

SEWAGE WORKS REHABILITATION

overview of the project

Purfleet Sewage Works were built in 1980 on land owned by the Purfleet-Taree Local Aboriginal Land Council (PTLALC) on the New South Wales north coast. The works were decommissioned in 1993 when the community was connected to the main sewage system. Due to lack of funds, the infrastructure, including a settling pond and some concrete and asbestos structures, was never removed. The Land Council carried out this project to rehabilitate the old sewage works. They removed an estimated 540 tonnes of rubbish that was harbouring non-native pest animals and planted 1,000 native seedlings. The project restored a neglected environment and removed a potential health threat to the Aboriginal community living nearby. Residents had been concerned about the settling pond as a potential breeding place for virus-carrying mosquitoes, and as a drowning hazard for children. The disused site had also been an unofficial dumping ground for household waste and white goods.

The project utilised the skills of a number of unemployed young people on an employment program to clear, drain and revegetate the site. This grant improved a neglected and potentially hazardous area, and also provided valuable work experience for local unemployed people.

how the project was carried out

The PTLALC formed a committee with the Greater Taree City Council and the Department of Environment and Conservation to plan the project.



Sewage works infrastructure before remediation

Midcoast Water provided plans of the original sewage works. This enabled the group to assess how much material would need to be removed. A contractor provided the equipment and carried out most of the moving work, including draining the water from the settling pond, removing the asbestos and the structures, and clearing away the rubbish. Twelve workers from the Community Development Employment Program supplied the labour for the cleanup and the revegetation. The team top-dressed the cleared and levelled land with a mixture of recycled green waste and treated effluent, and then planted 1,000 native seedlings of a variety of species.

The Land Council distributed a leaflet to inform the community about the project and to seek local support. The flier announced a new waste collection service offered by the Taree City Council to deter further dumping, and discouraged people from entering the site while the young plants were becoming established.

outcomes now and in the future

A major outcome of the project was the removal of a potential health hazard for the local Aboriginal community from mosquito-borne diseases and asbestos. The project also removed a large amount of rubbish, estimated at over 540 tonnes, which had

posed a threat to the environment of the adjacent State Forest. The green waste and metal were recycled. The old car bodies, white goods and waste provided an ideal habitat for non-native pest animals.

The Land Council is committed to maintaining the site in its restored state. They have instituted a system of regular inspections to monitor for rubbish dumping. After each inspection, any rubbish will be documented and reported to the Land Council, and a cleanup organised. These inspections will initially be carried out weekly but will become less frequent. The team will also monitor the establishment of the native plants and any weed regrowth.



Regeneration on the cleared site

benefits, challenges & lessons learned

This project was carried out successfully, providing work experience in excavator operation and labouring and revegetation techniques to a number of unemployed people. There were no major difficulties in carrying out the project except for one unanticipated expense. The biosolids and sludge remaining in the sewage ponds required treatment before disposal, adding an extra \$13,564 in costs to the project. Fortunately the Department of Aboriginal Affairs funded this added expense.