



Georges Riverkeeper

ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24

GEORGES RIVERKEEPER EXECUTIVE GROUP REPORT



Councillor Stephen Nikolovski
(Sutherland Shire Council)
Georges Riverkeeper Chairperson Nov. 2023 – Jun. 2024
Georges Riverkeeper 2nd Vice-Chairperson Jul. 2023 – Nov. 2023



Councillor George Barcha
(Fairfield City Council)
Georges Riverkeeper Chairperson
Jun. 2023 – Nov. 2023



Councillor Paul Sedrak
(Bayside Council)
Georges Riverkeeper Vice-Chairperson
Jul. 2023 – Jun. 2024



Councillor David Walsh
(City of Canterbury Bankstown)
Georges Riverkeeper 2nd Vice Chairperson
Nov. 2023 – Jun. 2024



Councillor Peter Mahoney
(Georges River Council)
Georges Riverkeeper Treasurer
Jul. 2023 – Jun. 2024



Scott Reyes
Georges Riverkeeper Program Manager
Jul. 2023 – Jan. 2024



Kirsten Spry
Georges Riverkeeper Acting Program Manager
Jan. 2024 – Jun. 2024



Ian Drinnan
(Sutherland Shire Council)
Georges Riverkeeper Host Manager
Jul. 2023 – Dec. 2023



Jordan Widenstrom
(Sutherland Shire Council)
Georges Riverkeeper Host Manager
Dec. 2023 – Jun. 2024



GEORGES RIVER CATCHMENT

Georges Riverkeeper is an independent and not-for-profit organisation governed by the Georges Riverkeeper Executive Group, who is elected annually and meet monthly to oversee the management and operations of Georges Riverkeeper. This includes financial oversight, program review, and ensuring that Member Councils are well-informed, enabling key decisions to be made between General Committee Meetings.

Dedicated to advancing the natural environment by safeguarding and enhancing the health of the Georges River, during 2023/24 Georges Riverkeeper has undertaken community and stakeholder engagement, strategic planning, and best practice environmental management, to ensure the river's ecosystems thrive for future generations.

During 2023/24 the Executive Group was instrumental in several key organisational reviews, including reviews of GRK's compliance with the *Associations Incorporated Act*, Human Resources, Hosting options and budget review.

The Executive Group extends its gratitude to the Georges Riverkeeper Member Councils (Bayside Council, Campbelltown City Council, City of Canterbury Bankstown, Fairfield City Council, Georges River Council, Liverpool City Council, Sutherland Shire Council, and Wollondilly Shire Council), Financial Partner (Sydney Water), council officers, stakeholders, and community members for their ongoing support and valuable contributions over the past year.

GEORGES RIVERKEEPER PROGRAM MANAGER'S REPORT



Kirsten Spry
Georges Riverkeeper
Acting Program Manager
Jun. 2024

Georges Riverkeeper's role is to work with our eight Member Councils and Financial Partner to look after the Georges River. By undertaking best practice management within our five main Programs we help to protect natural resources and improve liveability along the Georges River.

In 2023/24, our team faced significant challenges due to staffing vacancies. A key full-time position remained unfilled throughout the year, and another was vacant for half the year. Recruitment for these roles was delayed due to uncertainties regarding position descriptions, remuneration, and the future Host location. Although these issues have now been resolved, the vacancies impacted our ability to fulfill all items in our Annual Work plan including holding the annual Paddle Against Plastic event and producing the State of the River Report initially planned for 2024.

Despite these challenges, we successfully delivered across all five Programs. This included reviewing our Governance, Constitution, preferred Hosting arrangements, and some of our Human Resource practices. We secured a new Host at Liverpool City Council and prepared to migrate our business to their premises. We also conducted bi-annual estuary and freshwater sampling in 2023/24, ensuring continuity in our data set. We plan to release a River Health Report Card in 2024/25 to share our latest findings.

