



Parramatta River
Catchment Group

Parramatta River Catchment Group

Strategic Plan 2026–2050



Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land and waterways within the Parramatta River catchment and extend our deepest respects to their Elders, both past and present.

We recognise and honour the rich and enduring cultures, beliefs, and traditions of First Nations peoples, who have maintained a profound connection to Country for thousands of years. Their knowledge and wisdom are invaluable to ensuring the long-term health and resilience of the Parramatta River and its tributaries.

We celebrate the ongoing contributions of First Nations communities to the cultural and social fabric of our region. Their insights and practices play a crucial role in enhancing our understanding of sustainability and environmental stewardship.

This land is, was, and always will be Aboriginal land. We are committed to fostering respectful relationships that honour this legacy and support the ongoing vitality of First Nations cultures.

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Foreword from our Chairperson



It is my pleasure to present the Parramatta River Catchment Group's (PRCG) Strategic Plan, which sets the direction for our collective efforts over the coming years and towards 2050.

The Parramatta River is one of Greater Sydney's most significant natural assets, supporting the environmental, cultural, social, and economic wellbeing of the communities it connects. As population growth, urban development, and climate change continue to place pressure on the catchment, the need for coordinated, long-term action has never been more important.

Since its establishment, the PRCG has demonstrated the value of collaboration in addressing complex challenges that extend beyond individual organisational boundaries. By bringing together councils, state government organisations, industry, community organisations, and Traditional Owners, we have created a strong foundation for knowledge-sharing, strategic planning, and collective action. This partnership approach has delivered tangible improvements in river health and strengthened community connection to local waterways.

This Strategic Plan builds on those achievements and reaffirms our commitment to integrated catchment management.

It provides a clear framework for collaboration, investment, and advocacy, while recognising the importance of aligning environmental, cultural, and social outcomes. It also acknowledges the vital role of First Nations knowledge and leadership, and the importance of community stewardship in caring for the river and its catchment.

The challenges ahead are significant, but so too is our collective capacity to respond. By continuing to work together, we can build a healthier, more resilient, and more connected Parramatta River catchment for future generations.

I thank all PRCG members and partners for their ongoing commitment and collaboration. Your dedication is fundamental to our shared success, and I look forward to the progress we will continue to achieve together.

Councillor Penny Pedersen
Chairperson
Parramatta River Catchment Group



About the PRCG

Established in 2008, the PRCG is a member-based alliance responsible for coordinating efforts to improve the health of the Parramatta River and its catchment. Recognising that many issues cross geographic and jurisdictional boundaries, it provides a platform for shared decision-making, regional coordination, and collective leadership.

The PRCG's flagship *Our Living River* initiative sets a long-term vision of restoring the Parramatta River to a swimmable condition, guiding actions and funding that improve environmental outcomes and strengthen community connection to local waterways.

Key areas of focus include reducing stormwater pollution, protecting biodiversity, improving climate resilience, and advancing water sensitive urban design. The PRCG also advocates for policy and planning reforms that support waterway health, promotes the integration of First Nations knowledge in catchment management, and fosters community awareness and involvement in protecting the river and its catchment.

By aligning regional priorities and leveraging collective expertise, the PRCG helps drive lasting improvements in environmental health and community wellbeing across the Parramatta River catchment.

Our Purpose, Vision, and Values

The PRCG has refreshed its purpose, vision, and values to strengthen our identity and clearly define our leadership role in catchment-wide coordination and governance. Alongside this, *Our Living River* continues to play an important,

complementary role as our community-facing initiative, promoting the vision of a healthy, vibrant Parramatta River and encouraging stronger community awareness, connection, and care for the river and its catchment.



OUR PURPOSE

To provide a whole-of-catchment approach to revitalising the Parramatta River.



OUR VISION

A healthy Parramatta River catchment with a world-class, living river at its heart.



OUR VALUES

- **Excellence:** Best-practice and adaptive thinking to address current and emerging challenges.
- **Respect:** Recognising diverse perspectives, experiences, and contributions, and the inherent rights of nature.
- **Collaboration:** Working together with accountability, responsibility, and active engagement.

Understanding our river's past

The Parramatta River has been shaped by millions of years of natural processes and thousands of years of human connection. Formed between 15 and 29 million years ago as a drowned river valley estuary, the river has long been a defining feature of the landscape.

For more than 30,000 years, the Dharug people have cared for the river and its surrounding lands, maintaining a deep cultural, spiritual, and physical connection to Country.

