

# ESTABLISHMENT OF LAND FOR WILDLIFE PROGRAM ON THE CENTRAL COAST

## overview of the project



Members erecting a sign on a Land for Wildlife property

This project extended the already successful Land for Wildlife program to the Central Coast of New South Wales. Land for Wildlife is a nature conservation program that aims to improve the biodiversity values of native plants and animals on privately held or community land. This program has been extremely popular, with over 1,000 hectares of native vegetation now being conserved on the Central Coast. The program provides landholders with grass roots help to enhance the habitats under their care. With the help of partner groups from Local and State Government and the community, the project provided a variety of activities to encourage landholders in the Gosford, Wyong and Lake Macquarie areas to integrate nature conservation with their land management practices. Once registered with the program, landowners gained access to a wide range of resources and activities to help them build their capacity to conserve and restore native habitats on their land. A bush regeneration team has been appointed to help landholders rehabilitate and maintain their properties and the team is setting up a seed bank.

## how the project was carried out

The project was achieved through a partnership network that included the Community Environment Network, the Department of Environment and Conservation, the local councils of Wyong, Gosford and Lake Macquarie, and other groups. The committee publicised the program through established networks, the media, letter box drops and open days. To register and receive the benefits of the program, landholders completed an Expression of Interest, after which they were assessed for eligibility and offered either Full registration or Working Towards registration. The latter landholders were advised on sustainable land management practices to help them achieve Full registration. Once registered, landholders were placed on a database and received a variety of conservation fact sheets, the quarterly Bush Matters newsletter and information on program events.

The program included field days and open days held around the Central Coast, and several hugely successful workshops



Members and their signs

on seed collection and propagation, plant identification, weed control and biodiversity monitoring. Landholders also received invitations to 35 workshops outside the project on a wide variety of topics from Fungi and Frogs to Tax Incentives for Conservation Agreements.

## outcomes now and in the future

Within the project period, Land for Wildlife attracted a total of 132 expressions of interest. All were assessed by site visits and most received Full registration, with 16 Working Towards registration. Since the initial project finished, the program continues to flourish, and the committee has estimated that well over 1,000 hectares of native vegetation are now being conserved in the three council areas. The 150<sup>th</sup> landowner has recently been registered with the program. This was celebrated on the rainforest property of a Land for Wildlife member. The program continues to hold field days, the most recent being on seed collection and propagation. This training is designed to encourage people to grow native plants of local provenance.

## benefits, challenges & lessons learned

The program has been extremely successful in improving biodiversity values on the Central Coast and in bringing people together to participate in habitat-enhancing activities. Across the three council areas, membership rates vary, with slow uptake by the Lake Macquarie residents and greater demand in the Gosford area. The ongoing program is addressing these differences by more vigorously promoting Land for Wildlife in Lake Macquarie. There was some reluctance to join the program in the early days due to the misconception that registration would bind landholders to limitations on land use. These misconceptions have since been addressed by clear communication on information sheets and on the Expression of Interest form, stressing the benefits and the voluntary nature of the scheme.