



Case study 13

Cooks River bank naturalisation

Sydney Water together with: Sydney Metropolitan Catchment Management Authority, local councils, Cooks River stakeholders (incl. community)

This case study showcases

how collaboration and integrated planning deliver better value for communities

Problem

The Cooks River meanders through the inner South West of Sydney for some 23km before discharging into Botany Bay. The river was lined with concrete in the 1940's to reduce flooding. In the mid 2000s Sydney Water observed that sections of the concrete channel were starting to fail structurally and required renewal.

Solution

The need to renew this stormwater asset provided the opportunity to work towards a different future for the river and re-think the role of the Cooks River in the local community. Sydney Water and eight councils collaborated to develop a flood study and Masterplan for the river. The Masterplan and partnership model was also the basis for the naturalisation of 1100m of the river by Sydney Water in 2014–15. This project replaced the failing concrete riverbanks with more gently sloped banks stabilised with sandstone

and native plants as well as associated open space and cycleway amenities.

The community was highly supportive of the idea to renaturalise the river and remains engaged in the ongoing protection and management of the river. Collaboration with universities resulted in very valuable economics insights, as well as capacity increase for utility staff.

Business case

The project was supported by a federal government grant. An ongoing international research study is now mining historic sales data to determine the lift in house value as a function of the condition of a nearby river (and associated amenity).¹ The value of property across the Georges and Cooks River Catchments adjacent to waterways with natural channels and wide continuous vegetation canopy cover, was found to be up to 8.9% higher than property near a channelized waterways without canopy cover.

Key drivers

Need for asset renewal met a desire to do more than BAU.

Collaborative approach, with a committed group of project partners.

Very strong community support with over 80% in agreement with the project.

Benefit/outcome

The solution goes well beyond the original project need of flood protection.

Safety benefits: flood mitigation

Community benefits

Great uplift in amenity with new cycle paths, trees and open space, wetlands, ongoing engagement in maintaining and protecting the river, education and appreciation of saltmarsh with signposted viewing platform. Property value uplift by between 4.8% and 8.9%

Environmental benefits

Renaturalised river, wetlands, threatened saltmarsh vegetation reintroduced, flood (and erosion) mitigated

Staff capability was expanded through exposure to new economic assessment models and top-end research "We never talked about these concepts before this project, and now we are thinking about how we can apply the models to other projects".

¹ <http://riversymposium.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Philip-Birtles.pdf>
<http://ageconsearch.umn.edu/bitstream/235637/2/Thomy%20ppt%20upload.pdf>