

Manning Coastcare Group – a case study

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Summary

Manning Coastcare Group (MCCG) won the Australian Government National Coastcare Award in 2006. The Award recognized the scale of achievement and systematic approach to planning and on-ground works targeting bitou bush (*Chrysanthemoides monilifera* spp. *rotundata* (DC.) Norl.) control and 'coastal corridor' restoration.

As a community organization, we have recognized the need to take a holistic approach on a regional scale. Our goal was to achieve restoration of the coastal corridor and maintenance of biodiversity as opposed to conserving a small number of specific sites. Our key members have practical common sense and tertiary training in environmental management and education and a strong desire to achieve productive on-ground works. We looked objectively at the site history and scale of weed infestations and then prioritized weed species and allocated work priorities according to the funds and resources available.

The Group formed in 1995 and started work in 1996 on eight Littoral Rainforest sites along the Manning coastline in conjunction with Greater Taree City Council. In 1998, MCCG received 'Coastcare' funding to undertake a baseline study of environmental weeds at 51 sites along the coast ('Coastline Survey of Asparagaceae and other Environmental Weeds' (Williams and Gerrand 1998a)) and funding from the New South Wales (NSW) Environmental Trust to undertake the development of eight Littoral Rainforest Action Plans (Williams and Gerrand 1998b). In 1999, the Greater Taree City Council Local Government Authority 'Bitou Bush

Control Strategy' was prepared (Williams and Gerrand 1999). This strategy and the previous studies facilitated prioritization of weeds and development of further funding applications.

Since 1996, MCCG has received over \$624 500 in grant funds from the National Landcare Program, Coastcare, NSW Environmental Trusts, Envirofund, Greater Taree City Council and the Hunter Central Rivers Catchment Management Authority (CMA). The Group now targets prioritized weeds over some 200 hectares of coastal corridor under funding from the Hunter Central Rivers Catchment Management Authority.

Conservation of biodiversity within the coastal corridor has been a central focus for MCCG with activities covering some 80% of the 40 kilometre coastline. Specialist contract regenerators are used in sensitive environments such as the 'endangered ecological communities' of Littoral Rainforest and Themeda Grasslands and where spraying of bitou bush is required. These contractors are locally based and have developed invaluable specialized knowledge on weed control techniques and local conditions.

Manning Coastcare Group has also concentrated on developing skills and providing social and employment opportunities for the local community. The Group has developed a mechanism for harnessing community contribution on a regular basis through an 'over 50s volunteer worker' program in association with Centrelink, the Australian Government human services agency. Over 30 local residents contribute 15 hours per week every week of the year under this scheme. When this

in-kind contribution is coupled with the Groups other voluntary time, MCCG has contributed over \$3 566 510 of in-kind labour since 1996.

The Group also works closely with Greater Taree City Council Noxious Weeds Division and the NSW Department of Lands on the application of aerial spraying of bitou bush along the coastal corridor to complement the more site specific works around sensitive Littoral Rainforest environments. Monthly meetings are conducted with alternate meetings held in the field to review works on various sites.

MCCG is currently undertaking a 10 year review of weed status along the coastal corridor as a basis for a monitoring program and comprehensive evaluation of progress. Funding has been provided by Hunter Central Rivers CMA, which intends to use the project as a 'model' in monitoring and evaluation for land managers and community groups.

In times of increasing population pressures along the coastal fringe and climate change predictions, the sustainability of our natural ecosystems as well as our local social networks is a very important part of building the resilience of our local environment. Manning Coastcare Group is expanding its programs to integrate changes in community profiles and shifts in government welfare arrangements for the unemployed, while continuing its commitment to maintaining biodiversity within the coastal corridor.

References

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- Williams, G. and Gerrand, D. (1999) 'Greater Taree City Council – bitou bush control strategy'. Coastcare and Greater Taree City Council, Taree, NSW.