

Introduction & Welcome!

Welcome to the first issue of the Gills Bridge Creek Community Newsletter. The newsletter has been developed to assist in communicating the works planned and those undertaken as part of the overall Rehabilitation Project for the Creek. At this stage it is proposed that the newsletter be published on a quarterly basis to provide an update to the community on the progress of various aspects of the project. This issue will provide some background information on the project as well as outline some of the work and activities undertaken so far. If you would like to find out further information about the project or would like to become involved please contact Sustainable Development Services at Kempsey Shire Council on 6566 3200.

Rehabilitation Plan

In July 2007, Council finalised a Rehabilitation Plan for the Gills Bridge Creek environment.

The Rehabilitation Plan aims to set a framework for preserving and enhancing existing assets of the creek, such as remaining segments of intact native riparian vegetation and aquatic habitats, and to rehabilitate degraded ecological assets, such as water quality and the extent of weed coverage. In doing so, the project aims are to describe and set in place measures to improve and sustain the ecological condition of the Creek, while encouraging a Total Catchment Management (TCM) aware, involved and practising community.

The objectives of the rehabilitation plan are to:

1. Improve water quality and flow regimes;

2. Protect and where possible regenerate native riparian vegetation;
3. Improve and sustain aquatic and terrestrial ecological habitats;
4. Increase bank stability and decrease erosion;
5. Manage, control and where possible reduce the area and extent of weed species; and
6. Raise community awareness of total catchment management (TCM) principles.

In order to implement all of the recommended actions of the Plan, funding resources, additional to those currently estimated in Council's long term budget, are required. To this end Council applied for grant funding through the NSW Environmental Trust in August last year. Council was recently informed that its application was successful in attracting grant funding totalling \$92,000. This funding will greatly assist in undertaking a number of recommended actions, however, Council will continue to explore further opportunities for funding, including possibilities for corporate sponsorship, to value add and build on a number of actions recommended in the Plan.

Environmental Review and Education Program for Businesses

As part of the Rehabilitation Project an 'Environmental Review and Education Program' for commercial and industrial businesses within the Gills Bridge Creek Catchment was developed and has been partly implemented. Through a review of current practices and provision of education material, the Program has sought cooperation with owners and operators of commercial and industrial premises to help:

- reduce the impact operational activities may be having on the environment;
- meet legal responsibilities in relation to environmental legislation;
- identify current or potential sources of pollution; and
- provide recommendations for achieving improved environmental performance.



The first part of this program involved an initial environmental review of businesses within the catchment. During these initial reviews Council officers looked at such things as the waste generated from the premises, discharges to water, the type of chemicals stored and the way in which noise and air pollution was managed.

The most common issue of concern during the initial round of reviews was the appropriate use of bunding around stored fuels and chemicals. Lack of appropriate bunding was predominately due to operators requiring unimpeded access to storage areas for efficient operation of their business. However, following the initial review and recommendations made by Council officers, a number of businesses came up with innovative solutions to overcome this problem by designing site specific bunding that still enabled access to these storage areas by vehicles and other mechanical removal techniques. The installation of the strip of yellow bunding shown in the photo below demonstrates an appropriate bunding profile that provides containment of spills whilst still allowing unimpeded access to the stored liquids.



Example of site specific bunding installed which still allows unimpeded access to materials.

Another priority area of concern was the maintenance of stormwater collection and distribution pits. A regular maintenance program for any on-site stormwater pits should be undertaken as part of general operations to ensure that stormwater quality exiting the site and entering the creek is sediment and pollution free.

Businesses were also encouraged to develop water saving initiatives, such as the collection of rainwater and re-use of greywater for on-site operations. A good example of one such initiative was that undertaken by HF Hand & Co Pty Ltd. This business improved their dust suppression operations by constructing a custom built mobile water cart (from recycled metal) that can be positioned under a down pipe to capture rainwater during a rain event and then during dry and windy conditions carted around the site to suppress dust using the sprinkling system at the rear of the cart. The water cart will reduce HF Hand & Co's reliance on town water for dust suppression operations, saving on water bills and helping to conserve this precious resource. A photo of the water cart is shown below.



HF Hand & Co's custom built water cart.

ANU Student Visit

In September 2007, students from the Australian National University (ANU) in Canberra, visited the Macleay Valley to undertake a number of field based activities as part of their final year studies. The majority of their fieldwork activities were conducted within the Gills Bridge Creek Catchment.

Over 3 days, students were required to collect and analyse a variety of data on the physical, chemical and biological condition of the system. Among other things the students undertook:

- a survey of the aquatic and riparian vegetation (vegetation within the creek along the banks);
- a stream flow assessment;



- a water quality assessment;
- a soils assessment; and
- an aquatic invertebrate assessment.



ANU students conducting soil analysis tests as part of their field work activities.

The data collected and corresponding reports produced by ANU students combined with initial water quality monitoring results and field inspections undertaken by Council, will provide important baseline information on the current environmental condition of the creek and surrounding catchment. This data and information will be used to help direct resources to appropriate areas within the catchment as the rehabilitation project is implemented.

South Kempsey Public School Partner in Waterwatch Program

In conjunction with Macleay Landcare and Kempsey Shire Council, South Kempsey Public School have become involved in a Waterwatch program on Gills Bridge Creek. The students are meeting with staff from both Landcare and Council each term to test the water quality in the Creek. The students are checking for the presence of aquatic water bugs and recording the levels of pH, electrical conductivity, temperature and turbidity, all of which give an indication of water quality.

Waterwatch NSW supports the involvement of local communities in taking responsibility for their rivers and aquatic ecosystems. By monitoring water quality and biological indicators, local communities can directly observe and learn about the health of their waterways and identify whether changes are occurring.



South Kempsey Primary School students learning how to test the quality of the water in Gills Bridge Creek.

The results obtained by South Kempsey Primary School will add to the baseline water quality data already collected by Council and ANU students and help provide a measure of any changes in the condition of the Creek as the rehabilitation program progresses.

What's Next?

The focus over the next 6-12 months will be identifying priority areas for weed and rubbish removal and reinstatement of native endemic vegetation.

Follow-up environmental reviews will also continue for relevant businesses within the catchment.



This program has been assisted by the New South Wales Government through its Environmental Trust



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