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# THE HAWKESBURY-NEPEAN WATERKEEPERS FORUM: “A COMMUNITY VOICE FOR THE RIVER”

*We acknowledge the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the Land on which we work and live as the first people of this country.*

## SUMMARY

A lively consortium of community participants, academics, and local and state government representatives came together in a Hawkesbury-Nepean Waterkeepers Forum in late 2020 to elevate concerned conversations about the Hawkesbury-Nepean River system and revitalise a local Waterkeepers Alliance. The forum, held on 25<sup>th</sup> September 2020, was attended by over 55 stakeholders and individuals from 23 industry bodies and seven community groups. Sharing their knowledge were Yara River Waterkeeper Andrew Kelly, CHEN coordinator and community advocate Sue Martin, and Western Sydney University's Dr Ian Wright. Discussion groups were supported by University science student volunteers.

The forum participants expressed a desire for a *healthy, livable, swimmable, fishable Hawkesbury-Nepean River*. Individuals, community groups, councils and government agencies demonstrated a will to work together on this goal. Community members discussed concerns and hopes for the River. Potential partnerships, particularly with complementary initiatives such as the Hornsby Shire Council-led [Hawkesbury-Nepean Coastal Management Plan](#) were built upon.

Key findings from the forum were used in a funding application for an NSW Environmental Trust Education Grant with a focus on setting up a reinvigorated Waterkeepers Alliance, employing a Riverkeeper and developing a river report card (submitted November 2020).

In 2021, the group will continue to:

- Seek additional funding opportunities.
- Explore and identify a governance model that is fit for purpose.
- Speak to stakeholders (local councils, Sydney Water, community groups, First Nations people) to strengthen relationships and build partnerships.
- Participate in the Australian chapter of the [International Waterkeeper Alliance](#).



## KEY FINDINGS

Five themes guiding what a revitalized Hawkesbury-Nepean Riverkeepers Alliance would look like emerged:

1

### ORGANISATIONAL FOCUS

An independent community voice working to improve river and catchment health undertaking a systems approach with respect for environmental, social, cultural and economic values along the River.

2

### GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

Learn from and build on success stories from other river systems, and include and represent diverse community perspectives.

3

### COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Use education and advocacy, including citizen science with schools, universities and community groups, to increase community connection with the River and awareness of issues facing the River.

4

### FUNDING MODEL

Seek long-term funding security to support a resilient organisation.

5

### LINKING WITH OTHER EXISTING PROGRAMS

Connect with and complement existing initiatives, particularly the Hawkesbury Nepean Coastal Management Plan and other Riverkeeper programs in the region.

Through the forum breakout discussion session, the community voice also highlighted the:

- Opportunity to engage all stakeholders within the Hawkesbury-Nepean catchment, particularly local government and First Nations groups;
- Desire for accessible and transparent water quality data and river health report cards;
- Need for strategies that highlight and educate the environmental and economic value of the river to ensure improved and ongoing river and catchment health; and
- Aspiration for one body to consolidate the legislation, monitoring, advocacy and management of the Hawkesbury-Nepean River.

Some direct participant feedback on the Alliance included:

“

*To impact the way people, care for our river and shift the thinking communities have with our waterways. Through education and communication and we all have responsibly and a duty of care to protect and enhance our natural waterways.*

FORUM RESPONDENT

”

“

*Increase community's capacity to take action to protect Hawkesbury Nepean River and connected waterways, create and coordinate opportunities for initiatives to achieve common goals for the River.*

FORUM RESPONDENT

”

*See appendix for full list.*

## NEXT STEPS

As a result of the forum, the following recommendations have been made:

1

*Build and strengthen connections with key organisations across the Hawkesbury-Nepean, including First Nations groups.*

2

*Seek out funding opportunities to establish a Hawkesbury-Nepean Waterkeeper Alliance program to steer, coordinate, educate and advocate for the health of the Hawkesbury-Nepean River.*

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## WORKING GROUP

The forum was organised by a collaborative working group from Western Sydney University (comprising RCE Greater Western Sydney), Greater Sydney Local Land Services, Greater Sydney Landcare Network (GLSN) with Streamwatch and GLSN member groups: Cattai Hills Environment Network (CHEN), Hawkesbury Nepean Landcare Network (HNLN) and Hawkesbury Environment Network (HEN), as a member of the International Waterkeeper movement.

