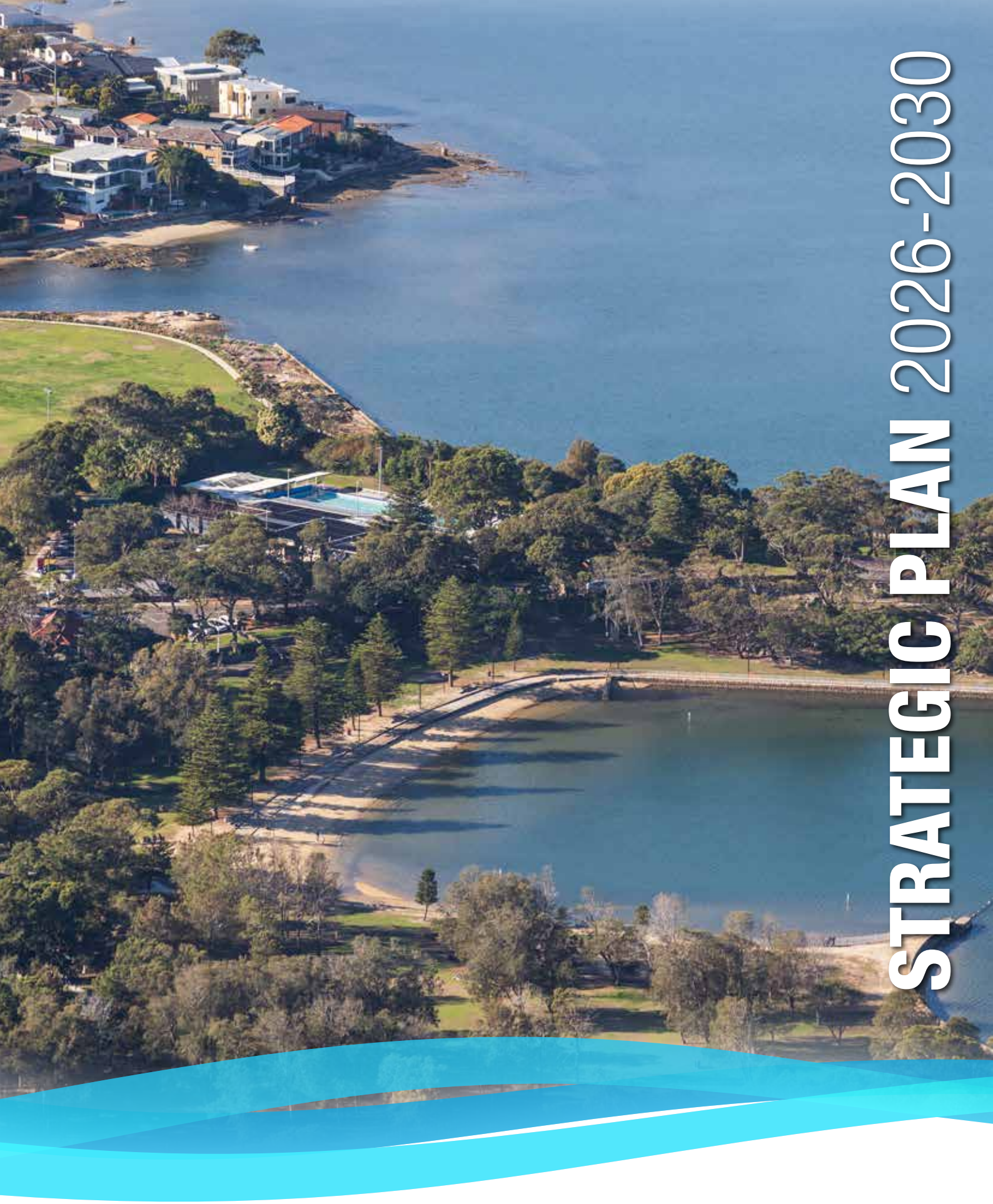


# STRATEGIC PLAN 2026-2030

Georges Riverkeeper







# CONTENTS


Chairperson's and Program Manager's Foreword 1

4-Year Strategic Plan, Georges River Regional Context, Aboriginal Heritage 2

The Georges River Catchment Map 3

Georges Riverkeeper – Regional Context, Aboriginal Heritage 4

Urbanisation of the Georges River Catchment, Environmental Urbanisation Issues 5-7

Georges Riverkeeper - Our Role, Our Aspirational Goal 7-8

Our Members and Other Stakeholders 8

Strategic Programs 9

Operations Management Program 10-11

Catchment Actions Program 12-13

River Health & Research Program 14-15

Stormwater & Sewage Program 16-17

Education & Capacity Building Program 18-19


Cover Photography by Matthew Vasilescu - www.mattvas.com.au
Design & Production by DT Graphics - www.dtgraphics.com.au

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT** OF COUNTRY:

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 future.

