

Our River, Our Future

Parramatta River Catchment Group



Parramatta River
Catchment Group

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land and waterways of the Parramatta River catchment and pay our respects to Elders past and present.

We honour the deep, ongoing connection of First Nations peoples to Country and recognise the value of their knowledge in caring for land and water.

We are committed to respectful partnerships that support the continuation of First Nations culture and their vital role in shaping a sustainable future.

This land always was, and always will be, Aboriginal land.

Foreword from the PRCG Chairperson



It is with great pride that I present this prospectus, showcasing the vital work of the Parramatta River Catchment Group (PRCG). Our collective purpose is simple yet profound: to improve the health of the Parramatta River and its surrounding environment, ensuring it remains a source of life, connection, and inspiration for future generations.

The PRCG plays a key role in connecting councils, state government organisations, community groups, and other stakeholders to collaboratively address the river's environmental challenges.

Through our Masterplan, we work to enhance water quality, reduce stormwater runoff, prevent litter, restore habitats, and promote sustainable practices across the catchment area. We also prioritise community engagement, providing ways for people to connect with the river through educational programs, clean-up initiatives, and recreational activities.

Looking ahead, the PRCG is focused on strengthening partnerships with First Nations communities to integrate cultural knowledge into waterway planning and promote shared stewardship of Country. We are also advocating for improved catchment governance and increased infrastructure funding to improve river health, while supporting councils to build climate resilience and adapt to environmental challenges.

I invite you to explore the following pages to learn more about our efforts in creating a world-class river for Sydney.

Councillor Penny Pedersen
Chairperson
Parramatta River Catchment Group

Parramatta River – our iconic waterway



The Parramatta River is Sydney's most significant waterway, shaping the region's landscapes, communities, and history for tens of thousands of years. It has always been a place of connection, providing food, water, transport, and gathering spaces. For First Nations peoples, the river continues to hold profound cultural and spiritual significance, reflecting enduring relationships with Country that remain central today.

Colonisation in the late 18th century brought rapid and devastating change. The Traditional Custodians were dispossessed from their lands, and the health of the river declined as it became a corridor for farming, industry, and urban settlement. Over time, pollution from factories, untreated sewage, and stormwater runoff left lasting impacts on ecosystems, wildlife, and the river's amenity.

With urban growth and climate change placing increasing pressure on our waterways, protecting the Parramatta River is more important than ever.

The rise of environmentalism in the 1970s marked a turning point, sparking renewed efforts to restore waterway health. Building on this momentum, the Parramatta River Catchment Group (PRCG) provides strategic, regional leadership, driving a long-term vision for the river through a coordinated and holistic approach to its ongoing care and management.

Through these efforts, the Parramatta River continues to play a significant role in the life of Greater Sydney. It serves as a key transport corridor, supports diverse communities and wildlife, and provides places for people to gather, relax, and connect with nature.

With urban growth and climate change placing increasing pressure on our waterways, protecting the Parramatta River is more important than ever. By valuing its cultural and natural significance, acknowledging its history, and fostering active community stewardship, we can ensure the river remains a vital and cherished part of Sydney's identity.



Burramatta – kin, culture, and connection

The Parramatta River takes its name from the Dharug word Burramatta (or Baramada), meaning 'the place where the eels lie down' or 'head of the river'. For thousands of years, the Burramattagal and other Dharug clans lived along its banks, relying on its rich resources for food, ceremony, and cultural life.

