

Sustainable Water Challenge Entry 2005

Hawkesbury City Council

Environmental/Stormwater Levy Program

Category: Planning and Policy

Project Summary

Introduced in 2002, Hawkesbury City Council's Environmental Stormwater Program reached the end of its third year in June 2005. Regular reports on the Program are provided to Council in the Council Business Papers as part of the quarterly Management Plan Review. However this Report provides detailed and specific information about the Environmental Stormwater Program and the projects initiated by Council using the Environmental Stormwater Levy funds.

The Environmental Stormwater Levy was introduced for five years with the approval of Council and the NSW Minister for Local Government in 2002, following concerns expressed by the community. The Program outlined in the Report was developed specifically for the introduction of the Levy. Its goals align with Council's Strategic Plan, and with the Catchment Blue Print and Stormwater Management Plans developed previously with community input for the Hawkesbury catchment.

The Program takes an integrated approach to improving stormwater quality. Based on research that identifies the most successful ways to create environmental improvements, the Program combines technology and engineering projects that help to 'cure' existing problems, with community education and involvement projects that help to 'prevent' pollution from occurring in the first place.

Program priorities are set and decisions are made based on sound data. Where data that best suits the Hawkesbury is not available, the Program undertakes any research needed or collects information to fill the gaps. An "adaptive management" principle for the projects has meant that small scale and budget pilot projects precede broader and/or more costly ones.

Most importantly, partnerships have been created within the Hawkesbury community that ensure that each community project has the support it needs to achieve its goals. It is these partnerships that allow us all to play a role, share our expertise and influence the priorities and outcomes of each community project under the Environmental Stormwater Program.

Levy Funds Expenditure

Hawkesbury ratepayers currently contribute \$39.20 per household annually to the Levy that funds the Program. This provides just under \$1 million per year for the Environmental Stormwater Program projects that improve the local environment in and around the Hawkesbury River within the Local Government Area. To the end of the financial year 2004/2005, \$2.68 Million had been collected from Hawkesbury ratepayers under the Levy Program. Approximately \$2.4M had been allocated to environmental and stormwater projects under the Program over the three years to the end of June 2005.

The funds provided by the Levy enable much more to be done than would be possible using other Council and community resources alone. Since the Environmental Stormwater Program commenced, 23 projects have been initiated, some of which are already complete.

Approximately \$2.5 Million remains to be allocated to projects over the remaining two years of the current Levy Program. Preliminary details of 20 projects to which the funds will be

allocated in 2005/2006 and 2006/2007 account for all but approximately \$200,000 of the Levy funds expected to be collected.

Projects

The projects include the installation of four new Gross Pollutant Traps to prevent litter, sediment and other materials from entering our local creeks and waterways, adding to the traps already installed throughout the catchment under previous grant programs. Funds from the Levy also enable more regular cleaning of all of the gross pollutant traps in the Hawkesbury Local Government Area. At a cost of approximately \$4,000 per year for each Gross Pollutant Trap, the cleaning program has trapped more than 200 tonnes of litter, sediment and rubbish, preventing this from reaching the river. Just as importantly, a new program of monitoring gross pollutant traps allows initiatives and projects to better target major contributors to materials being collected in Gross Pollutant Traps at specific locations.

The Environmental Stormwater Program also has provided important data needed to improve how we plan and make decisions in the Hawkesbury. Many of the decisions made by Council, business, industry and the community affect the water quality in our waterways. The Program has helped to give councils across NSW a new toolkit for water quality monitoring through a cooperative project led by Liverpool Council. Projects have explored the relationship between native freshwater mussels and their ability to remove pollutants in our waterways, and will map native vegetation and weed species throughout the Local Government Area.

Information provided by the Program, along with projects to make this information easily available to decision-makers, allows for improved urban and rural land use decisions, more effective priority setting and better targeted works to improve our local environment.

Through the Environmental Stormwater Program, Council has been able to focus on community awareness and development. Work with the University of Western Sydney continues to provide Council with a comprehensive understanding of its local communities, their aspirations and needs for an improved environment in order to develop targeted programs. Benchmark social research within the Hawkesbury has been carried out to provide strategic direction and long-term performance indicators.

Environmental education consultants to Council developed programs with a broader focus, such as the Hawkesbury Street Keeper. As a direct result, Council now works alongside a number of local communities across the Hawkesbury on projects identified as part of the Program as being an environmental priority for local residents.

In local schools, Environmental Education Units and a pilot School Environmental Audit process that is consistent with the Department of Schools Education Policy, have been delivered. Rolling out this program to other schools within Hawkesbury City is proposed for the final two years of the Program.

