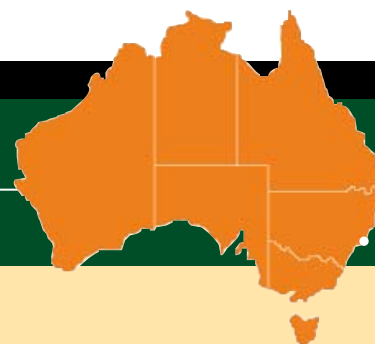


factsheet

A community approach

incentives for biodiversity conservation, Hornsby Shire, NSW



Background

Hornsby Shire is noted for its scenic bushland. Its local community places a high value on the natural environment and enjoy having wildlife in their gardens. However, it was determined that the majority of people in the Shire did not realise their responsibility for conserving the native flora and fauna on private property.

Approximately 90% of the Endangered Ecological Communities within the Shire occur on private land. Many of these communities are modified or degraded by weeds and are endangered or critically endangered.

Urban sprawl and suburban development within the Shire has prompted the Council to develop a number of community incentive programs to assist with both the conservation of biodiversity and protection of primary industry. The resulting programs use a 'carrot and stick' approach that should result in greater community acceptance and participation in on-ground actions.



Community involvement and participation in information exchange sessions is essential to the success of the partnership programs that have been developed.

Photo: Lyndel Wilson

Project: Development of five partnership programs to engage and encourage the community's participation in biodiversity conservation on private lands (rural and urban properties).

Participants: Hornsby Shire Council; residents of Hornsby Shire.

Location: Hornsby Shire (area: 510 km²; population: 145 000), northern suburbs of Sydney, NSW.

VET sector resource: RTD4403A *Develop a pest management action plan for a local area* and RTD5402A *Develop a strategy for the management of target pests.*

Developing a conservation strategy

Pivotal to the development of the community incentive programs is the adoption of the Biodiversity Conservation Strategy for Hornsby Shire. This outlines the overall local strategic response that the Shire will undertake to address biodiversity loss.

Importantly, the Council's approach to biodiversity conservation brings together regulation, community partnerships, incentive programs and environmental education and training.

Incentive programs complement the legal obligation that the Council undertakes in noxious weed control. These incentive programs encourage landholders to conserve and restore weed-infested native vegetation, enhance fauna habitat and improve water quality.

Developing partnerships and programs

Hornsby Shire Council has recognised the role that strong community partnerships play in producing on-ground actions that assist in the conservation of biodiversity. It has shown a strong commitment to forming partnerships between the community and the other agencies.

Currently, there are five partnership programs:

- Rural Lands Incentive
- Gardens for Wildlife
- Hornsby Bushcare
- Community Nursery
- Land for Wildlife.

Council has a Bushland and Biodiversity Team that is responsible for promoting, running and evaluating the programs and actively cross-promoting and integrating the programs within the community.

Rural Lands Incentive

The Rural Lands Incentive program encourages landowners to learn about the bush in their back paddock (see table below). It includes information sessions and property planning courses.

Once a plan is prepared, incentives are provided for biodiversity conservation, bushland restoration works and weed control. These take the form of cash payments, provenance plants and

other materials, plus opportunities for the landholder to be involved with ongoing learning on their own property working alongside professional bush regenerators.

The NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change is also promoting the property management planning component of this program for environmental property planning on the rural-urban fringe.



Property planning courses, incentives and assistance with on-ground weed management encourage landowners to improve biodiversity conservation on their property.
Photo: Jamie Wright

Partnership programs in Hornsby Shire	
Rural Lands Incentive	
Development and funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hornsby Shire Council and the (former) Hawkesbury-Lower Nepean Catchment Trust.
Key aims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase awareness and understanding of protection of bushland from weed invasion and other threats by residents of rural areas. Improve access for residents to Council staff's technical knowledge on environmental management. Reduce areas of weed invasion and detection and treatment of new weed outbreaks.
Special features	<p>Education:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Site visits involving council staff specialising in weed and pasture management, on-site sewer treatment and natural area restoration. Environmental workshops (on native flora and fauna, bushland and pasture weed identification, weed control techniques, fire management etc). Property management planning courses. <p>Financial incentives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cash incentives (biodiversity credit payments) for managing land for biodiversity and catchment protection. Payments based on size, condition (related to weed cover), and conservation value of bushland and landholder commitment on these areas. On-ground works/materials subsidies linked to property management plans and annual biodiversity credit payments.
Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Since 2003 over 400 residents have actively participated in the program. A total of 205 businesses have participated in an environmental review. 140 rural resident properties have received environmental educational inspections. Residents of 63 properties attended property management planning courses. 40 property management plans have been prepared. 21 property owners have received funding to implement property plans. Greencorps volunteers have assisted 5 property owners in bushland weed control. 1 property has obtained a Voluntary Conservation Agreement. Residents have spent approximately \$75,000 over 3 years of in-kind works on weed removal and improved stormwater management. 82% of landholders in the program had not been involved in any other environmental program previously. Residents have formed a local Landcare group.
Benefits to the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protects and enhances privately held bushland. Preserves of fauna habitat. Encourages cleaner creeks and streams through stemming of erosion and weed removal. Provides early detection of weed outbreaks. Develops community networks.

Gardens for Wildlife

The innovative Gardens for Wildlife pilot program was developed by Hornsby Shire Council for residents living in urban and urban-rural fringes (see table next page). It is based on a lecture series of topics on encouraging native wildlife into urban gardens and how to be more wildlife friendly around the home. This program has:

- developed strong relationships between a large number of landholders and Council
- facilitated free flowing exchange of information between landholders and Council
- provided landholders with access to Council facilities and expertise
- improved environmental outcomes in reducing bushland weeds
- expanded landholder capacity
- offered practical incentives to support landholders.