# CHAIRPERSON'S FOREWORD

As the new Chairperson of Georges Riverkeeper and with my previous roles on the Executive Group, I have witnessed the challenges that Georges Riverkeeper has faced over the last couple of years, during its transition from one host council to another and staff turnover. In the last year recruitment has occurred, and it is wonderful to see Georges Riverkeeper with a full team again and a renewed sense of purpose.

This Strategic Plan 2026–2030 reflects a refreshed strategic vision, building on a stable foundation. As the organisation has matured, our focus is on strengthening and refining our work. Our goal remains clear: to protect, restore, and advocate for the Georges River catchment, ensuring it continues to be a healthy and valued asset for the diverse communities it supports.

Over the next four years, we will prioritise science-driven catchment management, deepened collaboration with our Member Councils, and meaningful engagement with the people who live, work, and play along the river. We recognise that the health of the river is inextricably linked to the wellbeing of our community. By tackling urban runoff, protecting biodiversity, and adapting to a changing climate, we are safeguarding a legacy for future generations.

I am incredibly proud of the resilience our organisation has shown. With a talented team of experts and the steadfast support of our partners, we are ready to tackle the complexities of urban water management with innovation and integrity.

I invite you to join us as we embark on this new chapter for Georges Riverkeeper. Together, we can ensure the Georges River is a resilient and thriving ecosystem that we can all be proud of.

*Cr David Walsh, Chairperson*

**GEORGES RIVERKEEPER'S ASPIRATION GOAL:**
BEST PRACTICE ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT FOR A LIVEABLE URBAN RIVER.

# PROGRAM MANAGER'S FOREWORD

The Georges Riverkeeper Strategic Plan 2018-2022 and 2022-2026 laid the foundation for effective collaboration with our members over the last eight years. In November 2025, we held a Strategic Plan Review Workshop, with input from all Member Councils and Financial Partner. This review has been vital in informing our direction for the next four years and is now our interim Strategic Plan 2026-2030, while we develop the Georges River Estuary Coastal Management Plan (GRECMP). The review has given us the opportunity to engage with Member Councils and seek valuable feedback while also incorporating a litter prevention focus which was not prevalent in the last Plan.

This interim period is critical as we develop the comprehensive GRECMP which will provide a mandated opportunity to review current efforts, undertake new scientific studies, and consult widely with the community. The GRECMP will set our direction from 2030 and alongside community input will represent a new 10-year plan and vision for the Georges River. The interim Georges Riverkeeper Strategic Plan will guide us for the next four years while we deliver this important legislative requirement for the Georges River.

Previous Georges Riverkeeper Strategic Plans have laid a robust foundation for effective, collaborative waterway management with our Member Councils, Financial Partner and stakeholders over the last eight years. The new Plan has retained the successful format from previous years with our five key work areas—Operations Management, Catchment Actions, River Health & Research, Stormwater & Sewage, and Education and Capacity Building Programs—ensuring continuity in our goal for 'best practice environmental management for a liveable urban river'.

Key achievements from the delivery of the **Georges Riverkeeper Strategic Plan 2022-2026** include:

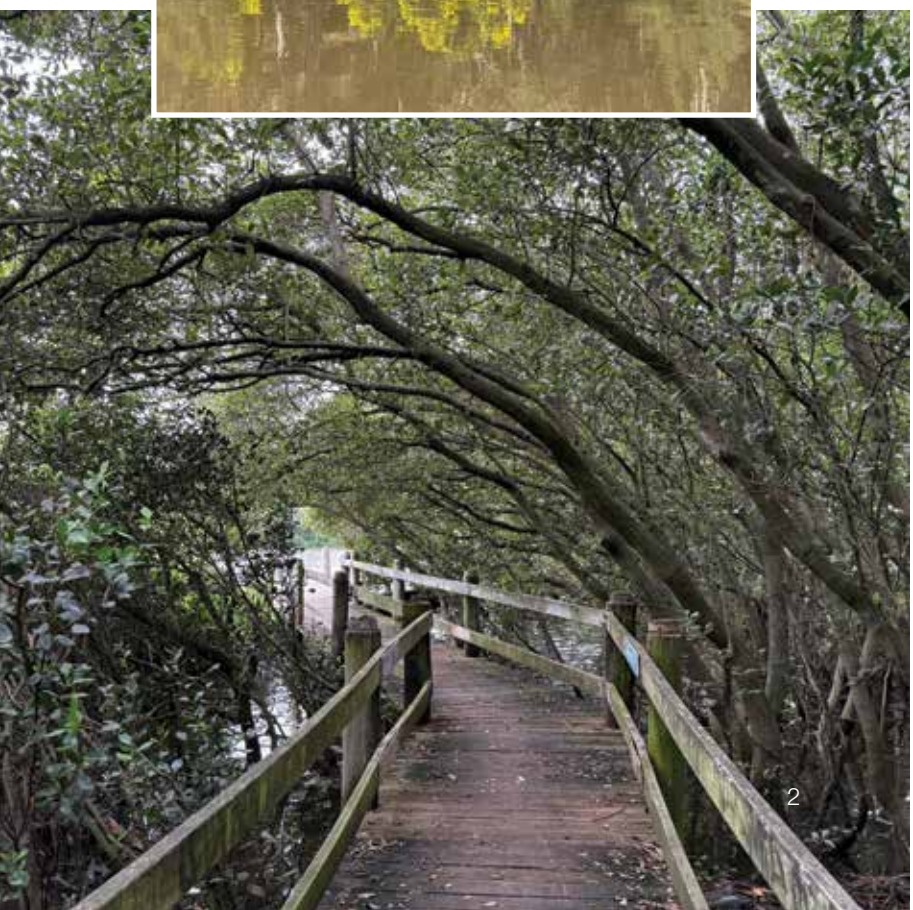
- **Litter Reduction & Prevention**: Successful completion of the award-winning "Zero Litter in Georges River" project, preparation of the

Georges River catchment Litter Prevention Strategy and removal of over 377.15 tonnes of waste over four years July 2022- March 2026.

- **Environmental Monitoring**: Regular publication of the River Health Report Card, which showed an improvement in the overall estuary grade to A- in 2023-24.
- **Biodiversity Protection**: Secured **$899,190** in federal funding for large-scale riparian restoration and installed a custom osprey nesting platform at Lugarno.
- **Strategic Growth**: Developed a Litter Prevention Roadmap and secured **$665,000** for Stages 2–4 of the Coastal Management Program.
- **Operational Transition**: Successfully migrated hosting to Liverpool City Council in late 2024.

*Nell Graham, Program Manager (2025 - current)*





## 4-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN, 2026-2030

This Strategic Plan sets out the direction and activities that Georges Riverkeeper will implement over the four-year period (2026-2030). Georges Riverkeeper, with its Member Councils and Financial Partner Sydney Water, facilitates proactive waterway management that is adaptive and integrated across our program areas. The Strategic Plan does not include the actions or responsibilities of individual Member Council or other stakeholders. The five focus areas remain the same from previous Strategic Plans which are:

- Operations Management Program (OMP)
- Catchment Actions Program (CAP)
- River Health & Research Program (RHRP)
- Stormwater &Sewage Program (SSP)
- Education & Capacity Building Program (ECBP)

Detail of activities required to address the objectives of the Strategic Plan will be outlined further in Annual Workplans, which will be created leading into each financial year, in consultation with the Georges Riverkeeper Committee.

The Strategic Plan has been written to be implemented alongside other relevant documents related to the management of the Georges River, for example the Georges River Estuary Coastal Zone Management Plan. This document is not intended to override waterway management plans of Member Councils or other relevant documents.

This Strategic Plan 2026-2030 was developed to build on the success of the first two Georges Riverkeeper Strategic Plans. Georges Riverkeeper's strategic planning explicitly recognises urbanisation and stormwater as the main challenges for the Georges River and its catchment. Within this Strategic Plan it is also acknowledged that the detrimental impacts of our built environment effect not only environmental values, but more broadly effect liveability (e.g. health, aesthetics, and recreational opportunities). Protecting the Georges River should not be the exclusive domain of environmental departments within councils, rather it should be integrated within all council activities.