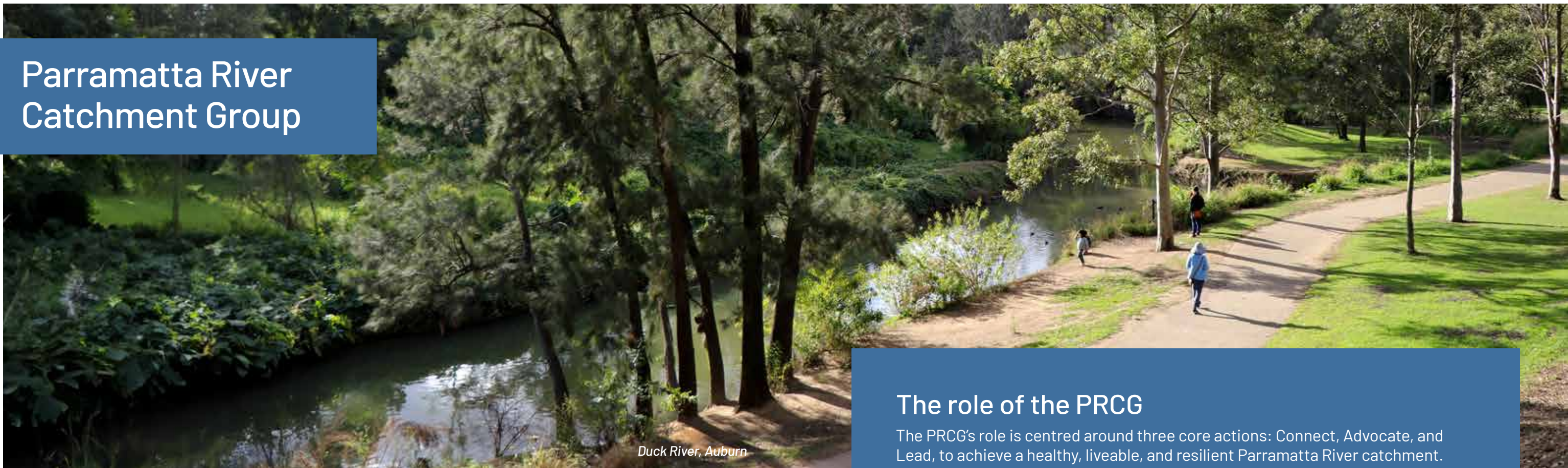
The eel, the Burramattagal's totem, is central to their kinship system and connection to Country. Caring for the eel and its environment ensures the continuation of its life cycle and the health of the river. Its long migrations

and ability to thrive in diverse conditions make the eel a symbol of resilience and endurance for the Burramattagal people.

In 1791, the British adopted the Aboriginal name for the European settlement of Parramatta, and the river has held this name ever since. Today, it serves as a lasting reminder of First Nations peoples' continuing connection to Country, the river's deep cultural significance, and the need to protect and care for this ancient waterway.

Image: Bara (Eel) by Leanne Mulgo Watson.

Parramatta River Catchment Group



Duck River, Auburn

Established in 2008, the Parramatta River Catchment Group (PRCG) is an alliance of local councils, state government organisations, and community groups that are working together to improve the health of the Parramatta River and its catchment.

Spanning 266 km² and 11 local government areas, the catchment extends from Blacktown Creek in the west to its junction with the Lane Cove River in the east. The 21 km river is freshwater up to the Charles Street weir in the Parramatta CBD, where it becomes estuarine.

The PRCG provides strategic leadership, coordination, and advocacy for the river, bringing together diverse stakeholders in collaborative, catchment-wide initiatives that achieve more effective and lasting outcomes than isolated action alone.

Swimmability was chosen as a clear and tangible goal to inspire local and state government and the wider community to take meaningful action on improving water quality.



Our Living River

The 'Our Living River' initiative, launched in 2014, defines our vision, purpose, and mission to create a healthy, liveable, and resilient catchment.

- **Our Vision:** We believe Sydney deserves a world-class river.
- **Our Purpose:** To make Parramatta River a living river.
- **Our Mission:** To make Parramatta River swimmable again by 2025.

Swimmability was chosen as a clear and tangible goal to inspire local and state government and the wider community to take meaningful action on improving water quality. This shared mission has created a strong foundation for collaboration and long-term commitment.

Over the past decade, the PRCG has led efforts to improve catchment health and supported the activation of three new swim sites – bringing the community's vision of a living river to life and creating cleaner, more accessible waterways for both people and wildlife.

The role of the PRCG

The PRCG's role is centred around three core actions: Connect, Advocate, and Lead, to achieve a healthy, liveable, and resilient Parramatta River catchment.



CONNECT

Facilitate Collaboration

We bring together councils, state government agencies, universities, and community and environmental groups on joint projects to enable knowledge-sharing, capacity building, and coordinated action.



ADVOCATE

Voice for the River

We serve as the voice of the Parramatta River, advocating for its long-term protection and health, highlighting key catchment issues, and representing member organisations in regional planning and policy forums.



