

LET'S MAKE OUR RIVER SWIMMABLE AGAIN BY 2025



MEDIA RELEASE

Friday 27 November 2015

MAKING PARRAMATTA RIVER SWIMMABLE AGAIN BY 2025 – ONE YEAR IN

One year into the Our Living River initiative to bring swimming back to the Parramatta River (the river) by 2025, the Parramatta River Catchment Group (PRCG) has released its first 12 month progress report.

Newly elected PRCG Chairman City of Ryde Mayor Clr Jerome Laxale welcomed the report: "I'm pleased that we've made some serious progress on the way to achieving our goal of swimming in the Parramatta River again.

"I, like many others, was captivated by the notion of being able to swim in this river again. I live around 2km from Meadowbank, and I cannot wait to take my kids down there in 10 years' time."

"Community involvement is paying off already! This year we saw a pod of eight dolphins seen swimming as far west as Silverwater Bridge – the first dolphin sighting in a long, long time," he said.

The Our Living River initiative is spearheaded by 16 local councils and state government agencies and community groups within the catchment area.

With the necessary partnerships and support in place, the group has now taken steps to establishing a Riverwatch monitoring program and developing a river master plan, to look at all issues related to restoring the river to full health and activation. Through this they are setting a range of achievable targets to bring currently unusable parts of the river and surrounding creeks back to life.

"After decades of neglect, we are now bringing our river and surrounding creeks back to their former glory. This will have tangible social and economic benefits to the two million residents who surround the area," Clr Laxale said.

"This year is crucial. We'll be asking communities who live around the river to help shape what they want for the river, and how we make it swimmable again."

Currently, the river west of Cabarita is un-swimmable, with the exception of Lake Parramatta¹.

¹ Parramatta Lake is safe to swim in only when lifeguards are on patrol and in patrolled areas, to ensure swimmer safety.

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Highlights of the report include:

- Lake Parramatta¹ opened for swimming for the first time in 72 years – the Lake is currently voted as the most popular place where people want to swim.
- More than 4,000 votes lodged online for where people want to swim on the river. To have your say and vote, go to ourlivingriver.com.au
- Sightings of dolphins, seals and penguins swimming in the river.
- Our Living Catchment Fauna and Habitat Report launched highlighting the richness and diversity of animals that exist in natural banks and bushland surrounding the Parramatta River.
- Commitment shown from all-levels of government and the community to look at issues related to restoring the river to full health and activation.
- The Environment Protection Authority and The Hills Shire Council join as new members, completing the partnership needed to achieve the mission.
- Commitment from the Minister for Environment to support developing a Riverwatch monitoring program for the river.
- Macquarie University report launched, investigating five issues that impacts on the mission to make the river swimmable again.
- High profile ambassadors for Our Living River announced, including the Wests Tigers, academics from four Sydney Universities, State and local MPs and Councillors.
- Advocating for a replacement of the RiverCat ferries with a new, low wake design to reduce the impacts on future swimming.

To celebrate their first anniversary, members of the PRCG came together at Meadowbank Baths, one of the historic swimming locations to re-create a picture of the past. (See attached historic photo).

For more go to ourlivingriver.com.au

PHOTO OPPORTUNITY: Thursday 3 December 2015, 9.00am, Meadowbank Ferry Wharf
For all media enquiries contact: Sarah Clift, PRCG Coordinator, m 0477 745 634 p9806 8275
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Attachments: (i) PRCG Annual Report 2014-15 (ii) Historic photo Meadowbank Baths (pre 1926) voted 7th most popular spot for future swimming with 249 votes.

About Our Living River: The [Our Living River](http://ourlivingriver.com.au) initiative is being delivered by the Parramatta River Catchment Group (PRCG). The PRCG is a group of councils, government agencies and community groups who are working to improve the Parramatta River and creeks that flow into it. Members include: Ashfield Council, Auburn Council, Bankstown City Council, Blacktown City Council, Burwood Council, City of Canada Bay Council, Holroyd City Council, Hunters Hill Council, Leichhardt Municipal Council, Parramatta City Council, City of Ryde Council, Strathfield Municipal Council, The Hills Shire

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Council, the Environment Protection Authority, Greater Sydney Local Land Services and Sydney Water.

Resources:

Voting map and chart of top 10 most popular swimming spots. Community faces and ambassadors showing their support for the mission (upon request).

www.ourlivingriver.com.au Youtube/archival videos incl a) Rob Stokes announcing NSW Government's commitment to the mission, b) Our Living River community events and snapshots of key ambassadors, c) Launch of the Our Living Catchment Fauna and Habitat Report , d) Natural History of Parramatta River video e) 1910 Lifesaving Festival at Little Coogee on Parramatta River in Parramatta Park.