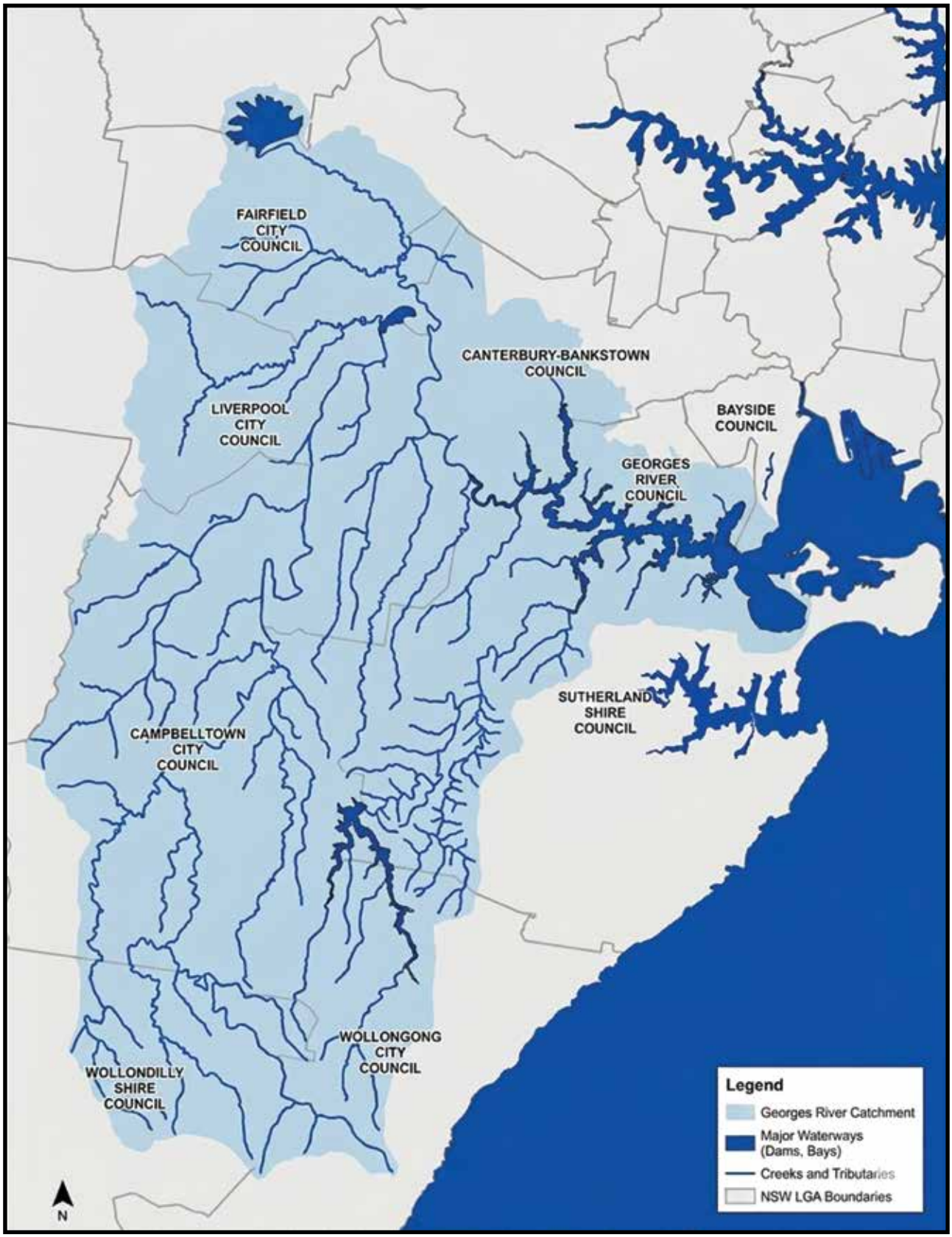



*Figure 1: The Georges River catchment, with boundaries of local councils that have land within the catchment.*



# THE GEORGES RIVER REGIONAL CONTEXT

The Georges River catchment extends from Botany Bay on the New South Wales east coast, west to Prospect Reservoir and south through bushland around Campbelltown and Appin. The northern and western catchment is largely urbanised, reflecting Sydney's expanding metropolitan area, while the upper southern catchment contains significant natural areas and national parks. The Georges River is approximately 100km long, with the tidal limit at Liverpool Weir, above which waters are freshwater. Below the weir, waters become increasingly saline toward Botany Bay.

