

## **COOKS RIVER VALLEY ASSOCIATION 2013 YEAR IN REVIEW**

The Cooks River Valley Association (CRVA) is an environmental and community organisation. The CRVA, its members and supporters work independently and with like-minded people and have, for over 80 years, been actively working to improve the health of the Cooks River, including its water quality, the state of the river bed, the riparian zone and the river's flora and fauna. A healthy Cooks River is improving the quality of the Botany Bay waterways and the Towra Point wetlands. We regard ourselves as Cooks River people caring for Country in the Cooks River Valley.

### **BUSH CARE & RIVER CLEAN-UPS**

The CRVA in combination with the Mudcrabs – Cooks River Eco-Volunteers have continued to expand our landcare work in the Cooks River Valley. In 2013 the members of the group worked at seven sites along the Cooks River, regenerating significant areas of the riparian zone with indigenous flora. This work has included landcare in freshwater wetlands, salt marshes, pockets of remnant vegetation and rehabilitated public foreshore land. In the 8 years since its formation in 2005 the group has removed more than 10,000 bags of litter from the Cooks River - this is estimated to be more than 1500 cubic metres. They have also removed 2500 bags of weeds and planted about 12,000 native trees and shrubs at the 7 sites along the river.

Three of the sites are exclusively Mudcrabs sites, two are worked in conjunction with Canterbury Council, one with Marrickville Council and one with local residents working on the escarpment running from their backyards down to the river. Mudcrabs sites have local residents as coordinators ; Joy Berville at Rosedale Reserve, Liz Millen at Foord Ave, Nadia Wheatley and Sue Bishop at Ewen Park , and Bernie Hobbs at Thornley St. Many of the volunteers involved live near their respective site which they have adopted as their patch. There are also two clean-up sites on the river; Canterbury Racecourse coordinated by Michele and Peter and Marrickville golf course coordinated by Peter Munro and John Butcher

At National Tree Day this year, July 28, the Mudcrabs , with other members of the local community, began the process of revegetating the Wave Rock site, an extensive foreshore area running about 150m along the river at Marrickville Golf Course. It is proposed that this site will be an ongoing Mudcrabs site managed with the assistance of Marrickville Council. The plans for the site were developed collaboratively by Marrickville Council's biodiversity officer and landscape consultant and CRVA and Mudcrabs representatives. Marrickville Council has provided a grant of \$1,160 to equip the Mudcrabs group working on the site.



## CAMPAIGNS & EVENTS

The CRVA has endeavoured to engage the local community by staging imaginative, attention-grabbing events. One example was the Cash for Containers event held at Steel Park in Marrickville in April 2012. The CRVA has continued to lobby for a container deposit scheme which will help to remove the plastic bottles and other containers which contribute over half of the rubbish which the Mudcrabs remove from the river

The CRVA has also been conducting a campaign to reduce or eliminate sewage overflows into the Cooks River. The Association held a "Non-swimming Carnival" on the River's edge at Steel Park in Marrickville. The carnival featured the launch of a postcard addressed to the State Premier urging the Government to make the river clean and healthy. An indicator of river health would be the capacity for safe swimming in the River. This event and the postcard campaign captured the imagination of the local and wider community and attracted extensive media cover both in the local press, the SMH, ABC radio and Channel 7 News. The postcard featured the 1932 Steel Park River Patrol on parade in front of their clubhouse beside the Cooks River with the message "People used to swim in the Cooks River – why not now? Join our campaign to make the Cooks River safe for swimming. This postcard campaign was preceded by the presentation to local state MP's Linda Burney, Canterbury, and Carmel Tebbutt, Marrickville, of petitions and form letters calling on the state government to remove the raw sewerage from the river.

The CRVA was also instrumental in proposing to the Marrickville Cooks River Committee that Kendrick Park be selected as a potential safe swimming spot. This proposal was adopted by Council and has received extensive media coverage. At the instigation of Gayle Adams, who was the CRVA Water Quality Coordinator, the Area Public Health Unit has convened meetings of stakeholders to work towards achieving the goal of a healthy river which is safe for swimming. As part of this process the Beachwatch program has agreed to assess CRVA nominated potential swimming spots along the river.

Although Gayle Adams is currently taking a well earned break from the role of CRVA Water Quality Coordinator the water testing is continuing with several new volunteers.

Another significant community event, hosted by the Association, was the Two Valley Trail Reconciliation Walk held in both 2011 and 2012. These events were initiated by the CRVA and focused on the concept "we are all Cooks River people, caring for country" with the goals of acknowledging the indigenous history of the Cooks River Valley and furthering the process of reconciliation." The events were organised in cooperation with the Canterbury Aboriginal Advisory group and Canterbury Council. The Cooks River Valley Association produced a pamphlet titled "Caring for Country in the Cooks River Valley." This leaflet has had and will continue to have wide distribution within the Cooks River catchment. Our aim is to encourage our local community to live in harmony with the land and with each other.



This year the CRVA held a Candles on the River event for Earth Hour. Paper boats made by local residents at the Children's Festival held that day at Marrickville West Public School were fitted with lighted candles and launched on the river at Steel Park. Over 200 people attended the event and one hundred and eighty boats were launched. Canoeists from the local River Canoe Club collected the boats to avoid littering the River. A local music group added atmosphere to the celebration. This event was a wonderful collaboration between the CRVA, the local school and the local community. And it was a magical celebration of the River and our connection with it. The success of the event was largely due to Peter Munro who was the principal organiser.

Following a request from a local resident the CRVA has taken up the cause of Fatima Island. This is the only remaining island in the Cooks River and it has environmental and cultural significance. The condition of this small island is rapidly deteriorating. It is eroding away and needs urgent remedial work.

As indicated in the previous sections. The CRVA / Mudcrabs have worked closely with the environment sections of both Canterbury and Marrickville Councils and have established a good working relationship with the project manager of the Cooks River Alliance of councils. The CRVA has lobbied representatives of Local, State and Federal Governments to increase the profile of the Cooks River, to remedy the effects of past abuse and neglect and to secure infrastructure improvements.

Over the past year the CRVA website has been revamped and made more attractive and interactive. This was largely due to the efforts of Peter Munro. A facebook page has also been added and is being managed by Gayle Adams and Ann Leahy. Ranjith Evas has also added a Mudcrabs facebook page.

The CRVA has about 100 members with a much larger group of supporters and contacts. The Mudcrabs have about 500 people on their email list. All these people are notified of work bees and other events. The participants at working bees average between 12 – 20 people. The CRVA with the Mudcrabs have engaged in ongoing river clean-ups. On Clean Up Australia Day 2013 the CRVA and Mudcrabs worked at three sites along the River, with 93 volunteers collecting 295 bags of rubbish.

Over the years the CRVA has faced the basic challenge of restoring a river which had effectively been converted into a polluted drain. Its natural banks had been replaced by steel piling and concrete channels. The wetlands and flood plains had been filled in. The course of the river had been altered and straightened. And the mouth of the river had been moved to accommodate Sydney Airport. In the past it had been difficult to convince the local community and local, state and federal politicians and the relevant state authorities that it would ever be possible to once again swim in a healthy river. The work of the CRVA has helped to transform that negative perception of the river.

John Butcher, President