

# 2020-2021 ANNUAL REPORT



[www.cooksriver.org.au](http://www.cooksriver.org.au)

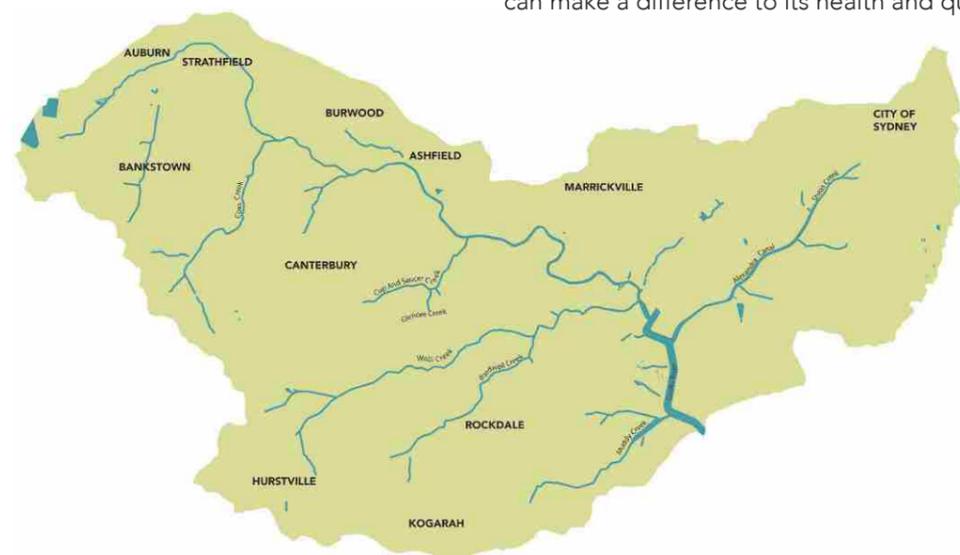


## Acknowledgement

The Cooks River Alliance respectfully acknowledges the Wangal, Cadigal and Gameygal, the Traditional Custodians of the Cooks River catchment, and also acknowledges other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 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 100km<sup>2</sup>. 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 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 countless 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 reflects the natural water cycle.
- 5 Native habitats are thriving and connected across the catchment.
- 6 The catchment is resilient to the impacts of climate change.

## Message from the Chair

I wish to start by acknowledging the Wangal, Cadigal and Gameygal lands, through which our River runs.

I am pleased to report that during 2020-2021, the Alliance achieved significant progress in our key focus areas of advocacy, partnerships and community engagement. This year marks the end of the Cooks River People's Plan 2018-2021, providing an opportunity to reflect on the breadth and scale of the Alliance's achievements over the past three years.

During another difficult year disrupted by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Cooks River and its environs once again became a focal point for our community to enjoy the many health benefits of accessing green space and nature in a highly urbanised environment.

This year, we welcome Sydney Water as an Alliance member. We look forward to working with our new partner on a range of river health initiatives, including improving how we manage stormwater and identifying potential options for future bank naturalisation. We are also very grateful and thank our member councils Bayside, Inner West, Canterbury-Bankstown and Strathfield for their ongoing support and commitment to the Alliance for a further three years.

It has been a pleasure continuing our long association with local community groups, the Mudcrabs, the Cooks River Valley Association and the River Canoe Club. We thank you for your strong advocacy and ongoing positive contributions to the care of the River.

I would like to acknowledge outgoing Executive Office Sue Burton and thank her for her leadership and dedication to the Alliance. I would also like to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of Alliance staff during what has been a difficult and challenging time.

A particular note of thanks to Canterbury-Bankstown Council for continuing to host the Alliance.

