



# Bellingen Shire Council

## Environmental Levy

### Projects 2014-2015

#### **Introduction**

Bellingen Shire Council applied to the Minister for Local Government in May 2005 for a special variation to General Income for environmental projects. On the 30<sup>th</sup> June 2005 Council received notice that an increase of 4% was approved on an on-going basis. In 2014-15 this equates to a fund of \$241,262 for environmental projects.

As identified in the *Shire of Bellingen 2030 Community Vision*, the environment levy supports the implementation of projects to achieve the strategic directions, outcomes and aspirations for the future from our local community. The key focus areas are as follows;

- Invasive plant management;
- Biodiversity management;
- Coastal and river ecosystem management;
- Sustainable food production; &
- Climate change adaptation and mitigation.

These projects presented in this report will deliver actions identified in the North Coast Weeds Action Program, NSW Invasive Species Plan; draft Dangar Falls Plan of Management, Estuary Management Plan, Kalang River Health Plan & the Bellinger River Health Plan, Bellingen Emission Reduction Plan (BERP), the Bellingen Climate Change Risk Adaption Strategy and Dairy Effluent Infrastructure and Management Assessment and Planning Project.

Council's intention is to apply for external grants where appropriate to match, and therefore maximise the funds, and these have been outlined in this report.

This report has been prepared by Council's Manager Sustainability and Natural Resources and is for the information and comment of the ESAC.

#### **Projects 2014-2015**

##### **Pedestrian Access Mobility Plan (PAMP) – Key Focus Area: Climate Change Adaption & Mitigation**

In 27 March 2013, Council resolved to undertake Stage 2 of the Hungry Head Road cycleway. Stage 2 of the Hungry Head Road cycleway project will extend the Hungry Head Cycleway south of Pipe Clay Creek Bridge by approximately 400 metres in the 2014/15 financial year. The total project cost for this extension is \$167,500 of which 50% is to be funded from Council's Pedestrian Access Mobility Plan (PAMP) and



Financial Assistance Grant (FAG). This program includes a \$30,000 contribution from the environment levy.

The funds to be allocated to this program are \$30,000 for the 2014/15 financial year.

**Community Fund – Key Focus Area: All**

The BSC EL community fund is available for community groups working on public land and sustainability projects through a competitive process, to gain additional funds to complete projects. This fund has supported over 22 community groups over recent years, including 7 to the total value of \$35,000 in 2013/14. It is recommended that this community funding process continue.

In the 2011/12 financial year the BSC EL community fund application and grant process has underwent significant review in consultation with the former Environmental Advisory Committee (EAC). Projects are now capped at \$5,000

The funds to be allocated to this program are \$20,000 for the 2014/15 financial year. However, there is \$35,000 remaining in environment levy reserve fund and therefore the total is now \$55,000. Council intends to open the community fund in July 2014.

**Weeds Action Program – Key Focus Area: Invasive Plant Management**

Council, in alliance with the NSW North Coast Weeds Advisory Committee, has applied under the new Weeds Action Program for funds to implement the NSW Invasive Species Plan. In order for Council to implement invasive plant removal projects and achieve the 12 weed action program objectives, an allocation to the weeds operational budget will be required.

The total project value is \$144,000 per year with the Department of Primary Industries providing \$48,000, Council general funds providing \$48,000 and a contribution from the BSC EL of \$48,000 is required

Council will also allocate an additional \$10,000 for on ground weed control and maintenance work of the riparian zones around creek ways in the Bellinghen township. This funding will come from Council's general funds and will assist in maintenance of Market Park, Connell Park and the lowland floodplain rainforest on Bellinghen Island (an Endangered Ecological Community). These sites will be managed in partnership with Bellinghen Urban Landcare Group.

The funds to be allocated to this program are \$48,000 for the 2014/15 financial year.



**Dangar Falls Biodiversity Improvement** – *Key Focus Area: Invasive Plant Management and Biodiversity Management*

This project continues the excellent works already undertaken at Dangar Falls Reserve. The minimal investment has resulted in an excellent response from the Antarctic Beech and Port Jackson Pine Groves forest (an Endangered Ecological Community). The project will be the continuation of that already reported to the committee and will focus on the weed removal and revegetation throughout the Dangar Falls recreation area.

The funds to be allocated to this program are \$7,000 for the 2014/15 financial year.