Following European colonisation in 1788, the river and its foreshores underwent extensive change. Wetlands were drained, native vegetation was cleared, and the waterway was progressively modified to support agriculture, transport, industry, and urban growth.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Parramatta River became a popular recreational destination, with swimming baths and waterfront activities attracting communities along its shores.

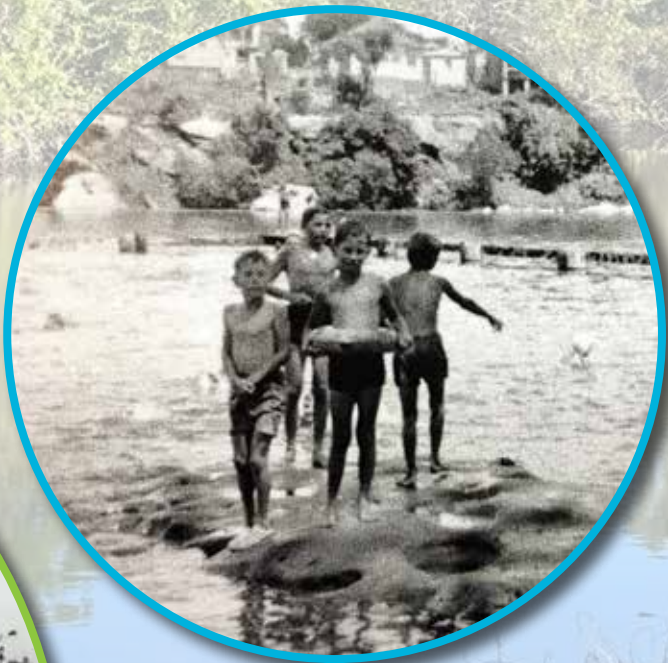
As industrialisation and urbanisation intensified, however, water quality and ecological health declined. Pollution

from industry, stormwater, and wastewater contributed to the degradation of the river, and by the 1960s swimming was considered unsafe, resulting in the closure of most river baths.

Over the past four decades, substantial efforts have been made to improve the health of the river through stronger environmental regulation, remediation programs, improved stormwater management, and coordinated planning.

While significant progress has been made, restoring and managing the Parramatta River remains a complex task, requiring effective governance and ongoing investment to improve infrastructure and support long-term catchment health.

Background image: Parramatta River, North Parramatta (PRCG); Left: Rockend Cottage and Harold Meggitts linseed oil mill, Gladesville around 1924. (City of Ryde); Below: The Glades Bay Baths, 1951. (City of Ryde).



A changing catchment

The Parramatta River catchment is entering a period of significant transformation. Population growth and changing land use will place increasing pressure on waterways, green spaces, and natural ecosystems over the coming decades. As the catchment continues to urbanise, ensuring environmental values

are protected while accommodating future development will become increasingly important. Climate change is expected to compound these challenges, bringing more frequent and severe flooding, rising temperatures, and greater stress on biodiversity and ecosystem health.



36%
Population growth by 2050



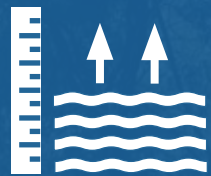
140+
Languages spoken across the catchment by 2045



60%
Medium/high-density housing growth by 2036



15-25
Annual days above 35°C in Western Sydney by 2040



14-40cm
Sea level rise in Metropolitan Sydney by 2050



80%
Impervious surface coverage across the catchment



100+
Threatened plant and animal species



11
Endangered ecological communities



100 tonnes
Average annual litter volume collected by Gross Pollutant Traps

Our Living River: From vision to action

Since launching the *Our Living River* initiative in 2014, the PRCG has led a coordinated effort to improve waterway health and strengthen community connection to the river and its tributaries. Guided by the long-term vision of making the Parramatta River swimmable again, the initiative has provided a clear focus for investment, policy reform, and on-ground action across the catchment.

This work was guided by *Duba, Budu, Barra – Ten Steps to a Living River: the Parramatta River Masterplan*, which sets out a holistic, evidence-based approach to improving water quality, restoring ecosystem health, and enhancing community access to the river. The Masterplan has supported action across key areas including swim site activation, stormwater management, sewage overflow reduction, water sensitive urban design, habitat restoration, community stewardship, and First Nations engagement.

One of the most visible achievements of the past decade has been the return of swimming to the Parramatta River. The reopening of Bayview Park Baths in 2022 marked the first new swim site on the river in more than 50 years. This was followed by the opening of Putney Beach and Bedlam Bay in 2025, reflecting significant improvements in river health and public confidence in water quality.