The Georges River Estuary is a drowned river valley, characterised by deep channels and steep rocky foreshores in its lower reaches, transitioning to expansive alluvial floodplains upstream. Typical estuarine depths are around four metres.

The catchment is one of Greater Sydney's fastest growing regions. It's supported almost 1.5 million residents at the 2021 Census, with the population projected to reach nearly 1.7 million by 2031. This rapid growth places increasing pressure on the river system through habitat loss, urban encroachment, expanding impervious surfaces that intensify stormwater runoff and erosion, the spread of pest species, and rising levels of litter and pollution.





# ABORIGINAL HERITAGE

Aboriginal people are the First Peoples of Australia and have maintained continuous connections to Country for more than 60,000 years. Through the Dreaming, Aboriginal people understand the creation of the land, waterways and living things, and the laws that govern relationships between people, Country and culture. These creation stories express enduring spiritual, cultural and environmental knowledge that continues to guide Aboriginal custodianship of Country today.

For thousands of years, Aboriginal people have lived throughout the Sydney region, organised into family clans within broader language groups or nations. The Georges River formed an important cultural boundary and meeting place between language groups. To the north of the river were peoples of the Dharug language group, including the Kameygal, Bedigal, Cabrogal and Cannemegal clans. To the south were peoples of the Dharawal language group, including the Gweagal and Norongerragal clans. The river and its surrounding lands provided food, shelter, transport and places for cultural practice, and remain central to Aboriginal identity and connection to Country.

In 1770, the Kameygal people encountered Lieutenant James Cook and the *Endeavour* at Botany Bay, near the mouth of the Georges River. British colonisation in 1788 marked the beginning of widespread dispossession, disruption and conflict for local Aboriginal communities. During the nineteenth century, many Aboriginal people were forced to live on missions, including those established at La Perouse, Sans Souci (Kogarah Bay) and Peakhurst (Salt Pan Creek).

Despite these impacts, Aboriginal culture remains strong across the Georges River catchment. Middens, scar trees, engravings, grinding grooves and hand stencils are found throughout the region, providing tangible evidence of longstanding cultural connections. Today, the Georges River catchment is home to one of the largest Aboriginal populations in Australia, with Aboriginal people continuing to care for Country and maintain cultural, spiritual and community connections to the river and its waterways.

# URBANISATION OF THE GEORGES RIVER CATCHMENT

The Georges River has experienced significant changes since European settlement and is expected to see further increases in population and housing in the coming years. European settlement of the area was initially delayed when the location for initial establishment of the colony was moved from Botany Bay to Sydney Cove, owing to a lack of supply of reliable fresh water. But, the colony expanded, initially along rivers around Sydney and European settlement along the Georges River accelerated from the 1830s, almost 200 years ago. The upstream limit of the estuary, the National Trust listed Liverpool Weir, is located approximately 46km from the mouth of the river and was constructed by convict labour 175 years ago to supply water to the growing township of Liverpool. As a result, the estuary now has a clearly delineated upstream limit.

# ENVIRONMENTAL URBANISATION ISSUES

**Deforestation** - Urbanisation replaces bushland with infrastructure to support population growth, resulting in deforestation and an increase in hard, impervious surfaces. This change reduces both the quantity and quality of water entering the Georges River and alters natural hydrological processes.

Deforestation leads to habitat loss and fragmentation, reducing available habitat for native flora and fauna, including iconic species such as koalas. The Georges River catchment contains several Endangered Ecological Communities that require protection and, where possible, restoration and expansion. Extensive hard surfaces also reduce liveability by increasing local temperatures through the urban heat island effect.