LEAD

Drive Outcomes

We provide strategic leadership and coordinate catchment-wide initiatives through collaborative action and informed decision-making to achieve tangible and sustainable improvements in waterway health.

Parramatta River Masterplan



Parramatta River Masterplan launch, 2018

Key Support, Funding and Achievements



35+
Partner Organisations



\$5.5M+
Funding and Contributions



3
New Swimming Sites



300+
Stakeholder Events



8
Industry Awards

Launched in October 2018, *Duba, Budu, Barra: Ten Steps to a Living River* — the Parramatta River Masterplan is a bold, collaborative strategy to revitalise the river and make it swimmable once again.

The Masterplan sets a long-term vision for a healthy, living waterway that supports biodiversity, respects First Nations cultural knowledge and heritage, and enhances quality of life for the community and wildlife.

Developed through close collaboration with local and state government, First Nations organisations, scientific experts, and the community, the Masterplan takes a unified approach to revitalising the Parramatta River. It combines scientific evidence,

cultural knowledge, and local insights to guide practical, coordinated action across the catchment.

The ten steps focus on the most effective ways to improve waterway health — from activating swim sites, improving stormwater management and planning controls, and reducing sewage overflows, to restoring natural habitats, fostering community stewardship, and embedding First Nations knowledge in catchment management.

Together, these actions form a clear, achievable roadmap to transform the Parramatta River into a thriving, swimmable waterway that sustains diverse wildlife, connects communities, and enhances urban liveability.

The following pages showcase progress to date, highlighting successful initiatives, collaborative partnerships, and tangible improvements in waterway health. These

outcomes demonstrate the power of collective action and reinforce our long-term vision for a safe, accessible, and ecologically rich Parramatta River.

As we look to the future, the PRCG remains committed to improving the health of our tributaries, recognising their essential role in supporting a thriving river system. We are also focused on strengthening partnerships with First Nations communities to embed cultural knowledge and foster shared stewardship of the catchment.

By advocating for stronger waterway governance, increased infrastructure funding, and sustained support for councils, we aim to strengthen on-ground action and deliver long-term environmental outcomes.

Through these efforts, we are fostering more sustainable and resilient communities, ensuring that the Parramatta River and its catchment continue to support people, nature, and culture for generations to come.



Water quality sampling, Canada Bay



Stakeholder engagement workshop

Strategic Priorities and Focus Areas



Powells Creek, North Strathfield

Improving waterway and ecosystem health

Stormwater runoff continues to be a primary source of pollution in the Parramatta River. As development expands across the catchment, the PRCG supports councils in developing and implementing practical, coordinated solutions to reduce runoff, control litter, and enhance ecosystem health.

Get the Site Right campaign

Launched by the PRCG in 2016, and delivered in partnership with other Sydney catchment groups, the NSW EPA, and over 20 NSW councils, this award-winning campaign promotes best-practice erosion and sediment control on building sites through education, inspections, and enforcement.

Stormwater Compliance and Education Program

This program works with councils, builders, and the community to improve stormwater

management, promote water sensitive urban design, and build council capacity, with NSW Government funding supporting the expansion of work already achieved.

Wastewater network improvements

Sydney Water has undertaken major works to reduce the impact of wet weather overflows from the wastewater network. This work includes pipe relining, repairs to manholes and emergency relief structures, and rectification of illegal sewers to prevent stormwater ingress during wet weather.

Riparian restoration

The Parramatta River Bank Naturalisation and Planning of Priority Corridors project, funded by the NSW Government, aims to improve waterway health by identifying priority areas for revegetation, delivering on-ground works, and guiding priority restoration planning.



Bar-tailed godwit (*Limosa lapponica*)

Biodiversity and conservation

The Parramatta River runs through one of Sydney's most densely urbanised areas and supports over 360 native species, highlighting the ongoing need to prioritise biodiversity enhancement across the catchment.

The PRCG works with a range of organisations to protect native species and restore natural areas, including conserving fragile habitats such as mangroves, which provide refuge for endangered plants and waterbirds.

Central to this work is the promotion of five iconic species: the bar-tailed godwit, eastern long-necked turtle, powerful owl, southern myotis, and striped marsh frog. These act as indicators of waterway and ecological health and inspire community awareness and action to protect the river's biodiversity.

