



BELLINGER LANDCARE INC ANNUAL REPORT - 2021

Message from the Chairperson

The past two years have continued to test communities around Australia and the world. The ongoing effects of the COVID 19 crisis, recovery from the 2019/20 bushfires, the past years' La Nina rainfall and the recent extreme flood events have caused widespread devastation across the ecosystems of the east coast. 2021 saw the renewal of our local ecosystems post-fire and some much-needed funding to help repair not just fire damaged areas but degraded ecosystems across the shire.

Despite these difficult times, Landcare across the shire has continued to flourish - with many exciting new projects across our local Landcare groups and at BLI. We look forward to continuing the good work and improving the resilience of our environment not just for ourselves, but for all species, for all time.

*Liz Brown
Chairperson*

Summary

We have received funding from both the NSW state government Landcare program and Bellingen Shire Council during 2020/21 and 2021/22. This funding has enabled the continuation of the Co-ordinator position for two days per week. Significant grant funding was also received to deliver projects which have been managed by our Co-ordinator and project managers.

The core funding enables us to respond to enquiries, visit sites with landholders, develop funding proposals, distribute newsletters, maintain our website and Facebook pages, complete governance requirements and complete required reporting. We now have well over 500 members and over 80 landholders who have expressed interest in participating in projects. This means we can submit funding proposals based on their needs.

BLI and Local Landcare groups have improved over 515 hectares of Bellingen Shire land and have planted over # trees during the reporting period. There has been the equivalent of over \$935,000 in kind contributions from volunteers in the local groups, from our management committee, and from financial and time commitments from private landholders involved in projects. Since 2017 we have received \$1.8m in funding for our core operations and projects.

LOCAL LANDCARE GROUPS IN THE BELLINGEN SHIRE

Bellingen Island Landcare Group

For over 30 years now volunteers have been weeding Bellingen Island each Tuesday morning. With no major floods this year and low rainfall their work has been unusually productive. Bellingen Island is the most sizeable remnant of Lowland Rainforest on Floodplain endangered ecological community in the area. It is the nursery camp of Grey Headed Flying Foxes. Over the last year the group has been weeding and planting the river back-channel which borders the island. This has not only reduced the weed load but has also improved access to the island and visual amenity to the public. Work on the island is an ongoing process, and though tough it's rewarding to be working in one of the rarest patches of rainforest in the Bellingen Shire.

Mountain Top Landcare Group

Formed in 1992, under the continuing leadership of Rod and Ruth Holmes, the objective was initially to plant trees along the roadsides for windbreaks. This rapidly expanded to farm windbreaks, farm plans, dairy laneways, weed control, cattle creek crossings, fencing and planting riparian zones, introducing dung beetles and encouraging other Landcare groups. Members still carry out work on their own properties and roadsides and we have continued to slash and maintain the Rocky Creek Reserve.

Urunga Landcare Group

Urunga Landcare group have been very active, running monthly working bees supported by funding gained from the NSW Environmental Trust Restoration and Rehabilitation program to improve the condition of Urunga Wetlands, a Coastal Freshwater Wetland threatened ecological community. The \$100,000 funded program, which is being delivered in the 2020, 2021 and 2022 calendar years, has already led to vast improvements to the condition of the wetlands. This has included weed control, including using a large mulcher machine which removed a wall of weed trees up to 8m in height over a length of approximately 680m. Natural regeneration on the site has been supplemented by revegetation planting by local group members, supported by a professional Bush Regeneration contractor. The project has involved regular letterboxing to provide project information and invite the participation of more than 160 neighbours in the residential area surrounding the wetland.

Station Creek, Urunga, Landcare group

This is a new group which started in 2021, working along the highly significant Station Creek which joins Urunga Wetlands with Urunga Lagoon which are both threatened ecological communities. We hope to assist in finding funding for the group, particularly to remove a Coral Tree infestation.

Lake Burrawong, Urunga, Landcare group

This is also a new group, protecting and enhancing the bird haven formed by the man-made wetland in Urunga Keys. It's an important site for avifauna which has had many significant sightings of bird species there. It's great to see this site being cared for and we hope to help the group find some funded support.

Mylestom Landcare Groups

Mylestom Landcare continues to work within the Alma Doepel Reserve in Mylestom, Tuesdays from 8-10am each week. The group has achieved impressive results under the leadership of Lynne Gordon. Their active membership is steady with Tuesday working bees having from two to five workers. They continue to grow our own tube stock. Weeds are still present but they've made significant progress to regenerate Littoral Rainforest which is an threatened ecological community. Their work area is now incorporated into the Mylestom to Tuckers Rocks Coastal Vegetation Corridor Regeneration Project as described later in this report.

Johnson Street, Mylestom, Landcare Group

This group formed in 2020 during the global pandemic when residents were highly motivated to improve a patch of native vegetation between Johnson Street and the caravan park. They have achieved amazing results through the removal of Coral Trees, other weeds, and planting. Their work area is now incorporated into the Mylestom to Tuckers Rocks Coastal Vegetation Corridor Regeneration Project as described later in this report.

