



Sydney Coastal Councils Group

Resilient coasts. Engaged communities. Local leadership. Regional impact.



2015 - 16 ANNUAL REPORT



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From the Chair

As we report on the activities and achievements of the Sydney Coastal Councils Group in 2015-16, we also reflect on this as a year of many changes and challenges. During this period local government amalgamations have reduced the number of our Member Councils from fifteen to twelve, with more amalgamations expected during 2016-17.

Firstly, I would like to sincerely thank the outgoing Chair, Cr Geoff Stevenson, for his energy and enthusiasm in leading the work of the SCCG. I would also like to thank all previous SCCG Member Councils and delegates for their valued contributions over the years.

As always the SCCG's activities have covered a range of coastal management issues this year, including emergency management, waterway pollution, biodiversity conservation, sewer overflows and climate change. Advocacy has also been a particular focus this year. One of our biggest programs, the *Salty Communities* grants program, has invested over \$1.25 million in 17 projects, and has leveraged a total investment of more than \$2.75 million to restore and enhance biodiversity across the Sydney region.

I am extremely proud to be the Chairperson of an organisation that has produced so much for its Members. The results of our 2015-16 Annual Survey reflect how much our Members value our services.

I personally believe the SCCG is well positioned to lead, coordinate and amplify efforts to more sustainably manage our coast for years to come.



Cr Lynne Saville
Chairperson

From the Executive Officer

2015-16 was another successful year for the SCCG. Led by our long-term vision and new Strategic Plan, we have achieved significant outcomes in sustainable coastal management for our Member Councils.

We have advanced effective collaboration, built capacity and influenced the focus and direction of coastal management in Sydney through advocacy, strategic initiatives and by continuing to identify and address emerging issues. We have formed new partnerships and cemented existing ones. A new Memorandum of Understanding with Sydney Water has taken us back to our roots, working together to achieve healthier waterways and integrated urban water management.

This Annual Report provides members and stakeholders with an overview of these activities focusing on highlights and case studies of key outcomes.

Our substantial achievements would not be possible without the combined efforts and contributions of many. I would like to thank our Member Council delegates, both elected representatives and professional staff, for their participation, contributions, and leadership, which ensure the SCCG drives regional outcomes across Sydney. Thank you to the SCCG Secretariat for their diligence and hard work to implement continuous improvements to member services, and to our external project partners and contributors whose continued support reflects the relevance and significance of our work.

2015-16 was a year of turbulence and uncertainty for local government in the face of amalgamations and several major State Government reforms. The SCCG will continue to respond proactively to the multitude of challenges and opportunities as they arise.



Geoff Withycombe
Executive Officer

About Us

Established in 1989, we are a co-operative organisation that advances sustainable management of Sydney's urban coastal environment. We currently comprise twelve Member Councils who represent nearly 1.5 million Sydneysiders. Collectively we cover an area of around 800km² with a total oceanic and estuarine coastline of almost 600km, encompassing the waterways of Broken Bay, Pittwater, Port Jackson, Port Hacking, Botany Bay, Middle and North Harbours, and the lower reaches of the Lane Cove, Georges and Cooks Rivers (Figure 1).

During this period, our three most northerly members, Manly, Warringah and Pittwater, merged to form the Northern Beaches Council. Leichhardt Council has also merged with Ashfield and Marrickville to form the Inner West Council.



FIGURE 1: SYDNEY COASTAL COUNCILS MAP



Vision

Resilient coasts. Engaged communities. Local leadership. Regional impact.

Mission

To lead sustainable management of the coast through collaboration, research, capacity building and advocacy.

Goals

We work towards our vision and mission through the implementation of activities grouped under four key goals: Collaboration, Capacity Building, Advocacy and Research. For each of these goals we report on our performance for 2015-16 and highlight our projects and achievements.

Our Team

The strength of the Sydney Coastal Councils Group rests in the shared expertise of the elected representatives and technical staff of our Member Councils, and the capacity of our Secretariat to facilitate collaboration and knowledge sharing within the group.

Our **Full Group Committee** provides a forum for councillors and executives to share information and direct the core activities of the SCCG. Our **Technical Committee** provides a forum for council staff to exchange information, collaborate on current and emerging needs and develop regional projects and programs. We also have an **Executive Committee** to direct and make decisions on specific strategic and operational matters. Our Executive Committee members in 2015-16 are pictured below.



Chairperson
(2016 -)
Vice Chairperson
(Estuarine)
(2014 - 2016)
Cr Lynne Saville
Willoughby Council



Outgoing Chairperson
(2014 - 2016)
Cr Geoff Stevenson
Randwick Council



Treasurer
(Honorary)
Cr Peter Towell
Sutherland Council



Secretary
(Honorary)
Cr Leon Goltsman
Waverley Council



Member
Cr Greg Levenston
Woollahra Council



Member
Cr Brian Troy
Botany Bay Council



Vice Chairperson
(Ocean)
(2014 - 2016)
Cr Cathy Griffin
Manly Council



Member
(2014 - 2016)
Cr Selena Griffith
Pittwater Council

Our Secretariat facilitates the operation of these committees and manages the day-to-day work of the group. Secretariat staff for the period 2015-16 are listed below.

