

HUON HEALTHY RIVERS PROJECT

The courage to lead on biodiversity at the local level

Tasmania:

Region: Southern Tasmania

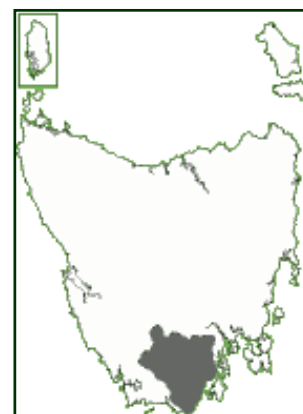
Affiliated Regional NRM Group: Southern Tasmanian regional NRM group
(currently being established)

Background

The Huon Healthy Rivers Project is an integrated natural resource management project operating at a municipal level. Council boundaries match catchment boundaries leading to greater effectiveness in addressing issues such as water quality, vegetation management, waterway and coastal degradation and community awareness and involvement.

The project has addressed these issues in an integrated manner, with a comprehensive array of actions ranging from strategic to local planning activities, specific on-ground actions and working in with local communities and industries. This has resulted in completed works and the increased capacity of local groups.

The *Healthy Rivers Project* has been running now for nine years and it is intended to continue indefinitely to build on the work done.



Achievements to Date:

- ❖ The project was based on a need to improve water quality in local waterways. The last year has seen a continued consolidation of the Waterwatch program with support provided to a dozen very active local groups.
- ❖ Significant water quality monitoring work has been completed.
- ❖ A water quality database has been maintained and a report produced that assesses all water quality data collected up to the end of 2002 (6 years worth of data from many sources and across all catchments).
- ❖ The completion of a vegetation and biodiversity strategy for the municipal area.
- ❖ Operation of a devolved grant program to protect priority vegetation communities.
- ❖ Provision of support to local Landcare groups undertaking revegetation and rehabilitation projects, through training, field days and workshops to better educate local land owners.
- ❖ Providing specific attention to weed control.

INTEGRATION OF BIODIVERSITY INTO REGIONAL NRM PLANNING

- ❖ Addressing waterway and coastal degradation, with support provided to the local Landcare and Coastcare groups.
- ❖ Two Green Corps projects completed on the rehabilitation of local waterways and some coastal locations.
- ❖ Rivercare plans completed for a number of waterways and some implemented on the ground (eg Agnes Rivulet).

Information Used:

National data sets:

- ❖ Aware of and take proper cognisance of Commonwealth priorities, issues and information data sets.

State data sets:

- ❖ State Government staff (eg: Threatened Species Unit) plus all available technical information (which is summarised in a comprehensive "state of the environment" section in the draft Huon Valley NRM strategy).

Regional data sets:

- ❖ Local information is collected and accessed to encourage integration of approaches on specific sites.

Market and Non-Market Mechanisms for Biodiversity Conservation:

Economic Instruments (financial mechanisms):

- ❖ Devolved grants scheme:
 - Healthy Rivers staff co-ordinated the 'Huon Valley Protection of Priority Vegetation Project', which was funded through the Natural Heritage Trust as a devolved grants project;
 - it provided funding in a 'one stop shop' manner to landowners and Landcare groups in the Huon Valley to protect and rehabilitate priority areas;
 - the type of work which has been funded includes fencing of riparian areas and remnant bush, installation of off-stream watering sites such as troughs, some weed control, revegetation and the preparation of Rivercare plans or Whole Farm Management plans;
 - allows groups autonomy and enables them to get on with action;
 - provides a rapid response that maintains local enthusiasm.
- ❖ Municipal funding:
 - Council uses funding from the Federal Assistance Grants Scheme to allocate up to \$30,000 per year for a separate conservation grant program overseen by the Council's Landcare Advisory Committee;
 - ratepayer funds are used to meet the employment costs of Healthy Rivers staff.

Community measures (motivational mechanisms):

- ❖ Icon species:
 - use of the platypus as an icon species to increase awareness;
 - an extensive survey carried out throughout the community to register all sightings of platypus;
 - a different way to engage the community;
 - the intention is to come back to this in several years time to assess the impact of improved river management.
- ❖ Community education:
 - raising community awareness about the benefits of better natural resource management, which involves improving the capacity of local groups working in the area;
 - working closely with those within the community who are interested in improving the quality of their local environment;
 - providing training opportunities to facilitate safe on-ground conservation works;
 - broader community awareness has been raised through the use of the media, newsletters, displays, workshops, local Shows, a Healthy Rivers web site and a very active local school program;
 - the project provides a “resource” room or library that is used for technical information by the local community.
- ❖ Local facilitators:
 - employment of two local facilitators on a part-time basis, with one focused on the implementation of the natural resource management strategy and the other co-ordinating 30 groups in the Valley.

Critical Success Factors:

- ❖ Proactive focus on planning:
 - a Catchment Management Plan was completed in 1997 and has since been implemented;
 - a draft Huon Valley Natural Resource Management Strategy has been recently completed;
 - from a biodiversity perspective, the main outcome has been the Vegetation and Biodiversity Strategy which contains a wide range of biodiversity related strategies and prioritised actions within the Natural Resource Management Strategy;
 - preparation of the Natural Resource Management Strategy ensures that the region is well-placed to have its issues included in future natural resource management strategies developed for the Southern Region, as part of the new State NRM Framework.



- ❖ Landscape approach:
 - the Biodiversity Strategy is prefaced on a total landscape approach and is set into the context of the wider NRM Strategy;
 - Council works hard to avoid compartmentalising in a geographic or issues sense;
 - the constant battle is to remain integrated and inter-related.

- ❖ Willingness of local government to lead:
 - local Council drives the process to enable the community to have a voice at the local level;
 - local Council commitment is essential to action happening on-ground;
 - local government recognises that a strong local network of facilitators and motivated community members is needed and that this is a local government role, rather than a State Government role.

- ❖ Constant, on-going presence:
 - on-going involvement rather than project based involvement;
 - awareness that a decrease in support would lead to a decrease in biodiversity activities;
 - recognition that the Commonwealth funds projects to see outcomes, but real outcomes being achieved are never short term and long term commitment is necessary;
 - Local Councils are better placed than most organisations to provide this long term commitment to local communities.

- ❖ Development of partnerships:
 - combination of the Green Corps teams and the Huon Valley Protection of Priority Vegetation devolved grants has enabled a great deal of work to occur on-ground, within the Huon Valley;
 - networks with local groups;
 - relationships built with industry;
 - co-operation with specific experts in State agencies for information and support.

Further Reading:

- Huon Valley NRM Strategy.

Contact for Further Information:

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Quote:

“At the outset, we thought we could run for a couple of years, groups would become autonomous and we could step back.

Now we know that no matter how much support you give initially, you must maintain the support indefinitely. You must be hard at it all the time.”

Tony Ferrier