The PRCG also supports citizen science programs such as TurtleSAT and FrogID that provide valuable data to guide conservation efforts.



Putney Beach, Putney



Mcllwaine Park: Connecting with the river beyond swimming

Mcllwaine Park at Rhodes is a leading example of how communities can engage with the Parramatta River in diverse and meaningful ways. Reopened in 2023 following an \$8.7 million upgrade by the NSW Government and City of Canada Bay, the park features several innovative environmental elements such as discovery rockpools, Living Seawall tiles, and a protected saltmarsh.

This site, delivered through the Parramatta River Masterplan, shows how well-designed foreshore spaces can support recreation, learning, and stronger community connections to our waterways.

Creating liveable and resilient communities

The Parramatta River is the natural heart of Greater Sydney, contributing to the region's cultural, social, and recreational life. The PRCG works to reconnect people with the river through swimming and recreation sites, and by improving access to green and blue spaces across the catchment to create vibrant, natural areas for the community to enjoy.

Working closely with member organisations, the PRCG supports every stage of new swim site development, from planning and design to promotion and ongoing management. This includes facilitating technical working groups, engaging local communities, and delivering strategic communications to ensure the swim sites are safe, accessible, and well-used.

Central to this work is Sydney Water's RiverWatch™ program, which monitors and reports recreational water quality at new

swim sites. RiverWatch helps ensure new swim sites meet water quality guidelines before opening and supports the public in understanding when and where it is safe to swim once sites are open, building public confidence in river swimming

Four swim sites have been opened in the last 10 years: Lake Parramatta reopened in 2015 after a 72-year closure; Bayview Park Baths followed in 2022, the first estuary site to open in over 50 years; Putney Beach opened in January 2025; and Bedlam Bay is scheduled to open in late 2025.

These sites complement long-standing favourites including Cabarita Park Beach, Chiswick Baths, and the iconic Dawn Fraser Baths, which continue to be monitored by Beachwatch. Additional swim sites are being explored at Callan Park, Mort Bay, and Cockatoo Island.

Beyond swimming, the PRCG champions initiatives that connect people with the river and its creeks through more cycleways, walking paths, and green spaces, including the Parramatta to Sydney Foreshore Link and river access enhancement projects at Parramatta, Camellia-Rosehill, and Wentworth Point.

The PRCG is working in partnership with councils and Landcare NSW to increase canopy cover across the catchment, providing natural cooling, creating habitat for native wildlife, and helping mitigate the impacts of climate change.

The PRCG is proud to be a founding signatory of the Swimmable Cities Charter, strengthening our leadership in this space and building on the global movement to create clean, swimmable urban rivers that are central to city life and accessible to all.



Parramatta River foreshore, Sydney Olympic Park



Concept for Callan Park Tidal Baths, Lilyfield



Toongabbie Turtles event, 2023

Fostering community awareness and stewardship

Protecting the Parramatta River and its tributaries is a shared responsibility. The PRCG works with a range of organisations on initiatives that engage the community, encourage active participation, and contribute to caring for Country.

Riverkeeper Program

At the heart of the PRCG's community engagement is the Riverkeeper Program. Partially funded by Landcare NSW, the program brings together councils, community groups, and other organisations to raise awareness, inspire local action, and strengthen support for waterway protection.

Riverfest

Riverfest is the PRCG's flagship annual event, held each September in collaboration with councils and community groups. It features a diverse program of activities that invite the community to celebrate, connect with, and protect the Parramatta River.

Parramatta River and Waterways Network (PRAWN)

Facilitated by the Riverkeeper, PRAWN is a network of local environmental groups that meet regularly to share information and coordinate community environmental initiatives across the catchment.

Education campaigns

The PRCG runs education campaigns to raise awareness of everyday actions that protect our waterways. *Love Your Waterways* promotes five simple steps to reduce pollution. Its companion campaign, *Reduce Your Rubbish* encourages responsible waste disposal and sustainable living.

Support for local events

The PRCG also supports education and engagement initiatives delivered by member councils and community groups, including clean-up events, bushcare, workshops, and sustainability festivals.



Our Living River 10th Anniversary Community Event, 2024

Caring for Country

The PRCG is committed to fostering strong, respectful partnerships with First Nations communities, working together to care for our waterways and heal Country.