The PRCG delivers a range of initiatives to improve waterway and catchment health across the Parramatta River catchment. Key programs include Get the Site Right, which reduces sediment pollution from construction sites, and the Stormwater Compliance and Education Program, which supports councils, industry, and the community to improve stormwater management, promote water sensitive urban design, and build capacity.

The Bank Naturalisation project identifies and restores priority areas to enhance waterway health and biodiversity. Community stewardship is encouraged through initiatives such as the Riverkeeper Program, the Parramatta River and Waterways Network (PRAWN), and Riverfest – the PRCG’s annual celebration of the river.

The PRCG also partners with First Nations communities to integrate cultural knowledge and Caring for Country principles into planning, restoration, and waterway management through projects such as the Designing with Country Framework.



Images (clockwise from left): Toongabbie Creek clean-up; Welcome to Country, Our Living River 10th Anniversary event, 2024; Bayview Park Baths opening, 2022; Get the Site Right site inspection.

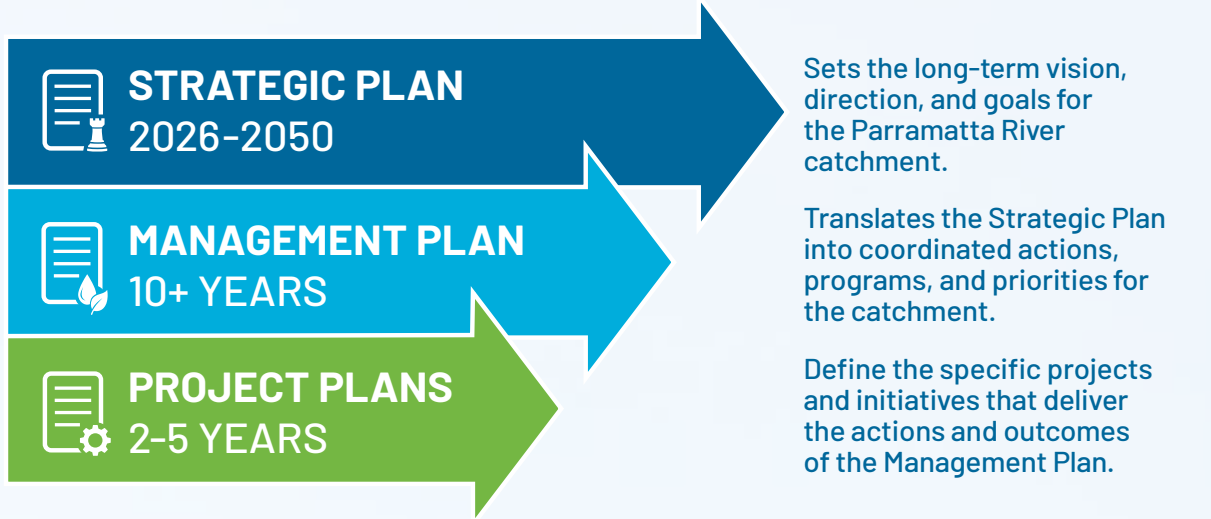


A framework for collaboration

The PRCG provides the governance and partnership framework needed to address complex challenges across the Parramatta River catchment. Through our Integrated Planning Framework, member organisations work towards shared goals while contributing their expertise, resources, and leadership. The framework also supports accountability through consistent planning, reporting, and performance review.

Supporting this approach, the PRCG Roles and Responsibilities table defines collective responsibilities across our three core functions: Lead, Connect, and Advocate. Together, the framework, responsibilities and success measures provide a foundation for collaboration, helping align priorities, strengthen partnerships, monitor progress and support a healthier, more connected, and resilient catchment.

Integrated Planning Framework



Parramatta River, Parramatta Park.