Additional achievements this year include our ongoing collaboration with NSW Corrective Services for litter collection and bush rehabilitation, the successful completion of our award-winning Zero Litter in Georges River grant-funded litter prevention project, our commitment to installing an Osprey nesting pole in the riverbed at Lugarno, contributing support for shorebird monitoring, and striving to establish a Coastal Management Program for the Georges River.

As our four-year Hosting Agreement with Sutherland Shire Council concluded in September 2024, the Georges Riverkeeper team extends thanks to the Councillors and staff at SSC for their invaluable contributions and in-kind support throughout this period.

The team is looking forward to continuing to implement our Programs from our new base at Liverpool City Council, where we anticipate new opportunities to enhance our work and further our mission to protect and improve the Georges River.

KEEP AUSTRALIA BEAUTIFUL NSW 2023 AWARD

Georges Riverkeeper's Zero Litter in Georges River project was honoured as the winner in the Litter Prevention / Clean Waterways category at the prestigious Keep Australia Beautiful NSW 2023 Sustainable Cities Awards.

Sponsored by the NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA), this award recognises Georges Riverkeeper's commitment to preserving the health of the Georges River and is a testament to our catchment-wide approach.

The Zero Litter in Georges River project, funded by the Australian Government, is a project between Georges Riverkeeper, six local councils, six primary schools, and their communities, to reduce litter entering the Georges River through stormwater. zerolitter.georgesriver.org.au

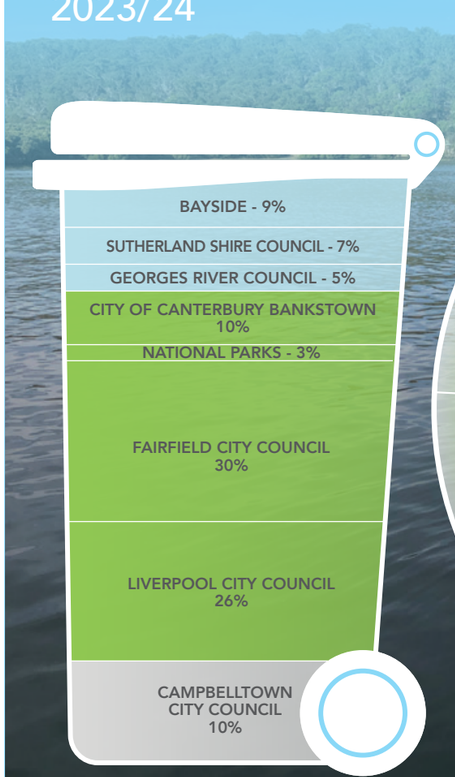


CATCHMENT ACTIONS PROGRAM
LITTER & BIODIVERSITY

LITTER REMOVAL

Litter, particularly plastic products that make their way into the Georges River Catchment affect biodiversity, degrade water-quality and have a negative impact on the aesthetics of our precious waterways. Georges Riverkeeper works tirelessly to reduce the impact of litter. In 2023/24 we helped to remove 93 tonnes of litter and rubbish from the Georges River catchment. That equates to over 6,000 large bags of litter removed. Co-ordinated through Georges Riverkeeper's Catchment Actions Program, litter collection teams from Corrective Services NSW spent a combined 21,000 hours helping to cleanup litter in parks, beaches, creeks, river foreshores and industrial areas. In 2023/24 thanks to the support of our Member Councils, the program continues to expand with the addition of 19 new litter collection sites.

RUBBISH REMOVED FROM THE RIVER SYSTEM 2023/24



RUBBISH BY SUBCATCHMENT 2023/24



CATCHMENT ACTIONS PROGRAM
LITTER & BIODIVERSITY

LITTER PREVENTION

Preventing litter from entering our waterways is best practice management. Following the completion of the Georges River Litter Prevention Strategy in 2022/23, Georges Riverkeeper has continued to work with Member Councils in Bayside, Georges River, Sutherland, Canterbury Bankstown, Liverpool and Campbelltown Local Government Areas to build support for litter prevention in the Georges River Catchment. Georges Riverkeeper has been successful in obtaining $42,000 in funding from the NSW Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) to produce a Litter Prevention Roadmap. The Roadmap will be completed in 2024/25 and be used to guide Litter Prevention Initiatives with our partners over the next five years. The completed Roadmap will assist Georges Riverkeeper to be eligible to receive additional implementation funding from the NSW EPA.