*Maryanne Duggan*

**Cr Maryanne Duggan**  
Chair Cooks River Alliance



Council	Representative	Meeting attendance		
		Aug 20	Nov 20	May 21
Bayside	Cr Andrew Tsounis Cr Christina Curry	✓	✓	
Canterbury Bankstown	Cr Khal Asfour (Mayor) Cr Clare Raffan (CRA Deputy Chair)	✓		✓
Inner West	Cr Darcy Byrne (Mayor) Cr Colin Hesse	✓	✓	✓
Strathfield	Cr Maryanne Duggan (CRA Chair) Cr Nella Hall	✓	✓	✓



## Focus Area 1:

# An Alliance of valued partnerships

### A renewed Alliance

**Four** member councils recommitted to the Alliance until 2024

**Two** non-member councils committed financial and in-kind support to the Alliance



**Over \$1,000,000** in member funding secured for the River over three years

### Partnerships across the catchment

**100%** of stakeholders satisfied with Alliance partnership

**89%** agree the Alliance effectively facilitates collaboration

**93%** agree the Alliance provides useful information for my organisation



**85%** agree Alliance activities lead to a healthier River

**91%** agree the Alliance has increased the community's capacity to act

*"The CRA are great communicators - helpful, constructive and accessible to stakeholders."*

*"No other organisation does it as well as the Alliance."*

- From stakeholder feedback survey



## A growing Alliance

This year marked the completion of our Cooks River People's Plan 2018-2021, with the Alliance reflecting on three years of remarkable and valued partnerships fostered across the catchment.

In 2021, Alliance member councils committed to continue these partnerships for a further three years, and welcomed Sydney Water as a new member. Further partnerships were established with Burwood Council who joined the City of Sydney, in committing to support the Alliance in the development of the Cooks River Catchment Coastal Management Program.

These partnerships represent ownership of over 85% of the catchment, ensuring the Alliance can continue to deliver on the community's long-term vision for the River from Yana Badu to Kamay.

## An Alliance of valued partnerships

This year saw extremely strong engagement for the Cooks River Catchment Coastal Management Program with 85 participants from 35 organisations working across seven different reference groups including biodiversity, climate change and heritage. The participants included a diverse mix of subject-matter experts, strategic planners, and passionate community members working closely together.

The Alliance continued to deliver a number of other key projects including partnerships with 21 different agencies on this year's Get the Site Right Campaign and nine councils/agencies on the Cooks River Catchment Flood Study.

The Alliance also formalised new research partnerships with Sydney Olympic Park Authority and Sydney Wetlands Institute, while becoming a formal member of NSW Landcare.

### Strategic Plan 2018-2021 Outcomes



**98%** of stakeholders satisfied with the Alliance's performance against Strategic Plan outcomes



**Four** Strategic Plan goals completed



**60+** organisations engaged in Alliance activities

# Advocacy for the health of the River, catchment and habitats

## Coastal Management Program (CMP)



Cooks River Catchment CMP Area

**Stage 2** commenced with a range of studies completed to support the final CMP

Over **\$850,000** in Council and NSW government funding secured to complete the **three** remaining planning phases

**85** individuals contributing from **35** organisations

## Advocacy and communications

**\$627,000** in grant funding for waterway health secured

**Nine** submissions advocating for waterway health



**Six** external waterway health projects supported

**Two** conference papers delivered to state, national and international audiences



## A whole of River and catchment plan

In 2020-21, the Alliance made substantial progress in the development of a Whole of River and Catchment Plan, the Cooks River CMP.

The Alliance secured significant funding from members and the NSW Government to complete the remaining planning phases of the CMP in partnership with key stakeholders from across the catchment. After developing Stage One in 2020, over 35 organisations continued to work across Stage Two, completing a diverse range of technical studies to inform actions and projects in the final CMP. To date, the Alliance has commenced four technical studies completing two with the remaining studies set to be completed in 2022.

The CMP provides a unique opportunity to tackle complex long-term issues facing the River that can only be addressed collectively including preservation of Aboriginal culture, water quality, community usage, biodiversity degradation and flooding.