- Geoff Withycombe | Executive Officer
- Belinda Atkins | Manager Projects and Programs
- Emma Norrie | Coastal Projects Officer (part time - to November 2015)
- Katherine Howard | Coastal Projects Officer (part time - from January 2016)
- Fiona Shadbolt | Program Manager - Biodiversity Resilience (part time - grant funded)
- Duncan Webb | Project Officer Biodiversity Resilience (part time - grant funded)
- Antonina Pilat | Support Officer (part time)

Sydney Coastal Councils Group in a Snapshot

Sydney's coastal environment faces a range of pressures which are expected to intensify over the coming years.



A growing population brings with it increased development, demands on natural resources and pollution.



Climate change is impacting on coastal ecosystems with
 * rising sea levels,
 * extreme weather events and
 * warming temperatures already evident.



The SCCG assists its Member Councils to prepare for these changes and to sustainably manage our dynamic coastal environment into the future.

Our Work in 2015-2016



Coordination of

9 expert guest presentations

7 field trips & study tours



Facilitation of

13 internal committees

48 meetings, workshops & events



Representation on

15 external committees & working groups



Delivery of

4 quarterly newsletters

17 capacity building workshops, forums & events

12 Making Waves website updates



Advocacy via

11 comprehensive submissions

7 letters to Government



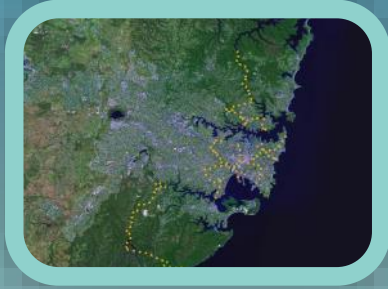
© Randwick City Council



© City of Sydney

Our Region

Landscape



An area of drowned river valley estuaries, cliffs, beaches, headlands, bays and lagoons.

800 *km² total area*

600 *km of coastline*

Population



Sydney Coastal Councils Group represents

12 *Member Councils*

1.5 *million Sydneysiders*

Economy



Our region produces

12.4 *per cent of Australia's GDP*



Our performance in 2015-2016

Financial Performance

The SCCG maintained a good financial position in 2015-16.

- Total Income: \$1,136,251
- Total Assets: \$1,418,820
- Total Expenditure: \$1,064,063
- Total Liabilities: \$617,753
- Total Equity \$801,067

In addition to utilising \$390,065 in membership contributions for operational and internal expenditure, the following grant funded projects commenced, were ongoing or were completed during 2015-16.

- Salty Communities Program – Commonwealth Government grant funding: \$715,000
- Emergency Management Program – State Government grant funding (Office of Emergency Management): \$70,000
- Sydney Harbour Coastal Zone Management Plan – Scoping Study: \$17,500
- NCCARF Contract CoastAdapt Tool Implementation Partner and Coastal Tool Case Study , Griffith University – Commonwealth Government funding: \$16,000

Annual Members Survey

An important tool for measuring our success is our Annual Members Survey. The Annual Survey provides an opportunity for Full Group and Technical Committee representatives to evaluate our performance, identify the continuing and future needs of Member Councils, and make suggestions to inform the SCCG's future activities.

Snapshot of 2015-16 Annual Survey results:

- 96% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement *"Overall, you are satisfied with the SCCG's performance"*.
- 81-96% agreed with statements relating to performance against our **Strategic Plan**.
- 96% agreed that the SCCG is **advocating** well on behalf of Member Councils.
- The majority of respondents told us that the SCCG **communicates** well both internally and externally.
- 80-100% agreed that **capacity building services** were relevant to them.
- 100% agreed or strongly agreed that SCCG **membership** confers a range of benefits.

Overall, results from our 2015-16 Survey were extremely positive, although we recognise there is room for improvement in the structure of meetings and in the time provided for feedback on submissions. (N.B. This year, for the first time, the Annual Survey has been timed to align with the financial year and the Annual Report.)

The Annual Survey enables the SCCG to continue to improve our services to Member Councils by focusing on priority issues identified by participants. The results will be used to guide our activities and assess where improvements can be made.