BIODIVERSITY

The waterways and riparian areas of the Georges River Catchment support an amazing array of biodiversity that exists alongside our urban areas. However, pressures from the urban environment can have a destructive effect on biodiversity and requires careful management. Georges Riverkeeper collaborates with Member Councils and stakeholders to help protect the biodiversity of the catchment.

Riparian areas which link and support terrestrial and aquatic biodiversity are some of the most threatened natural areas in the catchment. In the ongoing partnership with Fairfield City Council and NSW Corrective Services, this year we helped to improve the condition of seven endangered Cumberland Plain Woodland and River-Forest sites along Fairfield's creeks. Participants contributed 812 hours to removing invasive weeds which has enabled native plants to flourish. Georges Riverkeeper also applied for $906,000 in funding through the Federal Government's Urban Rivers and Catchments Program. If successful, the project will restore four high priority riparian areas within the catchment.

Working closely with Member Council biosecurity officers, we remain vigilant against priority weed proliferation in the catchment, conducting nine comprehensive inspections along waterways throughout the year.



We also contributed to a post flood working group that aimed to limit the spread of aquatic weeds.

This year, Georges Riverkeeper has been working collaboratively with Georges River Council to install a nesting pole and platform for a pair of Ospreys. The Ospreys, a threatened species, have recently nested on a crane at a riverside construction site in Lugarno. The installation of a nesting platform will provide a safe, alternate nesting site for the birds. In 2023/24, planning documents were prepared and approvals were sort. Further down the river, our commitment to the long-term shorebird monitoring project with the Australian Waders Studies Group and Local Land Services continues, with Georges Riverkeeper assisting with monthly monitoring of the threatened birds.

RIVER HEALTH & RESEARCH PROGRAM

River Health Monitoring, established in 2009, employs scientifically rigorous methods to assess freshwater tributaries and estuarine sections of the Georges River. The data collected is shared with Member Councils to support efficient and effective resource management and waterway improvements. Additionally, this information is used to inform the broader community about the condition of the waterways within the Georges River Catchment.

In 2023/24 Georges Riverkeeper collected data to inform our biennial River Health Report Card which will be released in 2024/25. Thirty-four freshwater sites were monitored in Spring and Autumn with information on physical water quality, macroinvertebrates and riparian conditions recorded. The sites vary from highly modified concrete channels in urban areas to near pristine headwaters in Dharrawal National Park. Using our vessel, estuary sampling also occurred from November to March at 17 sites. The water quality data will be added to Georges Riverkeeper's extensive dataset for the catchment. This year, our records assisted Sydney Marine Institute which is undertaking modelling of the Botany Bay ecosystem and Sydney Water which is updating environmental modelling for the Malabar sewage treatment network.

In addition to our scheduled river health reporting, in 2023/24 we responded to various pollution incidents including reports of oil releases, mangrove dieback, polystyrene releases, and grease trap waste in waterways. We liaise with community members, councils and other authorities to ensure that the health of the river is prioritised.





RIVER HEALTH & RESEARCH PROGRAM

The research Georges Riverkeeper facilitates aims to deepen our understanding of how urbanisation impacts the Georges River and contribute to the development of effective waterway management practices. This year, we continued our support of a Macquarie University PhD student, who completed a project investigating carbon decomposition rates in both natural and restored saltmarshes. The study found that decomposition rates were comparable between remnant and restored saltmarshes, offering valuable insights into the restoration process. We also participated in networking events, such as the Macquarie University Natural Sciences Partnership Event, to build connections with potential research partners and further our collaborative efforts.

