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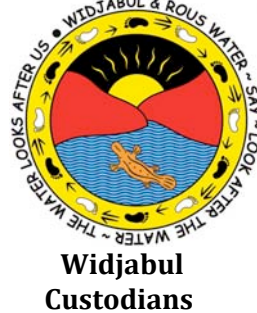


Wilsons River Final Report

prepared by Sustainable Futures Australia & Rous Water

November 2012

This report was prepared by Sustainable Futures Australia and Rous Water
with input from Widjabul custodians
for the community of the Wilsons River catchment and northern NSW
in November 2012



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‘Reconnecting to Country - Wilsons River’

Final Report – November 2012

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This Final Report describes the project activities and on-ground outcomes of 'Reconnecting to Country' in the Wilsons River catchment from September 2008 to September 2012. It is an extract from a longer report prepared for the primary funding body NSW Environmental Trust.

PROJECT SUMMARY

'Reconnecting to Country' (RtC) is an ecological and cultural restoration project that has taken place in two regions of NSW: the Blue Mountains and Northern New South Wales. Project partners were the Gully Traditional Owners, Blue Mountains City Council, Rous Water, Widjabul people of the Bundjalung Nation and Sustainable Futures Australia.

New Community Groups

In Northern NSW, four RtC local working groups of community volunteers were actively engaged in implementing seven inspiring projects in their sub-catchments of the Wilsons River. These projects were all initiated and designed by community members and clearly demonstrated a variety of ways that local people can improve the biodiversity and water quality of the catchment area whilst creating a new culture of sustainability integrating local Aboriginal knowledge. The involvement of many Aboriginal people of the Far North Coast of NSW has been integral to all elements of this project.

Creating Places and Restoring Country

Projects include riparian restoration beside a traditional ceremonial ground in Lismore; the creation of a wetland in an old creek bed beside a swimming hole in Bangalow Park; protection of rainforest remnants on farmland in Corndale; interpretive signage overlooking a view of the whole catchment at Dorrroughby; a composting toilet to protect Coopers Creek; riparian rainforest regeneration in the upper catchment; and the establishment of bushtucker garden at Wilsons Creek primary school. All projects integrated cultural and environmental education, practical community action and Aboriginal employment and are continuing beyond RtC funding. On-ground works were designed with local Aboriginal input to prevent cultural damage to the sites. Two highly culturally significant sites are locations for projects.

Community Events & Educational Resources

Open days and working bees, including an integrated 'grand finale' event, at all project locations included enjoyable cultural activities building a sense of place, community and reconciliation. A total of 19 interpretive signs throughout the catchment were developed by members of each of the working groups in liaison with local Aboriginal people including the Widjabul project partners. Two high quality cross-cultural historical books were also published. Some traditional knowledge has been integrated into these signs and books, including totems; bush food, medicine and other uses; impacts of European settlement; artwork and language.

In the Blue Mountains, the project focused on the development of an interpretive walk through 'The Gully' at Katoomba, and educational programs throughout the broader region.

Relationships

Strong working and personal relationships were formed between members of the local working groups and the Widjabul project team and other local Aboriginal people. Cross-cultural training was an important part of this.

Project teams from Northern NSW and Blue Mountains kept in regular contact through monthly phone hook-ups. This proved invaluable in providing support and mutual learning during this ambitious project. A strong relationship formed between the Widjabul custodians and the Gully Traditional Owners. Four site visits were held through the project, including an Aboriginal cultural meeting in the Blue Mountains in November 2010, and culminating in a 'grand tour' of all the Wilsons River projects by the whole project team in March 2011.

1. BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

1.1 Background

Reconnecting to Country at the Wilsons River and The Gully involves a project partnership established between Rous Water (in association with the Widjabul people of the Bundjalung Nation) and the Blue Mountains City Council (in association with the Gully Traditional Owners), and Sustainable Futures Australia.

The project was funded by a grant from the Urban Sustainability Program of The Environmental Trust (now part of the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage). The Wilsons River project was granted \$400,000 between 2008 and 2012, which was supplemented by Rous Water, Lismore City Council, Byron Shire Council, and substantial in-kind contributions from Sustainable Futures Australia, project staff, other professionals, community group organisers, and large numbers of passionate and dedicated community volunteers.

Reconnecting to Country actively partners Aboriginal communities and local government in a project that aims to establish a culture of sustainability through community engagement in on-ground environmental improvements. Land and water restoration projects will integrate sustainability principles with local Aboriginal culture and land management practices. Australia's original inhabitants understood 'sustainability' in a way that enabled people to live in relatively stable relationship with the natural environment for many thousands of years. We are fortunate, therefore, that we are able to involve their descendants, people who still hold aspects of that cultural knowledge, in this project.

The project aims to meet all of the objectives of the Urban Sustainability Program both by achieving sustainability outcomes through specific on-ground actions, as well as by using an effective community engagement process as a means of creating a culture of sustainability.

The project develops a 'sister city' relationship between the Widjabul people and The Gully Traditional Owners, and between Rous Water and Blue Mountains City Council. Each organisation has mentored the other in their respective areas of expertise to facilitate shared learning that marries traditional Aboriginal understanding and culture with modern scientific approaches ('best management practice') to promote the sustainable management of natural and cultural assets.

The coming together of Aboriginal people from two geographically separate nations to share their knowledge with each other as well as with their local government authority and communities is very innovative, and is a unique feature of this partnership.

It is important to note that the Aboriginal partners in this project were chosen through correct traditional protocol. The Widjabul project partners in the Wilsons River region were originally identified in 2003 by the Chairperson of the Bundjalung Elders Council as the traditional custodians of the project area and therefore the appropriate partners for regional water authority Rous Water. The Gully Traditional Owners are in a formal co-management agreement with Blue Mountains City Council that began in 2008 to care for the Gully in Katoomba which is a recognised Aboriginal Place.

As Widjabul elder Aunty June Gordon says "Protocols were followed. From the beginning protocol was followed. That is the strength of this relationship [the Steering Committee] and this project." (27 May 2011)

1.2 Project Vision

A new culture of sustainable catchment management is cultivated through community engagement in on-the-ground action and cultural exchange with Aboriginal custodians

1.3 Project Objectives

Objective # 1: Improving Catchment Health

The ecological integrity of drinking water catchments will be improved. Local communities will be directly involved in improving catchment health through on-the-ground restoration projects.

Objective #2: Building a Culture of Sustainability

A culture of sustainability and land management will be developed and promoted that integrates ecological, social and cultural values. Aboriginal cultural knowledge is acknowledged as an integral part of this contemporary model of sustainability action and education. This culture will be fostered in Rous Water, Blue Mountains City Council, and with other environmental professionals and the wider community.

Objective #3: Developing Creative Partnerships

A 'sister-city' type relationship will be developed between the Widgee custodians and The Gully Traditional Owners, and between land managers Rous Water and Blue Mountains City Council. The development of good relationships between the Aboriginal custodians and land managers in each location will promote/foster ongoing creative collaboration.

Objective #4: Building Capacity to Employ Aboriginal People in Sustainability Education and Action

Aboriginal participants will gain skills and experience through direct involvement in land management, community education and interpretation. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants will be educated about Aboriginal culture, issues and history and protocols for working cross-culturally.

Objective #5: Cultivating 'Sense of Place' and Reconciliation Through Action & Culture

A sense of connection with place (including the land, culture and people) will be cultivated through locally focused action and cultural exchange. This place-based culture will be promoted within the larger regions. The project will engage in the process of reconciliation between local Aboriginal communities and their respective councils and local communities.

2. VISITING EACH OTHERS' COUNTRIES

A series of four visits were held over the period of the project to share the local projects with each other; visit each others country; learn from each other; build relationships and hold project planning and evaluation meetings.

Blue Mountains Visit – November 2008



Figure 1: Traditional welcome by the Gully Traditional Owners to Widgebul Custodians and Widgebul River project team – November 2008.