Achievements and Highlights 2015-2016

- Finalised the new SCCG Strategic Plan 2015-2019.
- Commenced the grant-funded project *Implementing and Embedding an Emergency Management Health Check for Local Government*.
- Distributed grant funding to council projects under the *Sydney's Salty Communities* program, and the successful completion of the main round projects.
- Actively engaged with local councils, stakeholders and the NSW Government on the Stage two Coastal Reforms through meetings, workshops, and a dedicated committee.
- Represented and advocated for Member Councils' interests through the preparation of 11 major submissions to NSW Government policy, legislation, reviews and announcements, including comprehensive submissions to the coastal reforms, Hawkesbury Shelf Marine Bioregion Assessment, and the biodiversity legislation reforms.
- Prepared a key policy recommendations document for response by political parties contesting the 2016 Federal Election.
- Signed a Memorandum of Understanding between Sydney Water and SCCG to enhance collaboration and communications between the organisations and the SCCG Member Councils, and to progress integrated water management across the Sydney region.
- Engaged a research intern to prepare a Literature Review and Issues Paper on sewer overflows management in the Sydney region.
- Developed and delivered capacity building programs, workshops and events to build the capacity of Member Councils and address primary issues of concern, including the Flying Fox Regional Forum, the Pollution Response Interagency Meeting and the Healthy Waterways Workshop.
- Delivered another successful Summerama coastal education program which saw over 2,200 participants attend nearly 60 events in January 2016 across 12 SCCG Member Council areas.
- Represented our Member Councils at conferences, events, forums and committee meetings.
- Shared our knowledge and expertise through presentations to other organisations and stakeholders via forums and conferences.

GOAL 1: Collaboration

Facilitate cooperation between, and coordination of, actions by Member Councils and coastal stakeholders.



Strategies

- 1.1 Ensure our governance structure continues to facilitate effective participation of Member Councils
- 1.2 Facilitate collaboration within and between Member Councils
- 1.3 Facilitate collaboration, dialogue and partnerships with coastal stakeholders, including government agencies
- 1.4 Facilitate information exchange and sharing with Member Councils, coastal stakeholders and the broader community
- 1.5 Promote community engagement in our activities
- 1.6 Provide efficient, effective and coordinated support to Member Councils

Summary

Our quarterly Full Group and Technical Committee meetings continued to provide a valuable forum for networking and information exchange between Member Councils. Expert guest presenters, detailed reports and roundtable discussions enabled delegates to workshop key issues and to share information and knowledge, as well as success stories and lessons learned.

Throughout the year the SCCG established or facilitated existing internal committees and working groups to advance project-related and topical issues including the Sydney Salty Communities Working Group and Expert Reference Committee, NSW Coastal Reforms Committee, Emergency Management Advisory Committee, SCCG Grants Committee, Summerama Champions, and the SCCG/Sydney Water MOU Partnership Steering Committee. Through these groups and committees the SCCG has been successful in bringing together council practitioners with technical experts, other government stakeholders and academic institutions to facilitate collaboration and dialogue, and to ensure decision-making and activities are informed by the best available information.

The SCCG has also represented our Member Councils on numerous external committees and groups, including the International Urban Coastal Cities Forum Advisory Committee, National Australian Coastal Advocacy Alliance, Bureau of Meteorology Marine Weather Services Consultative Committee, Interagency Riparian Boundaries Working Group, Sydney Regional Leadership Network, NSW Coastal Conference Organising Committee, Greater Sydney Local Land Services Local Government Advisory Group and Community Advisory Group, Sydney Waterways Managers Group, NSW ROCs Group, Connected Corridors for Biodiversity Steering Committee, Local Malabar Headland Interagency Group, Environment Educators Network, NCCARF Advisory Groups, and CRC Low Carbon Living (UNSW). This has enabled greater collaboration and partnerships with various levels of government, organisations, universities, community groups, and regional organisations of councils.

Summerama

The Summerama Program, celebrating its 13th year in 2016, is a coastal education and activities program held annually throughout January.

Summerama is designed to increase the community's connection with, and stewardship for, Sydney's coastal environments through fun, action-packed coastal activities, from kayaking, snorkelling and adventure tours to rock pool rambles and walk 'n' talks.

Summerama 2016 saw over 2,200 participants attend nearly 60 activities across the 12 participating council areas.

This year the annual Summerama Photo Competition was launched on 15 December 2015, with the theme of 'finding a solution to waterway pollution'.

The Photo Competition winning prize was sponsored by Captain Cook Cruises. In-kind support was supplied by Member Councils, and the NSW EPA provided giveaways for Summerama activities.



Collaboration SCCG and Sydney Water

This year, a new collaboration was initiated in the form of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Sydney Coastal Councils Group and Sydney Water.

The MOU, signed on 27 April 2016, outlines how our two organisations will work together to achieve healthier waterways and improved integrated water management, balancing water, sewerage and stormwater solutions to optimise environmental, social and economic outcomes.

Under the MOU Schedule of Activities, Sydney Water and SCCG Member Councils have signed an agreement to share data on water assets, and attended a Healthy Waterways Forum with a focus on pollution response.



Sydney Regional Flying-Fox Forum

In recent years, flying-foxes have established new roost sites and increased in numbers in urban and peri-urban areas. Growing evidence shows these changes are consistent with behavioural responses to acute food shortages associated with drought and habitat destruction, rather than overall increases in flying-fox populations. As a result, many NSW councils are grappling with significant human/flying-fox conflict.