**The Jaliigirr Biodiversity Alliance Project Maintenance** – *Key Focus Area: Invasive Plant Management, Biodiversity Management and Coastal & River Ecosystem Management*

In the 2011/12 financial year Council was successful in applying for a \$300,000 grant over six years. The Jaliigirr Biodiversity Alliance Project (Bellinger River Tree way & Dorrigo National Park Protection) has commenced. This project aims to improve the biodiversity (including koala habitat) of the Shire through ongoing weed control and planting of native seedlings across both public and private land.

The quantifiable outcomes of the project achieved until date are listed as follows;

- Dorrigo National Park Protection (1 site) – implemented 5.94ha of weed removal to protect that has resulted in the protection of Dorrigo National Park.
- Bellinger River Treeway (10 sites) – planted 1.43ha of native seedlings, implemented 2.34ha of weed removal and the project has enhanced 5.95ha of native vegetation in the Shire.

As part of this grant funded project, Council is required to maintain the project sites where Council is the land owner for a five year period.

The funds to be allocated to this program are \$10,000 for the 2014/15 financial year.



**Rock Fillets for Fish Fillets - Key Focus Area: Biodiversity Management and Coastal & River Ecosystem Management**

Working in partnership with the NSW Soil Conservation Service, the Rock Fillets for Fish Fillets project will result in the installation 300m of rock fillet (groynes) and artificial reef structures in the Bellinger River estuary adjacent to Mylestom Drive.

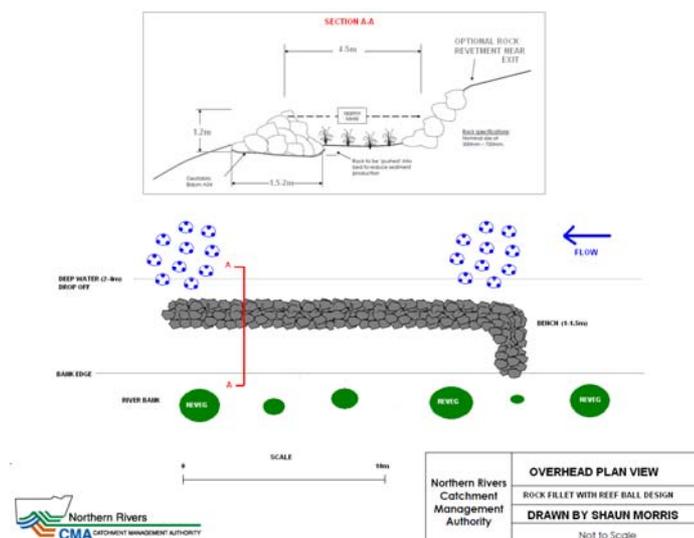
A rock fillet is a low wall which protects the base of the bank from wave action and provides habitat for mangrove regeneration. The project will also utilise artificial “reef balls”. These are large balls of concrete with holes formed into their structure. When placed under water they provide instant fish habitat. See Figure 1 below.

This project will improve river bank stability and habitat for mangroves, fish and other marine organisms in the lower Bellinger estuary.

This project commenced in the 2013/14 financial year and Council's role is to project manage the revegetation on Council land along adjacent river banks to the rock fillets improving the Shire's biodiversity and to assist in riverbank stabilisation. This includes maintenance of these important environmental assets.

Council was also successful in applying for a \$40,000 NSW Recreational Fishing Trust Habitat Action grant and will also commit this funding to the project.

The total project value is \$290,000 (\$260,000 from external grants and \$30,000 for environment levy contributions) and the funds to be allocated to this program are an additional \$6,000 for the 2014/15 financial year (for weed control and revegetation maintenance work).



**Figure 1:** Example of rock fillet (Source NRCMA)



**Floodplain and Estuarine Water Quality Improvement Project - Key Focus Area: Sustainable Agriculture, Biodiversity Management and Coastal & River Ecosystem Management**

The project aims to improve dairy effluent management practices to reduce potential impacts of the dairy industry on estuarine water quality, an important public asset. This is a key priority identified in Council's Estuary Management Plan, Kalang River Health Plan & the Bellinger River Health Plan. The objective of the project is to provide funding for farmers managing farms on the Bellinger River floodplain to implement priority actions identified in the Dairy Effluent Infrastructure and Management Assessment and Planning Project 2011 (funded by Bellingen Shire Council and NORCO and coordinated by Bellinger Landcare in association with NSW DPI), and to fund biodiversity improvement projects on public land. Key activities are likely to include: underground poly pipes for effluent irrigation field expansion to best management practice targets; concrete aprons and laneways to improve effluent collection and/or distribution on farm; riparian fencing to exclude stock from waterways and wetlands; riparian revegetation and a field day to showcase project outcomes and foster industry/community education and networking.

