

Catchment News

Huge response received for incentive funding

The latest round of CMA incentive funding identified a high demand in the community for funding, with almost 500 Expression of Interest (EOI) forms received from community groups and private landholders in the Hunter–Central Rivers Region.

CMA General Manager Glenn Evans said staff had been overwhelmed with the huge response from the community and had been working solidly over the past few

months, with groups and individuals who submitted eligible projects, on the development of project bids and plans.

'The first round of incentive funding to be distributed is the Small Grant Program,' explained Mr Evans. 'A panel of CMA staff and community representatives have assessed the projects and will provide almost \$180 000 to 46 community groups and private landholders for projects improving vegetation and soil erosion over the next 12 months.'

'The CMA will now start assessing projects identified for the Land Management Tenders and Property Vegetation Plans, which will see \$1.2 million of funding distributed over the next 12 months.'

The CMA is also working on a number of other funding programs, which will be available in November this year. One of these will provide funds to implement works outlined in Upper Hunter Catchment and Rivercare Plans. Landcare groups and individuals can obtain more information by contacting Community Support Officers Steve Clarkson (Singleton) on (02) 6578 7346 or Mark Shortis (Merriwa) on (02) 6542 4426.

Incentive funding is being provided through the Commonwealth Government's Natural Heritage Trust Program, the State Government's Sustainability Funding program, and Hunter Catchment Contributions (for Hunter projects only). For information on current funding opportunities, visit the CMA's website (www.hcr.cma.nsw.gov.au) or phone the CMA on (02) 4930 1030.



Lower Hunter Catchment Officer Anna Ferguson and Estuary Project Officer Nick Staheyeff assess the vegetation on a project site in the Hunter.

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Catchment Action Plan well underway

Preparing the Catchment Action Plan (CAP) for the Hunter–Central Rivers region is well underway, with catchment targets and actions being reviewed by over 80 organisations and community groups. Information from this process will be included in the draft CAP, which is expected to go on public exhibition later this year. The CAP is a strategic plan that will guide catchment activities in priority areas over the next 10 years.

Changes to the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources

Recent changes to NSW Government departments have resulted in the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources being split into three separate departments: the Department of Infrastructure, the Department of Planning and the Department of Natural Resources. The Hon Ian Macdonald has been appointed as the new Minister for the CMAs, covering the portfolios of Natural Resources, Primary Industries and Mineral Resources.



Giving away a mountain bike might seem an unusual way for people to learn about their catchment but that's exactly what happened at this year's Tocal Field Days. The CMA competition attracted thousands of people to the CMA display, where they found out about the role and activities of the CMA, and the 2005 incentive funding program. Pictured is our winner from Duns Creek (left) with CMA General Manager Glenn Evans.

Encouraging environmental excellence through the 2005 Coal Awards

Supported by government, industry and community, the Hunter–Central Rivers Coal Industry Environmental Awards aim to encourage environmental excellence in the coal mining industry. Nominations have been received from Muswellbrook Coal Company (No. 1 Open Cut Mine), Coal & Allied Operations, Anglo Coal (Drayton and Dartbrook Mines), Mt Arthur Coal and Mt Owen Mine.

A panel of judges will inspect the nominated projects in October and the winner will be announced at an awards ceremony on 29 November. For more information visit the CMA's website (www.hcr.cma.nsw.gov.au) or contact Liane Corocher on (02) 4930 1030.



Hunter Region Landcare Award winners at the recent Hunter Landcare Forum.

2005 Landcare Awards

Every year Landcare groups around Australia are rewarded for their inspirational efforts in protecting and enhancing the natural environment in their local area. The CMA would like to congratulate all of the Landcare groups from the Hunter–Central Rivers region that received a Landcare Award in 2005. For details on the winners, go to www.hcr.cma.nsw.gov.au.

New look Catchment News

Catchment News has been improved to provide more interesting and relevant information to the community. To ensure the CMA continues to improve *Catchment News*, please complete the *Catchment News* feedback form on the CMA's website or phone (02) 4930 1030. Respondents will go in the draw to win a catchment pack valued at over \$100, including books and information on managing native vegetation.

