

Milton Ulladulla subtropical rainforest

Endangered ecological community

Target: expand the range of this threatened ecological community through weed control, fencing and plantings

Through on-ground management actions such as weed control, fencing, plantings, and community engagement and education, *Saving our Species* (SoS) has not only protected, but also expanded the range of the Milton Ulladulla subtropical rainforest endangered ecological community (EEC).

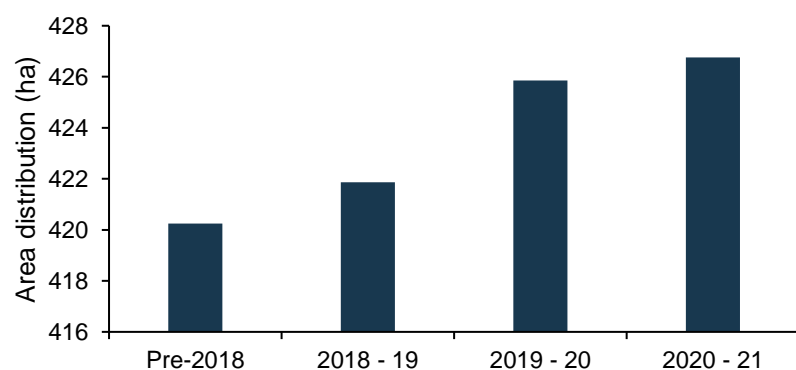
Characterised by a diverse canopy layer and confined to the Milton region on the NSW South Coast, this community faces great threats from land clearing, fragmentation, damage from stock and invasive plants, and edge effects. Plants and animals found on the edge of a habitat are more at risk of impacts from increased noise, light and human activity. The project began in 2018 after the prolonged drought caused many plants to defoliate, and since then community collaboration has seen on-ground management actions have a significant positive impact. The project experienced a significant setback with the 2019–20 fires, which burnt up to 65% of the rainforest. The community is home to many threatened species, including the powerful owl and grey-headed flying-fox.

There have been some notable outcomes to date:

- The extent of the community **increased by 1%** due to plantings.
- Over **7000 trees (6.5 hectares)** were planted.
- **24 hectares** of rainforest was fenced to protect the community from stock incursion.
- Volunteers contributed over **500 hours** to the project.

Trajectory: increasing

While the area of the community is increasing, other key monitoring metrics are to be measured on 3- to 5-year timescales to investigate how the ecosystem is responding to our management as a whole.



Partners

This project is led by the SoS program in partnership with Milton Rural Landcare, local landholders, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, Shoalhaven City Council, Local Land Services, Ulladulla Local Aboriginal Land Council and Treading Lightly (a grassroots environmental organisation). This project has provided many benefits to the community including better farm practices, local employment, and community cohesion, particularly after the recent devastating bushfires.

What did we find?

Through on-ground plantings we have directly increased the area of the Milton Ulladulla subtropical rainforest EEC, with over 7000 trees planted to date.

On-ground management actions are also being implemented to improve the quality and resilience of the habitat. Weed control is being used to reduce competition from introduced plant species, while 24 hectares of rainforest has been fenced to protect against grazing and trampling by stock.

There has been enthusiastic support from private landowners. So far, 11 landowners have actions being undertaken on their properties and ongoing discussions are underway with additional landholders. Community involvement has been a key component of this project, with numerous community events hosted including a rainforest information day and a post-fire weed information day run by project partner Milton Rural Landcare.

The 2019–20 bushfires have had a major impact on the project, requiring a shift in focus to increased weed management as a result of the post-fire flush of weeds.

Preliminary work has begun on understanding the impacts of the bushfires on the rainforest. Encouragingly, species diversity has been maintained, although rainforest structure has been significantly altered. Weed diversity and cover have also increased in burnt rainforest patches.



Post-fire impacts on the Milton Ulladulla subtropical rainforest. Photo: David Bain/DPIE

Plantings adapting to a changing climate

In order to introduce potential adaptation to a changing climate, a small percentage of seedlings for the plantings are germinated from seed collected up to 100 kilometres north of Milton.

This expansion of seed provenance is considered to be an enhancement of natural processes, given the pollen and seed of many of these rainforest plant species are transported by flying-foxes and large frugivorous birds that can travel large distances.

Regional climate predictions and predicted climate envelopes for plant species are used to inform these decisions – as we can predict how changes in this region will impact species' chances of adapting and surviving.



Two creek lines replanted with a suite of rainforest species plus an ecotonal boundary into eucalypts. Photo: David Bain/DPIE

Saving our Species is a NSW Government flagship program delivered by the Environment, Energy and Science Group in the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment. To find out more about threatened species in New South Wales and the *Saving our Species* program, visit the [Saving our Species Program webpage](#).