

# Investment in the Cooks River Catchment

Government at all levels has been investing for many years in projects to improve and enhance the Cooks River, its foreshores and the bushland areas within the catchment.

Over the last ten years the State Government and Sydney Water have invested more than \$12 million in projects and planning to improve stormwater quality, riverbanks, foreshores, green space areas and bushland. The Cooks River Foreshore Improvement Program, supported by the Department of Planning, will have provided \$2 million in grants for a range of research, planning and "on-ground" works by the end of 2007. Other improvement projects have been funded by the Sydney Metropolitan Catchment Management Authority and the Australian Government through the Natural Heritage Trust. On top of this, local councils are making enormous investments in a range of projects and programs to improve the river and the catchment.

Much of this activity is reported in the CRFWG's Annual Reports, which can be downloaded from the CookNet website.



View of Cooks River and Kendrick Park

# Your Community Your Catchment – Getting Involved

Many local community groups are committed to the conservation and enhancement of the bushland, wetlands and waterways of the Cooks River Catchment. Their work includes restoring native habitats, propagating native plants, monitoring native wildlife and water quality, removing litter from the River, raising awareness of environmental issues, encouraging changes in community behaviour and lobbying for political action. Local councils also provide volunteering opportunities through Bushcare, Landcare or community nurseries. Non-government organisations like OzGreen and Conservation Volunteers of Australia (CVA) offer young people great ways to contribute while learning useful skills. With so many options, it's easy to find ways to get involved. Joining a local community group is a great way to start. Why not get in touch with: **Wolli Creek Preservation Society** ph 9554 3176, [www.wollicreek.org.au](http://www.wollicreek.org.au); **Cooks River Valley Association** ph 0410 217 965, [crva@bigearth.com.au](mailto:crva@bigearth.com.au); **South West Enviro Centre** ph 9759 0997, [rainbowsigns@bigpond.com](mailto:rainbowsigns@bigpond.com); **Inner West Environment Group** ph 9568 4212, [kimmyjohn@pacificnet.au](mailto:kimmyjohn@pacificnet.au); **Rockdale Wetlands Preservation Society** ph 0409 567 426, PO Box 146 Rockdale NSW 2216; **Bankstown Bushland Society** ph 9785 2374, [sternaalbifrons@unwired.com.au](mailto:sternaalbifrons@unwired.com.au); **Mudcrabs Eco Volunteers** ph 9558 2656, [munropete@ozemail.com.au](mailto:munropete@ozemail.com.au); **The Men of the Trees** ph 4572 8556, [fbcc@zeta.org.au](mailto:fbcc@zeta.org.au); **Friends of Ewen Park** [ewenpark@hotmail.com](mailto:ewenpark@hotmail.com); **OzGreen** ph 9984 8917, [ozgreen.org.au](http://ozgreen.org.au); **Bardwell Valley Bushcare Group** ph 9150 7736, [walkingwilfgretel@bigpond.com.au](mailto:walkingwilfgretel@bigpond.com.au); or **CVA** ph 9564 1244, [sydney@conservationvolunteers.com.au](mailto:sydney@conservationvolunteers.com.au). Learn more about these and other groups on the **CookNet** [www.canterbury.nsw.gov.au/cooknet.htm](http://www.canterbury.nsw.gov.au/cooknet.htm), or ask your local council how to get involved in your area.

**Association** ph 0410 217 965, [crva@bigearth.com.au](mailto:crva@bigearth.com.au); **South West Enviro Centre** ph 9759 0997, [rainbowsigns@bigpond.com](mailto:rainbowsigns@bigpond.com); **Inner West Environment Group** ph 9568 4212, [kimmyjohn@pacificnet.au](mailto:kimmyjohn@pacificnet.au); **Rockdale Wetlands Preservation Society** ph 0409 567 426, PO Box 146 Rockdale NSW 2216; **Bankstown Bushland Society** ph 9785 2374, [sternaalbifrons@unwired.com.au](mailto:sternaalbifrons@unwired.com.au); **Mudcrabs Eco Volunteers** ph 9558 2656, [munropete@ozemail.com.au](mailto:munropete@ozemail.com.au); **The Men of the Trees** ph 4572 8556, [fbcc@zeta.org.au](mailto:fbcc@zeta.org.au); **Friends of Ewen Park** [ewenpark@hotmail.com](mailto:ewenpark@hotmail.com); **OzGreen** ph 9984 8917, [ozgreen.org.au](http://ozgreen.org.au); **Bardwell Valley Bushcare Group** ph 9150 7736, [walkingwilfgretel@bigpond.com.au](mailto:walkingwilfgretel@bigpond.com.au); or **CVA** ph 9564 1244, [sydney@conservationvolunteers.com.au](mailto:sydney@conservationvolunteers.com.au). Learn more about these and other groups on the **CookNet** [www.canterbury.nsw.gov.au/cooknet.htm](http://www.canterbury.nsw.gov.au/cooknet.htm), or ask your local council how to get involved in your area.