In November 2008, Widgebul elders and descendants from Northern NSW visited the Gully Traditional Owners (GTO) in the Blue Mountains, as the first important milestone in the Reconnecting to Country project. A traditional welcome invited the Widgebul people and their project partners - Rous Water, Sustainable Futures Australia and the Blue Mountains City Council into The Gully, a declared Aboriginal Place in Katoomba. This visit marked the first meeting of the elders and project teams and was significant in relation to the formation of the 'sister-city' type relationship between the Widgebul custodians and The Gully Traditional Owners.

The visit included two site visits to areas of significance - The Gully, and Kings Tableland, Wentworth Falls. Wayne Brennan and Michael Jackson, archeologists working with the Gully Traditional Owners, joined the group and along

with the GTO provided insight into the work being carried out in the region. The site visits provided the opportunity for the visiting project team, and the BMCC project team, to learn more about the GTO and their country. They also provided an opportunity to begin forming relationships amongst team members.

Also included in the visit was a more formal meeting to discuss the individual components of the project between the two teams. John Street from NSW Environment Trust also attended this meeting. At the conclusion of the Blue Mountains visit both of the non-Aboriginal project teams engaged in an action learning session, led by Elizabeth Bragg. This session provided an opportunity to evaluate the visit and discuss the project so far. Overall, the visit was considered to be highly successful by both teams. This was further reinforced in evaluation sessions conducted with the Widgebul elders and descendants and the GTO.

Widgebul River Visit – June 2009



Figure 2: The Gully Traditional Owners with Widgebul Custodians during the visit to Widgebul River in Northern NSW – June 2009.

In June 2009 the project team from the Blue Mountains (including members from the Blue Mountains City Council (BMCC) and the Gully Traditional Owners (GTO) visited the Widgebul River catchment as an important milestone in the Reconnecting to Country project.

The three day visit included activities involving the Blue Mountains Project Team, the Widgebul River Project Team, staff at Rous Water and members of the local Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. Activities included a Welcome to Widgebul country and official welcome from Rous Water; a visit to Cubawee Aboriginal Reserve, Evans Head and other sites of Widgebul significance; meetings about project

administration, project discussion and project progress; and a traditional Widjabul smoking ceremony at Rocky Creek Dam. The gatherings at Cubawee and the smoking ceremony at Rocky Creek Dam were also attended by local working group members.

Most activities were essentially designed and facilitated by the Widjabul project team, with support provided by other project team members, and staff from Rous Water and Sustainable Futures Australia. The visit provided opportunities for the visiting and local project teams and members of the wider community to learn more about Widjabul project team members and their country. It also provided an opportunity for project discussion and evaluation.

Blue Mountains Visit – November 2010

The Widjabul project team visited the Gully Traditional Owners to have their own cultural meetings without the involvement of non-Aboriginal project teams from Rous Water, Sustainable Futures Australia or Blue Mountains City Council.

Wilsons River Visit – March 2011



Figure 3: Aunty Mary King (Gully Traditional Owner), Soren Mortensen (Blue Mountains City Council) & Jally Mesurier during a visit to Dorrobbie Grass as part of the Wilsons River Visit March 2011.

To celebrate the achievements of the Reconnecting to Country project over the past three years, the Blue Mountains project team came for another visit to the Northern Rivers, and had the opportunity to swap notes and view the work done by the Wilsons River project team and working groups.

A two day 'Grand Tour' allowed the GTO and BMCC teams to meet formally and also informally with the local project participants and to connect to country in each of the Wilsons River sub-catchment sites. A gift presentation and formal welcome at Rous Water gave an update of the project as introduction to the visit's activities.

A bus route through the winding roads of the Wilsons River upper to lower catchments showcased the work of each working group. The groups hosted their guests with refreshments and "Show and Tell". It started at Dorrobbie Grass with a walk and talk about this culturally and ecologically important site. Next was morning tea in Wilsons Creek with a view of the riparian revegetation and school children's moving rendition of "What a Beautiful World". Then on to Bangalow for lunch and insight into the wetland site's history and future vision. Here the visitors met with the Byron Shire Mayor, Jan Barham, and the two projects were compared from the point of view of local government. The evening in Lismore started with a campfire at Slaters Creek, and moved on to Gunnawannabe Café for a launch of the book 'Reconnecting to Slaters Creek'. Local choir music accompanied dinner and Lilli Pilli Punch.

An evaluation workshop at Rous Water the following morning was facilitated by Peter Cuming of Sustainable Futures Australia. This was followed by a rural experience at the Havillah property where riparian revegetation and a solar powered fence were on show. A 'grand finale event' was hosted at Corndale Hall. Here, each of the Reconnecting to Country projects were presented by their working groups, with displays and talks. The 'Coopers Creek: A Place of Many Stories' publication was launched and the significance of the project was expressed by Aunty June Gordon and Lismore City Mayor, Jenny Dowell. It was a terrific opportunity to be informed about the project in a festive atmosphere, with cyclists from the bike ride of the morning, performing musicians, Aboriginal people involved in the project in various ways, and people of all ages and walks of life being invited to celebrate Reconnecting to Country and continue it into the future. Local community participants appreciated the presence of the Gully Traditional Owners, particularly Aunty Mary King who spoke to the crowd about her impressions of the project.

3 WILSONS RIVER PROJECT ACTIVITIES

3.1 Social Marketing Campaign

An integrated social marketing strategy was implemented throughout the project that included the creation of a Reconnecting to Country 'brand' with tag-line "Let's stand together, looking after Country"; websites and e-lists updates; media releases; creation of 'props' to assist local community 'word of mouth' publicity including postcards, posters, and formal invitations. Gifts distributed at the end of the project included hip hop CDs, t-shirts, stickers and large posters which will publicise the achievements of the project into the future.

Project Beginning – September 2008 to November 2008

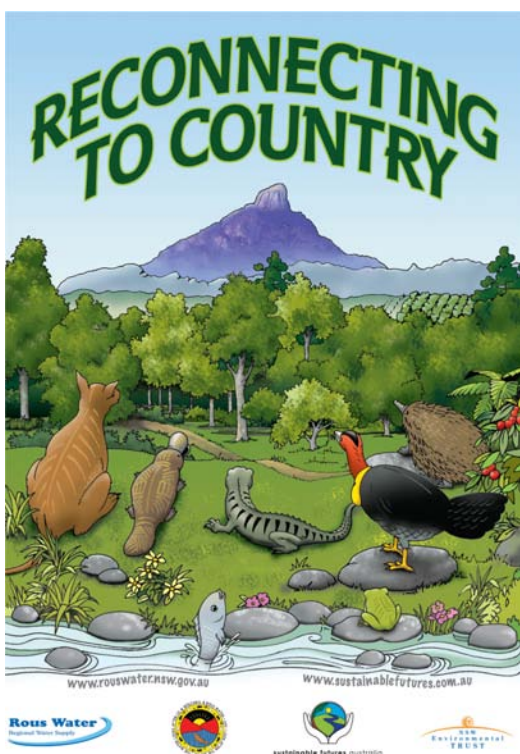


Figure 4: Key artwork created in October 2008 and used in posters, postcards and advertisements throughout the project..

Leading up to the commencement of Reconnecting to Country we blitzed the media with our media campaign. Over October and November 2009 we had 29 presences in local print media. These included media releases announcing the project and inviting the public to the upcoming community workshops; articles written by journalists about the exciting prospect of, working together both aboriginal and non aboriginal people in catchment management; advertisements placed by us; and a cartoon series using Wiabul language to convey the importance of caring for our water. Reconnecting to Country information was also available on the Rous Water and Sustainable Futures Australia websites.

Four local radio stations broadcast a combination of radio interviews and community service announcements inviting the public to the community workshops. Artist Geoff Williams from Sustainable Futures Australia was commissioned to create an artwork that has been used for the duration of the project. The artist received significant artistic direction from the Widjabul project team members on this project. The final image was used to create posters, advertisements and postcards.

A total of 100 posters were displayed in selected businesses, institutions and community spaces across the catchment. A total of 4,000 postcards were distributed throughout the catchment area. The majority of postcards were left at selected strategic locations throughout the catchment for pickup by community members (such as general stores/post offices), whilst some were sent in the mail to community members that had registered their interest in the RtC project. Sets of postcards were also sent to 6 community members who agreed to distribute the postcards in their local communities.

