

# Bush Futures Project: Improving Urban and Peri-Urban Bushland Sustainability in Tweed and Byron Shires



**Council Name:** Tweed & Byron Shire Councils

**Web Address:** [www.tweed.nsw.gov.au](http://www.tweed.nsw.gov.au) [www.byron.nsw.gov.au](http://www.byron.nsw.gov.au)

**Size:** 1,876 sq km combined

**Population:** 121,119 combined



**Abstract:** The Tweed Byron Bush Futures Project was developed as a joint project between Tweed and Byron Shire Councils to address a common need for improved bushland management in urban and peri-urban areas.

This project will achieve, through on ground works and extension, the sustainable management of a number of State and regionally significant urban and peri-urban bushland areas within Tweed and Byron Shires.

The main aims for the project are to:

- Undertake extensive on-ground work to restore native bushland in urban areas and minimise threats;
- Raise awareness within the community of sustainable bushland management practices; and
- Reinforce councils' role in managing bushland reserves.

## Background:

Over the last decade both councils, and other stakeholders in this project (NRCMA; the Landcare network; OEH; LPMA, Tweed Byron Local Aboriginal Land Council) have been involved with ad hoc approaches to habitat restoration work in urban and peri-urban contexts.

However, the need for a more coordinated approach in this area has also been driven by strong community demand for improved environmental management of the regions' substantial biodiversity values.

Both Council's Management Plans and other strategic documents (e.g. Tweed Futures 2004/24, Tweed Vegetation Management Strategy 2004, Byron Biodiversity Conservation Strategy 2004, respective SOE reports etc.) reflect this community demand, and resources and staffing have increased accordingly.

Apart from reducing the area of habitat available for native flora and fauna, urban settlements indirectly influence the distribution and abundance of native species through a wide range of changes to the landscape including: the creation of edges, isolation of remnant patches, changes to soil and hydrological conditions, sedimentation of aquatic habitats, disruption of habitat complexes, introduction of weeds and exotic animals, pollution and changes to pre-European bushfire patterns.

While attempts are now made to ensure that new urban developments minimise their impact on surrounding habitats, there remains an urgent need to prevent further degradation of remnant habitats. These factors, seen as common across both Shires and elsewhere at the urban bushland interface helped define the objectives of the project.



## Implementation:

The timeframe for the Project is three years; the first year devoted to development of a Business Plan (see website) and completion of a bushland audit to determine bushland condition and rehabilitation priorities. Years two and three are devoted to on-ground and other works.

Implementation of the project has been guided by the Business Plan which identified Governance protocols and major program areas including, site prioritisation and planning, implementation of on ground works, community engagement and institutional engagement, with specific responsibilities assigned to each.

The project has been directed by a Steering Committee consisting of professional staff from both Councils, and representatives of NRCMA and Environmental Trust and both major Landcare networks. The steering committee led by a project manager has provided a link between Councils, the funding body, key stakeholders, consultants and contractors and the broader community.



New City Road residents, Mullumbimby

Stakeholders targeted for engagement during this project include:

- Councilors, council executive management, staff and units undertaking on ground works;
- Residents living adjacent to native bushland;
- Sustainability Streets Program participants;
- The wider Tweed/Byron community; and
- A Key Stakeholder Group, including local environment groups, land management agencies, aboriginal groups and community representatives etc.

The project budget is \$1.7m; \$100,000 for the audit, \$81,000 for community engagement, \$470,000 for project management and \$1.07m for on-ground works. Funding for the project was gained from the NSW Government's Environmental Trust Urban Sustainability program.

This straight-forward project required:

- Engagement of bushland restoration contractors to undertake on-ground works including preparation or implementation of SAP's, monitoring and evaluation of works.
- Recruitment of Landcare and Community Support Officers to deliver ten community engagement workshops per year and provide input into fact sheets and manuals.
- Appointment of part-time Invasive Species Officers to provided community support for control programs.
- Development of institutional engagement programs by project staff familiar with the internal workings of Council.
- Informing neighbours at work sites of proposed works and provision of information about the project and actions they can initiate in their own backyards to protect local bushland values.

