbish and weeds and spread 4,290 sqm of mulch</p> <p>Engaged 300+ school students in water sensitive urban design activities</p> <p>Reached 1450+ culturally and linguistically diverse community members about stormwater pollution</p>	 <p>Published three Ecological Health Report Cards</p> <p>Wrote 10 submissions to federal and state government</p> <p>Launched one new website</p> <p>Produced nine short films in seven languages about community connections to water and stormwater pollution</p>	 <p>Delivered 30+ professional development opportunities to more than 370 attendees</p>  <p>Attended 46 meetings and activities with Aboriginal advisory committees and stakeholders</p>

New governance structure



Over this reporting period the governance structure of the Alliance was reviewed and then revised. The impact of Council amalgamations and the finalisation of the Alliance Action Plan in 2017 were contributing factors.

A business case was completed in August that concluded:

'The Cooks River Alliance has delivered double cash investment since it was established in 2011,

and is the preferred mechanism by state and federal government for funding. It has provided 'value for money' to member councils, achieving collectively what was not possible to achieve individually. It has generated internal value within councils through capacity building, has secured \$2.1m in project funding and rolled out significant on-ground works, and supported increased value and understanding of Indigenous heritage.'

The business case also recommended a new vision and governance structure with an expanded membership. After stakeholder, community, and state government consultation, a new structure was agreed that provided opportunity for all land managers across the catchment to participate in the Alliance and to combine efforts on issues that require a whole of catchment approach. The new governance structure

(see Figure 1) was approved in November by the 2017 Board.

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

The Catchment Congress provides information, advice and recommendations to the Management Committee. 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 are subcommittees of the Congress formed around specific issues and projects. Teams make recommendations to the Congress around policy and actions. Membership can consist of multidisciplinary staff from across the catchment, stakeholders from relevant community organisations and industry.

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

The first Management Committee met with newly elected Councillors in April 2018, then again in May. The Alliance would like to sincerely thank its 2017 Board and 2018 Management Committee members for their contributions. In particular, we thank our community board members for their years of service since 2015.

The Alliance would also like to thank its host councils. In January 2018 the City of Canterbury Bankstown began hosting the Alliance Secretariat taking over from Strathfield Council who had hosted for the previous five years.

2017 Board Members	2018 Management Committee
<u>Councillors</u>	Cr. Andrew Tsounis, Bayside Council
Cr. Andrew Soulos, Strathfield Council	Cr. Clare Raffan, City of Canterbury Bankstown
Cr. Andrew Tsounis, Rockdale City Council	Cr. Colin Hesse, Inner West Council
Cr. Daniel Bott, Strathfield Council	Cr. Darcy Byrne, Mayor Inner West Council
Cr. Jess Miller, City of Sydney	Cr. Khal Asfour, Mayor City of Canterbury Bankstown
Cr. Jess Scully, City of Sydney	Cr. Maryanne Duggan, Strathfield Council
Cr. Raj Datta, Strathfield Council	Cr. Nella Hall, Strathfield Council
<u>Post-amalgamation administrator nominees</u>	
Chris Woods, Inner West Council	
David Dekel, Bayside Council	
James Carey, City of Canterbury Bankstown	
<u>Community representatives</u>	
Brian Shaw	
Justine Langford	
Mark Kibby	