In June 2016, SCCG hosted a Sydney Regional Flying-Fox Forum with assistance from the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage. The event was open to all councils and land managers across Sydney and provided updates on scientific research and monitoring, NSW Government policy, management planning, community engagement tools and a new funding program. Council case studies were presented and gaps in current knowledge and other resource needs were discussed.

We look forward to continuing to work with OEH and our Member Councils on an appropriate Sydney regional approach to achieve the challenging twin aims of flying-fox conservation and conflict reduction.



Grey-headed flying-fox © Jacob Sife

GOAL 2: Capacity Building



Develop and exchange knowledge and tools to support the role and build the capacity of Member Councils.

Strategies

- 2.1 Provide accurate, timely and relevant information on sustainable coastal management
- 2.2 Build Member Council and stakeholder capacity to advance sustainable coastal management
- 2.3 Identify and secure external funding and support from Governments and other sources
- 2.4 Build Member Councils' capacity to engage with the Federal and State Governments and stakeholders to advance sustainable coastal management
- 2.5 Support Member Councils to engage with the community to advance sustainable coastal management

Summary

In 2015-16, in addition to our ongoing capacity building services, we progressed or delivered specific capacity building projects including; the *Waterway Pollution Response and Notifications Interagency Meeting* and *Implementing and Embedding an Emergency Management Health Check for Local Government Stage 2* (see case study p 11).

Throughout the year we continued our largest ever grant-funded program – *Sydney's Salty Communities – Turning the Tide on Blue-Green Carbon* (see case study pp 12-15).

We continued to build Member Council and stakeholder capacity through regular updates on coastal-related news and policy in our quarterly *Coastal Currents* newsletter and monthly *Making Waves* online updates.

Our 2016 annual Funding Guide included over 60 funding programs and award opportunities. In 2016 we also established the SCCG Grants Committee to provide advice and direction on potential grant project ideas and expert input to grant applications.

The respondents to our 2016 Annual Survey indicated that they continue to find our capacity building services useful and relevant, including access to the SCCG network of experts, facilitating interactions with state and national stakeholders, opportunities for peer-to-peer knowledge sharing, consultation and peer review of policy and practice, and SCCG expertise and advice.

PROJECTS



The Sydney Harbour Coastal Zone Management Scoping Study

This feasibility project was completed on 30 June 2015 as groundwork for a potential future Sydney Harbour Coastal Zone Management Plan to protect, enhance, maintain and restore the valuable asset of Sydney Harbour.

The outcomes report for the *Sydney Harbour Coastal Zone Management Plan Scoping Study* was distributed to our Member Councils and relevant agencies in July-August 2016.

Healthy Waterways Workshop

A Healthy Waterways Workshop was held for Member Councils in May 2016.

This workshop was an action under the MOU between SCCG and Sydney Water.

The workshop focused on pollution incidents and how to improve incident response and notification procedures. It also aimed to build the capacity of Member Councils and Sydney Water, and facilitate communication and collaboration between the parties.

Pollution Response Interagency Meeting

The SCCG, as resolved by its Technical Committee, convened a Pollution Response Interagency Meeting in March 2016. This forum addressed ongoing concerns raised by our Member Councils regarding uncertainty and poor communications between councils and state government agencies on waterway pollution incident responses, incident notifications, waterway closures and communications about pollution incidents to the public, including the installation of temporary or permanent signs at polluted waterways.

The Interagency Meeting brought together representatives from local councils, Local Government NSW, the NSW Environment Protection Authority, the Office of Environment and Heritage (Beachwatch), NSW Health, Sydney Water, Roads and Maritime Services, the Department of Primary Industry Water (Regional Algal Coordinating Committee), the Ports Authority and NSW Transport. The aim was to clarify the jurisdictions, roles and responsibilities of councils and state agencies in pollution incident response and notification procedures, and resolve ongoing questions where needed. The Interagency Meeting was supported by the Environment Protection Authority.



Case Study | Emergency Management

The Office of Emergency Management provided funding to the SCCG through the State Emergency Management Projects Program to complete the SCCG Project *Implementing and Embedding an Emergency Management Health Check for Local Government*.

The project's aim is to build local council capability in emergency management planning, and enable councils to implement and embed the Health Check Tool into their integrated planning and reporting framework.

An Advisory Committee was established, with members from local councils, state government agencies and academia, to provide expert advice throughout the development and delivery of the project. Consulting firm Janellis was engaged to bring to fruition the project deliverables.

By the end of December 2016, the project aims to deliver:

- A functional, user friendly Health Check Tool for local councils to use and embed into their integrated planning and reporting framework.
- Stakeholder engagement workshops for local councils across NSW.
- A resource package for local councils.