Catchment Council contacts:	
Ashfield	9716 1800
Burwood	9911 9911
Bankstown	9707 9999
Canterbury	9789 9300
Hurstville	9330 6222
Kogarah	9330 9400
Marrickville	9335 2222
Rockdale	9562 1666
Strathfield	9748 9999
The Watershed	9519 6366



A tree planting day on Wolli Creek © Gavin Gatenby

# Cooks River Community Update



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## Working with you to secure the future of the Cooks River

I am pleased to present this Community Update brochure on the Cooks River. This snapshot of catchment environmental projects highlights the many initiatives of the community and government to improve the natural values of the Cooks River and its tributaries.

The Cooks River has been highly impacted over the past two centuries and the work of rehabilitation will continue for many years to come. The Sydney Metropolitan Catchment Management Authority is committed to supporting the work of the community and government in their ongoing efforts to restore the River, its tributaries and catchment.



Bob Junor  
Chairman  
Sydney Metropolitan Catchment Management Authority



## The future!

The future of the Cooks River depends on the involvement of everyone who lives, works and plays in the catchment, so councils and land managers are looking for more effective ways to work with their local communities. The award-winning **USWIM Project** (Marrickville Council) has brought residents of the Illawarra Rd sub-catchment together with council staff and technical experts, to develop an inspiring community vision for the River and an Action Plan for sustainable water management in their local area. The Plan, which is now being implemented, includes a variety of rainwater/stormwater harvesting and water conservation and reuse projects. Phone 9335 2104 to find out how you can become involved. Other councils across the catchment are looking to engage their communities in similar locally-based, participatory and inter-disciplinary approaches, to bring about more sustainable catchment management. Look out for opportunities to get involved!

How do you think water could be more sustainably managed in your local area?



Water ambassadors involved with the USWIM project © Marrickville Council

## Learning more about your local environment

Designed and led by trained community volunteers, **Riverlife Interpretive Tours** offer local residents the opportunity to share their knowledge and passion about the Cooks River and the environmental issues it faces. For information or to join one of the many interactive and engaging walking, cycling, kayaking (in partnership with the River Canoe Club at Tempe) or art tours, phone 9335 2222 or email [rlproj@marrickville.nsw.gov.au](mailto:rlproj@marrickville.nsw.gov.au).

Learn about the natural heritage of the Cooks River Valley and the cultural heritage of the Cadigal and Wangal peoples, who were indigenous to the area, at [www.cadigalwangal.com.au](http://www.cadigalwangal.com.au), or find all sorts of information about the River on the **CookNet**: [www.canterbury.nsw.gov.au/cooknet.htm](http://www.canterbury.nsw.gov.au/cooknet.htm)

**Missing Jigsaw Pieces: The Bushplants of the Cooks River Valley** (Benson, Ondinea and Bear; published by Royal Botanic Gardens Sydney with assistance from the CRFWG), is an excellent reference on the native species and remnant vegetation of the valley and tells the story of how the plants and landscape have changed over time due to geologic processes and human impacts.



A Riverlife kayak trip of Wolli Creek © Gavin Gatenby

## Cooks River Foreshore Working Group

The Cooks River Foreshore Working Group (CRFWG) is a council-initiated association of local and State Government authorities who are working together to bring a more holistic and co-ordinated approach to the management of the Cooks River and its foreshores. By facilitating communication and collaboration among governmental as well as community stakeholders, the CRFWG helps to generate, attract support for and implement a wide range of collaborative regional projects for the improvement of the River environment, many of which are mentioned in this Community Update. I hope you will be inspired by the great work that is already occurring and share our optimism for the future of this much-loved and valued river.

Judy Pincus, Coordinator

### Members and Participating Organisations

Ashfield, Bankstown, Canterbury, City of Sydney, Hurstville, Marrickville, Rockdale and Strathfield Councils, in partnership with NSW Department of Planning, NSW Department of Natural Resources, Sydney Metropolitan Catchment Management Authority, Sydney Water and RailCorp.

