

How the catchment management program will be implemented

The Manning River Estuary and Catchment Management Program (ECMP) aspires to protect and improve the ecological health of the Manning Estuary and its catchment, and in doing so support the social, cultural and economic values of the region.

The Manning ECMP sets out a long-term action program (ten years) for Council, our community and partner organisations to improve the health of the Manning River. It brings together 36 management actions in a format that is measurable and targeted.

The Manning River ECMP was adopted by Council in July 2021 and has now been submitted for certification under the NSW Coastal Management Act 2016. Once certified Council will be able to access co-funding from the NSW Government.

Get involved

Sign up for the Our Manning River Newsletter to hear about ECMP progress, education and conservation activities. To subscribe, visit www.midcoast.nsw.gov.au/ourmanningriver



MIDCOAST
council



**MANNING
RIVER
ESTUARY &
CATCHMENT**



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MANNING RIVER ESTUARY AND CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT PROGRAM 2021-2031

Looking after the river we love

Photo credits:
East Coast Photography (front cover)
Karen Bettink (this page)

The Manning River, its tributaries and the estuary give life to our community connecting the mountains to the sea. Together we manage the catchment holistically and respond to a changing climate - safeguarding environmental, social, cultural and economic values.

MidCoast Council has worked with our community and partners to develop a **Catchment Management Program for the Manning River and its estuary**. The program takes a whole-of-catchment approach, recognising that what happens on the land influences water quality and ecosystem health.

The **Manning River** originates at 1,570m above sea level in the Gondwana World Heritage Area of the Barrington Tops and flows 261km to the Tasman Sea on the mid-north coast of NSW (NSW Govt. 2016). Its vast catchment covers an area of approximately 8,420km² with 16 major tributaries.

The **Manning estuary** is a mature wave dominated barrier estuary covering an area of approximately 32.3km. From the tidal extent at Abbots Falls up-river of Wingham, the estuary is a single channel to Taree then spills over an extensive floodplain with a complex of inter-connecting channels approximately 115km in length. Six islands lie between the north and south entrances.

Healthy riverbank vegetation, coastal wetlands and well-managed farmland will buffer us from impact and help make our environment, our community and our economy more resilient. The ecosystem services provided by nature sustain our use of the river in good times and reduce impacts when extreme events occur.

Why does the Manning River matter?

The Manning River is the lifeblood of our community. The estuary is important for oyster-growing, fishing, tourism and recreation. From the upper reaches of the catchment the Manning and its tributaries provide water for drinking, stock and irrigation. All these uses depend on a healthy ecosystem and clean water. Cultural connections to the river and estuary for the Aboriginal community spans multiple generations.

Our dependence on the river brings vulnerability. In 2019, a record-breaking drought saw the upper Manning river run dry. Then came bushfires that burnt 244,173 ha, representing 30% of the catchment. In 2021 we experienced a major flood, charging down the river and inundating the floodplain. Climate modelling tells us these extremes, along with sea level rise, will become more frequent in our lifetime. We need to start preparing now. Improving ecosystem health is the best way to make our natural assets resilient to extreme events.



Managing the River

A whole of catchment approach has been applied to the Manning River Estuary and Catchment Management Program to address the holistic nature of current and future risks.

We've developed a program of 36 management actions grouped under 8 key objectives listed opposite.

These actions focus on community engagement and education, supporting a transition to best environmental management practice with farmers, restoring coastal wetlands and riverbank vegetation, and remediating acid sulfate soils.



1. STEWARDSHIP

Engage with the community, build capacity and support partnerships to promote understanding, connection and stewardship



2. WATER QUALITY AND ECOSYSTEM HEALTH

Manage the Manning River catchment and its estuary holistically to maintain and improve water quality and ecosystem services



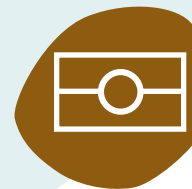
3. CLIMATE CHANGE

Understand, mitigate, adapt and build resilience to current and future hazards including the impacts of climate change



4. BIODIVERSITY

Protect and conserve natural character and biological diversity



5. ABORIGINAL CUSTODIANSHIP

Acknowledge and support Aboriginal peoples' spiritual, social, customary and economic connection to the Manning River catchment and its estuary



6. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC VALUES

Manage the Manning River catchment and its estuary to maintain and improve social, cultural, and economic opportunities and benefits



7. LAND USE PLANNING

Facilitate ecologically sustainable development and promote sustainable land use planning decision-making



8. GOVERNANCE

Build stakeholder partnerships for good governance and integrated management

What did our community say?

37% of our community¹ said that they valued healthy aquatic ecosystems the most in the Manning River. This was closely followed by visual amenity and then cultural and spiritual values. Riverbank vegetation and instream habitat were selected as the most important features of the Manning River.

What are some of the problems?

- Lack of stewardship
- Climate change
- Loss of coastal wetlands and riparian vegetation
- Floodplain drainage
- Acid Sulfate Soils
- Agricultural impacts

Who we consulted with:

Since 2018 we have engaged with a wide range of community members and stakeholders including, the Manning River ECMP Reference Group; the Manning River ECMP Technical Advisory Group; delivery partners; the local Aboriginal community via Purfleet-Taree Local Aboriginal Land Council; community, industry and environmental groups; the local farming community; and the wider community.

Over 300 individuals were engaged through events, surveys, focus groups, face-to-face consultation and workshops. 19 messages of support were received during the public exhibition phase.

¹ Values survey, 122 participants