CAPACITY BUILDING CASE STUDY:

Sydney's Salty Communities -

Turning the Tide on Blue+Green Carbon



Sydney's Salty Communities is a three year grant program funded by the Australian Government, focusing on research, capacity-building and on-ground rehabilitation for biodiversity and carbon storage in 'salt-influenced ecosystems' across Sydney's coastal and urban waterways. Now in its third year, the main grant round is largely completed and a supplementary round of projects is underway. The main and supplementary rounds invested just under \$1.3 million in 17 projects, delivering works valued at approximately \$2.8 million.

In addition, a series of 'special projects' has been developed to address issues identified by the program's Working Group and Expert Reference Group, and gaps identified in a [Literature Data & Practice Review](#) into coastal zone biodiversity management and knowledge. Special projects will provide capacity building opportunities for biodiversity managers; an assessment of backyard habitat programs; an assessment of sea level rise and planning implications for salt marsh and mangroves habitats; and information on the value of blue green carbon.

This year we also partnered with CSIRO to deliver the *Climate Ready Tool* (p 15). Climate Ready Tool Workshops instructed natural resource managers and researchers in the use of the tool and provided opportunities to work together on evidence-based case study projects. The workshops have catalysed the development of key relationships, a primary legacy of the Salty program.

The 'Salty community of practice' of Sydney's urban coastal biodiversity managers, educators and researchers working together on similar issues and engaging in collective learning, sharing of resources, planning and problem solving, facilitates the development of evidence-based practice and is an important legacy for the program.

Main round projects

From twenty-three applications received for the main grants round, eleven projects were funded. Successful grantees were the councils of City of Sydney, Lane Cove, Pittwater (two projects), Mosman, Rockdale (leading a group of 15 other councils), Waverley, Willoughby, Sutherland and North Sydney. OceanWatch also received a grant to collaborate with Willoughby, Ryde, and Lane Cove Councils. Details of the targets and outcomes of main round projects are provided below.

TABLE 1: MAIN ROUND PROJECTS- ON GROUND TARGETS AND OUTCOMES

| Measure | Target | Actual | Variance | % Variance |
|---|--------|--------|----------|------------|
| <i>Number of community engagement activities</i> | 148 | 158 | 10 | +7% |
| <i>Area covered by pest treatment (ha)</i> | 322.7 | 939.2 | 616.5 | +191% |
| <i>Area of revegetation works (ha)</i> | 6.4 | 9.5 | 3.1 | +48% |
| <i>Kilograms of seed sown (kg)</i> | 2 | 2 | - | - |
| <i>Number of plants planted mature height < 2m</i> | 48,283 | 50,966 | 2,683 | +6% |
| <i>Number of plants planted mature height >2m</i> | 6,805 | 8,649 | 1,844 | +27% |
| <i>Number of plants planted</i> | 55,088 | 59,795 | 4,707 | +9% |
| <i>Total new area treated (ha)</i> | 107.4 | 114.9 | 7.5 | +7% |
| <i>Average survivability of tube stock and seed stock (%)</i> | 85.6% | 87.2% | 1.6% | +2% |
| <i>Number of plants surviving with mature height >2m</i> | 5,843 | 7,691 | 1,848 | +32% |

Urban Aquatic Corridors, City of Sydney Council

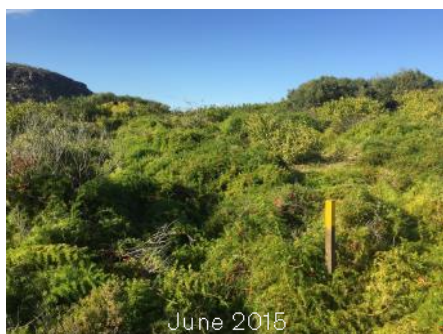


The City of Sydney partnered with the University of Sydney's Centre for Research on Ecological Impacts of Coastal Cities and the Royal Botanic Gardens Sydney to create an aquatic corridor consisting of 60 'flower pots' installed within the tidal range of the Farm Cove seawall. The pots have already resulted in an 80% increase in the number of fish and invertebrate species using the seawall as habitat. Over 500 school students have been introduced to the project. A successful Ecological Engineering Forum also showcased interventions to support intertidal biodiversity from around the world.

Gore Creek Reserve Bush Management, Lane Cove Council

Lane Cove Council worked with residents and BushCare groups to revegetate Coastal Escarpment Littoral Rainforest and surrounding vegetation communities. The project delivered over 50% more plants in the ground than planned.

North Palm Beach dune restoration, Pittwater Council



Weed treatment and replanting as part of the North Palm Beach dune rehabilitation, *Pittwater Council*.

This project rehabilitated a highly degraded area of coastal dune within the North Palm Beach dune system. The site was acting as a reservoir for weed seed that was impacting other areas. The project delivered an area of revegetation 50% greater than its target.

Bilgola Creek Restoration, Pittwater Council



This project tackled major weed infestations and revegetated patches of two threatened ecological communities: Themeda grassland on seacliffs and coastal headlands (NSW) and Littoral Rainforest and Coastal Vine Thickets of Eastern Australia (EPBC). Over 2,250 native tubestock plants and 2kg of Themeda seed were planted over three sites. A community planting and information day was held on the Bicentennial Walkway track, which was also upgraded to limit damage to the Themeda grassland.