Project Proposal and Detailed Design Phase – December 2009 to February 2010

Working group participants requested that we did not encourage more people to join their groups and slow their process down during the phase where they were working in small groups on their project proposals and detailed designs. Therefore during this stage we didn't promote and encourage participation from the wider community.

On-the-Ground Phase - March 2010 to March 2011

As each local project emerged from its planning phase, working groups were keen to invite the wider community to participate.

Community events that have been publicised through the social marketing campaign were:

- Wilsons Creek - Bushtucker Garden Planting Day
- Corndale Farm Working Bee - Building an Electric Fence
- Big Scrub Day – Reconnecting to Country Picnic and Displays
- Rosebank Recreation Reserve – Opening the Composting Toilet
- Dorrobee Grass Open Day & Signage Unveiling
- Slaters Creek - Banyam/Baigham Family Day
- Bangalow - Park Wetland Open Day
- Wilsons Creek - School & Landcare Tree Planting
- Bangalow - Lunch, Walk & Talk
- Slaters Creek - Publication Launch
- 'Riding Round the Ridges' Bike Tour
- 'Grand Finale' & Coopers Creek Publication Launch

Our multi-faceted social marketing strategy was in full operation in this phase, and included:

- use of the Wilsons River 'Reconnecting to Country' graphic on most artwork as a recognisable 'brand'
- postcards and large 'events' posters with blank spaces for working group members to insert details of each event
- media releases that report on the last community event and promote the next
- advertisements placed in local papers, focusing on small local journals and newsletters to support these local enterprises and target our participants
- liaison with local reporters and film-makers to raise the importance of the project
- documenting each event through video (sometimes by professional filmmakers)
- development of draft graphics for 'merchandise' including t-shirts, stickers, high quality posters and calico bags to use as giveaways in the final celebratory events and for future sale to promote visits to each project site
- production & distribution across the community of the 'merchandise' including t-shirts, stickers, high quality posters and hip-hop music CD's
- supplementation by Wilsons River Catchment Management Plan summary document produced in a similar graphic style to RtC material and using common 'totem' animals to promote the relationship between the two projects
- personal invitations are also made to each event for relevant people and groups
- an internet presence through local events sites, internet journals and RtC website hosted on Rous Water also accessible through Sustainable Futures Australia website
- a comprehensive e-list that is regularly updated from each community event, with updates sent at least every six weeks showcasing previous achievements and inviting participation in upcoming events
- special invitations for the 'Grand Finale' event were created and distributed as a keepsake invitation

3.2 Process of Project Implementation and Community Engagement

Community engagement was core to project implementation. Community volunteers from four subcatchment locations designed and implemented their projects, guided by the objectives and Steering Committee of the wider RtC project. This was facilitated by:

- a series of information days at public events
- appointment of Widjabul Community Education Officer
- community workshops in four locations
- formation of local working groups and development of project proposals
- presentation of project proposals at second series of community workshops
- approval of proposals by Steering Committee
- development of detailed designs and gaining necessary government approvals
- formal approvals of detailed designs by Steering Committee
- on-the-ground works (see section 3.4)

Info Days – September 2008



Figure 5: Banner painting facilitated by SFA project officer with kids and teenagers at the Info Day at Big Scrub Rainforest Day – September 2008.

An introduction to the public of the Reconnecting to Country project occurred at Info days for the Wilsons River Catchment Management Plan (WRCMP); held in early September 2009. The Info Days were held in four locations across the Wilsons River Catchment at Bangalow, Lismore, Corndale and Rocky Creek Dam. Two of the Info Days occurred within larger festival frameworks (Big Scrub Rainforest Day and the Fatherhood Festival).

Representatives from Rous Water and Sustainable Futures Australia attended the Info Days and recruited interest for Reconnecting to Country. Water health in the catchment was promoted through fun activities including catchment banner

painting, storytelling and a giant catchment puzzle. The banners were used as displays throughout the project at community events. The six sub-catchment representatives from the WRCMP were also present at each of their local events to promote Reconnecting to Country to their local community and to explain how the project ties into the WRCMP. We estimate that approximately 100 people visited the information stalls and we had 18 people formally register their interest in the Reconnecting to Country project.

Appointment of Community Education Officer (Reconnecting to Country) – September 2008



Figure 6: Roy C. Gordon is the appointed Community Education Officer employed by Rous Water.

In September 2008, Rous Water appointed Roy C. Gordon to the position of Community Education Officer (Reconnecting to Country) to develop and implement natural and cultural asset management initiatives that integrate understanding of the culture, traditional laws, customs, and beliefs of the local Aboriginal people into the Rous Water *Reconnecting to Country* environmental education, information and promotional programs, for the purposes of educating and informing Rous Water, stakeholders and raising community awareness regarding catchment management.

This role set out to develop effective links, communications and networks within (a) the local Aboriginal community; (b) between the Aboriginal community and Rous Water; and (c) the project team; through shared experiences on the *Reconnecting to Country* project. This position was also intended to identify and share the sustainability and cultural values and issues of importance to the Widgee people in the area and to educate the local community about these natural and cultural values. As part of these roles, a critical component involved working together with local community working groups to brainstorm and further develop ideas for community projects in the area which could meet the objectives of the 'Reconnecting to Country' project and the Urban Sustainability Program.

Given the diversity of roles and the project timetable, including being a link between the elders and the project, this role has proven a challenging one, as it involves the coming together of cultural protocols with project/'bureaucratic' protocols and timetables. These difficulties are heightened when involving extension work in the community due to a history of/concerns regarding prejudice/racism issues. As a result, the Widgee people have been keen to ensure that the groups are receptive to their messages/input, prior to cultural engagement.

First Community Workshops Facilitated by Sustainable Futures Australia – November 2008



Figure 7: Community Workshop at Lismore Civic Centre with facilitator from SFA standing and Widgee elders seated to the right – November 2008.

The 19th to the 25th of November 2008 saw us hold four Reconnecting to Country Community Workshops across the Widgee River Catchment. The workshops were held in each of the following locations: Widgee Creek, Corndale, Lismore and Bangalow and were facilitated by Sustainable Futures Australia, Rous Water and members of the Widgee project team. Catering was provided by the Aboriginal run café in Lismore 'GunnaWannaBe Café'.

The community workshops covered the following: Welcome and purpose of the workshop; Welcome to Country; an introduction to the project including why we are doing it, a Widgee perspective and an outline of the project. The workshop

then moved onto an interactive group process whereby the group explored the natural and cultural values of the area; the challenges to these values; and opportunities of addressing these impacts. Finally we highlighted the criteria for local projects; brainstormed ideas for projects; and formed local working groups.

The community workshops had a total participation of 113 community members across all four locations. Seventy seven participants filled in evaluation forms and the following data was drawn from that group of participants. 10 participants indicated they were Aboriginal. The ratio of men to women was 51:49. 63% of all workshop participants were in the 41 to 60 years age brackets with a further 16% of participants in the 31 to 40 years bracket. 97% of participants rated the workshops as moderately successful to highly successful. 22% indicated that they may and 76% indicated that they would be interested in further participation in Reconnecting to Country.

Formation of Local Working Groups and Development of Project Proposals – December 2008 to March 2009



Figure 8: Lismore Working Group visiting potential project site for riparian regeneration at Slaters Creek – February 2009.

Working groups (WGs) were formed in each of the sub-project locations. These WGs met on a regular basis during December 2008 to March 2009 and each had between 3 and 4 facilitated meetings during that phase. The WGs have Terms of Reference and Operating Protocols by which they work within. Each group averaged 10 members with an average WG meeting attendance of 7 participants. Additional meetings, site visits and bushwalks were also organised and attended by the WGs.

Each of the four groups built upon the material from the initial wider community workshops, to develop their project plans. The project plans focused on: a wetland project adjacent to the Bangalow Pool; a riparian regeneration project on Slaters

Creek in North Lismore; a plan to provide public access along the Wilsons Creek working in partnership with Landcare; and value-adding to existing projects in the Lower Coopers Creek sub-catchment whilst focusing on water education as the element tying the existing projects together.

