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Water Quality in the Richmond Catchment: Ecohealth 2015 report card released

Today Richmond River County Council marked the completion of a year's collaboration on monitoring river health in the Richmond Catchment with the launch of the Ecohealth final report and report card.

This report was completed by Professor Darren Ryder and Sarah Mika from the University of New England, and supported by multiple project partners. Gathering with Ecohealth Project partners, including councillors and representatives from local councils and funding bodies, the report's findings were handed over by staff from the University of New England.

This project was supported by Richmond River County Council, Ballina Shire, Lismore City, Richmond Valley and Kyogle Councils, Rous Water, North Coast Local Land Services, NSW Office of Environment and Heritage, and the Aquatic Ecology and Restoration research group from the University of New England. Contribution and support was facilitated through funding from the Australian Government.

Ecohealth is an aquatic ecosystem monitoring program that measures how healthy our rivers and estuaries are for the plants and animals that live in them. Aiming to better understand the health of the Richmond catchment and the key issues the community must face to protect it, the monitoring project was conducted at 48 sites in the catchment. The samples and data collected were analysed to provide an assessment of river health.

Council Chair, David Wright said "It's important to understand that an Ecohealth report does not attempt to report on human environmental health issues in the rivers. The report does not assess drinking water quality, heavy metal contamination, disease, bacteria, viruses, our ability to harvest shellfish or fish, or if our rivers are safe for swimming".

Councillor Wright went on to say "from a range of A+ to F, the report returned a grade of only D+ for the Richmond Catchment; this score indicates that some real work needs to be put into restoring the health of our river systems."

General Manager, Kyme Lavelle said "Two key areas for improvement are riparian riverbank vegetation and water health. Riparian riverbank restoration is badly needed in many areas, with severe riverbank slumping and exposed tree roots found on multiple sites".

Reports such as Ecohealth are crucial to understanding where our rivers are under the greatest stress, and where investment in key restoration projects are required. The management of natural resources on the Richmond River coastal floodplain covers complex issues such as drainage, acid sulphate soils, floodgate management, water quality monitoring, and estuary and wetlands management.

Richmond River County Council believes that with concerted effort from both the community and local natural resource management groups, the Richmond catchment will see progressive improvement in its health and overall condition in the coming years.

A full copy of the Ecohealth report, and an educational Ecohealth brochure and poster can be found on the Richmond River County Council website at www.rbcc.nsw.gov.au

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