Dolphins in the Parramatta River video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xzvdE-LbKcw>

ANNUAL REPORT

2014 - 2015



PARRAMATTA RIVER CATCHMENT GROUP



OUR NEW MISSION

The PRCG worked with state and local government, and community members, with input from creative sustainability specialists, to develop a vision, key messages and communications campaign that raises the profile of the river and provides a more focused implementation plan for the coming years.

OUR PURPOSE: To make Parramatta River a living river

OUR VISION: We believe Sydney deserves a world class river

OUR MISSION: To make the Parramatta River swimmable again by 2025

- Reviewed draft strategic plan from 2013.
- Planning workshop with member organisations to develop the top end priority targets to make the river swimmable again by 2025.
- Feedback received from each member organisation about the new Parramatta River Catchment Group focus, how they can be involved and the benefits.
- Briefed all Councillors and media communications staff in each council.
- Canvassed our new mission with school students at the 2014 Youth Eco Summit.



OUR CAMPAIGN

The **Our Living River** public campaign was developed to raise awareness of our new mission “To make the Parramatta River swimmable again by 2025”. This year our focus was on harnessing support for this mission.

- Campaign launched in December 2014.
- New campaign website launched www.ourlivingriver.com.au
- Over 9,000 website visits and over 25,000 page views.
- Over 240 articles of local, state and national media coverage with a potential reach of 7.2 million people.
- Facebook page launched with over 120 followers and a potential reach of over 2,500 people.
- Eight e-newsletters sent to over 300 people.
- Over 2,880 individual votes lodged for favourite swimming spots on the river.
- Printed and digital campaign materials distributed to all member organisations for use and co-badging.

The extensive media coverage provided a great opportunity to raise awareness, talk to many people in the community, promote events, share photos and engage the growing list of ambassadors who support the Our Living River campaign.

OUR SUPPORTERS

Support for the Our Living River initiative was built at the community, organisational and political levels.

- Workshop held with member organisations to identify priorities and actions that require NSW Government support.
- In principle support from NSW Minister for Planning with discussions in progress.
- In principle support from NSW Minister for the Environment to establish a Riverwatch water quality monitoring program. New working group convened to start developing this.
- Discussions commenced with NSW Department of Planning and Environment regarding integration of PRCG mission into sub-regional plans that sit under *A Plan for Growing Sydney*.
- Commitments of support from Sydney Water and NSW Environment Protection Authority in developing work plans for making the river swimmable.
- Support from Greater Sydney Local Land Services and Sydney Olympic Park Authority through data sharing and co-hosting events.
- High profile ambassadors agreed to be spokespeople for Our Living River.



This annual report highlights the achievements of the Parramatta River Catchment Group during 2014-15.

OUR EVENTS

Fun family friendly events held as a great way to engage directly with the community, promote the campaign and engender support.

- Three community events held in Blacktown, Parramatta and Canada Bay local government areas and attended by over 1200 people.
- Support, participation, contributions and funding from member local councils.
- Source to Sea partnership event with Greater Sydney Local Land Services and Greater Sydney Landcare Network to celebrate the work of Bushcare volunteers and community groups and raise awareness, attended by over 170 people.
- Short videos created from the events showing the support of community members and ambassadors. Videos can be accessed at www.ourlivingriver.com.au
- Event photos posted on our Facebook page.

OUR SUBMISSIONS

Formal submissions were made with the aim of influencing government policy and funding that affect the health of the river and its catchment.

- NSW Government draft Sydney Harbour Regional Boating Plan.
- NSW Government Independent Biodiversity Legislation Review Panel to examine native vegetation, threatened species and related biodiversity laws.
- Australian Government Senate enquiry into stormwater resources in Australia.

OUR PROJECTS

City of Canada Bay led the *Native Habitat Recovery in the Parramatta River Catchment Project* on behalf of 8 councils and funded by NSW Environmental Trust.

- Comprehensive *Our Living Catchment Fauna and Habitat Report* developed that maps where animals live in the catchment and identifies priority corridors for rehabilitation.
- 8 awareness raising presentations delivered to our member organisations and stakeholders.
- 37 publicity articles distributed, potentially reaching over 2.3 million people via newsletters, print, online, TV, radio and social media.
- “Biodiversity awareness” sessions for council staff.
- 20,308 natives planted in priority corridors.
- 19 sites monitored by Birdlife Australia.

Other initiatives also progressed to address high priority issues and resourcing.

- Parramatta River Estuary Coastal Zone Management Plan adopted by all eight councils. The certification process has commenced and the Estuary Management Group reconvened to work on priority actions: advocating for low wash ferries and catchment wide water quality monitoring.
- Working group formed to develop a governance model for accepting private sponsorship from business.
- *Sydney Harbour Catchment Water Quality Improvement Plan* finalised by Greater Sydney Local Land Services in collaboration with many PRCG member organisations and other partners.

