

CREEKS ALIVE COMMUNITY SUPPORT PROJECT

overview of the project

The *Creeks Alive Community Support Program* resulted in the development of eleven community groups in Newcastle to undertake riparian restoration and rehabilitation works for creek lines identified as a high priority for restoration. Newcastle City Council had identified issues of weed infestation, channel erosion, sediment deposition, poor water quality, lack of shading and lack of indigenous plants as issues of concern in their local area. Council employed a Community Support Officer to provide practical support, appropriate training and assistance to the newly formed and existing community groups. The eleven Creekcure groups developed as a result of this project have improved the health and function of their local creeks. Throughout the project a total of 5,870 tube stock were planted within riparian zones.

This project improved community understanding and involvement in caring for local creek systems and has improved the quality and extent of biodiversity in the riparian zones of local creek lines. The long-term benefits of this project include reconnection of local communities with their urban creeks, increased awareness within the community of the environmental value of creeks and improved protection of these areas for the future.



Volunteers planting out the banks of a local creek

how the project was carried out

The Community Support Officer engaged communities in target areas by inviting families and individuals to be involved in a range of activities in their neighbourhood. Gutter Talk is a street event for residents to help them understand the importance of keeping their street clean for waterway health. Creeks Alive Bug Surveys offer residents the opportunity to take a look at the life in their local creek. At these activities, educational materials and other resources relating to creek line issues were provided. These activities identified interested community members who formed eleven new rehabilitation groups.



Creeks Alive community bug survey

The new groups were provided with induction training prior to commencing work on their local sites. Induction training included a background on rehabilitation methods, Council expectations and occupation health and safety advice. Volunteers at

each site were also provided with onsite briefings and practical support, native plant tube stock, equipment and protective clothing.

Council wanted to determine local residents' knowledge, values and perceptions of their natural environment and their interaction with it and so conducted a community survey. This information was used to develop a package for residents in new sub-divisions that encourages them to adopt more sustainable practices and behaviours.

outcomes now and in the future

This project has provided the participants with practical skills in rehabilitation methods, which they can use to conduct further on-ground works. There has also been an increased awareness of biodiversity conservation and riparian protection in the wider community.

One of the major benefits of the program is that strong relationships between the local council, residents and the local Catchment Management Authority have been developed. These groups working together can have a greater influence on riparian zones, land management and conservation in the area. It also allows for greater linkages and grant access with three supporting grant applications being written which were successful in obtaining \$65,000 to continue the program. This funding will target riparian and land management issues in the area and is supported by the Hunter Catchment Management Authority.

benefits, challenges & lessons learned

This has been a successful project that has provided training and empowerment for the community to conduct rehabilitation work on local creek lines and better understand the environment. The increased activity in the Creekcure areas has increased neighbourhood awareness and reduced illegal dumping.

The project provided Newcastle City Council with the opportunity to look at all the creek lines in their local area and prioritise their restoration needs. They are getting maximum benefit for the investments they make by working on the areas that need it most.

The main lesson acknowledged by Council is that the full life cycle of this type of project needs to be considered, not only the current work but the ongoing maintenance costs associated with the project. They also need to ensure that staff has an appropriate knowledge base to be involved in this type of rehabilitation work. A few problems with maintaining volunteer commitment were experienced, however having a Community Support Officer available and working alongside volunteers minimised any disruptions to the project.