Mosman Foreshore Biodiversity, Mosman Council

This bush regeneration project targeted specific areas of human encroachment along the interface between bushland and private land on the foreshores of Quakers Hat Bay and Beauty Point. Mosman Council worked to raise awareness amongst residents of the challenges posed by 'garden escapees' as sources of weeds in native vegetation.

Sydney's Salty Communities - Turning the Tide on Blue+Green Carbon



Integrated Fox Control, Rockdale City Council (lead)



This project brought together 15 councils and the Royal Botanic Gardens Sydney (RBGS) and formed a Fox Control Working Committee to coordinate a regional approach to fox management. The partners have shared resources and standardised guidelines for fox management. A web portal, foxscan.org.au, encourages residents to report fox sightings across the region. RBGS has established a monitoring program to answer core research questions about fox distribution, movements, predation, diet and behaviour, and has secured the legacy of the project with two Australian Postgraduate Awards to undertake these studies.

Waverley Coastal Heath, Waverley Council



Waverley Council revegetated and improved the condition of remnant native coastal cliff top heath vegetation communities, also increasing their floral diversity and reducing invasive weeds. The outcome has been an increase in the size and resilience of these remnant vegetation communities. The project exceeded its target for surviving numbers of plants with mature height over 2m by over 50%.

Willoughby Salty Ecosystems, Willoughby City Council



This project has improved connectivity of native vegetation along the Lane Cove River. Work primarily consisted of invasive weed removal to allow natural regeneration of indigenous species, supplemented with plantings of indigenous plants to strengthen connection particularly of saltmarsh areas along the Lane Cove River. Chatswood Golf Club collaborated with the project by reducing their edge mowing, resulting in biodiversity benefits but also cost savings in reduced time spent on maintenance.

Sydney's Living Shorelines, OceanWatch



This is an innovative experiment using natural fibre open-weave bags of oyster shells (waste from commercial farms) to protect eroding riverbanks and stabilise riparian and coastal vegetation. It is hoped that over time, new oyster spat will settle on the shells and form a self-sustaining 'reef'. Preliminary testing of the structures has been undertaken at UNSW's Water Research Laboratory at Manly Vale with positive results. This project has been extended into 2016-2017 due to delays in obtaining the required permits.

Woronora River Resilience, Sutherland Shire Council



This project reduced the impacts of aggressive environmental weed species on threatened flora and fauna in the Woronora River system. Sutherland Council enhanced native flora and fauna biodiversity at nine sites, increased public knowledge of the area's natural values and ameliorated the impacts of past inappropriate urban development. All environmental targets were exceeded in this project.

Balls Head Reserve Canopy Recovery, North Sydney Council



Poor tree health and canopy loss at Balls Head due to over-abundance of arboreal termites (*Nasutitermes walkeri*) led to this project to research the possible benefits of termite control on canopy health in an isolated remnant. A consulting arborist advised on best practice termite control and the Australian Catholic University (ACU) developed a monitoring regime to assess short and long-term responses in tree health. Promising results have led to the project being expanded to Berry Island. It will take some years to determine the full impact of the intervention on the canopy, so the project will be maintained into the future via an ongoing collaboration between North Sydney Council and ACU.

Supplementary Round Projects

The six supplementary round projects, involving grants of \$358,687 to deliver projects valued at over \$790,000, commenced in 2015-2016 and will be completed by the end of 2016. These include *Connected Corridors for Biodiversity*, a project led by the Southern Sydney Region of Councils to collate existing habitat corridor mapping and identify opportunities for connectivity across council boundaries; and *Hollows as Homes*, run by the Royal Botanic Gardens and Domain Trust with the Australian Museum and Sydney University in collaboration with 39 Sydney councils to monitor wildlife use of tree hollows with the help of the community. Other projects are: Pittwater Council's biocontrol project to introduce the *Salvinia* beetle to Warriewood Wetlands; a holistic catchment project in Dee Why Lagoon by Warringah Council; Manly Council's Fisher Bay restoration and Warringah Council's Fishermans Walk restoration project.



Case Study | The Climate Ready Tool

The CSIRO were commissioned by the SCCG under the Salty Communities Program to develop *Climate-ready Biodiversity Management: A tool to help design biodiversity projects in the face of climate change*.

The tool is designed to help councils and other natural resource managers to understand the long-term implications of climate change on the biodiversity of their areas, to overcome barriers to adaptation decisions and to plan near-term biodiversity conservation initiatives that allow for future adaptation to climate change scenarios.

The tool was developed through a series of webinars and workshops with biodiversity managers facilitated by CSIRO and the Australian Resilience Centre with input from the Salty Communities Expert Reference Group. Greater Sydney Local Land Services provided an additional small grant to further explore the tool with Local Land Services staff through an additional series of workshops. The Climate Ready Tool is ready for use and available from the SCCG website.