OUR THANKS To Parramatta City Council for generously hosting the PRCG staff on behalf of our group, and all of our members and supporters for their fantastic work over the past year towards making the Parramatta River swimmable again.

OUR GROUP AND OPERATIONAL STRUCTURE IN 2014-15

The Parramatta River Catchment Group is a group of local councils, NSW government agencies and community groups who are working together to improve the Parramatta River and its tributaries.

FINANCIAL MEMBERS IN 2014-15



CHAIR: Cr Scott Lloyd, Parramatta City Council **VICE CHAIR:** Cr Peter Astridge, Hunters Hill Council

OUR REPRESENTATIVES

Representatives on PRCG full group and sub-committees:

Councillors:

- Ashfield Council: Clr Monica Wangmann, Clr Mark Drury
- Auburn City Council: Clr Steve Yang
- Bankstown City Council: Clr Naji Najjar
- Blacktown City Council: Clr Susai Benjamin, Clr Russ Dickens
- City of Canada Bay: Cr Angelo Tsirekas, Clr Pauline Tyrrell
- City of Ryde: Clr Denise Pendleton, Clr Terry Perram
- Holroyd City Council: Clr Pam Colman
- Hunters Hill Council: Clr Peter Astridge
- Leichhardt Council: Clr Frank Breen
- Parramatta City Council: Clr Scott Lloyd, Clr Shahadat Chowdhury
- Strathfield Council: Clr Andrew Soulos

Community members:

- Annie Nielson, Impeesa Bushcare
- Brian Powyer, Association for the Greening of
- Wayne Olling, Blacktown and District Environment Group Inc
- Tony Williams, Bidjigal Reserve Trust Board

Staff:

- Ashfield Council: Janene Harris, Sarah Kamarudin, Adam Ward
- Auburn City Council: Chris Chung, Kerrie Davies
- Bankstown City Council: Cherie Blackburn, Bart Schiebaan
- Blacktown City Council: Natalie Payne, Moomtahina Ahmed, Keysha Milenkovic, Carolyn Adamcewicz
- Burwood Council: Kundan Pokharel
- City of Canada Bay: Petrina Nelson, Rob Stevenson, Andrew Dimitriadis
- City of Ryde: Nilushi Disanayake, Kylie McMahon, Sam Cappelli, Nicola Booth, Sandra Payne, Denise Torres
- Holroyd City Council: Mark Evens, James Allsop
- Hunters Hill Council: Jacqui Vollmer
- Leichhardt Council: Mohammad Sikder, Jon Stiebel

Staff (continued):

- Parramatta City Council: James Smallson, Helen Papathanasiou, Paul Hackney, Pino Todarello
- Strathfield Council: Cathy Jones, Mark Latham, Alex Mackenzie, Chavvauhn Calver
- Sydney Water: Phill Birtles, Fernando Ortega, Kaia Hodge
- Greater Sydney Local Land Services: Peter Freewater, Vanessa Keyzer, Bill Dixon

Associate members:

- Office of Environment and Heritage: Gus Pelosi, Daniel Wiecek
- Roads and Maritime Services: Mark Millington
- Parramatta Park and Western Sydney Parklands Trusts: David Kirkland, David Brodie
- Department of Primary Industries: Carla Ganassin

Executive Committee 2014-2015:

- Cathy Jones, Corporate Strategy Coordinator, Strathfield Council
- Nilushi Disanayake, Sustainability Programs Coordinator, City of Ryde
- Natalie Payne, Waterways Rehabilitation Officer, Blacktown City Council
- Phill Birtles, Program Lead, Land and Waterways, Sydney Water
- James Smallson, Supervisor Open Space and Natural Resources, Parramatta City Council

PRCG Full Group Meetings in 2014-2015 were held on:

- 18th September 2014 hosted by Sydney Water
- 20th November 2014 hosted by Ashfield Council
- 5th February 2015 hosted by Auburn City Council
- 7th May 2015 hosted by Bankstown City Council

PRCG employed staff:

- Sarah Clift, Coordinator (3 days per week)
- Keysha Milenkovic, Events and Engagement Officer (2 days per week, Jan – June 2015)



OUR LIVING RIVER

Up until the 1950s most of the Parramatta River was swimmable and the focal point for many social activities. Today a lot of the river has become too polluted leaving few locations where people can swim. Our mission is to make the Parramatta River swimmable again by 2025. The challenge is complex, but it's achievable and already widely supported. Scientific modelling shows us it is possible and there are many international examples of where it has been done. There is a global movement to make big rivers the centres of life they once were. The Parramatta River Catchment Group and all of our supporters are making Sydney part of that.