

Biodiversity Beyond Boundaries



Council Name: Kiama Municipal Council, Shellharbour City Council, Wollongong City Council

Web Address: www.kiama.nsw.gov.au www.shellharbour.nsw.gov.au www.wollongong.nsw.gov.au

Size: 1,089.3 square kilometers combined

Population: 288,984 combined

Abstract: It has long been recognised in the Illawarra that investment in natural resource management is best managed at a regional level. A regional strategic approach is more likely to improve co-ordination and management of biodiversity across the Illawarra. A regional approach also makes best use of knowledge and resources. The Illawarra Biodiversity Strategy provides clear direction on biodiversity priorities. It also consolidates the Illawarra Councils' commitments to a range of higher order targets set at the national, state and regional level.

Background:

Population projections for the Illawarra of an additional 47,600 by 2031 places increased pressure on the Illawarra Councils to ensure the regions most valuable biodiversity assets are carefully safeguarded. The Illawarra Councils all share a similar geography; a narrow urban and rural coastal plain framed by the scenic Illawarra escarpment. This shared geography presents each of the Illawarra Councils with many shared biodiversity values and management issues.

The Illawarra Biodiversity Strategy aims to guide a program for biodiversity management for the three Illawarra Councils over the next five years. It will be used to assist in developing policy, inform strategic planning, community engagement and to define a program of 'on-ground' actions for the Illawarra Councils to work towards. The Action Plan intends to enhance and support the work being undertaken by other agency and community stakeholders; whilst providing a clear set of priority actions to be undertaken by the Illawarra Councils. The Strategy aims to ensure existing funding and staff resources are directed to activities that have the greatest biodiversity benefit where possible.

A regional Strategy was a practical approach. Sharing resources in a regional manner is also a cost saving that allows the Councils to increase their natural resource management capacity. The regional approach also helps to build ongoing relationships, and ensure that each of the Illawarra Councils have a complimentary approach to managing biodiversity issues across the region.

Implementation:

This Strategy was developed collaboratively with Kiama Municipal Council, Shellharbour City Council and Wollongong City Council. It was overseen by a multi-agency reference group, and engaged key regional stakeholders to identify threats, values, regional corridors, and develop a regional action plan.

To develop the Strategy, a biodiversity reference group was formed to oversee its development. This group included representatives from each of the partner Councils, University of Wollongong, Office of Environment and Heritage, Southern Rivers Catchment Management Authority, Illawarra Landcare, and Small Farms



Network. Further engagement with biodiversity experts and key stakeholders was also undertaken through a number of workshops. The preparation of this Strategy supports priority action 1.1 (a3) in Australia's Biodiversity Conservation Strategy 2010-2020, which is to 'incorporate information and approaches to meeting biodiversity responsibilities into corporate planning and annual reporting guidelines'.

The Strategy is divided into two parts. Volume One provides a brief overview of the key issues values and threats, and the details of the action plan. Volume Two provides the detail on the values, threats and methods used to assess them. The strategies and actions arising from the Biodiversity Strategy will be incorporated into the Integrated Planning Framework, which sets out the business plans for the three Illawarra Councils in the coming years.

Funding was provided under the NSW Environmental Trust's Urban Sustainability Program.

Outcomes:

A major achievement includes the formal adoption of the Illawarra Biodiversity Strategy by each of the three Illawarra Councils in June and July of 2011. Within the Strategy, some major achievements include:

- Mapping of a regional biodiversity corridor network.
- Mapping and identifying bush restoration priorities.
- Prioritising vegetation and threatened species priorities across the region.

Previous studies had mapped biodiversity corridors within the Wollongong Local Government Area (LGA), however no detailed mapping had ever extended this corridor mapping to the south through the Kiama and Shellharbour LGAs. Through engagement with local flora and fauna experts, and spatial analysis of extant vegetation, a detailed corridor network was mapped to cover the whole Illawarra region. This information was also made available to inform the recent drafting of revised LEPs for these two Councils.

An assessment of biodiversity values was undertaken across lands under Council care and control across the region. This was done based on an analysis of four key variables: bushland patch size, vegetation types, connectivity, and effort from volunteers and bush regeneration contractors allocated over recent years. This assessment led to a classification of several hundred parcels as either Highest, High, Medium or Low biodiversity priority. These sites were mapped to provide clear guidance to the allocation of internal and external funding for on-ground restoration works.

Threatened Species Priorities had been previously developed for the Metropolitan Region (Greater Sydney Basin) the former Department of Environment and Climate Change (DECC 2008). However, as that methodology was applied to a much larger study area, it was considered a local review of these priorities was required to better reflect priorities and threats to threatened species in the Illawarra. The prioritisation rules were reapplied as devised by DECC (2008) however, with the local expertise applied to the distribution of those species within our region.

Another legacy of the project is the building of relationships between natural resource management staff of the Illawarra Councils. This has already developed a legacy of sharing resources, and therefore improving efficiencies. This is a benefit that we expect to continue.

Challenges:

One of the greatest challenges, that is not unique to the Illawarra Councils, is the availability of biodiversity data such as a state-wide vegetation classification and mapping system. Inconsistencies between the three vegetation maps used by the Illawarra Councils meant that much broader vegetation mapping had to be used for analysis of vegetation community priorities in the Biodiversity Strategy. This presents a 'jargon' barrier for many stakeholders, who are used to using the particular vegetation maps and the nomenclature

within them.

Funding and resourcing constraints present ongoing challenges to Local Governments seeking to improve their biodiversity knowledge and data. Fortunately, a strong alliance with the University of Wollongong means the Illawarra Councils can seek student support for natural resource management projects.

Ongoing development and rising population pressures present persistent difficulties for the management of biodiversity. To ensure actions identified within the action plan are delivered, the Illawarra Councils will incorporate and report on their actions through the Integrated Planning Framework which will soon replace the current business planning framework.

The Strategy has been through a robust process of peer review, expert input, and community engagement. One of the greatest challenges was balancing strong opinions and conflicting ideas from the various stakeholders, and submissions arising from public exhibition.

Coordinating an Action Plan across three very different Councils presented a challenge. The solution to this was to create a set of regional actions, to complement a series of individual actions that will be progressed by the individual Councils with their different requirements and systems. The continuation of this regional approach to some of the activities prolongs the cost efficiencies gained from this approach.

References:

<http://www.wollongong.nsw.gov.au/council/haveyoursay/pages/illawarrabiodiversitystrategy.aspx>

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