Additionally, Georges Riverkeeper partnered with Sutherland Shire Council to conduct environmental DNA (eDNA) research in the Woronora catchment, targeting key species. We sampled four areas of suitable habitat to detect traces of the elusive platypus and the Macquarie Perch, both of which have been identified in the freshwater reaches of the Georges River. This research is crucial for informing conservation strategies and understanding the presence and distribution of these species in our waterways.





STORMWATER & SEWAGE PROGRAM

Stormwater contributes to an estimated 95% of pollutants in the Georges River. To address this, Georges Riverkeeper is partnering with Councils, State and Federal Agencies, and Sydney Water to improve stormwater, sewage, and catchment management, identifying opportunities to enhance water quality.

IMPROVING COMPLIANCE

'Get the Site Right' is a successful joint taskforce, now in its eighth year, aimed at improving erosion and sediment control on building sites to prevent pollution in local waterways. This initiative involves local councils, Georges Riverkeeper, and other key agencies. Campaigns were held in October 2023 and May 2024, with public reporting encouraged for environmental and stormwater pollution incidents.

GET THE SITE RIGHT



GROSS POLLUTANT TRAP GUIDE

Gross Pollutant Traps (GPTs) are widely recognized as effective tools for capturing litter and pollution from stormwater. As part of the Zero Litter in Georges River program, a 'Practical Guide for Gross Pollutant Trap Planning, Design, and Procurement' was developed to assist Councils in implementing GPT programs tailored to their needs. This guide is a resource for planners, engineers, asset managers, and consultants, promoting discussion and collaboration.



GEORGES RIVER COASTAL MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

A Georges River Coastal Management Program (GR CMP) needs to be prepared in accordance with the Coastal Management Act 2016 and the requirements of the NSW Coastal Management Manual. The GR CMP aims to enhance the ecological health, social amenities, and resilience of the Georges River coastal zone. Although Georges Riverkeeper is not eligible for the NSW Coastal and Estuary Grants Program funding, the organisation is Project Managing this program on behalf of Member Councils. Liverpool City Council, as Georges Riverkeeper's new host, will lead the grant application for Georges Riverkeeper's Member Councils. In February 2024, as Georges Riverkeeper faced staff shortages, Sydney Coastal Councils Group (SCCG) was engaged to assist by updating the scope of the program and preparing project management documentation for the grant application. CMP development is a 5 stage process and we are progressing towards undertaking stages 2 to 4.

EDUCATION & CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAM

The Education and Capacity Building Program aims to create and share educational resources while offering opportunities to build a collective understanding of the challenges and solutions for managing the Georges River, its waterways and catchment.

COMMUNICATIONS

Georges Riverkeeper connects with the community through our website (georgesriver.org.au), social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn, as well as through quarterly e-news, media outreach, and events. Our aim is to foster enjoyment, education, and stewardship of the river. We also produce publications like this Annual Report and actively respond to enquiries from the community and stakeholders.



CAMPAIGNS

- Biodiversity Bingo (Sept. 2023 Biodiversity Month)
- Video campaign for Plastic-free ways to enjoy the Georges River, 6 videos with Wasteman Mick, Jul. 2023
- Advertising of Stage 1 Education Modules on social media, Aug. 2023
- 'Reduce Your Rubbish' campaign, Nov. 2023, with Sydney Catchment Groups
- Annual Georges Riverkeeper litter stats release, Dec. 2023
- 'Get The Site Right' October 2023 and May 2024 Blitz campaigns
- 'Six ways to make every day Clean Up Australia Day' Mar. 2024
- 'Nature Walks' in the catchment, Apr. 2024
- 'Animals to Spot' in the catchment, Jun. 2024