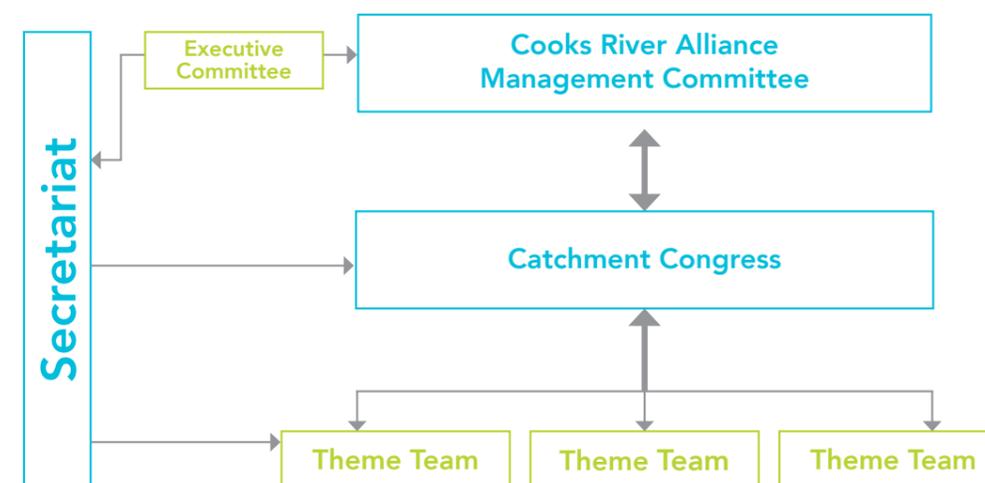
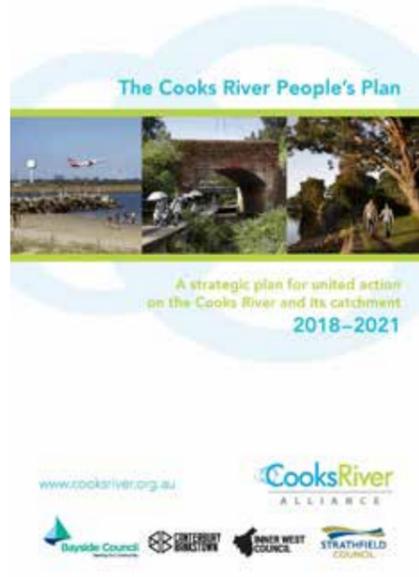


Figure 1 – Cooks River Alliance governance structure



A new strategic plan was developed with the final approval by the Management Committee in August 2018. The Cooks River People's Plan 2018-2021 builds on the long term outcomes in the previous Alliance Management Plan with annual actions and measures for the Alliance secretariat. The Plan also invites organisations to participate through the Catchment Congress and Theme Team Working Groups. The Plan has eight goals across three focus areas



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.

Under the new strategic plan, Goal 6 is for the Alliance to ensure there is an agreed approach to the management of the river and catchment. The Alliance is coordinating a Cooks River Catchment Coastal Management Program.

In November 2017 the City of Canterbury Bankstown, on behalf of the Alliance, received funding from the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage to commence the Scoping Study for the Cooks River Catchment Coastal Management Program.

The Scoping Study is the first stage in a four-year process that will provide an overall program for the Cooks River catchment to implement the requirements of the Coastal Management Act 2016. Among other deliverables, the Scoping Study identifies the vision, management objectives and risks to the coastal areas and makes recommendations for Stage Two studies. The Scoping Study is expected to be completed in early 2019.

The Alliance established a Cooks River Catchment Advisory Group that had the first meeting in May. The group has 20 stakeholders including Aboriginal representatives, state government agencies and public authorities, community groups, and industry. This group has provided significant data and direction to the Scoping Study.

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

Cooks River Catchment Advisory Group members

- Cooks River Alliance
- Bayside Council
- City of Canterbury Bankstown
- Inner West Council
- Strathfield Council
- Botany Bay and Catchment Alliance
- Burwood Council
- City of Canterbury Bankstown Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group
- City of Sydney
- Cooks River Valley Association
- Fisheries NSW
- Metro Local Aboriginal Land Council
- National Parks and Wildlife Service
- NSW Ports
- Port Authority of NSW
- Randwick Council
- Roads and Maritime Services
- Sydney Airport
- Sydney Water
- Wolli Creek Preservation Society



Yana Badu Wetland

The river's Aboriginal connections were acknowledged and celebrated throughout the year. The Alliance worked closely with Sydney Water to assist the Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council and the City of Canterbury Bankstown Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group to rename Chullora Wetland to Yana Badu Wetland, meaning walking beside water. The Geographical Names Board of NSW reported a record number of positive community submissions on the proposal. The Alliance is now working with Sydney Water to commission an Aboriginal artwork at Yana Badu and to increase site access.