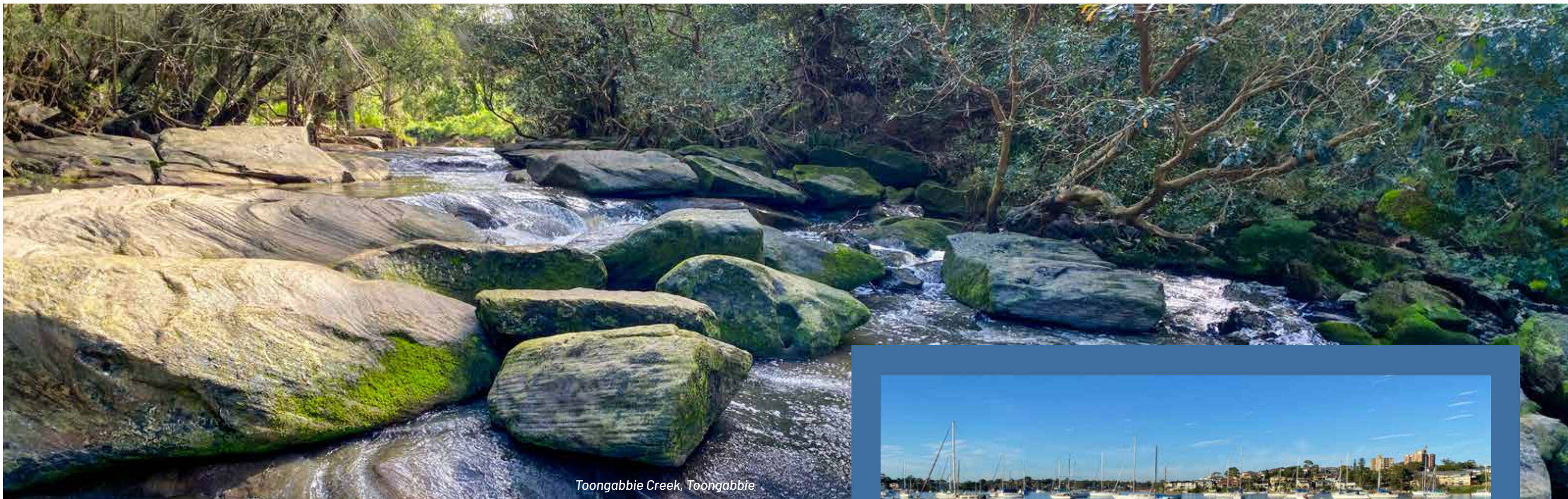
The PRCG collaborates with First Nations organisations, member agencies, and stakeholders to embed cultural perspectives into planning, projects, and community engagement, recognising the value of First Nations knowledge in biodiversity and waterway management.

This includes support for the Murama Healing Space and its Junior Rangers program, which empowers First Nations

youth to develop skills in caring for Country and fostering community connections.

The PRCG also developed the *Designing with Country Framework* to guide integration of cultural knowledge in urban design and restoration, and published *First Nations Peoples of the Parramatta River and Surrounding Area* to highlight the river's cultural significance.

The PRCG is exploring recognition of the Parramatta River as a living entity, guided by First Nations leadership and Rights of Nature principles.



Toongabbie Creek, Toongabbie

Strengthening catchment governance

Improving water quality across the Parramatta River catchment requires a coordinated regional approach, supported by strong and consistent policy and planning frameworks. In the absence of a statutory governing body, the PRCG works with our member organisations to advocate for reforms that strengthen local and regional planning controls, embed waterway health in decision-making, and build agency capacity to deliver tangible, long-term change.

Private WSUD Assets Audit

In 2022, the PRCG conducted an audit of 254 private stormwater assets across 50 properties in seven Local Government Areas. While most systems were functional, many lacked maintenance, with low owner awareness, poor design, and limited planning. Findings highlight risks to river health and flood management, guiding PRCG's focus on policy, education, compliance, and improved maintenance models.

Strategic and Statutory Planning Reform

As part of the Parramatta River Masterplan, the PRCG released the *Strategic and Statutory Planning Review to Create Our Living River*. This report outlines reforms to reduce stormwater pollution, embed waterway health in planning approvals, guide sustainable development, and align with the Risk-based Framework.

