



Issue A09 ~ April 2009

The Hunter Central Coast Regional Environmental Management Strategy (HCCREMS) is an innovative and highly successful regional initiative being implemented through the collaborative efforts of fourteen Councils in the Hunter, Central and Lower North Coast of NSW.

With a team of 13 full time staff, and a region covering nearly 4 million hectares, HCCREMS is working with councils to facilitate a collaborative approach to sustainable planning, development and natural resource management. The key projects and activities of the team currently include: Sustainability Education and Compliance, Regional Biodiversity, Regional Weeds Management, Climate Change and Roadside Environments.

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All are welcome to attend our first Regional Forum for 2009. This is a catered event so please RSVP to enviroadmin@huntercouncils.com.au or telephone 02 4978 4020.

**HCCREMS FORUM
APRIL 2009**

Date: Tuesday the 28th April 2009

Time: 9.30am - 2.40pm

Venue: The Bradford 11 Denton Park Drive
Rutherford (Off New England Highway)



Download the agenda from our website: www.huntercouncils.com.au/environment

What's New

Dr Maxine Cooper, Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment in the Australian Capital Region (ACR), has invited HCCREMS to provide a presentation to the Councils of the ACR (18 local governments in NSW and the ACT) at their upcoming Sustainability Forum. The ACR are interested in exploring the sustained success of the HCCREMS model over 12 years and how the region is tackling climate change and other sustainability planning and management issues.

We have recently engaged Dr Karen Blackmore – the lead climatic modeller/analyst on the current HCCREMS Climate Change Research project – as a staff member to commence in May 2009. This provides us with an extraordinary opportunity to continue the valuable work of this project as well as to assist Councils with a range of LGA specific climate profiles. For more information on the Climate Change Research Project see pg 2.

An application has been submitted by HCCREMS under the Commonwealth Government's Local Adaptation Pathways Program and has made it through to the second round. If we are successful the funding received will assist Upper Hunter Councils with undertaking climate change risk assessments for their organisations. We should know the final outcome of the application in May.

HCCREMS has applied for \$7.5M through the Federal Government's "Caring for Our Country Program" to deliver strategic on ground works to improve the ecological integrity and resilience of nationally significant environments in the region. In particular the project will reduce the impact of edge effects and other forms of degradation generated by the regional road network. It will also contain nationally core infestations of Alligator weed and Salvinia; two Weeds of National Significance that occur mainly in this region. A number of local council projects aiming to improve riparian health, restore biodiversity and address water pollution issues have also been included in the application. HCCREMS would like to thank all of the council staff that assisted with the application.

Climate Change Research Project

A two year research project to identify the regional and sub regional scale impacts of climate change across the Hunter, Central and Lower North Coast will be finalised this month. This innovative research project has completed a detailed analysis of historical climate variability in the region and combined this with a technique known as statistical downscaling to derive local impacts from the much broader scale outputs of Global Climate Models. The project has identified changes across the region for key climate parameters including temperature, rainfall, evaporation, wind and extreme events. For example, the results indicate that while average annual rainfall is not expected to increase or decrease significantly, a seasonal shift in the timing of rainfall is likely to occur, with a trend toward wetter winters and drier autumns. The research has also identified significant variation in the extent and nature of temperature change that is likely to be experienced in different parts of the region.

A full overview of the research results will be provided at the HCCREMS Forum on 28th April 2009. The full report will be available for viewing on the HCCREMS website in May.



To register your interest in being notified when the report is available, please contact Sara Markham on 4978 4023 or enviroadmin@huntercouncils.com.au.

Biodiversity

The Biodiversity Program staff have completed consultation workshops with key staff from 12 of our 14 member councils as a part of the on-going process to identify opportunities for the program to support biodiversity planning within councils. These workshops have included staff from Planning, Development Assessment, Environmental and GIS/IT sections within councils. The focus of the workshops has been to discuss any possible knowledge and/or capacity gaps in terms of biodiversity planning processes and to identify opportunities for the Biodiversity Program to draw on previous work to assist in filling these gaps.

Opportunities identified through this process fall into the 3 broad categories: (a) Development of tailored data products; (b) Developing and delivery of tailored training (c) Facilitation of sub-regional forums. A number of these opportunities will be delivered over the coming months both through the biodiversity and sustainability programs. Outputs to be delivered in the coming months through this process include:

- Slope environmental constraints layer (>18 degrees)
- Vegetation compilation mapping (best available data) as an interim product for LGAs without complete vegetation mapping coverage
- Woody vegetation extent map layer
- EECs on coastal floodplains flagging map layer
- Bushfire prone lands mapping
- Regional NRM data compendium

The Regional Vegetation Mapping Project has now completed the vegetation classification stage and a 3 volume set of reports will be released in the coming month. These volumes describe both the methodologies and the resulting vegetation classification (for the entire Hunter, Central and Mid-North Coast region) in detail. The volumes to be released include a technical report on the classification work (Volume 1), a report containing a detailed profile on each of the 210 vegetation communities recognised during the classification work (Volume 2) and a data audit volume (Volume 3) providing details of the vegetation survey datasets compiled for this project. These reports will provide a useful resource to anyone involved in management of vegetation, biodiversity or natural areas throughout the region.