Aboriginal Landcare Forum

Aboriginal people throughout the Hunter–Central Rivers region gathered at Tocal on 21–22 July for the region’s inaugural Aboriginal Landcare Forum. The forum was hosted by the CMA and attended by Aboriginal groups and individuals with an interest in natural resource management and environmental issues affecting their culture and country.

CMA Aboriginal Community Support Officers Gavin Callaghan and Dawn Townsend agreed that the success of the forum demonstrated the need for similar forums in the future to assist Aboriginal communities develop NRM projects.

The forum also enabled Gavin and Dawn to conduct a training-needs analysis to identify key areas to improve the capacity of Aboriginal communities to undertake natural resource management projects. Participants highlighted the need for training on a range of topics including bush tucker and medicines, flora and fauna, soil erosion, salinity and water quality.

The CMA will continue to work with Aboriginal communities and the newly appointed Aboriginal Cultural & Environmental Network (ACEN)–CMA Partnership Committee, to ensure recommendations from the workshop are acted upon.

Striking a balance on farm productivity

Striking a balance between farm productivity and environmental health is the aim of a best management practice project being implemented on a property at East Seaham on the Williams River.

CMA Program Manager Sharon Vernon said the joint project between the CMA, Hunter Water and Greswick Angus landholders John and Janelle Spearpoint, and supported by NSW Environment Trust, aims to trial cost-effective methods that can be realistically replicated by landholders on their own properties. ‘The project will showcase methods of restoring and rehabilitating riverbanks, controlling weeds and feral animals, revegetation and pasture management.’

Landholders and community groups are encouraged to learn more about the project by attending farm tours and field days being held on the property in the coming months. To find out more about the project or to express an interest in attending the field days contact the CMA on (02) 4930 1030.



Landholders John and Janelle Spearpoint inspect the progress of revegetation works on their Seaham property on the Williams River.

An international flavour hits Kooragang City Farm



University of Newcastle students in the garden at Kooragang City Farm.

The community gardens at the CMA’s Kooragang City Farm have taken on an international flavour, with University of Newcastle students from Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam, South Africa, India, East Timor and Papua New Guinea growing vegetables from their home countries.

Kooragang City Farm Manager Rob Henderson said the project has provided a great opportunity for students to relax in the gardens and learn more about Australian farming and the environment. ‘Students have been visiting the farm every Friday and planting vegetables they enjoy eating from their home country.’

‘It has also been a great social experience for everyone involved, with the students able to improve their English skills, interact with other overseas students and experience the Aussie culture first hand,’ said Mr Henderson.

Funding for the International Community Gardens was provided by Hunter Water through the Hunter Region Landcare Network.

For more information on the Kooragang Community Gardens, which is part of the Kooragang Wetland Rehabilitation Project, contact City Farm Manager Rob Henderson on (02) 4964 9308.

Creating 'cells' for sustainable grazing

Morris and Heather Green successfully applied for funding through the Sustainable Agriculture Grants program, offered to landholders in the Central Coast and Lake Macquarie areas, to establish up to 40 paddocks or 'cells' for rotational grazing at their Dooralong property.

The Greens were inspired by a recent visit to the CMA's Kooragang City Farm, where they learnt about the benefits of rotational cell grazing for pasture improvement, weed suppression, parasite control and overall stock quality improvement.

With the funds they receive, the Greens will install electric fencing, gates, water supply reticulation and water troughs, to limit the impact of grazing on the environment while also improving the productivity of their pastures.

The Greens' project is part of a National Landcare Program funded by the Australian Government and is coordinated by the CMA. For more information contact Charlotte Drury on (02) 4337 1213.



Dooralong landholder Morris Green (left) discusses sustainable pasture management with Department of Primary Industries District Agronomist Neil Griffiths.

Cashing in on environmental works



Field day participants inspect some of the works implemented at the Strachans' property near Merriwa.