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Greater Sydney



**Report prepared by Hawkesbury-Nepean Waterkeeper Alliance Working Group.  
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## **APPENDIX: FULL LIST OF RESPONSES TO GROUP DISCUSSION (DE-IDENTIFIED AS REQUIRED)**

### **What should the key goals of the riverkeeper be?**

- Riverkeeper voice for the river and have monument build in the community
- Water quality targets and objectives
- Improving habitat (getting it healthy for fish keeps it healthy for others)
- To collect water quality data and riparian assessments.
- Markable face etc such as the platypus
- Community want to drink & swim
- Community is disconnected to the river
- To connect elders and their knowledge of long-term observations of rivers ebbs and flows to the youth and younger generations to care and inspire custodianship of our waterways, through well documented reporting to assess and account for clean and safe waterways, for the whole community
- Increase community's capacity to take action to protect Hawkesbury Nepean River and connected waterways, create and coordinate opportunities for cross-council initiatives to achieve common goals for the River.
- Campaigning for the river
- Participate with the river
- Continually improve what is there NOW, not pre-European habitat
- Reporting water quality updates, like they do on the eastern swimming beaches to monitor if the conditions are safe for primary contact such as swimming or if there is a blue green algae outbreak, W1 invasive weed infestation, etc. letting the community know the statuses of the river conditions
- Non-partisan, should aim to appeal to variety of parties; river provides many uses that each political group could relate to and find values in
- Focus should be on communication – how to reach stakeholders, get their interest in the Waterkeeper Alliance
- Not enough to just appreciate beauty but also need to be action-oriented
- Looking at more at what community want as well
- Valid way of addressing this problem
- Our communities core values
- Be realistic goals
- Help coordinate everybody
- Key goals = find common ground and common interest that are shared with everyone
- Building support
- Education for the community
- One voice that community looks at
- Being independent is important for the riverkeeper but working with everyone
- Needs a strategic plan (like the Yarra has) after extensive community consultation
- It is different to Parra and Cooks as they are primarily urban
- Have Bushcare and Streamwatch groups so the community has a connection
- Preservation of species
- Everything needs to be an Independent nonpartisan governing body and aim to be self-sufficient in the long term
- To be set up so that it is unable to be shut down in political parties etc change
- Must have achievable goals and buy-in points, broaden engagement

### **How could you or your organization contribute to the Alliance?**

- XXXX can: support from governance, office space, infrastructure that is active on the river and contribute resources = start of small and build-up
- Council X can attend and contribute through attending future meetings, sharing communications and social media.
- Getting support from the Coastal Councils – Coastal management plan
- Council X, with more detail, we could collaborate, we could potential financially contribute
- Council X want to see what council is going to get out of this, all councils are in the same boat
- Joining the alliance under Streamwatch with water quality monitoring and river education.
- Local Land Service is interested in this alliance, can see the potential to report updated findings.

- Riverkeeper groups can share programs with different environmental groups – e.g. Keep the Site Right (sediment control program)
- Potential supportive groups that could contribute to the Alliance: Waterkeeper Alliance, Australian Water stewardship
- Collaboration; combining agendas, seeing how everyone can benefit – different environmental groups can host events with Riverkeeper alliance
- Volunteers
- Write submissions
- Government grants
- Need to nut out the financial funding
- Comes back to rational & benefit gain to determine level of support
- Need more detail about the riverkeeper
- Do we pay a contribution and how often?
- How does the state government play in this?
  - Got to lobby state government
  - Sydney water cannot be the state representative
  - Getting the governance right is important
  - State government can be short term
  - They are massive supporters of this