In recognition of its contributions, the CRFWG was selected as one of four finalists in the 2005 United Nations Association of Australia Award for Excellence in Overall Environmental Management.



© CRFWG

# Saving the Remnants

Surprisingly, the Cooks River Valley still contains patches of original bushland and valuable habitat areas of saltmarsh and mangroves. Scattered around the catchment, especially along the waterways, are remnants of the tall shale forests, sandstone woodlands, heaths, floodplain forests and swamps that once covered the area. In the upper parts of the catchment melaleuca paperbark trees indicate areas of the distinctive Cooks River/Castlereagh Ironbark Forest.

Bush Regeneration work is vital to conserving existing bushland. More than 20 sites of natural value are now the focus of community and council bushcare groups, working to restore degraded areas with careful weeding and regeneration activities. These include Bray Ave and Johnson St, Earlwood (Wolli Creek Preservation Society); Nannygoat Hill, Turella, and Third Avenue Reserve, Campsie (Canterbury Council); Wolli Creek Regional Park (Department of Environment and Conservation); Binnamittalong and the Bexley Quarry (Bardwell Valley Bushcare Group); Coxs Creek Reserve, Greenacre (Strathfield Council); Norfolk Reserve (Bankstown Bushland Society and Friends of Norfolk Bushcare Group); Stotts Reserve (Rockdale Council); Eve Street Wetlands (Sydney Water) and more!

Council and community nurseries are also growing native plants from locally collected indigenous seed to revegetate the foreshores and parklands and recreate habitat for native birds and animals. In the last three years, more than 30,000 local native plants have been grown in the Marrickville Community Nursery alone with the help of volunteers.



Remnant vegetation in Girrahean Park beside Wolli Creek © Gavin Gatenby

# Green Corridors

Much work is being done to create green corridors linking the pockets of remnant bushland and native vegetation remaining around the catchment. Such vegetation corridors are important for the survival of native plants because they provide the continuous or closely spaced tree cover needed by small, pollinating insects and birds, to enable them to move freely between these isolated sites. Because of their extent and continuity, the foreshores of the River and its tributaries are key links in creating this 'Green Web', so local councils and community groups have been working together for years to plant corridors of trees, shrubs and groundcover along sections of the Cooks River, Wolli Creek, Cox's Creek and other tributaries. Strathfield Council and community volunteers have done extensive revegetation works along the River in Strathfield, which have brought life, beauty and shade

back to what had been a barren stretch along a dreary concrete channel. Beyond the River, railway corridors and roadside verges are being planted with flourishing groves of native plants to add to the Green Web network. The Inner West Environment Group has been hard at work for years revegetating railway lands and school grounds to establish a 'GreenWay' connecting the Cooks River to Sydney Harbour. Some Marrickville residents are creating 'Bush Pockets' on their local streets with Council assistance. And schools like Wilkins Public School and Marrickville Public School are planting native gardens on their grounds. All these activities are slowly but surely helping to fill in the missing pieces of the 'jigsaw'.

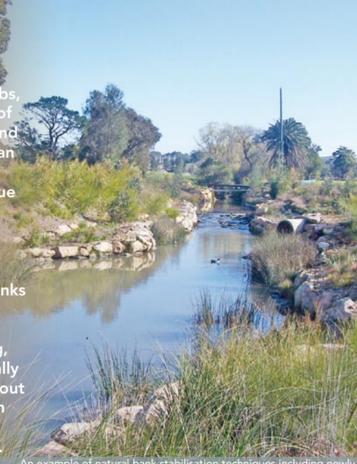


The same section of the Cooks River taken in 1947 (© Canterbury Council) and then in 2005 (© SKM) in Strathfield South showing the increase in tree cover along the River.

Volunteers mulching a newly established area within the railway corridor at Davis St, Dulwich Hill, as part of the Greenway corridor between the Cooks River and Sydney Harbour © Bruce Ashley