Hornsby Bushcare

The Hornsby Bushcare program (see table next page) commenced in 1989 with 30 volunteers. It has now developed into one of the largest Council run Bushcare Programs with over 800 volunteers involved in this local activity.

Community Nursery

The Community Nursery grows local, native plants for use in the Bushcare



Volunteers are an integral part of the Hornsby Bushcare Program.
Photo: Lyndel Wilson

program, contract restoration, Rural Lands Incentive, community open days and plant give-aways, Gardens for Wildlife and Garden Expo (see table last page). The nursery is operated by a Nursery Coordinator and 30 community volunteers. It has received accreditation through the Nursery and Garden Industry Association of NSW and ACT.

Land for Wildlife

The NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change has a state-wide Land for Wildlife program. Hornsby's Rural Lands Incentive program was linked to this voluntary program when the Council signed up as the first full partner in 2003. The program encourages and assists private landholders to provide habitats for wildlife on their property (see table on last page).

Conservation and community benefits

Early evaluation of the five programs suggests that residents are confident that they are learning about weed identification and control through the workshops and on-ground activities. After being involved in one program, residents often join one of the other environmental programs.

As the programs have expanded, there has been increased awareness of both weed and conservation issues



The Community Nursery provides local plants for a number of local projects and events.
Photo: Lyndel Wilson

amongst residents who may not have been initially aware of or interested in biodiversity issues within the Shire.

The programs have complementary on-ground benefits for public and private lands. Improved bushland condition as a result of bushcare activities leads to improved success of weed management on both private lands and public lands.

The future

Hornsby Shire Council is one of only a few local government organisations in NSW implementing incentive based partnerships with the community to protect bushland from weeds.

The Council is looking to expand these programs in the future. Continuation of these programs will:

- increase funding opportunities within the local government area and with partner Councils
- improve weed management and biodiversity conservation within the Hornsby Shire on both public and private land.

Other future goals include developing an ongoing Gardens for Wildlife program that incorporates conservation and restoration of privately owned bushland in urban and semi-urban areas, as well as developing partnerships with local schools that have significant bushland weed control issues on school grounds.



Wildlife is encouraged in the area via Gardens for Wildlife and Land for Wildlife programs.
Photo: Lyndel Wilson

Partnership programs in Hornsby Shire	
Gardens for Wildlife	
Development and funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental Trust (NSW) grant and Hornsby Shire Council.
Key aims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase awareness of Hornsby's threatened forests (including Blue Gum High Forest and Sydney Turpentine-Ironbark Forest). • Carry out on-ground restoration of weed infested reserves not previously managed through bushland weed control contracts with Council. • Ensure residents plant more locally sourced native plants in their gardens. • Encourage residents to participate in environmental activities.
Special features	<p>Opportunities for residents and community groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • educational resources including Garden Guides that feature descriptions and photographs of wildlife-attracting garden plant species that are compatible with threatened forest species and their various uses in the garden for habitat and landscaping purposes • participation in workshops and demonstrations about native vegetation, wildlife, gardening practices, and weed management and control.
Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More than 9400 native plants suitable for associated Endangered Ecological Communities given to residents via nursery open days and nine Gardens for Wildlife workshops. • 80 nesting boxes for possums, microbats and native birds. • Four bushland reserves receiving initial bushland weed control work to restore weed infested Endangered Ecological Communities. • Additional support for bushcare program via increased training for 18 bushcare groups restoring weed infested reserves, formation of bushcare sites, community open days, assistance to some schools with remnant significant vegetation and 37 new bushcare volunteers joined the program. • More than 250 properties in the program (receiving information packages on Endangered Ecological Communities, native fauna and other environmental topics). • Production of Garden Guides (launched at a garden design workshop and distributed to local nurseries). • Garden audits and property inspections undertaken upon request (detailed advice given about weed species present, control techniques and suitable alternatives). • Residents have increased their knowledge in altering gardens to match the natural environment (shown by pre- and post-program evaluations).
Benefits to the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increases awareness of environmental issues in their yard including weeds, fauna protection and habitat, retention of remnant trees and vegetation. • Encourages good gardening practices including plant selection and placement, safe pest and disease management, composting, water use reduction. • Provides provenance plants that contribute towards fauna food and shelter, specifically for attracting small birds and butterflies to the garden. • Provides mini frog pond starter kits through a frog and tadpole workshop. • Provides free access to a wide range of expert scientists presenting at each workshop. • Provides hands on experience of native fauna, plants and garden planning. • Provides opportunities to join a local Bushcare group in their area.
Hornsby Bushcare	
Development and funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recurrent Council funds (more than \$100,000 per year) and external grants.
Key aims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conserve and rehabilitate weed-infested publicly-owned bushland. • Provide a structured and supportive framework for volunteers. • Integrate the community with the management of natural areas.
Special features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community volunteers work with Council to conserve and rehabilitate weed infested publicly-owned bushland. • Every volunteer is accredited after completing bushcare training. • Council provides trainers to work on ground with Bushcare groups to provide hands-on training. • An annual workshop provides training over a broad area of environmental topics. • Volunteers get the opportunity to attend workshops and field trips to other parts of the Shire and an adjoining shire that give them a broader view of the program not just their own site.
Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over 600 active volunteers. The program commenced in 1989 with 30 volunteers. • Over 173 degraded sites have been rehabilitated. • A greater sense of ownership towards the conservation of bushland. • Involvement in a range of community planting days including local schools. • Volunteers have joined other environmental programs offered by Council.
Benefits to the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improves health and biodiversity of bushland. • Reduces allergy-causing, noxious and environmental weeds eg privet, lantana. • Creates a social network for people interested in the environment.