### **What do you see as the (potential) future opportunities for the River and/or the Alliance?**

- To impact the way people, care for our river and shift the thinking communities have with our waterways. Through education and communication and we all have responsibly and a duty of care to protect and enhance our natural waterways.
- Body that is knowledgeable of the river
- Who looks after the river?
- Need to look at the river
- We have to think more integrated
- Working together
- Look at thing as a whole system
- Riverkeeper has to have specific goals
- It needs to bring organisations together including community groups and NGOs (Fishers, farmers).
- Hopefully you are able to get in contact with Lex and the Darug group down at Yellomundee who work closely with NPWS and whom I would recommend as the appropriate people to be talking with when it comes to Aboriginal cultural matters to do with the river
- Can it have corporate partnerships (eg: OzFish have BCF).
- Links with planning need a more formal role, if you want more action should have community.
- The more people that put public pressure on a statewide initiative for a River keeper movement the more momentum it will have and the more changes of funding on a federal level.
- The bigger the public voice the more impact to make real change in tighten the relegations and policies to protect and maintain river health.
- Reporting; report cards, outreach information and visibility
- Audiobooks for different sections of the river
- Monitoring, education, volunteers, and planting days
- Advocacy tool
- Spotlight to the areas needing attention
- Publish what is happening to the river: local media, Councils, Social media, website
- Have warning signs posted near the rivers of any health hazards
- Education: go to schools- perhaps Streamwatch program
- Tapping into existing events eg: Parramatta Water Fest
- Making TV advertisements? More visual?
- Cooperating with university, making an education centre dedicated to the river
- Collaboration with local wildlife centres or zoos – more community centred
- EZEC undertaking student data – citizen science
- Align Riverkeeper curriculum through Brewongle / Penrith and Long Neck lagoon EZEC (Environment & Zoo Education Centres DET) for schools
- Linking with Sydney Blue – green plans within Greater Sydney Commission
- Linking with Greater Sydney Commission – district plans

- Linking with Resilient Sydney plans – Greener Places
- Bringing councils and other organisations together to achieve larger scale initiatives.
- A Hawkesbury-Nepean Riverkeeper is something Council would really love to see come to fruition as most of our waterways flow into the Hawkesbury-Nepean River. We are about to launch an exciting water-sensitive communities' program, in which one of the key outcomes is to increase connection of our community to their surrounding waterways.
- expanding the presence of Streamwatch within our community. Participating in Streamwatch will also help our community feel empowered in protecting their local environment.
- Partnering with the Riverkeeper/Alliance would be very beneficial in helping us achieve goals.
- would love to assist in field work projects, the need to make work with students relevant and something they can take into / utilise in their daily life.
- Capacity for the syllabus curriculum to have riverkeeper information and education. Able to support engagement in forums. Education for K-12
- Supporting CHEN and volunteers
- Everyone mentioned that an MOU should be had amongst stakeholders.

**What existing initiatives do you know of that could complement the riverkeeper?**

- Streamwatch
- WSU platypus project
- Local government – coastal management plans
- Landcare
- A caring for River Day movement.
- River Champions.
- Highlight Indigenous connection
- Litter captures near the flowing river (Hornsby Council did it)
- Tourism media and partnership, Bridge to Bridge race. Windsor to Hawkesbury
- Tourism industry: e.g. Hawkesbury harbour can play a role; people want to connect with nature - appeal to community, tourists in Hawkesbury area or Blue Mountains Area, get them involved in Waterkeeper alliance
- Possibly involving composting initiatives from local farms/communities or council to complement the Riverkeeper program in order to improve farming practices (controlling nutrient runoff)
- Our water-sensitive communities' program, <https://watersensitivecities.org.au/> partnering with Parramatta River Catchment Group's Riverkeeper.
- The tier 2 environmental education grant. \$250,000 open now closes 16 Nov.

*These comments are the views of the individual participants, and not the working group who organised the forum and/or the organisations they represent.*