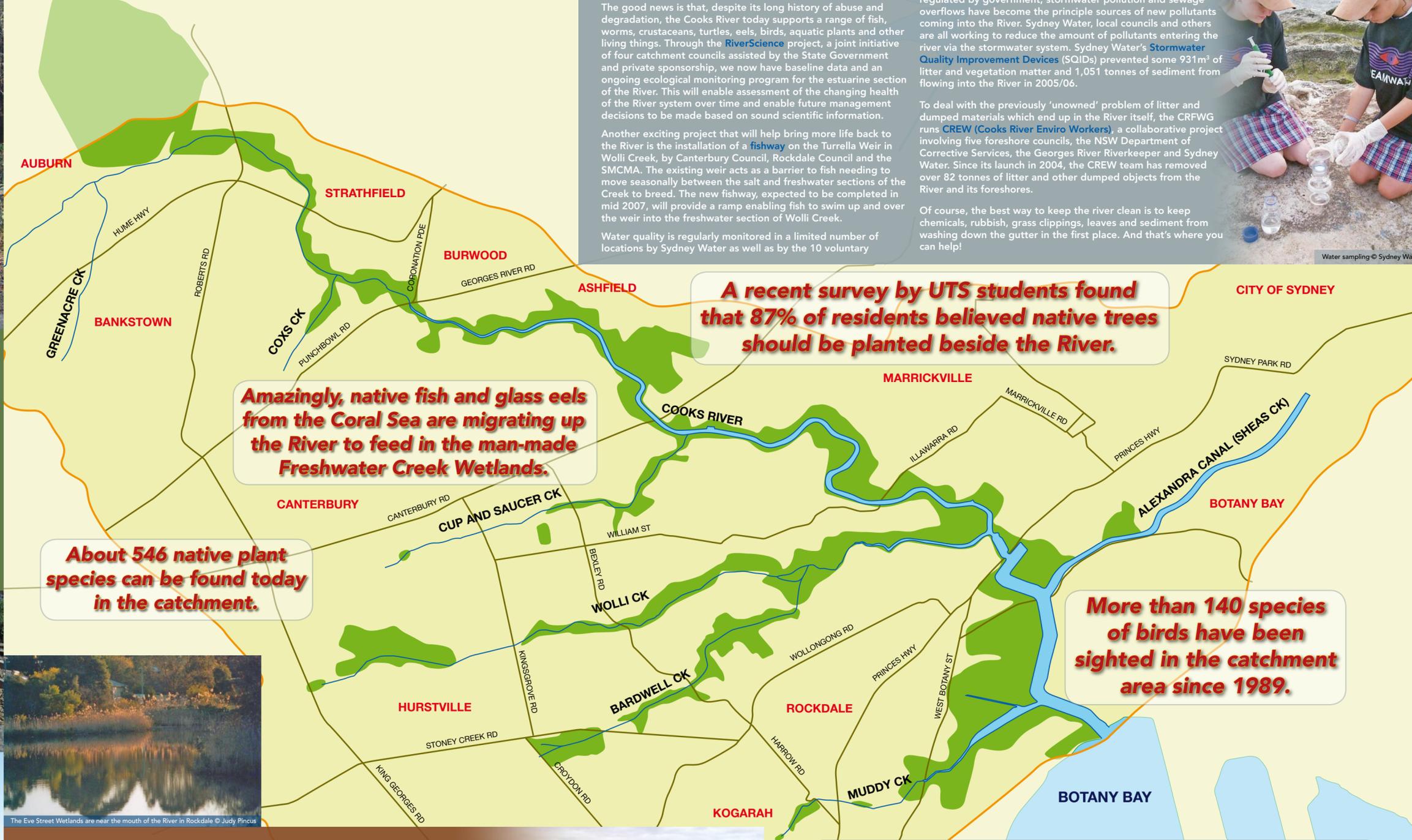
# Riverbank Restoration

Originally held together by the roots of eucalyptus trees, wattle shrubs, casuarinas, mangroves, saltmarsh, reeds and other plants, the banks of the Cooks River are now largely formed by walls of stone, concrete and steel. Most of those original plants have been removed since European settlement to provide timber for building and fuel, and land for agricultural, industrial and urban development. With them went unique habitats which supported a huge diversity of native wildlife. Today, we understand the importance of managing rivers in more sustainable ways, and the Cooks River is gradually benefiting from a number of riverbank rehabilitation projects which use more environmentally sensitive methods to control erosion and stabilise banks while restoring natural values and processes at the same time. In **Freshwater Park**, Strathfield Council is using sandstone rocks, terracing and dense plantings of native vegetation to turn an eroding, weed-infested reach of the River into a stable, bio-diverse and naturally functioning watercourse. Marrickville and Canterbury Councils are about to begin rehabilitation works that will include restoration of saltmarsh and other estuarine plants at **Kendrick Park** and **Gough Whitlam Park** and Rockdale Council has plans to restore the banks of **Muddy Creek**.



