Implementing the Broughton Creek Community Coastcare Project

The Shoalhaven River and Estuary are outstanding natural features on the NSW South Coast, boasting wetlands of national significance, habitat for migratory birds and the threatened Green and Golden Bell Frog, endangered ecological communities and significant places of Aboriginal and European cultural heritage.

Broughton Creek is a major tributary of the Shoalhaven River and Estuary and is a priority area for enhancing critical estuarine, riparian and wetland habitats. Many properties in the Broughton Creek catchment have livestock that enter waterways, drains and wetlands.

Studies have shown links between poor water quality, livestock access to waterways, the loss of foreshore vegetation and faecal pollution by animals or run-off from farm land following heavy rain. Past faecal pollution events have seriously affected oyster growers at the end of Shoalhaven Estuary.

The project involved a partnership with landholders, including dairy farmers, to work towards improved environmental, social and economic outcomes in the Broughton Creek and lower Shoalhaven River catchments. It began in March 2009 with a dedicated Project Officer and was due to finish in September 2010.

Project Aims

- Engage landholders and increase uptake of best practice land management.
- Protect riparian and intertidal zones of the Broughton Creek catchment, including endangered ecological communities.
- Improve estuarine water quality and oyster harvest in the Shoalhaven Estuary.
- Improve riparian and intertidal biodiversity in Broughton Creek and the Shoalhaven Estuary.
- Reduce impacts of creek bank erosion on farming land.

Project Activities

- Installation of stock-proof fencing.
- Revegetation and regeneration with native species.
- Control of priority weeds.
- Installation of off-stream stock watering points.
- Awareness raising and knowledge sharing.

What has been done?

- Word about the project spread to over 1000 landholders.
- 20 management agreements signed, 23 ha under contract.
- 16 ha (11 km streambank length) of riparian native vegetation fenced and protected from stock.
- 18 ha (12km streambank length) of native vegetation rehabilitated or enhanced.
- 4 ha of cleared area revegetated with native vegetation.
- 2 ha of native wetland vegetation fenced and rehabilitated.
- 5 ha of weed control.
- 20 off-stream (alternative) stock watering sites installed.
- 4 community groups supported with land management advice.
- 3 field days / workshops have been run.
- 126 people participating in training forums / working bees on revegetation, rehabilitation and sustainable farm practices.
- 2 case studies completed.
Who was involved?
Southern Rivers Catchment Management Authority (CMA) worked in partnership with:

- YWCA NSW and National Green Jobs Corps (fencing, planting native species and weed control).
- Shoalhaven Riverwatch (propagating long-stemmed tube stock for project at competitive prices).
- Shoalhaven City Council (water quality monitoring).
- Shoalhaven, Berry and Foxground Landcare Groups (support with volunteer coordination and communication of activities and outcomes).
- South Coast and Highlands Dairy Industry Group partnership (assisted with landholder identification, demonstration days and communication of activities and outcomes).
- University of Wollongong and Industry & Investment NSW (Fisheries) (workshops and knowledge sharing).

What were the successes?
The project adopted a highly targeted approach to on-ground works by focusing effort along Broughton Creek, a sub-catchment of the lower Shoalhaven River. Target landholders were identified using an assessment of existing fencing and riparian vegetation, and then contacted and encouraged to enter into agreements for on-ground works on their properties. Successes with the targeted nature of this project included:

- A confined area for promotional activities (e.g. letterbox drops and door knocking) allowed time and cost savings.
- Having access to similar on-ground works when discussing new projects – existing local showcase sites made it easy for curious landholders to see first-hand the methods and benefits of similar projects successfully applied in their local community.
- Self-promotion and improved efficiency – once momentum gathered, project implementation was self-promoting. Potential candidates could see and learn about the project activities from neighbours and other locals that were engaged, which reduced the need for ‘the big sell’ to achieve their buy-in.
- Engaging landholders in close proximity led to greater efficiency in managing contracts, contractors, suppliers and work teams, as they were all more familiar with the project and the landscape issues (e.g. the types of fencing and off-stream watering infrastructure required, local provenance native plants species, flood risks, site access and directions).
- Improved uptake through the support of a National Green Jobs Corps team – the requirement for landholders to provide in-kind labour was an unforeseen constraint that affected participation rates. NGJC’s provision of labour later in the project was instrumental in boosting the number of property agreements signed. Their involvement was facilitated by the targeted nature of the project.
- Ability to bring landholders together for field days – the size of the project area made it convenient for landholders to attend local field days and workshops.
- Knowledge and problem sharing / solving between landholders – people who attended the field days and workshop appreciated the chance to meet others in their local community with similar land management challenges, and share issues and ideas. These opportunities started the formation of local support networks.
What were the challenges?

- **Short timeframes for project delivery** – the short 1.5 year timeframe for the project led to a rushed planning phase, which made it difficult to properly assess landholder needs prior to the roll-out of project activities. This, together with the limited number of target properties, impacted on the engagement of landholders and the signing of property agreements.
- **Geographical constraints in the project area** – flood prone land created access problems which delayed the completion of works in some locations and the roll-out of the program.
- **Knowing the target audience** – assumptions were made about prior engagement and how this would effect the project. The uptake patterns were different to those of previous similar projects.

What were the lessons?

- **A targeted approach had positive snowball effects** – landholders were more likely to sign agreements when neighbours were already on board. Word of mouth from neighbours and peers is a powerful promotional force.
- **Time constraints have greater impact if targeted landholders are not ready to engage in project activities**. Rushing the project planning phase and assessment of landholders needs meant considerable extra time and effort to pick off more than the ‘low hanging fruit’.
- **Work teams providing on-ground labour was a critical factor in persuading landholders to sign property agreements**. The project could have been completed earlier if the constraints regarding labour were known.
- **Many landholders aren’t aware of the subtle signs of erosion affecting their property, such as undercutting and slumping**. Most were willing to re-vegetate affected areas with native species when learning that it can be an effective control method.

Advice for other organisations running similar projects

- **Don’t assume you know the likely participation rates for your project** – what worked once might not work the next time around.
- **Don’t skimp on project planning when faced with short project timeframes**. Understanding your target audience and their needs may be more critical in confined project areas and is likely to save you time and effort down the track.
- **Be flexible with project management** – being resourceful and seeking alternate options when participation is not as planned can overcome large obstacles.
- **Make knowledge sharing and networking an essential element of any on-ground works project**.

Contact

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