Biodiversity Planning Workshop

An intensive two-day workshop was recently held with local government planners and ecologists, Environment Division staff, and two guests internationally renowned in their fields - Professor Bob Pressey (Conservation Biology & Planning: James Cook University) and Professor David Farrier (Professor of Law: University of Wollongong).

The aim of the workshop was to discuss and analyse the effectiveness of various mechanisms for achieving biodiversity conservation outcomes and associated issues such as key principles, planning responses, and minimum data standards. The outcomes of this workshop are currently being analysed and there will be several follow-up sessions over the next few months. The work will form the basis of a future publication on local government conservation planning and management, and provide direction to the Environment Division team in terms of the design and development of regional tools, mechanisms and capacity building initiatives for member councils.



FOCUS ON SUSTAINABILITY

The Hunter Central Coast Regional Environmental Management Strategy (HCCREMS) team has commenced work on a major three-year sustainability program which aims to assist our 14 member Councils increase capacity and commitment to delivering Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD) within Councils and across their communities. The program is comprised of three separate grant funded projects, totalling almost \$2.64 million. The regional program will focus on a number of sustainability themes such as water, biodiversity, climate change, and resource efficiency.

FOCUS on Education and Capacity Building

Educators from the HCCREMS Councils have been working with FOCUS staff to commence implementation of the Regional Education Project. The first issue addressed by the project is Climate Change.

Project staff, in association with Council officers, developed a comprehensive presentation on Climate Change covering the science, global impacts, local implications and sustainable living practices. The presentation is designed to be 'cherry picked' so officers can tailor the presentation to their audiences needs, whilst ensuring that a consistent similar message is being provided throughout the region to all community groups.

To download the presentation, please visit <http://www.hccrems.com.au>

FOCUS on Energy Reduction

The FOCUS on Energy Reduction project provides every Council with the opportunity to engage directly with residents about their specific energy usage practices.

Councils in the region will soon receive a package of Power Meter kits which are to be loaned out to members of the public through branch libraries or the customer service areas of Council. The kits will provide community members with the tools to conduct a home energy assessment to identify high energy consuming appliances and practices.

The Power Meter Kit includes:

- A Power Meter - used to plug into appliances (just like a double adapter). The meter will measure the energy wattage of that appliance and calculate the running costs;
- FOCUS on Energy Reduction booklets containing information on how to reduce energy consumption in the home through changes in behaviour, or cost effective home improvements; and
- A home energy assessment that provides information on typical wattages of everyday appliances, the typical cost of running appliances and the greenhouse gas emissions of individual appliances.

The program provides a tool for Council's to engage householders in an action program and awareness campaign focusing on energy efficiency.

Focus on Regional Compliance

This Project is working to enhance regional environmental compliance through a coordinated approach, enhanced organisational capacity, staff training and targeted education and enforcement campaigns.

The FOCUS team are currently developing a model Regional Compliance Policy template. This model template is being developed with the assistance of the Regional Compliance Network which is made up of representatives from member Councils and Agencies. Development and refinement of the template will continue for the next few weeks, after which a series of meetings and presentations will be arranged to receive wider feedback on the Policy design and to identify the implications to work programs if the Policy was to be adopted in each Council. For more information on the Model Regional Compliance Policy please visit <http://www.hccrems.com.au/compliance/index.html>.

Staff from 12 of the 14 HCCREMS Councils recently attended training on Investigative Interviewing and Evidence Gathering. This free training was held in Singleton and Port Stephens over two days and provided attendees with skills, knowledge and hopefully confidence in interviewing witnesses and ensuring integrity of evidence, leading to improved investigation and prosecution results.

The FOCUS team, in association with Regional Training Organisations, is working to make accredited compliance training courses available in the Region. This training package will provide attendees with significant skills and knowledge increase and provide Nationally recognised certification following the successful completion of all course activities. More information on the training will be available in the coming months.

Website Upgrade

"Urbanwater.info" is an award winning website developed five years ago by HCCREMS for urban water professionals across Australia. Capacity building activities around urban water management have increased across the country since *urbanwater.info* was originally conceived.