An example of natural bank stabilisation techniques including newly planted native vegetation at Freshwater Park, Strathfield © Judy Pincus

# Cooks River Catchment



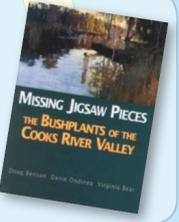
**Amazingly, native fish and glass eels from the Coral Sea are migrating up the River to feed in the man-made Freshwater Creek Wetlands.**

**About 546 native plant species can be found today in the catchment.**

**More than 140 species of birds have been sighted in the catchment area since 1989.**

**A recent survey by UTS students found that 87% of residents believed native trees should be planted beside the River.**

**All of the bush regeneration, as well as the bank and corridor revegetation work happening in the valley, is guided by the book "Missing Jigsaw Pieces: The Bushplants of the Cooks River Valley".**



# Aquatic Health

The good news is that, despite its long history of abuse and degradation, the Cooks River today supports a range of fish, worms, crustaceans, turtles, eels, birds, aquatic plants and other living things. Through the **RiverScience** project, a joint initiative of four catchment councils assisted by the State Government and private sponsorship, we now have baseline data and an ongoing ecological monitoring program for the estuarine section of the River. This will enable assessment of the changing health of the River system over time and enable future management decisions to be made based on sound scientific information.

Another exciting project that will help bring more life back to the River is the installation of a **fishway** on the Turrella Weir in Wolli Creek, by Canterbury Council, Rockdale Council and the SMCMA. The existing weir acts as a barrier to fish needing to move seasonally between the salt and freshwater sections of the Creek to breed. The new fishway, expected to be completed in mid 2007, will provide a ramp enabling fish to swim up and over the weir into the freshwater section of Wolli Creek.

Water quality is regularly monitored in a limited number of locations by Sydney Water as well as by the 10 voluntary

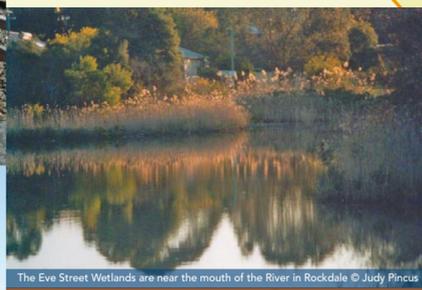
community or schools-based **Streamwatch** ([www.streamwatch.org.au](http://www.streamwatch.org.au)) groups in the catchment. Results can be found on the Sydney Water website. With industrial pollution now strictly regulated by government, stormwater pollution and sewage overflows have become the principle sources of new pollutants coming into the River. Sydney Water, local councils and others are all working to reduce the amount of pollutants entering the river via the stormwater system. Sydney Water's **Stormwater Quality Improvement Devices** (SQIDs) prevented some 931m<sup>3</sup> of litter and vegetation matter and 1,051 tonnes of sediment from flowing into the River in 2005/06.

To deal with the previously 'unowned' problem of litter and dumped materials which end up in the River itself, the CRFWG runs **CREW (Cooks River Enviro Workers)**, a collaborative project involving five foreshore councils, the NSW Department of Corrective Services, the Georges River Riverkeeper and Sydney Water. Since its launch in 2004, the CREW team has removed over 82 tonnes of litter and other dumped objects from the River and its foreshores.

Of course, the best way to keep the river clean is to keep chemicals, rubbish, grass clippings, leaves and sediment from washing down the gutter in the first place. And that's where you can help!



Water sampling © Sydney Water



The Eve Street Wetlands are near the mouth of the River in Rockdale © Judy Pincus

Constructed with financial assistance from Sydney Water, and managed by Sydney Water and SWEC volunteers, the wetland improves water quality by removing *E. coli* and other pollutants and increasing oxygen levels in the water. It also provides fantastic habitat for water birds and migratory waders, as well as fish and eels migrating from as far away as the Coral Sea. There are also wetlands in Rockdale, including the **Eve Street Wetlands**, managed by Sydney Water, and the **Landing Lights Wetlands**, managed by Rockdale Council.

# Wetlands

Wetlands are like nature's kidneys, helping to remove nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorous from stormwater before it enters our waterways. Within the Cooks River Valley there are a variety of wetland areas that are important to the health of the River. In Chullora, near Bankstown, water from the main river channel is diverted through the **Freshwater Creek Wetlands**, a man-made wetland constructed in 1999, thanks to the vigilance, vision and determination of members of the South West Enviro Centre (SWEC).



The Freshwater Creek Wetlands are near the headwaters of the Cooks River in Chullora. Photo © Darryl McKay