Set to be completed by June 2024, the final CMP will provide a long-term strategy and program of actions to improve the health of the River using the NSW Coastal Management Framework.

## Advocacy for the health of the River

The Alliance once again participated in the Get the Site Right Campaign. The campaign aims to raise awareness and improve compliance on the potential pollution impacts on waterways from building sites. This year, a record 762 sites were inspected across Sydney, with \$383,000 in fines issued for non-compliance.

The Alliance made nine submissions advocating for sustainable development, best-practice management and greater regulatory focus on the health of urban waterways.

A total of \$565,000 in grant funding for waterway health was received for the Whole of River and Catchment Plan. An Environmental Trust grant for \$60,000 was secured to develop a citizen science wetland monitoring program and catchment-wide Flood Study. Further grant funding totalling \$115,000 was secured by Canterbury-Bankstown Council for a catchment-wide flood study.

## Strategic Plan 2018-2021 Outcomes



**35+** submissions made advocating for waterway health



**600+** social media posts reached over 74,000 people across the catchment and beyond



**Nine** grants completed with over **\$450,000** in funding obtained

Focus Area 3:

## Communities taking action

### Litter in the catchment

**Eight** new pilot projects developed under the Cooks River Litter Prevention Strategy

More than **3.5 tonnes** of rubbish removed from River at Alliance-supported events



**900+** bags of rubbish collected via NSW Corrective Services partnership representing **\$73,000** value to member organisations

**30+** community members trained as accredited Australian Microplastic Assessment Project volunteers

### Wurridjal Festival 2021

**50+** free in-person and online events held throughout March

Over **550** attendees



**Four** new Aboriginal cultural events added to the program

**80%** of attendees were very satisfied

*"Great program, great location, great people." "It's brilliant. Do it again please!"*

*"It was a truly memorable and moving event. Sharing culture by Indigenous leaders, community and performers was really special. Also gave an insight into the local area and its natural rhythms, species and habitat."*

- Festival attendee feedback



### 50% less litter by 2025

The Alliance and River Canoe Club of NSW partnered on the development of the Cooks River Litter Prevention Strategy, with funding provided by Environment Protection Authority NSW. The strategy sets an ambitious target of **50% less litter in the catchment by 2025**, outlining who, where and how to tackle litter. Key community groups including the Mudcrabs, Cooks River Valley Association and Wolli Creek Preservation Society were consulted through the development of the Strategy and pilot projects. The Strategy marks a vital step forward in addressing litter across the catchment in a coordinated and strategic manner.

Despite being heavily impacted by COVID, the NSW Corrective Services partnership program removed 913 bags of rubbish from the catchment, with an additional 3.5 tonnes removed in several Alliance supported clean up events along the River.

### Valuing Aboriginal ways of thinking

In March 2021, the Wurridjal Festival celebrated its third year on the River. Mullet season is a time of plenty and of community gatherings within Aboriginal families. The festival opening was marked by a traditional smoking ceremony. The program included a diverse range of indigenous focused events with a cultural fishing tour, Aboriginal Astronomy webinars, and Wurridjal Djalang poetry sessions.

The Alliance's Aboriginal Landcare coordinator connected Aboriginal people and organisations to the River, hosting a series of soil and water seminars and contributing to the 2021 National State of the Environment Report. These contributions illustrate the importance of blending indigenous and western perspectives in caring for the environment and ensuring healthy waterways.

### Strategic Plan 2018-2021 Outcomes



**18** tonnes of litter removed from the River in three years of Alliance supported clean ups



**5,000** bags of rubbish and weeds collected from **20+** sites representing **\$448,000** value to member organisations



Over **3,000** attendees across **150+** free events at the Wurridjal Festival

## Highlight Project

# School Stormwater Action Program

### The impact of Cooks River Rescue

21 engagement events

12 community groups involved



Over **4,500m<sup>2</sup>** in catchment area treated, with **3,000m<sup>2</sup>** of revegetation works

**One** Cooks River educational video developed

### Eight schools implemented on-ground works to improve the catchment



Stormwater audits completed

Upgraded stormwater pits



Rain gardens and swales constructed



Raised garden beds constructed



## Cooks River Rescue

The Cooks River Rescue capacity building program equipped schools and students in the catchment with a better understanding of managing stormwater. Students learned how to develop projects that also serve as local demonstrations sites.

