

Report by David Backhouse, General Manager

RECOMMENDATION

That:

- 1. Strathfield Council join the Cooks River Alliance.**
- 2. Council allocate \$125,000 over three years for its financial contribution to the Cooks River Alliance beginning with the 2011/12 financial year.**
- 3. The General Manager develop a Memorandum of Understanding to establish the Cooks River Alliance.**

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. To update Council on the proposed formation of the Cooks River Alliance.
2. To establish a council commitment to joining the Cooks River Alliance.
3. To endorse the allocation of funding for 3 years, beginning with the 2011/12 financial year to join the Cooks River Alliance.

REPORT

The Cooks River is a unique natural resource that flows from south-western Sydney to Botany Bay. The Cooks River Catchment covers approximately 10,000 hectares. Set in a dense urban landscape, the Cooks River Catchment is home to around 500,000 people, including a number of active community groups passionate about the Cooks River. Over the last 200 years, the Cooks River has suffered significant degradation and currently is in poor ecological health.

Through the efforts of many stakeholders, the river is showing signs that recovery is possible. The long history of degradation, the many stakeholders involved, and the fact that water and pollution flow across LGA boundaries mean that addressing the issues of the Cooks River Catchment requires a stronger regional coordinating body.

The Cooks River Catchment encompasses portions of 13 Local Government Areas (LGAs) (Ashfield, Auburn, Bankstown, Botany Bay, Burwood, Canterbury, City of Sydney, Hurstville, Kogarah, Marrickville, Randwick, Rockdale and Strathfield).

The Mayors of ten councils within the Cooks River Catchment have been meeting quarterly to discuss the future management of the Cooks River. This has included discussions on the social, financial, and environmental benefits of forming a Cooks River Alliance. The Cooks River Alliance would transform the existing Cooks River Foreshores Working Group into a stronger coordinating body that has staff with key technical skills who would work across all catchment councils.

The existing Cooks River Foreshores Working Group (CRFWG) formed in 1998 has grown from a membership of four councils to eight councils and is a well-known and well-respected entity in

the community and among state agency representatives. The CRFWG has successfully initiated and coordinated regional efforts to obtain state and federal investment in the Cooks River, which has led to ~\$9m in projects.

Building on the success of the CRFSWG, a meeting of the Cooks River Regional Mayors in March 2010 gave in-principle support for the establishment of a Cooks River Alliance. A detailed proposal for how the Cooks River Alliance would operate has been prepared and was presented to the Cooks River Mayors meeting Monday 21 June 2010. This report is attached for Councillors consideration

The Cooks River Alliance would be an association of Councillors that implements a strategic plan for the Cooks River Catchment, supported by an Alliance Working Group consisting of dedicated Cooks River Alliance staff and council and state agency staff. The Cooks River Alliance has been proposed as the preferred option for building on the success of the CRFSWG and addressing critical gaps in current resourcing, council staff capacity and regional leadership.

The fundamental objective of the Cooks River Alliance is to define catchment standards for natural resource and water management and to aid member councils to achieve those standards by providing technical support, building council staff capacity, actively seeking external funding for projects, and coordinating activities within the catchment. Whereas the existing CRFSWG covers foreshore councils only, the expanded Cooks River Alliance aims to bring on board all 13 catchment councils.

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REFERRAL FROM OTHER DEPARTMENT

No referral was required.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Proposed Expenditure: Table 1 below gives the proposed alliance contributions of each council. As per the table, the proposed contribution for Strathfield Council is:

- Year 1 2011/12: \$37,000
- Year 2: 2012/13 \$40,000
- Year 3: 2013/14 \$48,000

Funding has not been provided in the current budget for this purpose. Should Council approve the expenditure, the source of funding will need to be identified in the budget.

Table 1: Proposed Alliance contributions from each member council.

LGA	% of Cooks catchment in LGA	% LGA in Cooks catchment	Contributions		
			Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Canterbury	24%	81%	60,000	73,000	87,000
Rockdale	20%	66%	53,000	63,000	74,000
Marrickville	12%	74%	47,000	55,000	65,000
City of Sydney	10%	43%	38,000	45,000	51,000
Bankstown	9%	13%	26,000	31,000	37,000
Hurstville	9%	36%	31,000	38,000	46,000
Strathfield	7%	53%	37,000	40,000	48,000
Ashfield	1%	3%	12,000	15,000	19,000
Botany Bay	5%	24%	23,000	29,000	35,000
Burwood	2%	31%	22,300	26,000	31,000
Auburn	1%	3%	12,000	15,000	19,000
Randwick	1%	4%	12,000	15,000	19,000
Kogarah	1%	3%	12,000	15,000	19,000
Total			\$385,300	\$460,000	\$550,000

ATTACHMENTS

1. Report On The Cooks River Alliance - Prepared For The Cooks River Regional Mayors Group June 2010.
2. Minutes of Regional Cooks River Mayors' Group Meeting 21 June 2010.