The WGs went on site visits to 'connect' to country; inviting experts to talk about issues relevant to the projects; and inviting beneficial community members to become working group members - all to help develop the project plans.

Second Community Workshops Facilitated by Working Groups – April 2009 to June 2009

The months of April, May and June 2009 saw us hold our second set of four Reconnecting to Country community workshops across the Wilsons River Catchment. The workshops were held in each of the following locations: Wilsons Creek, Corndale, Lismore and Bangalow and were facilitated by community members of the local working groups assisted by Sustainable Futures Australia and Rous Water. These workshops differed from the previous community workshops as they were very much local community-driven events with catering donated by the local working groups or local business; promotion of the events through local networks; and the workshops themselves being hosted by the local working group members.



Figure 9: Members of the Lismore Working Group at the reception desk for second Community Workshop – April 2009.

The community workshops covered the following: welcome, introducing the Steering Committee and purpose of the workshop; recap of the overall Reconnecting to Country project; summary of the proposals for the other local projects; the working group presentation of the proposed local project; an opportunity for questions and answers from the wider community and Steering Committee to the working group; looking at the next steps for the project; and the forming of the local 'detailed design team'.

The community workshops had a total participation of 91 community members across all four locations. Seventy one participants filled in evaluation forms and the following data was drawn from that group of participants. 9 participants indicated they were Aboriginal. The ratio of men to women was 52:48. 60% of all workshop participants were in the 41 to 60 years age bracket.

98.5% of participants rated the workshops as moderately successful to highly successful. 14% indicated that they may; and 86% indicated that they would be interested in further participation in Reconnecting to Country.

Formal Approval of Project Proposals – September 2009

Each of the project proposals was approved by the Wilsons River RtC Steering Committee and 'conditions of consent' were given to the group as they proceeded into the 'detailed design phase'. The working groups continued to work as self-organising project groups, each auspiced by an incorporated community group, and supported by the SFA project officer, Widjabul custodians and the project managers as they moved into the 'detailed design phase' and government approval process.

Detailed Designs for Local Projects – October 2009 to February 2010

Community volunteers worked hard to successfully complete the 'detailed design phase' of their projects. This included arranging insurance coverage and accounting by incorporated community groups; consultation with neighbouring landholders; preparing detailed plans; gaining formal approvals from local and state government authorities; and liaising with Widjabul custodians. This phase of the project was bureaucratically onerous, despite being assisted by project officers, community volunteers demonstrated great perseverance in working through a long process without the satisfaction of anything happening 'on-the-ground'.

Bangalow Park Wetland Project. The *Detailed Design Phase* saw the detailed design team for the Bangalow Wetland project busy liaising with Council to secure transfer of land ownership; briefing & selecting design consultants to undertake the wetland design; reviewing the draft wetland design and providing feedback; meeting with Widjabul custodians to discuss design details and cultural aspects of the project; obtaining necessary approvals as part of the REF; creating themes for the signage at the site and encouraging local school children and university students to undertake water testing of the Byron Creek.



Figure 10: Water testing by Bangalow Public School in Byron Creek at Bangalow Park.

The *Detailed Design Team* for the Bangalow Wetland had an active membership of 7 participants that contributed 158 volunteer hours to that phase of the project.

Slaters Creek Project (North Lismore). The *Detailed Design Phase* involved liaising with government departments to seek necessary approvals; seeking landholder agreements; meeting with Widjabul custodians and other local indigenous women to plan the



Figure 11: Detailed design team, local neighbourhood community and landholders on-site at Slaters Creek.

educational aspect of the project and document the cultural history of the area; selecting contractors to undertake on the ground works; on site meetings to discuss and develop designs for the walkway, seating & signage and networking with the community; and forming a local Landcare group.

The *Detailed Design Team* for the Slaters Creek Revegetation Project, had an active membership of 21 participants who contributed 200 volunteer hours to that phase of the project.

Coopers Creek Project. The *Detailed Design Phase* saw the detailed design team for the Coopers Creek Sub-Catchment forming their own Landcare group; supporting school groups to conduct initial water testing in the sub-catchment; designing clear goals and outcomes for each sub-project; obtain quotes and select deliverers of products and services; gain necessary government approvals; plan public open days & events as part of the project and network with the wider community to seek support and to develop information for the publication.

The *Detailed Design Team* for the Coopers Creek Sub-Catchment had an active membership of 13 participants who contributed 212 volunteer hours to that phase of the project.

Wilsons Creek Project. The *Detailed Design Phase* has seen the detailed design team for the Wilsons Creek Project actively engage the school in the development of the project; liaise with and address concerns of



Figure 13: Local kids playing in Wilsons Creek waterhole.

neighbouring landholders; gain necessary approvals from government departments and agencies; obtain quotes and select subcontractors for on the ground bush regeneration works; create detailed work plans; develop educational themes for signage and open days and meet onsite with Widjabul custodians to discuss cultural aspects of the project.

The *Detailed Design Team* for the Wilsons Creek Project has an active membership of 14 participants who have contributed 65 volunteer hours to this phase of the project.



Figure 12: Local resident, Alex Hunter, with Roy C Gordon, Widjabul descendent, at detailed design meeting. Dunoon Public School students testing water

3.3 Cross Cultural Training – October 2009 & April 2011

A total of 36 people attended three highly successful Cultural Awareness Training workshops facilitated by Widjabul elders, Auntie Irene Harrington and Auntie June Gordon.

Nineteen community volunteers from each of the working groups, representing a range of professions and organisations, attended two of the workshops: one in an Aboriginal café, the other in a local hall.

The first workshop brought together three project staff with 12 community members who represented a range of organisations including Lismore City Council, The Village Journal, EnVite, Lismore Progress Association, Dorrobbie Grass Reserve Trust and several Landcare groups. Participants represented professions including school teacher, social scientist, journalist, local food co-op coordinator, bush regenerator and university student. Of the 15 evaluation forms handed in to the Aunties at the end of the day, 8 gave the course overall a full score rating and 6 gave it a 4/5 rating. Comments on the day's facilitation indicated how much people appreciated the Aunties' personal stories and the openhearted sharing of information and experience – eg., "It was an honour to be present" and "A perfect balance of personal with historical, humour with serious stuff." The venue was also highly rated by participants, as GunnaWannaBe is not only a café incorporating bush tucker, it is also a gallery and learning centre, and the spirit of this is well represented by the café owners, who joined in the discussion with the group.

The second workshop was held for Rous Water staff and was attended by 12 members staff, including the General Manager, other senior executives, line managers, bush regeneration team and front-desk staff. In addition 5 Reconnecting to Country staff members attended the workshops. It was highly rated overall by participants on the evaluation forms. Of 12 participants, half gave 'overall workshop' the highest score and another third gave '4/5' rating. Appreciation of the willingness of the facilitators to share was expressed in the evaluation – eg., "The ladies spoke from their heart and with great compassion and understanding to our uneducated position" wrote one participant. Another wrote "Lots of new learning and a good overview of Aboriginal experiences".



Figure 15: Cross-cultural representatives from local working groups at training day with Widjabul elders – GunnaWannabee Café, Lismore – October 2009.

Topics covered included protocols, Aboriginal history, discrimination and racism, how to show respect for cultural diversity, and an understanding of issues faced today by Aboriginal people in all aspects of life.

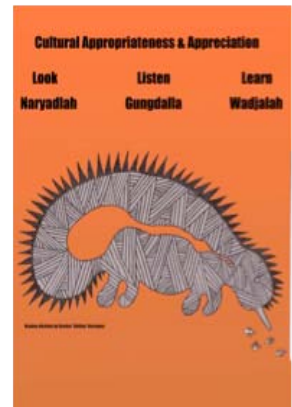


Figure 14: Page from Cultural Awareness Training Kit © Widjabul Custodians & Elders 2009

The third workshop, held at the end of the project in April 2011 brought together eight working group members for the training. Working group members were provided an opportunity to undertake the training should they have missed out in the previous workshop. One participant commented to the RTC project officer that the training "provided me with a deeper understanding of where Aboriginal people are coming from".