**Stormwater – Urban and Industrial Runoff** - The Georges River estuary and its freshwater tributaries receive runoff from an intensively urbanised and industrialised catchment. Controls on industrial discharge of pollutants has improved since the 1970s but the estuary has been a major repository for urban and industrial waste, including metalliferous loadings (e.g. copper, zinc, nickel, lead). Waste dumps and sewerage overflows also continue to contribute to high pollutant loading into the waterways. Water quality within the Georges River estuary was also significantly compromised by direct discharges from the Glenfield Sewage Treatment Plant, which continued up until 1986. Many pollutants, including metals, attach to sediments, which have accumulated within poorly flushed sections of the river across the estuary, including the upstream ends of bays and within deeper dredge holes.

**Water Quality** - From the mouth of the Georges River at Botany Bay to the Como Bridge there is good tidal exchange, therefore pollutants entering the estuary within this reach are comparatively well diluted and dispersed with incoming ocean waters. The degree of tidal exchange then reduces significantly with distance upstream. Although the freshwater inflows are relatively small, the upper reaches of the estuary remain strongly influenced by the catchment inflows. In addition to the natural flushing and dispersion characteristics of the estuary, the water quality of the Georges River and its freshwater tributaries is being impacted by a range of anthropogenic factors. It has been estimated that 95% of the total contaminant load to Georges River and Botany Bay estuary is now derived from stormwater runoff, so our continued focus on stormwater management is considered necessary. With increasing housing demand comes an increase in hard surfaces which will increase stormwater runoff unless stormwater is managed appropriately on site.



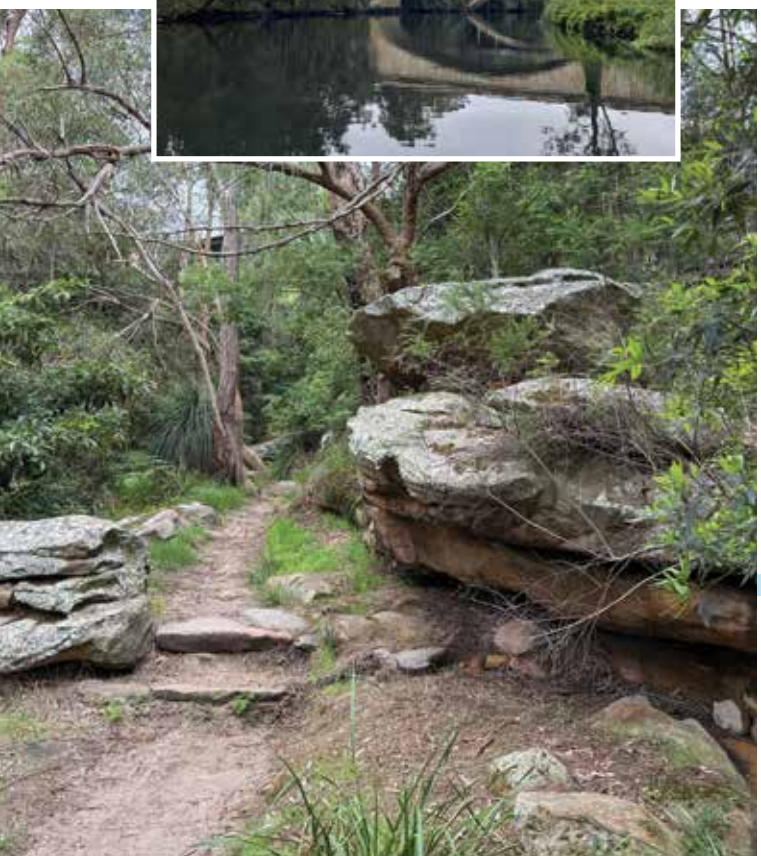


Evidence from the river health monitoring data collected by Georges Riverkeeper shows that water quality is generally Fair to Poor in urbanised freshwater tributaries. We know urbanisation contributes to altered flow regimes including intermittent stormwater flows. This is characterised by huge increases in flow quantity for the duration of rain events followed by low quantities of flow when there is no rain. These high flow rain events are predicted to increase in intensity & number with climate change. Stormwater causes major damage, which can also lead to flooding. Through the Strategic Plan we wish to address stormwater quality and quantity issues and flooding within the Georges River catchment.

**Flooding** - The major floodplain areas of the Georges River are located between Liverpool and East Hills, and along the lower reaches of Cabramatta Creek (Liverpool); Prospect Creek (Fairfield); and along Bow Bowing Creek (Campbelltown). These areas are subject to the most significant flood risks as they are urbanised and located in low-elevated landscapes.