## Outcomes:

While the projects on-ground works commenced in the previous financial year (2009/10) only 25% of the project outcomes to date occurred in that period. Within the year 2010/11 the following outcomes were achieved:

- 24 Site Action Plans (SAP) were prepared and three existing plans were updated; these SAP's covered approximately 262 ha;

- Extensive bushland restoration at 86 sites covering more than 112 hectares has resulted in a significant reduction in weed density and severity, removal of rubbish, feral animal control and interpretive signage installation;
- 1000+ residents contacted directly;
- Management planning and restoration within 8 vegetation communities including five Endangered Ecological Communities and threatened flora and fauna habitat;
- Development of a 'Care Group Procedures Manual' to direct volunteers working on public land;
- Delivery of seven 'Sustainable Streets' programs;
- Delivery of more than ten community workshops covering themes including biodiversity, fox and fox den ID, snake handling and ID and nest boxes for wildlife;
- Information dissemination at community events, work site interpretation field days, tree planting events, preparation of media releases;
- Support of numerous National Green Jobs Corps training groups;
- Delivery of institutional engagement program e.g. LGSA NRM training workshop, development of NRM survey for Council staff to identify training topics;
- Development of education resources including 'Creating a Bushland Friendly backyard', 'Nest Boxes for Wildlife', 'Regeneration near Flying Fox camps', 'Urban Rabbit Management', 'Byron Bay Dwarf Graminoid Clay Heath' and a 'Butterflies of NE NSW and SE Qld' poster;
- Continued roll out of the Indian Myna trapping program; over 5,000 birds trapped to date;
- Continued delivery of regular Cane Toad Musters at selected sites and in response to community feedback;
- Release of a Native Species Planting Guide containing information about more than 1500 species including canopy position, occurrence and prevalence within mapped vegetation communities, typical and maximum height, growth rates, adaptability to environmental constraints, potential as feed for fauna, birds, and butterflies, occurrence by soil type and commercial availability; and
- Delivery of an Indigenous Training program focusing on conservation and land management skills.



Before and after photos of the Byron Cemetery site showing understorey choked with lantana July 2010 and cleared of lantana November 2011.

In 2011, the project won the 'Local Government Landcare Partnership' category at the Northern Rivers Regional Landcare Awards and followed up by winning the same category at the State Awards and is in the running for the National Award to be determined in September 2012. In November, the project was also selected as the winner of the 'Natural Environment Protection and Enhancement: On-ground Works Award' at the NSW LGSA Excellence in the Environment Awards for both its division and as overall category winner.

Long term outcomes will accrue from the methodologies, guidelines, manuals and fact sheets prepared for the Project and in the capacity to assign costs to the management of areas of remnant bushland.

### Future:

While the project still has six months to run the councils will ensure benefits from the project are ongoing by undertaking some of the programs initiated in-house, including invasive species management and the Sustainable Streets programs.

The project team will also seek funds to continue implementing on-ground works by lobbying councilors and executive management for recurring budgetary funds and by seeking funds from external bodies.

If embarking on this project again we would have:

- Spent more time in testing out the monitoring and evaluation framework and ensuring the SAP guidelines were better disseminated to our contractors. This may have been best undertaken in a workshop format rather than dealing with each contractor separately which was unnecessarily time consuming. While most contractors produced excellent plans with minimal input, others have struggled.
- Undertaken more research into ways of encouraging community adoption of bushland friendly behaviours. Our unofficial target had been the 'unconverted', those unaware of good NRM practices and despite good responses to workshops and Sustainable Streets participation there was very little response to over 1,000 letters and fact sheets distributed to neighbours adjoining works sites and changes in behaviour were difficult to quantify.

### References:

<http://www.tweed.nsw.gov.au/BushFutures>

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Nest Box use by sugar gliders

**BUSH FUTURES** 