A comprehensive training kit was produced by Auntie Irene Harrington and Auntie June Gordon, with the assistance of Roy C Gordon and Herbert Roberts, and illustrated with traditional artwork by Sheldon Harrington.

3.4 Local Projects On-the-Ground – March 2010 to April 2011

Significant progress was made in the 'on-the-ground' phase of this catchment management and reconciliation project. Four Reconnecting to Country working groups of community volunteers have been actively engaged in implementing seven inspiring projects in their local sub-catchments of the Wilsons River. These projects were all initiated and designed by community members and clearly demonstrate a variety of ways that local people can improve the biodiversity and water quality of the catchment area whilst creating a new culture of sustainability integrating local Aboriginal knowledge.

A series of interpretive signs have been developed by each of the working groups in liaison with the Widjabul project team and other local Aboriginal people. Some traditional knowledge has been integrated into these signs, including totems; bush food, medicine and other uses; artwork and language. On-ground works have been designed with Widjabul input to prevent sometimes very subtle cultural damage to the sites. Two highly culturally significant sites are locations for projects.

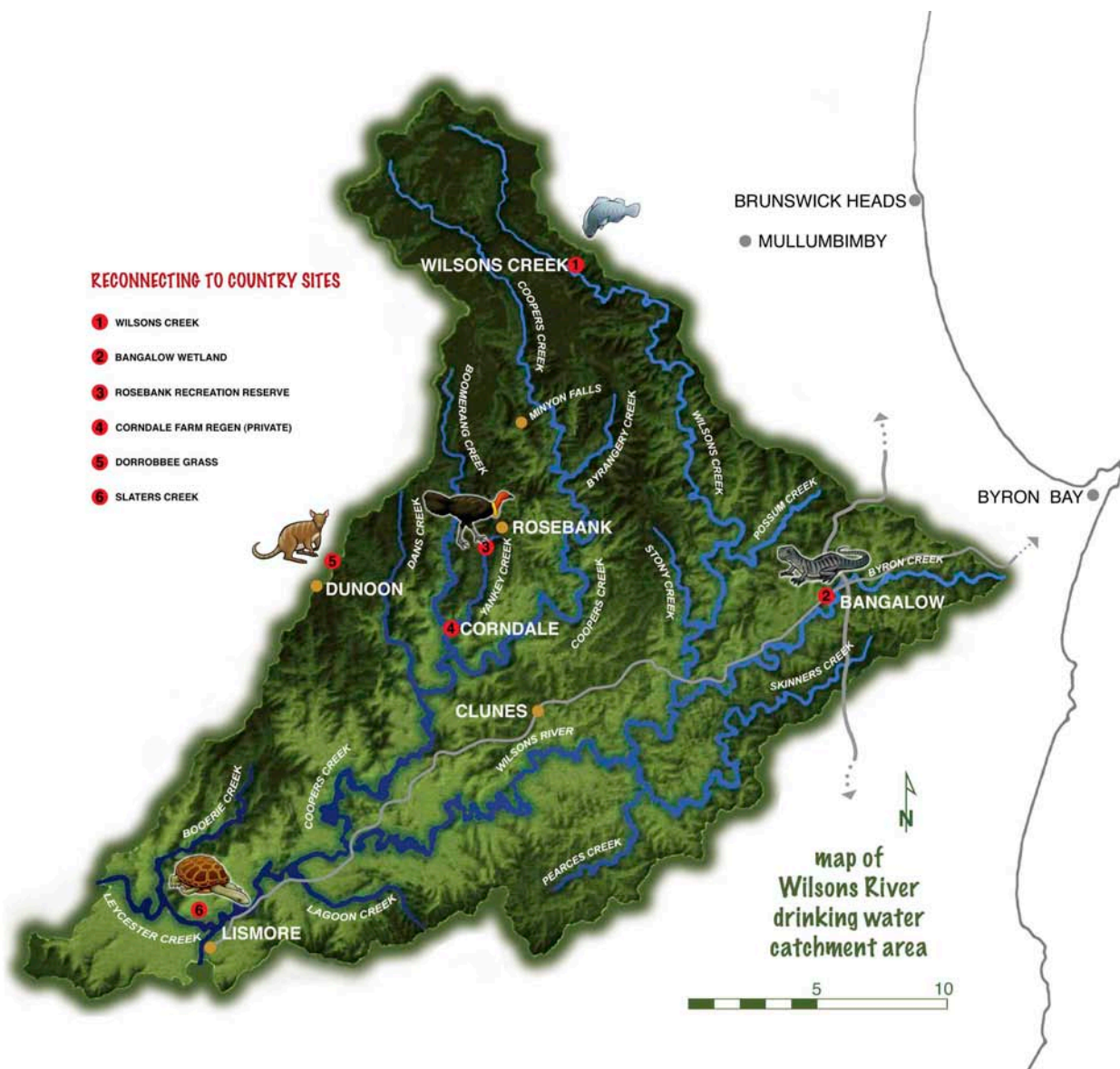


Figure 16: An interpretive map including all Reconnecting to Country project sites, and their ecological 'totems', within the Wilsons River drinking water catchment. A version of this map is contained on the 'welcome' sign for each site.

Byron Creek - Bangalow Wetland Project (extended to September 2012)



Figure 17: Location of proposed wetland in Bangalow Park on previous creekbed.

The aim of this project is to turn the dry creek-bed adjacent to the pool in Bangalow Park into a natural "billabong-like" wetland. Stormwater entering the wetland from the neighbouring village will be naturally filtered of nutrients, as will water overflowing from the weir, resulting in improved biodiversity and downstream water quality. Low-level boardwalks through the wetland with interpretative signage will encourage passive recreational use of the wetland and provide opportunities for relaxation, education and bird watching.

The **Working Group** for the Bangalow Sub-Catchment has had an active membership of 8 participants who have contributed 1512 volunteer hours throughout the whole project (November 2012).

The main achievement of the local community working group over the past 36 months has been to remain focused and united in working towards the goal of completing this ambitious but inspiring project in the face of unexpected challenges.

Particular achievements during the on-the-ground phase include:

- coordination with an engineering firm to produce a design report and drawings sufficient to enable approvals and construction;
- substantial ground work towards a comprehensive communication strategy to explain the value and purpose of the wetland project in an interesting and attractive way to different sectors of the community; including a community open day and a visit as part of the 'Grand Tour'; and a pre-commencement open day as part of Big Scrub Rainforest Day 2012
- producing a Development Application, Review of Environmental Effects and Wetland Management Plan to obtain approvals from Council and government agencies;
- potting wetland species for vegetating the wetland; and
- developing 5 interpretive signs in collaboration with Widjabul artist, Sheldon Harrington and linguist, Roy Gordon
- negotiating with Byron Shire Council to establish a construction program integrating the Bangalow Wetland into a 2 stage stormwater treatment upgrade for Bangalow – this funding was critical to the project's success;
- construction of the 1,200 m² Bangalow Wetland by Byron Shire Council construction crew; and
- planting the wetland with wetland and riparian plants by community volunteers, including watering of all plants during their establishment.



Figure 18: David Pont of the Bangalow working group accepts wetland painting by artist Sheldon Harrington, to be used for interpretive signage.



Figure 19: Working group members and technical consultants show wider community wetland plans onsite, November 2010.

Slaters Creek Revegetation Project in North Lismore

The aim of the project has been to revegetate a section of Slaters Creek, a small urban tributary of the Wilsons River in North Lismore. The project will, through the partnership with



Figure 20: Construction of walkway through revegetation site at Slaters Creek between town and showground.

Lismore City Council, see the creation of a wetland and a bush-tucker garden; has provided passive recreation opportunities for the public through a walking/cycle track and interpretative signage; created employment for Aboriginal contractors; shared the cultural history of the area and involved the community in on-site events.

The **Working Group** for the Slaters Creek Sub-Catchment, now registered as Banyam/Baigham Landcare under Richmond Landcare Inc, has had an active membership of 15 participants who have contributed 1096 volunteer hours to the whole project (May 2011).