The Cooks River Aboriginal Oral History Exhibition

The Cooks River Aboriginal Oral History Exhibition by artist Asher Milgate was exhibited at the Bankstown Arts Centre in November and at Redfern's 107 Projects Gallery in early July. The exhibition paired natural soundscapes of the Cooks River with photographic portraits and oral histories of 12 Aboriginal people with a lived experience and connection to the river.

The exhibitions were well attended with 107 Projects reporting twice the number of regular visitors. Alliance promotional activities generated media coverage across

five different newspapers including a front page feature and two radio interviews. The Redfern exhibition's Facebook event page was seen by more than 34,000 people with 1,100 people engaging with the page. The Alliance would like to express thanks to all oral history participants: the late Uncle Lester Bostock, Uncle Allen Madden, Aunty Ann Weldon, Aunty Jenny Thomsen, Uncle Ray Davidson, Deborah Lennis, Jason Wing, Jenny Newman, Michael Ingrey, Nardi Simpson, Nathan Moran and Suzanne Ingram.

Coxs Creek Litter Prevention Project

The Alliance successfully coordinated two Round 4 NSW EPA Council Litter Prevention Grant applications with the City of Canterbury Bankstown and Strathfield Council worth a combined total of \$210,000. The Lakemba and Strathfield South industrial areas within the Cox's Creek catchment are the focus of this project which seeks to reduce litter in the area by 40%. Businesses have been invited to lead litter management outside their premises. Anti-littering signage will be placed in the industrial zones and council staff will have an increased presence. Litter audits

were conducted and an evaluation framework developed that will inform the effectiveness of the business engagement model. The Alliance also coordinated litter training for council rangers and project staff. Additional industrial areas at Chullora and Lakemba have also been audited to gain a better understanding of litter in industrial areas. The projects are a NSW EPA Waste Less, Recycle More initiative funded from the NSW waste levy and will be completed by early 2019.

NSW Corrective Services partnership

The Intensive Correction Order (ICO) program is a welcome contribution to maintenance of reserves and parks across our member council areas. The rubbish collection, mulch spreading and weeding work by ICO participants in reserves and parks would not otherwise be regularly undertaken, greatly enhancing and improving recreation spaces. In total, more than 1,500 bags of rubbish and 500 bags of weeds were collected and 50 square metres of mulch was spread this year. This represents 6,540 participant and supervisor hours at a value of more than \$215,000.





Catchment education

The Cooks River catchment model was demonstrated at 12 events and schools this year reaching an audience of more than 2,000.

The Cooks River Rescue program was also trialled by the City of Canterbury Bankstown working with a local Girl Guides group. The program promotes specific actions that individuals, households and organisations can take to help improve the health of the river. The program will be a bigger focus for the Alliance in the year ahead in line with priorities identified in the new strategic plan.

Get the Site Right

Get the Site Right is a joint taskforce between the Parramatta River Catchment Group, Cooks River Alliance, Georges River Combined Councils Committee, Sydney Coastal Councils Group, Lake Macquarie Council, NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA), and Department of Planning and Environment, and more than 20 Sydney councils. We worked together to target developers and enforce best practice on commercial and residential building sites, as well as major infrastructure projects, to protect waterways and surrounding environments. If sediment such as soil, sand, dirt and mud are not properly managed on building sites they can directly pollute rivers and cause severe

environmental problems, making it less safe for people to use.

The Cooks River catchment model was on display at the Sydney Home Show demonstrating the impact of sediment run-off in waterways. The Alliance also coordinated council staff training for participating Sydney Councils and funded the development of a project evaluation framework to assist in data collection. Media activities generated coverage in the local paper in the form of a news article and letters to the editor.

The campaign received a Highly Commended in the Excellence for Education or Policy category at the 2018 NSW Stormwater Awards.



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

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