After surveying users of the site about their experiences, the decision was made to upgrade it to make it more relevant to the needs of the Councils. The upgraded site will:

- Be easier to navigate and revisit (and keep up to date);
- Provide a portal for information specifically relevant to water management professionals in our region;
- Link visitors to practical case studies and current guidelines, policies and procedures from across the country;
- Promote multidisciplinary approaches to achieving better environmental outcomes;
- Support knowledge sharing and networking between council staff;
- Provide ready links to upcoming and past regional events;
- 'Expand' beyond urban water matters to include content on biodiversity and ecology; and
- Acknowledge the economic, social, organisational and community opportunities and constraints that arise when working in local government.

UPCOMING HCCREMS EVENTS

Activity	Timeframe
HCCREMS FORUM	28 th April 2009
Community Energy Reduction Program – Power Meters.	Commence April 2009
Skilling staff and regional data - MUSIC modelling	From May 09 with event in June 09
Illegal Dumping enforcement blitz	May – June 2009
Council compliance self assessments	May – July 2009
Workshop on impact of CPRS and NGER on Council operations, finances and reporting requirements	May – July 2009
Release of the Climate Change Research Project report results	May 2009
Deliver Ombudsman’s Training on dealing with unrea-	June 2009
Biodiversity program mapping outputs delivered to	May – June 2009
Delivery of the Roadside Environment Project Products	June 2009

The Roadside Environment

The Roadside Management Kit is scheduled for release in June 2009.

The kit will include a variety of resources aimed to improve environmental outcomes in roadside environments when undertaking road construction and maintenance tasks. Specifically the kit will include a series of management guidelines, the Regional Roadside Environment Policy, Review of Environmental Factors templates for road maintenance tasks, training resources and GIS data.



HCCREMS has also recently been awarded funding under the NSW Environmental trust Restoration & Rehabilitation grants scheme for a project to protect ecologically sensitive sites in roadside environments. The project will design and implement a regional roadside marker system that will allow council staff not only to identify ecologically significant roadside sites but appropriately manage these important areas. Roadside environments within the region provide habitat for at least 28 threatened flora species, adjoin 480km of Ramsar listed wetlands and contain 7 ecologically endangered vegetation communities. The marker system will provide a direct link between regional roadside management guidelines and on ground works in roadside reserves. The project will produce field guides, mapping data and training to support and ensure the success of the roadside marker system. The project is due to commence in June 2009.

Weeds

HCCREMS welcomed Mary Greenwood to the position of Regional Weeds Coordinator last year. Mary has a PhD in Environmental Science (plant ecology) and brings twenty years experience in the horticultural industry to the position, with an additional ten years spent teaching at technical and university levels. Mary is leading the development of a new landscape- based Weeds Management Strategy for the region which will cover the Upper Hunter, Muswellbrook, Singleton, Cessnock, Maitland, Dungog, Port Stephens, Newcastle, Lake Macquarie, Gosford and Wyong LGAs. Key partners and stakeholders to be engaged the development of the new strategy include councils, DPI, HCRCA, DECC, research institutions, Landcare networks, landholders and managers.

A Regional Weeds Management Team and Technical Committee have been established to support this work.

The HCCREMS team have acknowledged the importance of having a standardised approach to data collection, collation, mapping and reporting across the region for both weeds. In 2008 a software product called WeedMap was identified as the optimum and most cost-effective tool for achieving this. Several Councils already have the software installed while the remainder either utilise a different software tool or have no facility at all. HCCREMS data manager negotiated a significant discount with the suppliers of WeedMap to enable the uptake of the product by all Councils in the region and most managers have included WeedMap software/hardware into their 2010 budget.

Post Flood Alligator Weeds Project

HCCREMS is in the final stages of implementing the Regional Post Flood Alligator Weed Project covering eight local council areas. The focus of the project is to:

- Identify, map and control new Alligator Weed infestations established after the June 2007 flood, which particularly consist of outlying infestations with the potential to develop into core infestations
- Determine high priority areas such as outlying infestations situated at the top of a catchment or areas where Alligator Weed become a potential threat to biodiversity
- Increase public awareness through Landholder Management Agreement incentives and education campaigns including workshops and media release and newsletter articles.

The main priority sites include the Hunter River in Singleton Council and Maitland Council areas and Lake Macquarie Foreshore. Upon completion it is conceived that the project will have completed the treatment of Alligator Weed covering an approximate area of 74 kilometres.

Post Flood Wollombi Salvinia Project.

This project is scheduled to be completed in June 2009. An aerial survey completed in November 2008 identified the extent of the infestation throughout the Wollombi Catchment, which has assisted in taking a strategic approach to identifying, mapping and prioritising the control of Salvinia.

The focus of the project is to target priority areas commencing from the top of the catchment and adopting an integrated management strategy incorporating a number of control methods including manual, herbicide application and biological control

Working closely with the Hunter-Central Catchment Management Authority and Cessnock Council the project has been successful in engaging at least 20 landholders to take part in the Landholder Management agreement incentives program to control and monitor Salvinia for a minimum of five years.