The Strachan family near Merriwa, along with 20 other landholders in NSW, are cashing in on environmental works as part of the Environmental Services Scheme, receiving regular payments for changing their land management practices to reduce their impact on the environment.

'Local landholders were invited to the Strachans' property in July to learn more about the scheme and the land management practices they have introduced,' explained the CMA's Business Manager Investment, Fiona Marshall. 'The Strachan family manages an organic cattle grazing property and have been busy establishing native grasses, revegetating riverfront land, developing vegetation corridors, protecting remnant vegetation, and improving their grazing practices.'

'Participants of the field day gained a practical insight into how to improve land management practices, whilst remaining financially viable and productive.'

The Environmental Services Scheme was introduced by the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources in 2003, with input from State Forests of NSW and NSW Agriculture.

The CMA also offers the Environmental Services Scheme as an incentives option, which enables landholders to receive regular stewardship payments in exchange for the environmental services they deliver.

An additional field day is being planned in Merriwa on Wednesday 2 November. For more information, contact CMA Catchment Officer Steve Eccles on (02) 6542 4421.



Improving outcomes for land management projects

Keeping a Project Journal and the companion *Project Journal* were published and distributed by the CMA in July. The publications are designed as a tool to help landholders and community groups record information on their land management projects and improve the outcomes of similar projects in the future.

Both documents are free and available electronically and in hard copy. Phone (02) 4930 1030 or visit the CMA's website (www.hcr.cma.nsw.gov.au) to obtain your copy.

Community and CMA work together

A key recommendation from a community workshop held in September last year, attended by 70 residents from the Hunter–Central Rivers region, was that one of the best ways for the CMA to involve the community in natural resource management (NRM) was through the establishment of community reference groups.

One of the first groups established is the Hunter Community Reference Group (HCRG), which will provide advice and guidance to the CMA on the delivery of programs and projects in the Hunter and the expenditure of Hunter Catchment Contributions (HCC).

The 16 members of the HCRG have been appointed on the basis of their skills and expertise, and come from a broad range of backgrounds, representing community, industry and local government in the Hunter catchment.

The group met for the first time in September and formed a working group to assist CMA staff with the development of the *Upper Hunter On-ground Works Initiative*, through which \$220 000 of HCC funds will be allocated. The working group will report back to the HCRG at its next meeting, which is scheduled for mid-November.

Planning is underway to establish additional groups, appropriate to the needs of communities in the Central Coast and Lower North Coast.



HCRG co-chairs Julia Imrie (left) and Arthur Burns (far right) with group members Norma Brooks from Buttai, Andrew Martin from Howes Valley and Stephen Thatcher from Muswellbrook.

Linking with Aboriginal communities

Over 12 months of planning, meetings and workshops with Aboriginal communities has led to the establishment of the Aboriginal Cultural & Environmental Network (ACEN)–CMA Partnership Committee.

The committee consists of Aboriginal community members from the Hunter, Central Coast and Lower North Coast landscapes and includes a broad cross-section of knowledge, experience and agency representation.

CMA Catchment Officer (Aboriginal Communities) Craig Aspinall explained that the role of the committee is to provide advice and guidance to the CMA Board on cultural heritage and NRM issues affecting Aboriginal communities. 'The committee will provide a critical link for the exchange of information between the CMA and local Aboriginal communities,' Mr Aspinall said.

The ACEN–CMA Partnership Committee met for the first time in September.

Winning the war on weeds

The challenge of controlling noxious weeds in the Hunter has led the CMA to allocate \$90 000 of Hunter Catchment Contributions to the research and implementation of effective control measures for high priority areas in the Hunter catchment.



The aquatic weed *Salvinia* can double in size in 5–10 days, quickly covering the water's surface.

SOURCE: WEEDS OF THE HUNTER AND CENTRAL COAST (HUNTER CENTRAL COAST WEED MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE). PHOTO COPYRIGHT: GRAHAME PRITCHARD.