Council intends to leverage these funds and has applied for the recent Office of Environment & Heritage (OEH) Coastline, Floodplain and Estuary Management grants to the value of \$76,000 (50% contribution is required by Council). Further the 11 dairy farmers on the Bellinger Valley has all been engaged on this project and have committed a total of \$116,000 to the project. If successful the project value will be \$268,000.

The project will be a government and industry partnership.

The funds to be allocated to this program are \$76,000 for the 2014/15 financial year.

**River & Biodiversity Project Officer General Community Consultation - Key Focus Area: Biodiversity Management and Coastal & River Ecosystem Management**

The River & Biodiversity Project Officer role will incorporate river restoration and biodiversity education and engagement workshops as well as providing a service for customer enquiries. The project value is \$10,000 per year for two years allowing for up to four hours per week of Project Officer time.

The funds to be allocated to this program are \$10,000 for the 2014/15 financial year.

**Sustainable Agriculture Farm Planning Project - Key Focus Area: Sustainable Agriculture**

Council proposes to engage Bellinger Landcare to develop sustainable farm plans to educate, provide guidance to landholders and encourage the community to



implement more sustainable agricultural practices. This is a key priority identified in Council's Estuary Management Plan, Kalang River Health Plan & the Bellinger River Health Plan.

Leveraging of Bellinger Landcare's extensive local networks and expertise in farm planning, this project will develop detailed farm plans that will provide recommendations in the following areas soil health, soil conservation & rehabilitation, erosion, sustainable grazing, cultivation, horticulture, weed control, native vegetation identification and protection. The plans will include maps and identify targeted management zones with the objective to reduce the environmental impacts on the river and estuary, important public assets.

The project outcomes include developing ten sustainable farm plans and five field days, and will assist landholders in applying for grant funding to implement the priority actions identified. This project has been identified as particularly important as new landholders regularly move to the Shire and can at times lack the necessary skills and experience to manage their land in a sustainable manner.

This funding allocation will also assist in supporting the Bellinger Landcare community group operate and deliver important sustainable agriculture projects in the 2014/15 financial year.

The funds to be allocated to this program are \$18,000 for the 2014/15 financial year.

#### **Sustainability Projects** – *Key Focus Area: Climate Change Adaption & Mitigation*

Council has adopted the Bellingen Emission Reduction Plan (BERP) and the Bellingen Climate Change Risk Adaption Strategy. There is a requirement to fund actions from the plan to achieve Council's greenhouse gas emission reduction target of 40% by 2020. This funding will focus on energy efficiency actions and awareness campaigns, engaging Planet Footprint to measure and report our GHG emissions and preparing Council and the community for climate change mitigation and this includes delivering community environmental workshops.

Council's intention is, where appropriate, to utilise this funding allocation and apply for external grants on an ongoing basis to match, and therefore maximise the funds, that may become available throughout the 2014/15 financial year.

The funds to be allocated to this program are \$13,262 for the 2014/15 financial year.

#### **Administration Expenses**

The BSC EL administration expenses budget will be used to pay for the required media and advertisements to promote and inform the community on projects outlined in this document.



The funds to be allocated to this program are \$3,000 for the 2014/15 financial year.

### Summary

<b>Project</b>	<b>Funding</b>
Pedestrian Access Mobility Plan	\$30,000
Environmental Levy Community Fund	\$20,000
Weeds Action Program	\$48,000
Dangar Falls Biodiversity Improvement	\$7,000
The Jaliigirr Biodiversity Alliance Project Maintenance	\$10,000
Rock Fillets for Fish Fillets Project	\$6,000
Floodplain and Estuarine Water Quality Improvement Project	\$76,000
River & Biodiversity Project Officer General Community Consultation	\$10,000
Sustainable Agriculture Farm Planning Project	\$18,000
Sustainability Projects	\$13,262
Administration expenses	\$3,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$241,262</b>