Major achievements during the 'on-the-ground' phase include:

- 11,250m² of land surrounding Slaters Creek has been weeded & planted with 2800 trees, shrubs and ground covers;
- encouraging Lismore City Council to purchase 14 lots on the creek so we have expanded the area we are working on;
- working collaboratively as a team of local Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents to develop 4 interpretive signs – 3 signs have now been installed (history, animals and welcome);
- construction of a new fence to allow access to showground, and a walking track of low environmental impact crushed sandstone, 2m wide and 350m long was built by a Work for the Dole team;
- persevering through a difficult negotiation phase (including issues regarding ownership of some of the site) and forming a new registered Landcare group called Banyam/Baigham Landcare Group under Richmond Landcare Inc. which meets twice a month for working bees;
- production of the illustrated historical book 'Reconnecting to Slaters Creek'; and
- the Banyam/Baigham Family Day held in November where over 100 people Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people came together to celebrate country



Figure 21: 'Deadly Dancers' performing at the Banyam/Baigham Family Day November 2010.



Figure 22: Trees planted on Family Day growing at Slaters Creek, March 2011

Coopers Creek Projects

This series of integrated projects aimed to inform the public about the cultural and ecological significance of the area. This was facilitated by encouraging access and recreational use of sites within the sub-catchment including Dorrobee Grass and Rosebank Recreation Reserve; modeling riparian conservation on local farms; and through the production and distribution of a book created by the community.

The **Working Group** for the Coopers Creek Sub-Catchment, now registered as Coopers Creek Landcare under Richmond Landcare Inc, has had an active membership of 12 participants who have contributed 1843 volunteer hours to the whole project (May 2011). The four 'sub-projects' described below are being implemented by different teams within the working group, who are then coordinated by one working group member and a common treasurer.



Figure 23: Working bee and symbolic tree planting at Havilah Family Farm. Aunty June Gordon and David Havilah beside new fence protecting riparian zone.

Corndale Farms - Riparian Conservation and Enhancement Project.

Funding was used to purchase a solar powered electric fence energizer and fencing materials sufficient to fence approximately 2km of riparian zone on a grazing property in the Corndale area. This property belongs to the Havilah family, who were one of the original settler families to establish Corndale in the 1800's. The fence has excluded cattle from a large area of riparian zone along Coopers Creek, with the potential to enhance water quality within the local water supply catchment and allow native vegetation to be conserved and enhanced along the creek banks. Vegetation protected includes a large remnant of former Big Scrub containing a number of threatened flora species and providing habitat for a number of locally occurring threatened fauna species.

An open day was held at the property on 14 August 2010 and brought together local stakeholders and Widjabul custodians to begin installation of the fence and celebrate a turning point in the property's history. The day marked a new chapter in the way this particular piece of country is valued.

As part of the project, a call went out to landholders in the area to accept a vegetation assessment of their property. Four neighbouring landholders accepted and had vegetation assessments conducted on their

properties. Each landholder will be provided with the results of the vegetation assessment and an action plan for on-ground works, for them to consider.

Dorrobee Grass Reserve – Interpretive Signage.

The Dorrobee Grass Working Group have worked hard designing the 4 directional signs at the Reserve. This process has involved much ongoing discussion by members of the 'sign committee', consulting several times with the signmaker, acquiring high quality horizon photos to use on the signs, preparing text and identifying landmarks visible from the top of the hill and pulling this all together into a satisfactory design. All this was with regular consultation and support from the Steering Committee members.



Figure 24: 'Looking North' interpretive sign at Dorrobee Grass Reserve

Community days held at Dorrobbree Grass included: an unveiling of signage in November 2010, a visit as part of the 'Grand Tour' and the gathering start point for the 'Riding Round the Ridges' Bike Tour in March 2011.

Rosebank Recreation Reserve – Composting Toilet Achievements of the project include:



Figure 25: Composting toilet being constructed by contractors, volunteers and Aboriginal builders assistant Ron Duncan employed with RtC funding, August 2010.

- Construction of a Farallones Style (Dual Batch) composting toilet, completed mid September 2010 and coming in on budget.
- All developments were reported in *The Village Journal* (the local monthly community newsletter) extending an open invitation for people to come down and check it out, or join the group at the working bees. These articles raised community awareness of the reserve and the new facility being developed.
- Employment of an Aboriginal builder's assistant, Ron Duncan, who thanked the Reserve Trust members for giving him the opportunity to do the carpentry work and particularly to work alongside the Trust's carpenter. Ron reported that the carpenter was a good teacher and that he had learned a lot of new techniques in building.
- A Community Open Day was held on 18th September 2010 for local people to celebrate their connection with country, plant trees and open the compost toilet.

Publication – 'Coopers Creek: A Place of Many Stories'. During the 'on-the-ground' phase, the 'publication team' progressed through the research and consultation phase. The group compiled a large collection of material to choose from and effectively accomplished the task of linking the stories to form a logical sequence and compatible yet diverse compilation of information bites. 'Coopers Creek: A Place of Many Stories' is a valuable tool in creating a shared history and visioning tool for the future.

Early in the 'on-the-ground' phase of the project, the publication team had difficulties initiating independent communication with the Widjabul project team. They were also very reluctant to progress too far without engaging the Widjabul representatives as this would significantly reduce the capacity of this publication to be a collective vision and compilation. However, once contact was made, a relationship was formed and the process of working with the appropriate member of the Widjabul project team was a deeply valued experience for the publication committee.



Figure 26: Aunty June Gordon and working group member Marie Mathews collaborate on Coopers Ck publication.

Wilsons Creek Project – Riparian Rainforest Regeneration and Bushtucker Garden

This project aimed to provide a focal point in the centre of Wilsons Creek where the local community can connect to country through access to the natural amenity of the creek for on-the-ground catchment management activities, cooperative action-learning, recreation and cross-cultural relationship building.

The community's existing focal point is the combination of community hall, primary school and rural fire brigade, and this location has become the physical centre of the project. Development of any kind is being kept away from the creek itself, which is across the road from these buildings.

The **Working Group** for the Wilsons Creek Project has an active membership of 7 participants who contributed 969 volunteer hours to the project (May 2011).

Main achievements include:

- regeneration of 10,000 square metres of steeply sloping land immediately adjacent to Wilsons Creek by Aboriginal bush regeneration team Mudhima Gulgan, Landcare and Wilsons Creek Primary School students assisted and managed by members of Wilsons Creek Huonbrook Landcare who are on the working group.
- Mudhima Gulgan team and the working group assisting kids, parents and teachers at Wilsons Creek primary school to plant and mulch a bushtucker garden in their grounds on 6th May. This fun and active day included a bushtucker barbeque; and talks about bush regeneration by Mudhima Gulgan and the importance of caring for country like the traditional custodians have done for thousands of years.
- collaborative input into the writing and design of three interpretive signs – one welcoming people to the heart of Wilsons Creek, and two accompanying the bushtucker garden in the school (one focusing on food and the other on meeting other vital needs)



Figure 28: Widjabul artist, Sheldon Harrington, paints messages for the creek with younger kids at the school, while older kids are planting the creek, Nov 2010.

- preliminary work on more detailed information for pamphlets about local bushtucker species, engaging local ecological and bushtucker experts, Widjabul project team, and other local Aboriginal people from the Galibal and Ngarakwal tribes.
- 800 plants in the ground at the creek including a planting of 500, in a combined planting day with students, Landcare & Madhima Gulgan in November 2010.
- primary school students creating cultural 'prayer flags' and paintings with messages of caring for the creek; and props for theatre-song 'What a Wonderful World'.



Figure 27: Mudhima Gulgan bush regen team weeding riparian zone on Wilsons Ck, and team member Gavin Heidenreich helping kids plant bushtucker at school.

3.5 Final Celebrations – March 2011

On the 4th and 5th March we hosted a 'Grand Tour' across all Reconnecting to Country project sites within the catchment. Working group members, the wider community and honored guests were invited to take part in the two day tour and visit all six Reconnecting to Country sites, meet the local people involved in each project and connect with country. A celebratory event was held at each project site. Details of each event are listed below.



