

# STARTING IN YOUR BACKYARD — LIVING ON THE EDGE

## overview of the project

'Starting in your backyard' was a project run by WetlandCare Australia (WCA) that educated residents in Ballina, NSW, about simple and effective ways to create and maintain environmentally friendly backyards. The project targeted residents who live adjacent to East Ballina Creek Wetland. This method of targeted education proved successful, with over 400 households receiving information on the wetland and over 50 participants attending two workshops and interpretative wetland tours. Follow up backyard visits demonstrated that significant behavioural change had occurred as a result of the project.

All surveyed workshop participants thought the workshops were valuable and over 87 percent of participants gained an increased interest in living sustainably, with the remaining participants claiming to already have a very high interest.



Learning about wetlands

## how the project was carried out

Informational packs about the wetland and invitations to attend on-site workshops including 'save the date' postcards were developed and hand delivered to over 400 households. These workshops were designed to provide residents with the information, hands on experience, examples and tools to protect the East Ballina Creek Wetland and to support on-ground works being conducted at the site.

The workshops began with a presentation on the types of wetlands in the area, weed control, the impacts of humans, and current management of these issues. This was followed by hands-on activities where residents learnt to identify plants, weeds, birds and frogs. A walk into the wetland afterwards gave residents the opportunity to use the information they had learned and become more aware of the wetland.

A facilitated brainstorming session followed the walk, where each household developed a 'Backyard Action Plan' for protecting the wetland. Facilitated discussion around current and potential actions assisted each resident in developing short, medium and long term goals for their backyard. Due to demand from participants, later in the project two additional interpretative tours of the wetland were offered, providing more time to discuss the ecology of the wetlands.

Following the workshops, WCA staff visited nine residents' backyards to review their backyard plans, provide advice to further improve their yard and an opportunity for residents to show off what they had done. The work was then promoted through a case study designed to inspire behavioural change in any future 'Starting in your Backyard' projects. A post workshop information pack was delivered to residents containing workshop participants' suggestions on protecting the wetland and improving its sustainability, an information bulletin and a postcard directing residents to the project's resource page on the WCA website.

## outcomes now and in the future

A positive outcome is that the project methodology is transferable for use in projects in other regions with wetlands or ecosystems adjacent to residential developments. Templates for the project materials, workshop outline and evaluations were created and refined during the project for future use in other projects.

The project resulted in the formation of five local partnerships that provided time, materials and advice to the project, as well as contributing a "local feel" and ownership of the project. An additional five organisations expressed interest in the project and would like to see this type of project in their local schools.

## benefits, challenges & lessons learned

In future, it may be worthwhile sending information through the local council, directly addressed to residents, to avoid the mail outs being dismissed as 'junk mail' by residents. However, extra time and resources would need to be factored into the project to accommodate this method.

One workshop was cancelled due to dust storms. Many of the participants could not attend the rescheduled event, so despite re-advertisement the workshop contained only half the expected number of participants. The delayed workshop meant that the Christmas season further delayed follow up backyard visits. Although this gave residents more time to undertake actions in their backyards, one month would have served as a better interval and more effectively maintained momentum.