Tuckers Rocks Dunecare Group

A small group of very dedicated volunteers have been improving the condition of a patch of Littoral Rainforest at Tuckers Rocks for many years now. Their work area is now incorporated into the Mylestom to Tuckers Rocks Coastal Vegetation Corridor Regeneration Project as described later in this report.

Friends of Wonga Forest

Wonga Forest Volunteers Landcare group formed in October 2017. They meet on the second Sunday morning of the month and carry out hand-weeding around trees that were planted and around areas of native vegetation in good condition, over a 20ha area.

Dandarrga Landcare

The inspiring Dandarrga Landcare group has continued to grow and has now incorporated as its own autonomous group. We are proud to have supported the development of their nursery and our role playing our proactive role in their development up to this point and look forward to working together with them into the future when opportunities arise.

Bellingen Urban Landcare

Bellingen Urban Landcare is also its own incorporated entity but is included in this report to fill in the picture about Landcare in the Bellingen Shire. They have been making a major contribution since 1995, regenerating waterways in the beautiful town of Bellingen. Little by little the collective effort has removed rubbish and weeds, constructed fences and bridges, planted and regenerated native species and generally rejuvenated a dozen Landcare sites. Their work shows what a successful community collaboration between volunteers, conservation teams and contractors can achieve.

BELLINGER LANDCARE PROJECTS

Hydes Creek Koala Corridor Project

run together with the Friends of Wonga Forest and Hydes Creek Landcare Group

- 17 private landholders engaged
- 2 local Landcare groups engaged
- 6,000 trees planted
- 90 ha total weed control area
- 3 tree Workshops and educational signage delivered
- 2 km of Hydes Creek Fenced, excluding cattle.

BLI working on this project as part of the Jaliigirr Biodiversity Alliance with funding from the NSW government Saving our Species program, the NSW Environmental Trust, North Coast Local Land Services, the World Wildlife Fund for Nature and the Great Eastern Ranges Initiative. The outcome is to establish a crucial link allowing the movement of Koalas across the landscape in the Bellingen Shire. It's exciting to see Koalas using trees previously planted by the Hydes Creek Landcare Group and to see the corridor being significantly reinforced by the delivery of this project. Works during 2021/2022 have focused on reinforcing weed control in core Koala habitat, with works funded by WWF with partnerships through Jaliigirr Biodiversity Alliance and the Great Eastern Ranges Initiative

Upper Bellinger River Afforestation and Rehabilitation Project

- 14 landholders engaged
- 17 km stream length being restored
- 3000 trees planted out of a total of around 5000 local trees
- 8 community workshops
- 3km fencing.

The Bellinger River Rehabilitation Project continues to expand year on year, with exciting developments this Financial year, including partnering with North Coast Local Land Services to deliver 7km of riparian restoration and the removal of over 1km of bamboo from the Bellinger River. We continue to work closely with the NSW Saving our Species program to support the recovery of the Bellinger River Snapping Turtle

The project is improving the condition of and extending the highly endangered Lowland Rainforest on Floodplain Endangered Ecological Community and improving habitat suitability in the upper Bellinger River for threatened species including the critically endangered Bellinger River Snapping Turtle. BLI gained \$100,000 from the NSW Environmental Trust and \$108,000 from the State government Saving our Species program to undertake on-ground work and community capacity building. We are also working with North Coast Local Land Services to deliver 7km of stream restoration during 2021/2022, with a further program being developed to extend works over the coming years.

Mylestom to Tuckers Rock Coastal Corridor Regeneration Project

To support the work of three local Landcare groups in an important vegetation corridor which incorporates the local group sites and the vegetation corridor in between, we have been successful in gaining \$170,000 from the NSW Environmental Trust for a four year project running throughout 2022 to 2025. We will be working together with the local groups and will be collaborating with the Darrunda Wajaar bush regeneration team which is auspiced by the Coffs Harbour Local Aboriginal Land Council. We'll also be communicating closely with the Rural Fire Service to minimise impacts on the corridor which contains Littoral Rainforest. There is a strong community engagement focus to the project, including providing educational materials and inviting residents to participate, including those living in the caravan park in Mylestom village.

Plateau Weeds Projects

The North Coast Regional Landcare Network has formed a partnership with North Coast Local Land Services so that Landcare offices devised a program to deliver targeted weed control outcomes. Under this program, Bellinger Landcare Inc managed funding to control Black Locust and Honey Locust trees on the plateau. We also assisted Rocky Creek landholders in the control Long-leaf Willow Primrose (LLWP) which is a highly invasive water weed. Rocky Creek is located at the very top of the Clarence River catchment, making this a crucial weed problem to address. LLWP control work has been carried out from Spring 2019 to Spring 2021, employing contract Bush Regenerators, and using a weed control drone contractor to reach many areas of the watercourse which are not reachable on foot. Workshops were delivered to educate the landholders about the need to control these three highly invasive weeds and techniques for their control.