Figure 29: The 'Grand Tour' began with a visit to Dorrobbbee Grass with a view over whole Wilsons River catchment.

Dorrobbbee Grass Visit

People on the 'Grand Tour' were welcomed at Dorrobbbee Grass Reserve by local working group members and bush regenerators that work on the site. They were given a guided tour of the 'Grass' and had a look at the interpretive signage that has been installed on-site as part of the Reconnecting to Country project.

A display showcasing the works undertaken at the 'Grass' enhanced people's understanding of this unique ecosystem and explained why Dorrobbbee Grass is considered a special place culturally and ecologically.



Figure 30: Wilsons Creek primary school students singing 'What a Wonderful World' for Aboriginal elders as part of the 'Grand Tour'.

Wilsons Creek Morning Tea

Members of the Wilsons Creek RtC working group & Wilsons Creek Huonbrook Landcare welcomed those on the 'Grand Tour' at the Wilsons Creek Hall with a morning tea including bush tucker from the local rainforest. Landcare spoke about the riparian restoration they managed as a part of the Reconnecting to Country project and what had been achieved thus far on-the-ground.

Those on the tour were then welcomed into the Wilsons Creek Public School where students proudly showed off their bushtucker garden and associated signage that was created through the Reconnecting to Country project.



Figure 31: Byron Shire Mayor, Jan Barham, announcing her support of the Bangalow project with Widjabul and Gully Traditional Owners and members of working group on site during 'Grand Tour'.

Bangalow Park Wetland Lunch, Walk & Talk

Members of the Bangalow Working Group welcomed those on the 'Grand Tour' at the Bangalow Heritage Tearooms and everyone enjoyed a lovely lunch and time for relaxed conversation, questions and answers about the Bangalow Park Wetland Project.

Long time local resident, Lyn Smith, gave a personally engaging historical account of the site. This was followed by an on-site walk and talk by local working group members. The Mayor of Byron Shire joined the tour in Bangalow and through gaining a deeper understanding of the project indicated that her council would support the project should further funds be required.



Figure 32: Book launch and dinner at GunnaWannaBe Café during 'Grand Tour'.

Slaters Creek Campfire & Launch of 'Reconnecting to Slaters Creek' Publication

Close to one hundred people attended the Slaters Creek Campfire & launch of the book 'Reconnecting to Slaters Creek, North Lismore'.

The campfire was held on the site of the Slaters Creek regeneration project and was a sociable and special event where Aboriginal people engaged the community in ceremony.

Following the campfire, the 'tour' continued onto GunnaWannaBe Café in North Lismore for dinner and the launch of the publication 'Reconnecting to Slaters Creek, North Lismore'. People were given copies of the publication and learnt about how it had been created. The Winsome Gospel Choir provided entertainment outside under the night sky.



Figure 33: Bike riders prepare to depart from Dorrobee Grass on the 'Riding Round the Ridges' bike tour, part of the 'Grand Finale'.

'Riding Round the Ridges' Cycle & Bus Tour

Twenty two people took part in the 'Riding Round the Ridges' cycle & bus tour. The 20km cycle tour set off from a local high point in the Coopers Creek catchment at Dorroughby Grass and rode around the ridges through shady forest to Rosebank for morning tea. Less experienced cyclists then joined the ride for the last 10km stretch, down the ridges following the creeks getting a sense of the Coopers Creek catchment. The cycle & bus tour finished at Corndale Hall where they joined in with the final whole-of-project celebrations.



Figure 34: Aunty Thelma James of Banyam/Baigham Landcare and Jenny Dowell, Mayor Lismore City Council celebrate publication of the book 'Reconnecting to Slaters Creek'.

Final 'Whole Project' Celebrations at Corndale Hall

Close to one hundred people attended Corndale Hall in the heart of the catchment for the whole-of-project final celebrations. The final celebrations featured displays, children's activities, talks, presentations, food and entertainment.

One highlight was the talks given by a representative from each working group, speaking to the crowd about what they had achieved and learnt through the Reconnecting to Country project.

The launch of the publication 'Coopers Creek: A Place of Many Stories' was held. Those attending were provided with a free copy of the book.

Members from working groups across the whole catchment had the opportunity to meet each other and celebrate the achievements of their local projects, all together. It was a fantastic finale for the Reconnecting to Country project in the Wilsons River catchment.

3.6 Additional Partnership Projects

The depth and outreach of the project into the community was enhanced through partnerships with many other organisations, including universities and primary schools; a youth empowerment group called the Creative People's Collective; Big Scrub Landcare; and environmental educators from Lismore City Council, Byron Shire Council and Rous Water. These partnerships were mostly initiated by the other organisations who were inspired by the RtC project as publicised through local media.

Poster and T-Shirt Design Competition. Southern Cross University – July to September 2008

Southern Cross University (SCU) in partnership with the Reconnecting to Country project ran the art competition through the first year fine arts program at the university. The project aimed to engage and educate the community on local water issues; to encourage people to consider the value of water; and their role and responsibility in water conservation.



Figure 35: Prize-giving (L to R): Roy C Gordon, Barbara Jensen (Rous Water), T-shirt winner Chrissie Huntsman, SCU lecturer Leonie Lane, poster winner Kate Stead – Sept 2008.

The students were asked to consider the impacts upon their own water supply. The students undertook onsite investigations of local water sources to gather information. They then created digital posters and these were displayed at the RtC community workshops. The local community was also invited to view the designs on display at the SCU Next Gallery in Lismore during November.

SCU visual arts lecturer Leonie Lane said the event was of benefit to students and the community alike.

Ecological Restoration and Monitoring, Southern Cross University – June to August 2009

Professor Alison Specht from Southern Cross University (SCU) approached Sustainable Futures Australia to determine whether students from the 'Ecological Restoration and Monitoring' course might be engaged in any relevant projects. Two groups of three students were supervised by the SFA project manager to conduct baseline research for the Reconnecting to Country project.



Figure 36: Students from Southern Cross University conducting research in local communities where Reconnecting to Country projects were designed

Both groups presented their findings at the 2009 Northern Rivers Conference for Ecological Restoration and Monitoring.

One research team with an interest in environmental education developed a 'community awareness survey' based on the relevant sections of the Evaluation Matrix (in our original Business Plan). Over twenty community members were surveyed in each of four locations near to a local RtC project. The other research team, with an interest in ecological monitoring, conducted a baseline study of the Bangalow wetland site that included measurements of water quality and surveys of flora and fauna.

Big Scrub Rainforest Day – September 2009



Figure 37: Publicity for Big Scrub Rainforest Day and Reconnecting to Country project displays.

This iconic annual Landcare event was held for the 11th year, in 2009, in the heart of the old Big Scrub country at Bangalow Showground. This event attracts thousands of local people annually, who are interested in rainforest restoration.

Community volunteers publicised each of the local projects and recruited new members for their 'detailed design teams'. A stall was held in the Rous Water tent with a volunteer roster organised by one community member.

Posters, banners, postcards and maps developed as part of the broad project social marketing campaign, as well as project proposals and sign-up sheets for individual projects, were all used at the stall. The children's story book of 'The Watering Hole', developed for Reconnecting to Country, was also read to the kids.

This poster and advertisement published in local newspapers illustrated how RtC's social marketing campaign could benefit from symbiotic relationships with related events.

Students Teach Water Testing at Byron Creek - November 2009.



Figure 38: Southern Cross University students and the Rous Water Education Officer teaching children from Bangalow Primary about the science of water quality management - Bangalow Reconnecting to Country site,

Environmental Science students from Southern Cross University spent a day with children from Bangalow Primary School showing them how to use the schools new water testing equipment.

The water testing equipment was donated to Bangalow Primary School by Rous Water as part of the Reconnecting to Country Project.

The school children learnt about the science of water quality management and the ecology of Byron Creek – based on the university students' own research for an ecological survey of the creek.

The day provided a unique opportunity for the younger students to be mentored by the older students with support from Rous Water. Water quality monitoring for improvement is to continue throughout the Reconnecting to Country project by both the university and the school.

