

Biodiversity Incentive Program and Sustainable Land Management

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Introduction

Known as the Nature Coast, the Eurobodalla Shire is located on the south coast of New South Wales. With an area of approximately 3402 square km, the Shire stretches along 110km of coastline. This area is covered by approximately 70 to 80% of reserve system through National Parks and State Forests that are predominantly located in the west of the Shire.

The permanent population is 36 000, however this figure can exceed 100,000 during peak holiday periods. Needless to say, there is strong population growth and development occurring on the coastal fringe similar to coastal areas across Australia. This development is leading to fragmented ecosystems and limited connectivity between the eastern developed strip and the western park systems in the Eurobodalla.

The broad aim of the biodiversity project has been to utilise the best scientific available natural resource information to strategically target effective on-ground biodiversity works. The biodiversity projects are considered in light of social and community aspirations. This also ensures that Landcare and community project works can be enhanced where possible.

Methods

The Program utilised the information derived from the *Eurobodalla Capacity Planning Project 2001* (<http://esc.gov.nsw.au/ECECP/index.asp> (Eurobodalla Shire Council 2001)). This project established a range of natural resource data inclusive of vulnerable ecosystems, fauna, soil landscape, bushfire and hydrology. The model used a decision hierarchy that established absolute constraints inclusive of riparian buffers, SEPP 14 wetlands, slope > 25%, bushfire hazard, soil wetness, vulnerable ecosystems and acid sulphate soils. The project allowed for the development of a technique called the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). SEA is a planning and decision making tool for undertaking environmental constraints analysis and determining suitability of land for development.

To determine the most suitable localities for project works, the *Biodiversity Incentive Program* has used Council's Geographical Information System (GIS), *Eurobodalla Capacity Planning Project* and field validated data. This has also included a study of the Estuary Management Plans to identify and implement works outlined within the plans. The recognition of Endangered Ecological Communities, threatened species and wildlife

corridors are also critical to the planning and implementation of the Program. The Program has employed the basis of desktop surveys to effectively identify and prioritise site localities across the Shire.

The work is now moving towards the on-ground delivery of the incentive program. This component is critical to the success of biodiversity conservation and involves community and landholder participation in biodiversity management. The incentive program is able to support the landowner in undertaking works to enhance the biodiversity values of their lands. These works have included removal of stock from waterways, fencing, erosion control, revegetation works, and property planning for long term sustainable land practices. Environmental education and technical support is also fundamental to the long-term success of biodiversity for the Shire.

Council has developed a ten year Management Agreement with landholders to ensure ongoing long term maintenance and responsibility for the works undertaken. The relevant parties sign this Management Agreement, which is inclusive of the landowner, Council and the Southern Rivers Catchment Management Authority (SRCMA). The *Biodiversity Incentive Program* is funded by the Natural Heritage Trust, so the partnership between the Council and SRCMA is mutually beneficial to local and state government, as well as the landholders. Project works enhance the delivery of outcomes outlined in the following plans:

- South East Blueprint (to be aligned with the Catchment Action Plan 2005)
- Eurobodalla Shire Council's Management Plan
- Estuary Management Plans

The project works ensure that the local objectives of Landcare are supported and met.

Aims

The *Biodiversity Incentive Program* is to protect and restore vulnerable ecosystems and core fauna habitat identified in the Eurobodalla. This includes:

- foreshore/riparian protection and revegetation;
- creation of linkages between remnants;
- protection and management of remnants;
- protection of identified vulnerable ecosystems and threatened species;
- erosion control and sediment load reduction;
- increase community participation in biodiversity conservation.

The aims of sustainable land management are a primary function of planning, where Council has a legal requirement to consider environmental assessment of land when determining future land use planning and development proposals.

Conclusions

The *Biodiversity Incentive Program* is funded for a further three years. This program, along with SEA and the move towards Sustainable Land Management, is making Council review the incentive and market based programs that are being conducted across the nation. Recent changes in NSW Natural Resource Management structures are impacting

on local Councils. These changes include the creation of the Catchment Management Authorities; the restructures of the Department of Environment and Conservation, Department of Planning Infrastructure and Natural Resources and the Department of Primary Industries; and the impending changes to the Native Vegetation Act. The implications of these changes are still uncertain. To further add to the mix, the Department of Planning Infrastructure and Natural Resources will introduce a new template for Local Environment Plans that must be completed by all Councils within the next three years.

These changing roles mean Council must investigate long term mechanisms that deliver acceptable incentives to conserve biodiversity in the Eurobodalla. Council's ongoing commitment to natural resource management must be matched to the community's increasing expectations to retain the values of the Nature Coast. Adherence to this goal will assist Council in developing new, innovative and robust planning and works programs.