Development over the past 40 years has modified flood risks along the Georges River. Although Councils have been diligent in preventing development on the floodplain, there is continual pressure for rezoning, development just above council's floodplain planning levels, and intensification of existing development through dual occupancies.





**Sandmining and Dredging** - Uncontrolled sand extraction throughout the mid-twentieth century in the upper reaches of the estuary has dramatically changed the river morphology. Implications of this have been dire for the estuary, with reduced tidal flushing, accelerated bank erosion, and water pollution. Meanwhile, sediments in the estuary remain affected from a long history of commercial activities and on-going urban runoff.

**Coal Mining** - Coal mining occurs in the upper Georges River catchment within Campbelltown City Council and Wollondilly Shire Council Local Government Areas. The river health monitoring data shows that whilst mining is associated with localised impacts to the Georges River, the impacts are less severe and far less widespread than the effects of urbanisation.

**Environmental Values** - Despite the considerable historical impacts and stressors, the Georges River has managed to maintain significant environmental value. Large sections of the catchment to the south remain forested, while a diversity of habitats and species can still be found across the catchment, including many Endangered Ecological Communities (EEC). Georges River is home to:

- 454 species of fauna (both aquatic and terrestrial, including several iconic species such as: koalas, platypus, flying-foxes, swamp wallabies, and grey kangaroos. There are also many important fishing species, such as Yellow Fin Bream, Dusky Flathead, Mulloway, Whiting, Mullet, Blue Swimmer Crabs and Mud Crabs.
- 30 riparian vegetation communities
- 29 Endangered Ecological Communities including 23ha of Estuarine Reedlands, 645.9ha of Mangrove Forest, 126ha of Estuarine Saltmarsh and 126ha of Estuarine Swamp Oak Forest
- 318ha of seagrass beds that include Posidonia autralis, which is an Endangered Ecological Population.

**Human Values: Ecosystem Services** - Ecosystems services are the benefits that humans freely obtain from the natural environment. The many and varied benefits are of fundamental importance to human well-being, health, livelihoods, and survival. It is estimated that the Georges River provides over $2 billion of ecosystem services each year.

**Oysters** - A specific ecosystem service that has been lost from the Georges River is commercial oyster production. In 1992, the lower Georges River estuary supported the State's second most productive oyster growing area, with 95 leases that each year produced approximately 18,000 bags of oysters with a market value of over $3.5 million. However, the Georges River oyster industry suffered major losses in the mid-1990s from QX Oyster disease, which attacked Sydney Rock Oysters. In the aftermath of QX disease the Pacific Oyster was introduced as a commercial species but in 2010 Pacific Oyster Mortality Syndrome affected large areas of oyster leases. Today the once thriving oyster industry in the Georges River has disappeared with the last commercial oyster farming ceasing operation in 2023.

**Liveability** - Liveability is the sum of the factors that add up to a community's quality of life, including the built and natural environments, health, economic prosperity, social stability and equity, educational opportunity, and cultural, entertainment and recreation possibilities.

The community values the Georges River primarily for its environmental services, and also its recreational potential. Primary and secondary contact waterway activities are desirable, while the community considers that ecological conditions should be maintained at a high conservation level (recognising that some areas are also moderately to highly disturbed).



# GEORGES RIVERKEEPER OUR ROLE

Georges Riverkeeper is the business name of the Georges River Combined Councils' Committee Incorporated (GRCCC), formed in 1979 by councils with a collective responsibility for the health of the Georges River to work together to improve its environmental condition and ongoing management.

Georges Riverkeeper aims to coordinate natural resource management on a catchment basis to achieve greater efficiencies and effectiveness.

Georges Riverkeeper is an entity registered as an Incorporated Association under the Association's Incorporation Act 2009, and is also a registered charity with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC). Georges Riverkeeper operates as a Not-for-profit organisation with its own Constitution. The Executive group are the officer bearers of the organisation.

# OUR ASPIRATIONAL GOAL

Georges Riverkeepers aspirational goal, which incorporates our vision and mission, is: 'Best practice environmental management for a liveable urban river'.

**Objectives of Georges Riverkeeper are to:**

- Implement the Georges Riverkeeper Strategic Plan in collaboration with our members, partners and stakeholders.