PRCG Roles and Responsibilities

Role	Collective Responsibilities	Success Measures
LEAD: The PRCG provides strategic leadership and coordinates catchment-wide initiatives through collaboration and informed decision-making to improve waterway health. 	Co-design and deliver adaptive plans for the Parramatta River catchment.	Management plan for the catchment is in place.
	Contribute individual organisational leadership and technical expertise to drive catchment outcomes individually and via the Delivery Partner model.	All catchment initiatives have an assigned, accountable Delivery Partner.
	Ensure governance frameworks engage member organisations to effectively achieve catchment outcomes.	Governance frameworks are reviewed with each new host period.
CONNECT: The PRCG unites local and state government, industry partners, and community on joint projects to support knowledge-sharing, capacity-building, and coordinated action. 	Regularly share information and build collective capacity.	Member representatives participate in committee meetings and workshops.
	Collaborate on the identification and management of catchment-wide priorities.	Fully developed project plans are established for all initiatives.
	Jointly report on collective progress toward agreed catchment outcomes.	Organisational progress is reported through established reporting frameworks.
ADVOCATE: The PRCG serves as the voice for the Parramatta River, championing key catchment issues and representing member organisations in regional planning and policy reform. 	Member organisations champion agreed vision and actions for the river internally and within their communities.	Alignment of member organisation policies and plans with PRCG outcomes.
	Amplify the group's collective voice through strategic partnerships.	Retention of existing partnerships and establishment of new strategic alliances.
	Advocate for policies and funding opportunities that support PRCG priorities.	Successful delivery of joint advocacy campaigns.

Our Strategic Directions

The strategic directions focus on four key areas that build on our strong partnerships and achievements to date, while responding to challenges affecting waterway health, including population growth, urban development, and climate change. Underpinning all directions is the PRCG's role in providing leadership, coordination, and advocacy across the catchment.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 1: Collaborative and effective leadership, engagement, and partnerships



Strengthened collaboration between Traditional Custodians, government, communities, and industry will deliver shared catchment outcomes.



Outcomes:

- A platform for effective catchment governance and collaborative action.
- A strengthened network that addresses emerging challenges.
- An educated and engaged community that cares for its waterways.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 3: A liveable catchment connected to its waterways



A resilient and activated catchment will create safe and vibrant places for communities to enjoy and connect with water.



Outcomes:

- Parramatta River is the social and cultural heart of the region.
- Activated waterways that enhance community recreation and wellbeing.
- Blue-green infrastructure that supports healthy, resilient communities.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 2: An ecologically sustainable catchment



A protected and enhanced Parramatta River and its tributaries will improve water quality, ecosystem health, and biodiversity.



Outcomes:

- Waterways are clean and healthy.
- Key habitat areas and priority ecological corridors are mapped and managed.
- A Country-centred approach to land-use management.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 4: Improved planning, policy, and investment



Aligned planning, policy, and investment with catchment outcomes will mitigate growth risks, tackle climate change, and build long-term resilience.



Outcomes:

- An integrated approach to catchment management.
- Increased and sustained investment in catchment infrastructure and initiatives.
- Healthy waterway outcomes embedded in planning and policy frameworks.

Securing the future of the Parramatta River

The Parramatta River is at a critical point in its evolution. As one of the region's most significant natural assets, the river sits at the intersection of rapid population growth, urban transformation, and a changing climate. These pressures present both challenges and opportunities, and how they are managed will shape not only the health of the river, but the liveability and resilience of the communities that depend on it.

Without coordinated planning, clear policy, and sustained investment, urban development can lead to greater runoff, pollution, and strain on infrastructure. Climate change is amplifying these impacts, with more frequent storms, flooding, and rising temperatures affecting water quality, ecosystems, and community wellbeing.

At the same time, the river's cultural significance must be recognised and respected, with First Nations knowledge and Caring for Country embedded in land-use planning and management.

The river plays a vital role in community life, providing opportunities for recreation, connection, and wellbeing, making access, safety, and shared stewardship key priorities. Delivering meaningful change in this complex context requires strong, coordinated governance across the catchment.

Through the development of our next catchment management framework, the PRCG will work to address these challenges in collaboration with member organisations and the broader community. This framework will focus on integrated, whole-of-catchment solutions that balance growth with waterway health, build climate resilience, embed cultural values, and strengthen community connection to the river and its tributaries.

Together, these efforts will help build a healthy, liveable, and resilient Parramatta River catchment for future generations.

Parramatta River, Drummoyne.

Our Member Organisations

We acknowledge the ongoing support and valuable contributions of our member and associate organisations, whose commitment continues to enable coordinated, collaborative, and sustainable outcomes for the Parramatta River catchment.

Improving the health of the river relies on strong and diverse partnerships and collective action, bringing together local and state government, universities, industry, environmental organisations, and community groups, each offering important perspectives and expertise.

FINANCIAL MEMBERS



ASSOCIATE MEMBERS AND OTHER KEY CONTRIBUTORS





ourlivingriver.com.au