EVENTS AND EDUCATION

- Conclusion of 'Zero Litter in Georges River' grant project with street artworks and community engagement in the Canterbury Bankstown area
- Presented on Georges Riverkeeper programs and ways to protect the River at the Lugarno Progress Association's General Meeting on 7 Aug. 2023
- Bush Bugs event with Sutherland Shire Council, Sept. 2023
- Cabramatta Moon Festival with Fairfield City Council, Sept. 2023
- Webinar: 'Fish stockings and Ladders' about fish programs for the Georges River, held on 30 Nov. 2023. Presenters and topics included:
  - Steven Hodosi, Coordinator Environmental Operations at Liverpool City Council presented on how upgrades to this important piece of infrastructure are progressing. Funding from this project was provided by the Marine Estate Management Authority.
  - Mick Gamble, Fisheries Manager in the Fish Stocking and Enhancement Operations team at DPI Fisheries presented on the Marine Stocking Program with a focus on the recent Mulloway stocking on the Georges River.
- World Wetlands Day walk and talk at Tonbridge Creek with Conservation Volunteers Australia and Bayside Council, 21 Feb. 2024
- Presented at the Kogarah Bay Progress Association on 6 Mar. 2024



OPERATIONS MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

This Program oversees daily operations, staff and financial management, governance, and lobbying efforts. Key advocacy actions in 2023/24 included opposing the NSW Government's cost-shifting proposal for local councils to fund Beachwatch, providing feedback on the EPA NSW Plastics 'Next Steps' Report, and advocating for stricter regulation of problematic plastics. Georges Riverkeeper also made recommendations during the NSW Koala Strategy Review, pushing for stronger protections and measures to reduce koala road fatalities in the southwest. Additionally, a review of the Synthetic Turf in Public Open Space Guidelines was submitted, emphasizing the need to prevent waterway impacts from synthetic materials. The organisation also contributed to a joint submission on the draft DPE Erosion and Sediment Control guidelines.

As Sutherland Shire Council's term as Host Council ends in 2024, Georges Riverkeeper explored future hosting options. The Committee accepted Liverpool City Council's offer to host for the next four years, with plans to eventually transition to a 'no-host' model for greater long-term stability.

To ensure compliance with the *Associations Incorporated Act*, Georges Riverkeeper joined the Associations Forum, which reviewed the organisation's Constitution, finding no urgent issues but making recommendations to enhance clarity. Additionally, in response to changes to the *Income Tax Assessment Act 1997*, Georges Riverkeeper began investigations for charity status to maintain income tax exemptions. Lastly, the renewal of key assets, including two utility 4x4 vehicles, was completed.

FINANCIAL REPORT GEORGES RIVERKEEPER 2023/24

	LAST YEAR (2022/23)	THIS YEAR (2023/24)
INCOME	**$**	**$**
Membership and Program fees	653,880	697,960
Operating Grants	85,259	16,997
Interest	30,152	43,973
Other Revenue	4,700	15,000
TOTAL INCOME	**773,991**	**773,930**
EXPENSES		
Employee benefits expense	436,705	316,422
Depreciation and amortisation expense	501	10,026
Materials & Contracts	423,935	211,375
Other expenses		
TOTAL EXPENSES	**861,141**	**537,823**
NET OPERATING RESULT	**-87,150**	**236,107**

MEMBERS & STAKEHOLDERS

Georges Riverkeeper acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the Georges River, the Kamegal, Bedigal, Cabrogal, Cannemegal, Gweagal and Norongerral people of the Eora, Dharug and Dharawal nations and we pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

EXECUTIVE GROUP

- Chairperson: Cr George Barcha, Fairfield City Council; Cr Steven Nikolovski, Sutherland Shire Council.
- Vice-Chairperson: Cr Paul Sedrak, Bayside Council.
- 2nd Vice-Chairperson: Cr Stephen Nikolovski, Sutherland Shire Council; Cr David Walsh, City of Canterbury Bankstown.
- Treasurer: Cr Peter Mahoney, Georges River Council.
- Georges Riverkeeper Program Manager: Scott Reyes, Kirsten Spry (Acting).
- Georges Riverkeeper Host Manager: Ian Drinnan, Sutherland Shire Council; Jordan Widenstrom, Sutherland Shire Council.