Key initiatives include updating council LEPs and DCPs, piloting tools such as the Blue Green Index and Grid, and consulting on WSUD Compliance and Maintenance Frameworks to strengthen accountability.

Water Sensitive Urban Design (WSUD)

The WSUD Uplift project advances the strategic and statutory planning reform by streamlining planning controls, embedding measurable water quality targets, and promoting consistent compliance and education. This ensures that both new developments and existing infrastructure contribute to healthier waterways.



Parramatta River, Drummoyne

A regional approach to litter prevention

Litter remains a significant threat to the health of the Parramatta River. While stormwater devices capture thousands of tonnes each year, large amounts still enter the waterway. Plastics are especially harmful, posing risks to wildlife and releasing toxins that contaminate water and enter the food chain.

To tackle this, the Parramatta River Catchment Group (PRCG) and Sydney Coastal Councils Group co-published the Regional Litter Prevention Strategy in 2022. Funded by the NSW EPA, the strategy provides a coordinated

framework to reduce litter and embed prevention measures into council policies and programs.

Building on this foundation, and with support from the EPA's Waste and Sustainable Materials (WASM) Grant, the PRCG is working with member councils to address litter hotspots, strengthen organisational capacity, and develop a comprehensive catchment-wide litter roadmap. This work aligns with state reduction targets and aims to cut plastic waste and reduce pollution to improve waterway health.



Our Living River 10th Anniversary Community Event, 2024

Working together for a healthy Parramatta River

The PRCG is strengthened by the wide range of organisations and individuals committed to the health of the Parramatta River catchment. The expertise of our member partners, including councils, state government agencies, universities, environmental organisations, and community groups, provides the foundation for a coordinated, evidence-based approach to catchment management.

Equally significant is the contribution of volunteers and local communities, whose on-ground projects, advocacy, and education initiatives play a critical role in improving river health and delivering lasting benefits for both the environment and the communities that rely on it.

The PRCG also works closely with other catchment groups and regional organisations, fostering knowledge sharing, collaborative initiatives, and stronger advocacy for improved planning, policy,

and governance. These collective efforts are essential to ensuring the Parramatta River remains a resilient, thriving waterway.

Sustaining this progress relies on the understanding that caring for the river is a shared responsibility. Addressing challenges such as litter, stormwater, land-use impacts, and climate change depends on both effective management and a shift in community behaviours. By working together to embed sustainable practices and foster a sense of collective stewardship, we can deliver the outcomes for meaningful, lasting improvements.

Through these partnerships, collective commitment, and active community engagement, the PRCG is working toward its long-term vision of a healthy, vibrant Parramatta River catchment that supports biodiversity, safeguards cultural heritage, and enhances the health and wellbeing of communities across Greater Sydney.

The Parramatta River Catchment Group is proud to partner with the following organisations:

Financial Members

Blacktown City Council
 Burwood Council
 City of Canada Bay
 City of Canterbury Bankstown
 City of Parramatta
 City of Ryde
 Cumberland City Council
 Hunters Hill Council
 Inner West Council
 Strathfield Council
 Sydney Water
 NSW Environment Protection Authority

Associate Members and other Key Contributors

Addventageous
 Beachwatch
 Birdlife NSW
 Friends of Toongabbie Creek
 Greater Sydney Parklands
 Habitat Network
 Landcare NSW
 Local Land Service
 Macquarie University
 Maritime Emissions Reduction Coalition (MERC)
 Murama Healing Space
 National Trust
 NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water

NSW Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure
 1 Million Turtles
 ParraParents
 Royal Life Saving NSW
 Ryde Hunters Hill Flora and Fauna Preservation Society
 Stormwater NSW
 Sydney Olympic Park Authority
 The Harbour School Sydney
 The University of Sydney
 Transport for NSW
 University of NSW
 Western Sydney University



The Parramatta River is ours to enjoy and protect – together!

Our vision for a world-class Parramatta River relies on the support and collaboration of member organisations, community partners, and the public. A healthy, swimmable river is everyone's responsibility, and we all have a role to play.

Whether you're passionate about environmental conservation, cultural heritage, community education, or simply love spending time by the river, every contribution counts.

Join us in restoring, protecting, and celebrating the Parramatta River, and help create a living, vibrant, and sustainable waterway for the future.



ourlivingriver.com.au