The Alliance partnered with the Georges River Environmental Education Centre to implement the program in primary and secondary schools across the catchment. The program was primarily grant-funded via the Federal Government Communities Environment Program.

The program was offered to schools across the catchment, with **565** participants from **19** schools engaged. Eight of these schools went on to implement on-ground works including landscaping, stormwater pit upgrades and construction of rain gardens. The program also developed the Cooks River education website with resources and educational tools made publicly available to all schools.

These environmentally literate students can now champion water sensitive projects and actions to influence their schools and wider communities.

## Everyone has a role to play

The Cooks River Rescue program emphasised that in a catchment of 550,000+ people, everyone can do something to reduce pollution entering the waterway.

Everything that people do in and around our homes, backyards, parks, schools and workplaces affects the quality of water that runs off our streets, goes into our stormwater drains and ends up in the surrounding waterways and eventually the Cooks River. Whether it is picking up after pets, installing a rainwater tank or rain garden or just putting rubbish in the bin, everyone has a role to play in protecting and improving the health of the River.

Joining local community groups or a council's bushcare group are ways to effectively contribute. Visit [cooksriver.org.au](http://cooksriver.org.au) for more information.



### A rainy day on the Cooks River

Scan QR code to watch on YouTube and learn more about the River.



## Who are we?

The Cooks River Alliance is a partnership between Bayside Council, City of Canterbury - Bankstown, Inner West Council, Strathfield Council and Sydney Water. The Alliance uses the combined resources, experience, knowledge and skills within its member organisations and the community to address the complex environmental problems of the Cooks River. Between 2018-2021, the Alliance and its members worked together to deliver The Cooks River People's Plan: a new strategic plan is to be delivered in early 2022 that will set the direction for the Alliance over the next three years.



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

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Thank you to our Councillors and member organisation staff who have supported and guided the work of the Alliance throughout the year.



### We also thank the many groups and organisations we've worked with this year.

- |  |  |                                     |
|--|--|-------------------------------------|
| Al Hikma College                                       | Dulwich Hill Public School                           | Ocean Crusaders                     |
| Art Est.   | NSW Environment Protection Authority                 | Pacific National                    |
| AUSMAP   | Georges River Environmental Education Centre         | Parramatta River Catchment Group    |
| Bexley Public School                                   | Georges Riverkeeper                                  | Port Authority of NSW               |
| Boomerang Alliance                                     | Green Living Centre                                  | Professor Ian Tyrrell               |
| Burwood Council  | GreenWay Birdos                                      | Queensland University of Technology |
| Campsie Primary School                                 | Kadoo Tours  | River Canoe Club                    |
| Canterbury Boys High School                            | Kirsten Banks  | Strathfield Golf Course             |
| Council of City of Sydney                              | Koomurri Entertainment                               | Stormwater NSW                      |
| Cooks River Valley Association                         | Keep Australia Beautiful                             | St Patrick's Secondary College      |
| Cooks River Valley Community Collective                | Landcare NSW   | Sydney Airport                      |
| Cooperative Research Centre for Water Sensitive Cities | Macquarie University                                 | Sydney Wetlands Institute           |
| Crab Walkers   | Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council           | Sydney Olympic Park Authority       |
| Crown Lands  | Mudcrabs   | Sydney Coastal Councils Group       |
| Diego Bonetto  | Mudlarks   | Tempe High School                   |
| Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources  | NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment |                                     |
| Dr. Arthur White                                       | NSW Ports  |                                     |