COUNCILLORS OF MEMBER COUNCILS

- Bayside Council: Cr Paul Sedrak, Cr Andrew Tsounis.
- Campbelltown City Council: Cr Rey Manoto, Cr Masud Khalil, Cr Matthew Stellino.
- City of Canterbury Bankstown: Cr David Walsh.
- Fairfield City Council: Cr George Barcha, Cr Kevin Lam, Cr Carmen Lazar OAM.
- Georges River Council: Cr Peter Mahoney.
- Liverpool City Council: Cr Peter Harle, Cr Fiona MacNaught.
- Sutherland Shire Council: Cr Hassan Awada, Cr Stephen Nikolovski.
- Wollondilly Shire Council: Cr Michael Banasik.

GEORGES RIVERKEEPER STAFF

- Program Manager: Scott Reyes; Kirsten Spry (Acting).
- Project Coordinator, Environmental Officer: Robert Dixon.
- Catchment Management Officer: Position vacant.
- Administration and Project Support Officer: Lydia Smithers.
- Communications Officer: Kirsten Spry.

STAFF REPRESENTATIVES OF MEMBER COUNCILS AND FINANCIAL PARTNERS

- Bayside Council: Judith Betts, Madelaine Hourihan, Colin Mable, Hong Nguyen, Peter Ryan, Pulak Saha.
- Campbelltown City Council: Michaela Beattie, Mitchell Clark, Michael Ellison, Cathy Kinsey.
- City of Canterbury Bankstown: Paul Angel, David Lowery, Sasha Marosevac, Sean Mooney, Craig Naughton, Asad Suman.
- Fairfield City Council: Farid Shahbazi Dashti, Eddie Ferry, Leonie Gray, Helen Pollard, Robert Stevenson.
- Georges River Council: Elyse Ballesty, Tom Heath, Fiona O'Brien, Sean Simpson, Andrew Spooner.
- Liverpool City Council: Joel Daniels, Alexi Gilchrist, James Henderson, Maruf Hossain, Roshan Khadka, Michelle Playford, Madhu Pudasaini, Waliminipeli Siripala.
- Sutherland Shire Council: Nathan Clare, Andrew Reid, Nathan Varley, Jordan Widenstrom.
- Wollondilly Shire Council: Ian Berthon, Bianca Klein, Ibrahim Muharrem.
- Sydney Water: Nathan Harrison, Lyndall Pickering.

STAKEHOLDERS

- Australian Government
- Australian Microplastics Assessment Project (AUSMAP)
- Australian Waders Studies Group
- Botany Bay Catchment Alliance
- Conservation Volunteers Australia
- Cooks River Alliance
- Corrective Services NSW
- CSIRO
- Friends of Oatley
- Greater Sydney Local Land Services
- Lands and Water – Crown Lands
- Local Aboriginal Land Councils
- Macquarie University
- National Parks and Wildlife Service
- NSW Department of Education – Georges River Environmental Education Centre
- NSW Department of Planning and Environment
- NSW Department of Primary Industries - Fisheries
- NSW Environment Protection Authority
- Parramatta River Catchment Group
- Sydney Coastal Councils Group
- The Nature Conservancy
- Transport for NSW – Maritime Services
- University of New South Wales
- Water NSW
- Transport for NSW – Maritime Services
- University of New South Wales
- Water NSW





Georges Riverkeeper

Georges Riverkeeper is an alliance of Councils with collective responsibility for the Georges River and its catchment.
www.georgesriver.org.au









MEMBERS

There are many different stakeholders and landowners in the Georges River catchment who all have a responsibility to manage their land in a way that ensures there is a minimal impact on the river and its ecosystems.

Sutherland Shire Council

Fairfield City Celebrating diversity

Liverpool City Council

Canterbury Bankstown

Wollondilly Shire Council

Georges River Council

Campbelltown

Bayside Council Serving Our Community

PARTNERS

Financial partner

Sydney Water

NSW Government Justice Corrective Services

National Parks & Wildlife Service NSW

Georges Riverkeeper is the business name of Georges River Combined Councils' Committee Incorporated (ABN: 182 467 92704)