In addition, the Hawkesbury 'Street Keeper' worked with local groups and businesses to increase awareness of the actions that we each can take to improve the local environment and our waterways. The soon to be initiated Hawkesbury "River Keeper" will continue to work with the community, through active groups, river users and individual land holders, to improve our environmental knowledge and skills. However this role will focus on river and catchment health, and in particular aquatic weeds, in close liaison with catchment bodies.

Council has learned many lessons from the work already undertaken as part of the Program and these help to tailor future projects to achieve better outcomes more swiftly.

Aquatic Weed Programs

Some strong links have been developed between the Hawkesbury City Council Environmental Stormwater Program and other work being done to better manage aquatic weeds in the Hawkesbury River. The local Environmental Stormwater Program funding supplements the millions of dollars from state and federal contributions to aquatic weed programs.

Through Environmental Stormwater Program projects, nutrients from point and non-point sources of pollution into the River are being reduced. Healthier aquatic and riparian ecosystems are resulting from various rehabilitation projects. Land use planning decisions and new planning instruments are informed by work, including water quality monitoring data, undertaken under the Program, as is government decision-making at all levels.

Community awareness and involvement around aquatic weeds will increase as the Weedbuster Program lobbying and River Keeper liaison with catchment bodies progresses.

Lessons Learned

The Environmental Stormwater Program has given Council an opportunity to learn a great deal about the community and the environment in the Hawkesbury Local Government Area. The continuing program will allow Council to capitalise on the valuable community intelligence gathered under the Program and for community partnerships to be pursued and maintained.

The Program also helps Council to meet the ongoing challenge from cost shifting to Local Government. In addition, the Program will help to encourage the NSW Government to undertake further and urgent action needed to better manage the Hawkesbury River.

The Program also has provided new data that allows for better decisions, including land use planning decisions.

Public Release

The Report will be publicly launched this week by the Mayor, and made available to the community on Council's website and at Hawkesbury City libraries. It will be sent to stakeholder groups and organisations for their information. The Report also will be provided to the Minister for Local Government as part of Council's progress report on the program later this year.

Next Steps for the Program

- Council proposes to ask the Hawkesbury River County Council to prove a guiding role for the Hawkesbury River Keeper, which would be part funded by County Council member councils and the Hawkesbury Nepean Catchment Management Authority, with the bulk of the funds coming from NSW Maritime. Council has requested that this be considered at the County Council meeting on 18 August 2005.
- A strategic review workshop for the Program, involving internal stakeholders, will be held in October 2005. Any community feedback on the Report will be considered at that time. The workshop will ensure that the Program remains linked to Council's new strategic direction and will aim to develop new performance measures. New priorities, including the maintenance of 30 new South Creek gross pollutant traps if

the Federal Government grant application is successful, will also be identified at the workshop.

- Later this year, Council will be asked to consider extending the Program and the Levy to 2012. If Council supports this, The Minister for Local Government will be asked to endorse the extension of the Levy for a further five years.
- The 2002- 2005 Report also will be forwarded to the Local Government Minister later in 2005 along with any submission.
- Current projects and those already proposed for 2005/6 to 2006/7 will be completed.
- Regular updates on the Program will continue to be provided in the quarterly report to Council on the Management Plan. A final report on the five year Program will be prepared in 2007.

Roll out of School Environmental Audits & Environmental Management Plans

Council began a trial of environmental audits at Bligh Park Public School. Students carried out the audits with guidance from staff from Council, Envirocom, Longneck Lagoon and Brewongle Environmental Education Centres, and environmental consultancy company Molino Stewart. The Department of Education and Training Environmental Education Policy provided excellent strategic direction for the program. The audits will assist in the development of School Environmental Management Plans (SEMPs), which now are mandatory in all government schools.

Audits were conducted for the following areas:

- Water consumption
- Stormwater
- Waste
- Materials use
- Biodiversity
- Energy consumption.

As a result of the audit, a range of issues were identified at Bligh Park. As an example, *Acacia pubescens*, a plant listed on the Commonwealth and the State threatened species lists, was identified in the school grounds. The school aims to manage the plant as part of its School Environmental Management Plan.

Based on the experience gained and an evaluation of the trial audit, Council is considering how they can best to assist other schools with their audits and development of School Environmental Management Plans. The initial audits have provided sufficient experience to enable Council to consider progressively rolling out the initiative to other schools across the Local Government Area.

Over the 2005/6 and 2006/7 financial years, it is estimated that the roll out would require a commitment of \$300,000 from the Environmental Stormwater Levy Fund.

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