GOAL 3: Advocacy



Provide a regional and cohesive voice representing Member Councils.

Strategies

- 3.1 Strengthen SCCG participation and influence in the development and review of Government policy, legislation, activities and programs
- 3.2 Present and raise the profile of Member Council interests at appropriate forums
- 3.3 Raise awareness of regional coastal issues in the media

Summary

Advocacy was a major focus for the SCCG in 2015-16. During this period, on behalf of our Member Councils we engaged with ten state and one federal government process of legislative or other policy review. Our advocacy took three main forms:

- formal submissions to government reviews and policies
- participation in relevant external committees and/or advisory bodies, and/or
- direct communications with elected representatives.

We advocated on behalf of our Member Councils on issues of importance and concern including plastic pollution, biodiversity legislation and advocating for a multi-use marine park for the Hawkesbury Shelf Marine Bioregion. Advocacy took the form of submissions and formal correspondence with government ministers, department directors and political party representatives. We also maintain positive relationships with agency staff across various departments and regularly call upon these networks to promote the concerns of Member Councils.

This year we prepared a document of *Policy Recommendations on the Key Coastal Management Issues Federal Election 2016* which was distributed to all major parties prior to the June 2016 election. This document outlined five key policy recommendations critical to the sustainable management of Australia's coastline:

- 1) A National Coastal Management Initiative
- 2) A Consistent and Coordinated Approach to Natural Hazards Management
- 3) Water Management for Cities
- 4) National Action on Plastics Pollution
- 5) Funding for Community Coastal Programs

The document and the responses received from political parties are available on the submissions page of the SCCG website: www.sydneycoastalcouncils.com.au/Submissions

Submissions 2015-16

- NSW Biodiversity Conservation Legislation Reforms Package
- Natural Resource Commission, Pest Animal Management Review
- Hawkesbury Shelf Marine Bioregion Assessment
- Five Year Review of the 2009 Joint Management Agreements for the NSW Shark Meshing (Bather Protection) Program
- NSW Coastal Management Reforms Stage 2
- Container Deposit Scheme Discussion Paper (Joint ROC Submission)
- IPART Review of Sydney Water Pricing
- Draft NSW Invasive Species Plan 2015-2022
- Draft State and Greater Sydney Local Strategic Plan
- Australian Government Senate Inquiry into Marine Plastic Pollution
- State Environmental Planning Policy (SEPP) Review

NSW Biodiversity Legislation Reforms

The SCCG made a [submission](#) expressing our concerns with the proposed package of biodiversity legislation reforms for NSW. The existing legislation has strong principles and procedures to protect biodiversity, developed over time and in consultation with multiple sectors of the community.

The proposed reforms constitute a severe weakening of environmental protections in this state. The SCCG and our Member Councils do not support proposed reforms that will not retain or enhance existing environmental protections.

Case Study | Coastal Reforms

In November 2015 the NSW Minister for Planning, the Hon. Dr Rob Stokes MP, released a draft framework for NSW coastal management. The framework included:

- a draft Coastal Management Bill
- an Explanation of Intended Effect for the proposed Coastal Management State Environmental Planning Policy (SEPP)
- elements of a draft coastal management manual.

In response, one of the SCCG's primary advocacy activities in 2015-16 was the formation and coordination of a formal Coastal Reforms Advisory Committee. This group was established to maintain accurate and timely representation of Member Councils' interests in relation to the NSW Government's Stage 2 Coastal Reforms. The Committee provided a forum for discussion, policy formulation and strategic direction and aimed to advance a regional approach to sustainable coastal management through joint submissions and representations.

A detailed submission addressing all elements of the NSW Coastal Reforms was prepared and submitted. The SCCG also submitted legal commentary on the draft Coastal Management Bill and the SEPP Explanation of Intended Effect from Kirston Gerathy, a partner at HWL Ebsworth Lawyers; and economic commentary on the proposed coastal management reforms by Professor Rohan Nelson.

The SCCG submission to the Coastal Reforms process is available from the submissions page on our website: www.sydneycoastalcouncils.com.au/Submissions



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GOAL 4: Research



Identify and address current and emerging regional coastal issues.

Strategies

- 4.1 Identify current and emerging priority issues
- 4.2 Promote and distribute relevant research outcomes to inform best-practice management
- 4.3 Enhance the research capacity of the Secretariat and Member Councils
- 4.4 Engage with and drive strategic partnerships between researchers and policy makers

Summary

During 2015-16, the SCCG continued to engage with our government and academic partners and other stakeholders to further our knowledge on priority issues, and to promote and distribute relevant research outcomes to our Member Councils.

Case Study

Estimating Coastal Values

The SCCG is collaborating with the Office of Environment and Heritage, Eurobodalla Shire Council and the Department of Primary Industries on the successful CSIRO project *Estimating Coastal Values using Multi-criteria and Valuation Methods*. This project commenced in January 2016 and is funded under the NSW Environment Trust Research Program, with the aim of:

- identifying the social, economic and environmental non-monetary values of interest to key policy and decision makers
- developing quantitative and consistent monetary measures for coastal community values, and appropriate tools for adjusting these values to account for different scales
- determining how these values and tools can be used in management decision making.