Bush Connect

Over the past six years BLI has been delivering the highly successful Bush connect program as part of the Jaliigirr Biodiversity Alliance. The project is improving 322 hectares on private land, including 34 hectares of weed control targeting invasive environmental weeds impacting on ecological processes, 1 km of fencing and the planting of over 2,200 trees. We are engaging private landholders on seven sites funded by the NSW Environmental Trust and administered by the Jaliigirr Biodiversity Alliance. Two of the sites on the Dorrigo Plateau have waterways protected from stock impacts, each site is benefiting from good bush regeneration outcomes with two of the sites having revegetation planting also being undertaken. Two other sites are located on or adjacent to the lowland areas of Dorrigo National Park so contain the Lowland Rainforest on Floodplain Threatened Ecological Community. In 2019 we also commenced work on two additional sites on the main channel of the Bellinger River at Gleniffer, and works are ongoing across all sites in this exciting long term project.

Urunga Wetlands Restoration – stage one

As described above in the previous paragraph about the Urunga Landcare group. We're hoping to continue to stage two of this project which would allow follow up work at the existing site and incorporate the new Station Creek local group site to continue improving the condition of native vegetation at the freshwater wetland and along Station Creek which connects the wetland to Urunga Lagoon which is another very important threatened ecological community which needs protection and enhancement.

Bellingen Shire Regenerative Farming Network

The kernel of the Bellingen Shire Regenerative Farming Network formed in 2020 in response to a marked increase in demand for local food during the public health emergency. We have since gained funding from all three levels of government to support the development of the network through the delivery of workshops and field days and the design and distribution of factsheets. Funding has been gained from the Bellingen Shire Council Resilience Program, the NSW Environmental Trust Environmental Education Program, and the Federal government Future Drought Fund. So far we have run workshops on improving soil health and pasture diversity to address Fireweed, with 28 in attendance at the Dorrigo event, and a two day workshop in Holistic Management with others to be run throughout the shire. We also ran a paddock planting day and a workshop on protecting riparian zones in 2021. The bulk of the funding will be expended in 2022 but funds will remain to support the network until the end of 2023.

Land for Wildlife

LFW encourages and assists landholders to include nature conservation along with other land management objectives. The program is free for landholders to join and is not legally binding. Registration in the scheme will not change the legal status of a property. Landholders who have their properties registered in the scheme can opt to investigate formalising higher level conservation covenants. Landcare staff complete site assessments, provide advice on suggested management strategies and actions for the property, and provide support and encouragement for landholders to carry out nature conservation on their land. Landholders are eligible to apply for small grants over three years to support their conservation actions. Currently there are 24 properties registered in the scheme in the Bellingen LGA.

Workshop Program

In addition to workshops we have delivered within our projects, we collaborated with North Coast Local Land Services to deliver a workshop on Bell Miner Associated Dieback in Thora, with a second one planned in 2022. Also planned is a workshop on tree hollows and nest boxes, run in collaboration with the North Coast Regional Landcare Network.

Landcare group and project figures (total amounts to date for project duration)

	LOCAL GROUPS	BUSH CONNEC T	HYDES CREEK KOALA PROJECT	UPPER BELLINGER RIVER PROJECT	URUNGA WETLANDS PROJECT	MYLESTOM TO TUCKERS ROCK PROJECT	MOUNTAINTOP RIPARIAN PROJECT	ROCKY CREEK WATER WEED CONTROL	BELLINGEN SHIRE FARM NETWORK	JALIIGIRR ENDANGERED RAINFOREST BUSHFIRE RECOVERY	TOTAL
Timeframe	2019/2023	2016–2026	Commenced in 2018 and ongoing	Commenced in 2018 and ongoing	2020-22 (3 years)	Commenced in 2020 and ongoing until 2024	2020-22 (2 years)	Commenced in 2019 and ongoing	2021-2023	2021-2022	
Number of plans / sites	8	7	10	10	1	5	4	4	10	5	64
Total area (ha)	30	40	92	90	1	30	20	2	10	200	515
Weed control area (ha)	30	34	28	50	1	20	20	2	5	100	290
Number of plantings	400	2,130	3,600	1,650	86	1000			2000	2000	12866
Length of fencing (m)		1,000	2,000	3,000					4,000		10000
Off stream water troughs									4		4
Number of factsheets									10		10
Number of participants	60	7		62	16	20	4	4	40	15	228
Number of workshops				6	3	2			20	1	32
Number of contractors		4	4	3	3	3	1	4	6	6	34
Number of grant applications				3	1	3	1	5	3		16
Value of volunteer in kind contributions (\$)	172,000	193,000	181,600	136,000	12,000	20,000	4,000	5,000	192,000	20,000	\$935,600
Funding amount (\$)		145,000	123,500	308,000	99,950	190,000	20,000	40,000	307,847	116425	\$1,350,722