Developing partnerships with groups (and individuals) such as local councils is essential in controlling weeds. The CMA has joined forces with Cessnock City Council and Hunter Councils to implement a number of measures to control *Salvinia* at Wollombi Brook, including installing floating booms, operating a mechanical harvester and releasing *Salvinia* weevils. Plans are also underway to develop a weed control strategy for Wollombi Brook in conjunction with the local community.

The CMA is also currently developing a partnership with Maitland City Council to investigate strategies for the control of African Olive in the Maitland Local Government Area.

Farmers target change within their catchment

Building on the success of the Setting Targets for Change program in the Landsdowne sub-catchment, the CMA is now extending the program into the mid-Manning, Dingo Creek and Wallamba sub-catchments under the new name Farmer Targets for Change.

Catchment Officer Geoff LeMessurier said the program involves 36 local farmers and aims to identify activities that are having a negative impact on both farms and the sub-catchment, and develop management targets and strategies to address the problems identified. 'The farmers have identified four main targets to address the problems on their farms, which include reducing pressure on riparian zones, minimising leakage of nutrients from farms, preventing erosion and conserving biodiversity.'

'The CMA and the Department of Primary Industries have helped the farmers develop plans for implementing on-ground works such as fencing riparian areas and installing off-stream watering for livestock. Many of the farmers have also applied for funding through the CMA's incentive program, to implement the on-ground works identified.'

Mr LeMessurier continued 'the great thing about the program is that the farmers are very motivated to implement the on-ground works and improve the health of the sub-catchment, as they have been directly involved in identifying the issues and solutions.'

For more information on the program contact Geoff LeMessurier on (02) 6552 2788 extension 239.

Waterwatch breaks new ground on the Lower North Coast

As part of the expansion of the Hunter–Central Rivers Waterwatch program on the Lower North Coast, Waterwatch Coordinator Ingrid Berthold attended the launch of Lansdowne Public School's *Have to Have Habitat* project in July.

Lansdowne PS students have been working with Greater Taree City Council and Green Corps to restore a small wetland behind the school that was disturbed by construction work earlier in the year.

'The students tested temperature, pH, salinity and turbidity and found the water quality very good', explained Ms Berthold. 'The students also found an abundance of tadpoles in the wetland, which has motivated the students to continue regular water testing to protect the frogs' habitat.'

The CMA would like to continue expanding the Waterwatch program on the Lower North Coast. Interested individuals and groups can contact Ingrid Berthold or Colin Mondy (02) 4930 1030 or email hcr.waterwatch@cma.nsw.gov.au.



Students from Lansdowne Public School testing water quality at the wetland site behind their school.

Education floods the Lower Hunter

Increasing community awareness and preparedness for flooding in Maitland and the Lower Hunter Valley is the aim of a new flood education project being coordinated by the CMA and the State Emergency Service.



High Street Maitland in the devastating 1955 floods that claimed 14 lives and left 15 000 people homeless.

A flood education strategy is being developed and will incorporate a number of actions to raise awareness and understanding of the dangers of floods, building on the success of events such as the 50th anniversary commemorations of the 1955 Maitland flood.

'It is a critical time for addressing this issue as we have many new residents moving into the area that have never experienced a flood event and will be unprepared when the next flood hits,' said CMA Flood Education Officer Amanda Hyde.

To ensure the flood education strategy meets the needs of the community, an advisory group has been established representing government, business and community interests.

For more information contact Amanda Hyde at the CMA on (02) 4930 1030.

Valuing wetlands

The CMA is supporting the second national Wetlands Innovation Series Forum, 'Valuing Wetlands', to be hosted on 18 and 19 October by The Wetlands Centre Australia. The forum will bring together the latest thinking, research and innovations in sustainable wetland management.

More than 100 wetland researchers and practitioners from around Australia are expected to attend the forum, which boasts an impressive line-up of regional, state and national speakers.

To find out more or register online, go to www.wetlands.org.au/forum or phone Tess Hilleard on 0427 445 665.

www.hcr.cma.nsw.gov.au

Go to www.hcr.cma.nsw.gov.au for the latest CMA news, upcoming events and current funding opportunities.

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