

Policy

River Health Grants

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River Health Grants

1 Objective

To assist rural land owners to manage creek and river banks in a manner that protects and enhances water quality, aquatic ecology and riparian ecosystem health.

2 Rationale

Council has responsibility for the provision of water and sewerage services to over 70,000 residents within the Shire. All water is sourced directly from the Tweed River. Council discharges treated wastewater into the Rous River, Tweed River, Terranora Creek and Burringbar Creek.

Council takes an active role in protecting the environmental health of the freshwater and estuarine reaches of the Tweed River, its tributaries and the Tweed Coastal Creeks.

The health of the Tweed River and the quality of water that flows through it is directly related to the condition of land adjacent to the banks of the river and its smaller tributary streams. Because most of this land is in private ownership, landholders who are protecting streams and water quality supply a vital service to the community, and should be supported to do this.

Improved creek and river bank management has a beneficial impact on the quality of water extracted by Council for treatment and distribution through the potable supply network. Reducing sediment and nutrient loads in the river has the potential to reduce water treatment costs.

Effluent discharge can have an impact on aquatic ecology. In order to increase the overall health of waterways and their resilience to the detrimental impacts of effluent discharge, problems such as bank erosion, lack of vegetation and cattle access must be addressed.

Where riparian land management does not conform to broadly recognised principles of best practice, it is in the community's interest to assist landholders to improve their performance.

Through adoption of this policy, Council will implement a River Health Grants program, which will assist rural land owners in undertaking creek or river bank rehabilitation projects.

3 Implementation

The objective of Council's River Health Grants program is to improve and protect water quality and aquatic ecosystem health in the Tweed's natural waterways.

To achieve this, the scheme will supply technical advice and financial assistance to rural land holders so they can address the typical problems found on creek and river banks.

The River Health Grants program is entirely voluntary, and a land owner commitment to project outcomes by way of financial or in-kind assistance is required.

To improve the hygiene of water supplies, a priority activity will be to supply fencing and off-stream stock watering points so that cattle do not drink from and defecate directly into creeks and rivers.

Good water quality and healthy river banks are associated with healthy native vegetation. Where practical, revegetation of river banks with native vegetation will be encouraged.

Land owners will be required to sign a River Health Grant Agreement which stipulates the objective, outcomes and commitments made by Council and the landowner in undertaking a project. Land owner commitments will generally include maintaining project outcomes.

4 Eligible Landholders and Activities

- Projects nominated for assistance under the River Health Grants program should be located on land zoned rural under Councils LEP.
- Generally, a minimum bank length of 100 metres will be considered for funding.
- Council may provide River Health Grants to incorporated Landcare or other community groups, where there is a clear benefit to Council, the waterway or locality in having a community based approach to waterway rehabilitation.
- Subject to agreement and design, funding will be provided for:
 - Fencing, permanent or electric (materials, not labour).
 - Stock drinking troughs – (materials, not installation).
 - Erosion stabilisation – (design, materials, equipment).
 - Revegetation - (minimum width 10 average metres - materials and some maintenance).
 - Stabilising stock stream access or crossing points - (design, materials, equipment).
 - Weed control – (primary control, consumables and tuition in appropriate techniques).
 - Maintenance of sites.

5 Selection Process

Projects will be supported based on the potential improvement they can make to the health of the subject waterway and water quality. Projects that are primarily intended to achieve an outcome essential for the normal function of a property, for example replacing a flood damaged causeway, will not generally be supported.

Land owners will be required to make a significant contribution to project costs through either cash or in-kind contributions.

Project proposals that achieve multiple aims, for example improving water quality and enhancing wildlife habitat, will be prioritised.

6 Land owner obligations

- Participation in this project does not change the rights or responsibilities of the land owner in any way.
- Land owners will be asked to sign an agreement with Council confirming their intention to complete and maintain stated works, in a certain time frame, for a nominated sum. The basis of the agreement will be good faith.

- Land owners will be expected to maintain their projects outcomes in the long term, however they will be eligible for maintenance assistance in the first three years after completion of works.
- Land owners will be required to allow access by Council to inspect works or use the site for monitoring or promotion purposes (subject to notification).

7 Funding

The River Health Grants Program will be funded through the Catchment Water Quality Budget.