Articles published in a local newspaper and local journal illustrated how RtC's social marketing campaign can benefit from a symbiotic relationship with related events.

Interns from School for International Training, Vermont USA

Three university students from the USA participating in a study abroad program called 'SIT Australia: Sustainability and Environmental Action' have contributed to the implementation and evaluation of Reconnecting to Country, supervised by Elizabeth Bragg of Sustainable Futures Australia. Andrea Sanders conducted independent evaluation research based on indepth interviews, a focus group and surveys in April 2011.

Water Watch Congress – March 2010



Figure 39: Kids from local primary schools at Water Watch Congress – Rocky Creek Dam, 17 March 2010.

Nine schools in the Wilsons River catchment have been involved in the Catchment Water Watch Project. This culminated in a Water Watch Congress held at Rocky Creek Dam – where 165 students representing the nine schools came together, sharing and learning from each other.

It was a wonderful day where students learnt practical skills to inspire and empower each other to take action for healthy catchments. The students got out of the classroom and spent the day involved in science, fieldwork, reconnecting to the environment and Aboriginal heritage.

Interactive educational activities were facilitated by a range of educators from different organisations and included: *acknowledgement of Wadjabul Country* and traditional custodians; *presentations* by each school describing their schools testing site and results from the Catchment Water Watch Project; *water testing* for pH, turbidity, salinity and temperature, analyzing their results & identifying which catchment it came from; *The Catchment Testing Challenge* facilitated by Dorroughby Environmental Education Centre; *Take Action For a Healthy Catchment*, using an interactive catchment model, facilitated by

staff from Rous Water and Lismore City Council; *What Water Bug Is That?* facilitated by the Northern River Water Watch Coordinator; reading Wadjabul stories - *The 'Njabai Water Creation Story'* and *'The Watering Hole'*; *'Hip Hop Drip Drop Plip Plop'* song-writing facilitated by the Creative People's Collective; and an *Ecological Walk* facilitated by Byron Shire Council.

The original idea for the Water Watch Congress came from an eleven-year old member of the Coopers Creek Reconnecting to Country working group, whose idea was supported by the rest of the group, the Steering Committee and the Rous Water Education Officer.

Through this Water Watch Congress, the Reconnecting to Country project has a closer working relationship with other programmes including *Catchment Water Watch Project* and the *Wilsons River Catchment Management Plan*; nine primary schools and the other educational organisations listed above.

Waterwatch in Wilsons River Catchment – March to September 2010

Since the Waterwatch Congress held in March, nine rural schools in the Wilsons River drinking water catchment continued to participate in the Catchment Water Watch Project and monitor the water quality of their place in the catchment. They all have chosen a testing site, undertaken a healthy water ways check and are carrying out regular testing. Another urban-based school in Lismore has also joined the program since March.

This project involves schools and their students in real and local water supply management issues. It has given them a voice and role in Rous Water's *Wilsons River Catchment*



Figure 40: Kids from Rosebank Public School hanging out at Rosebank Recreation Reserve after water testing in Yankey Creek in the Coopers Creek subcatchment of Wilsons River.

Management Plan and the *Reconnecting to Country Project*. Data that is collected is presented on the Rous Water website, and one school is managing to get their data onto the NSW Water Watch website.

Barb Jensen, Rous Water's Education Officer, coordinated the program, in partnership with Dorroughby Environmental Education Centre and NSW Water Watch. She reports that the children have improved their abilities to effectively monitor water quality and understand the results. Older children are now passing the skills on to younger ones so that the monitoring will continue each year.

Big Scrub Rainforest Day and Reconnecting to Country Picnic – September 2010

Members of different Reconnecting to Country working groups met for a picnic at this iconic annual Landcare event on 5 September. Stories were shared about the varying experiences that people are having; their different project outputs and progress; challenges and breakthroughs.

Some people met Sheldon Harrington, Widjabul artist of the project team and Steering Committee for the first time, and he shared some stories of local Aboriginal history from the past one hundred years. Bushtucker picnic fare was purchased from GunnaWannaBe Café in North Lismore, who have become a regular supplier for the Reconnecting to Country project.

Displays of all four projects were held in the Rous Water tent; upcoming events were advertised; and useful information such as the *Wilsons River Catchment Management Plan* summary document, were distributed. A 'low tech' interactive map locating Reconnecting to Country project sites, was included in the stall and passers-by encouraged to 'put themselves on the map' by identifying their own homes.

The picnic was held beside a Rous Water tent housing the interactive catchment model, and many exciting kids activities including the Water Challenge relay, which all the kids enjoyed immensely and learned a lot from.



Figure 41: Members from different RtC working groups met and picnicked together at Big Scrub Day with Widjabul artist Sheldon Harrington, while kids played The Water Challenge with Rous Water Education Officer, Barb Jensen.

Hip Hop Song Competition & CD for Distribution

Promoting the Reconnecting to Country theme, a CD which captures the project's spirit succinctly in the words of local children is now in distribution.



Figure 42: Hip Hop CD label.

"...Reconnecting to Country/ Treat the people/ Treat the land/ How you want to be treated/ Gotta reconnect/ Don't give up til your mission is completed"

"If you want to help the community/ You need to work continuously/ Respect the rocks and the trees/ Even fish I the seas/ That's what it takes for you and me/ Reconnecting to Country"

Five hundred copies with the Reconnecting to Country logo on it and a CD case with info about the project achievements continue to be distributed locally and played on local radio. They were also awarded as gifts to Reconnecting to Country working groups and have been well received.

The audio on the CD is the product of a *Hip Hop Song Competition* held in January to February 2009. The Reconnecting to Country project teamed up with the *Creative People's Collective (CPC)* of Lismore and Wazinator Studios to run a Reconnecting to Country song writing competition. The CPC went out into the communities of Lismore, Kyogle, Coraki and Nimbin over the school holidays 08/09 and ran Hip Hop song writing workshops around the theme Reconnecting to Country.

There were approximately 17 young people involved in these workshops and they were asked to write a song about their connection to country, to the land, the animals and people; what they valued most in their environment, the threats to those values and what they could do to minimise those threats.

Three of the groups managed to record a song on MP3 and these were showcased at the annual Aussie Battlers event in Lismore held on Australia Day. Sheldon Harrington judged the winning entry to be Kyogle. All participants were awarded prizes donated by Rous Water and the winning group of young people was offered a day in Wazinator recording studios kindly donated by Waz Porter.

Go to Rous Water's Reconnecting to Country webpage to listen to the tracks from Coraki, Kyogle and Lismore.

Hip hop was also integrated into the Reconnecting to Country project through the Water Forum and Slaters Creek Family Day, as a medium used, to reach out to youth. Through music and poetic expression these young people were invited to reconnect to country.



Figure 43: Members of the Creative Peoples' Collective perform Hip Hop at the Banyam/Baigham Family Day in November 2010.

CONCLUSIONS

Reconnecting to Country has delivered successful collaboration, participatory planning and inspiring 'on-the-ground' outcomes including six 'special places' for restoring and reconnecting to the river and creeks, two historical publications, engaging community events combining 'hand-on' regeneration work and cultural experiences, and two new Landcare Groups. Community volunteers and the project team have gained personal growth, friendships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, a sense of achievement and a deeper connection to place.

We believe that the cultural and ecological values of the Wilsons River have been effectively integrated into the seeds of a new local culture of sustainability. These seeds contain reconciliation and ecological restoration. These seeds are the places and the groups and the cultural products that have been created by the project. It is our hope that these seeds, including the lessons we have learned, can be used in other places within our region and further afield. All that is required is the fertile ground created by a community's intentions to heal its relationships with the land and with each other, a willingness to experience the joys and challenges along the journey, and the resources to facilitate the process. In the words of some of the project participants:

"It's not about blackfellas. It's about everyone, in our own way, finding a way to connect with country." Aunty June Gordon

"Black, white, brindle, polka dot. We're all caretakers." Member of Banyam/Baigham Landcare Group

"You can take this work on this project and show the children – and show the younger generation that if we work in this way it will be a better world." Uncle Sheldon Harrington



"A big THANK YOU to everyone who has contributed to this wonderful project!"