Case Study

NCCARF Coastal Tool

The SCCG was approached by the National Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility (NCCARF) to prepare a case study on the SCCG project *Prioritising Coastal Adaptation Development Options for Local Government*, for inclusion in the *CoastAdapt Tool* currently under development.

SCCG was also invited by NCCARF to become a member of the *Tool Development Partnership*, to play a role in supporting and providing input, guidance and advice on the development of the CoastAdapt Tool and testing of the final product.

The case studies are provided in the tool to enable practitioners to learn from the experience of others and to provide practical, real-life examples of adaptation processes or activities that could be used to leverage or model practices in other jurisdictions or organisations.

The [SCCG case study](#) can be viewed on the CoastAdapt website.

Case Study Sewer Overflows Literature Review and Issues Paper

A three month research project into the management of sewer overflows in the Sydney coastal region began in September 2015. Interviews were conducted with Sydney Water, the EPA, the Total Environment Centre and Manly Environment Centre to examine different perspectives on the issue.

A Literature Review of international best practice, historical trends and research papers was undertaken. An Issues Paper was also prepared to identify key issues for consideration in determining future options to reduce and mitigate overflows, including:

- Community and stakeholder perspectives, transparency, communication and engagement between stakeholders
- Integrated urban water management
- Illegal connections and faults in the private sewer network
- Current management of sewer and stormwater systems
- Sydney Water's risk based approach to sewage overflow management.

Consultation with the SCCG Technical Committee and Full Group on the Issues Paper resulted in input, ideas and prioritisation of potential management options.



Based on this information a draft Action Plan was developed, and will be finalised and adopted during 2016-17 following further consultation with Sydney Water.

Case Study April Storms 2015

SCCG partnered with Risk Frontiers (Macquarie University) on a pilot project that attempted to capture the total cost impact of a coastal hazard event such as an East Coast Low across the SCCG region. The April 2015 Storm Event was nominated as the trial event for the pilot study.

A data collection spreadsheet was developed by Risk Frontiers in consultation with the SCCG Secretariat.

Consultation and promotion of the pilot study was extensive, however data capture was limited to responses from five of our Member Councils.

SCCG will continue to work with Risk Frontiers on a plan to progress this work in the future.



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Looking Ahead

2015-2016 was a turbulent year for Member Councils with the realisation of amalgamations, the release of numerous government policy reform agendas, and the ever increasing needs and expectations of local communities.

2016-2017 will see this uncertainty continue with further expected forced amalgamations and the finalisation of key state government reforms. This will include significant legislative and policy changes in key areas of local government, coastal, marine, and biodiversity management and the ongoing review of and amendments to the NSW strategic and land use planning system.

These developments provide challenges but also opportunities for the SCCG. Our consistent presence and detailed corporate and technical knowledge are key to servicing the immediate and longer term needs for our Member Councils and the region. We will remain vigilant and continue to advocate for our Members' interests while they adjust to numerous new policy and governance changes.

The SCCG's focus and key activities for 2016-2017, as directed by the Strategic Plan, will include:

- Undertaking a necessary redevelopment of the SCCG funding model to secure the future of the organisation.
- Continuing to be an effective conduit between Members to achieve collaboration and coordination in partnership with external stakeholders, decision makers and investors.
- Finalising key grant programs including the *Sydney's Salty Communities Program* and the *Emergency Management Health Check Tool for Local Government*, and seeking new investment opportunities to continue the legacy of these and past SCCG programs while addressing the contemporary and future needs and priorities of our Members.
- Building on and implementing the Activities Schedule of the recently signed Memorandum of Understanding with Sydney Water.
- Finalising the *Sewer Overflows/Stormwater Management Action Plan*. Working with Sydney Water and the NSW Government to implement identified strategic actions to improve water quality and ecosystem values in coastal Sydney.
- Focusing on coastal and drainage infrastructure to improve integrated water management and identify solutions for improved environmental and social outcomes, considering future needs and threats.
- Continuing to advocate on behalf of Member Councils during the finalisation of key government legislative and policy reforms.
- Actively engaging with the Greater Sydney Commission on the development of the District Plans and representing Member Councils on the Commission's Environment Panel.
- Continuing to focus on emerging issues such as climate change adaptation via direct participation in key national research and capacity building activities.

The strengths of the SCCG are our collaborative approach and our partnerships and we look forward to building on our strengths in 2016-2017. The SCCG is well placed to meet existing and emerging challenges and opportunities head-on, with its long history, proven track record of driving change and improvement, and a strong strategic direction. With ongoing internal and external support we will be able to continue to provide effective, efficient and well-directed services to members and their communities to advance the sustainable management of Sydney's coastal environment.







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