- Liaise with stakeholders throughout the catchment on environmental issues affecting the Georges River.
- Promote the Georges River and its values consistently across the catchment.
- Lobby for environmental improvements along the Georges River and its catchment.
- Encourage all Local Government Councils in the Georges River catchment to recognise their responsibility to contribute to the enhancement of the environmental, recreational and social values of the Georges River.



## **OUR MEMBERS** AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

The Georges Riverkeeper Committee consists of seven Member Councils in the Georges River catchment: Bayside Council, Campbelltown City Council, City of Canterbury Bankstown, Fairfield City Council, Georges River Council, Liverpool City Council and Sutherland Shire Council; and one Financial Partner Sydney Water.

Georges Riverkeeper stakeholders, who may be represented on the Committee, include but are not limited to:

- Corrective Services NSW
- Greater Sydney Local Land Services
- Greater Sydney Landcare Network
- Local Aboriginal Land Councils
- NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the environment and Water
- NSW Department of Education - Environmental Education Centre (Georges River and Botany Bay Kamay)
- National Parks and Wildlife Service
- NSW Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure
- NSW Lands and Water – Crown Lands
- NSW Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development
- NSW Department of Land and Property
- Transport for NSW Roads and Waterways
- NSW State Emergency Service
- Various environmentally focussed community groups and other regional organisations, unity groups and other regional organisations



# **STRATEGIC** PROGRAMS

### Governance

The robust governance structure has contributed to the ongoing stability and success of Georges Riverkeeper, and a review of the Georges Riverkeeper Constitution has recently been completed with no major changes to the structure.

We will continue to engage with Aboriginal Custodian representatives from across the catchment and ensure the organisation remains cognisant of cultural issues and values to support the input of Tradional Ecological Knowledge.

### Strategic Programs

The strategic programs encompass activities that will allow Georges Riverkeeper to work towards meeting the aspirational goal with Member Councils, Financial Partner and other stakeholder organisations.

The five focus areas which underpin our work plans are:

- Operations Management Program (OMP)
- Catchment Actions Program (CAP)
- River Health & Research Program (RHRP)
- Stormwater & Sewage Program (SWP)
- Education & Capacity Building Program (ECBP)

Although these are distinct programs, they are integrated and work together to protect the health of the Georges River.

Each program is further explored below, specifically:

- The challenge
- What has been done by Georges Riverkeeper in the past?
- Our goal for the future
- How will we achieve our goal?

When discussing how the goal will be achieved, the role of Georges Riverkeeper is outlined within each Program. The role of Georges Riverkeeper is defined within the terms of:

- **Leader:** lead on identified actions
- **Facilitator:** facilitate others in implementation of actions
- **Supporter:** support others to implement actions
- **Partner:** work with stakeholders to achieve identified actions
- **Advocate:** Georges Riverkeeper will advocate for the best interests of the Georges River, its catchment and the environment.

There are a few key points that were identified during the development of the strategy as important to include, but did not warrant an individual program and are integrated into each of the five programs:

- Georges Riverkeeper has a role to advocate on behalf of the river
- The governance structure of Georges Riverkeeper, and
- First Nations representation and advice into the programs.

Following this, a Program Logic has been developed for each program with a corresponding monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement plan (MERI). The timeframes for the Program logics are outlined below.

- Aspirational Goal: 20+ years
- Long-Term Goal: 10-20 years
- Intermediate Outcomes: 5-10 years
- Outputs/Activities/Inputs: within 4 years, during the life of the Strategic Plan





# OPERATIONS MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

### The Challenge

Georges Riverkeeper is a small Not-for-profit catchment group that receives funding from Member Councils and a Financial Partner to improve the environmental condition of the river and catchment, and ongoing management.

Georges Riverkeeper maintains its own insurances and organisational policies. Since the abolition of Catchment Management Authorities in NSW in 2013, catchment management has lacked consistent funding, coordination and strategic direction, placing increased pressure on catchment groups to deliver more with fewer resources. A clear, agreed Strategic Plan is therefore essential to define Georges Riverkeeper's role, priorities and activities.

### What has been done by Georges Riverkeeper in the past?

Over the previous planning period, Georges Riverkeeper focused on strengthening governance, partnerships, organisational capacity and environmental advocacy. Key achievements included strengthened governance through charity registration and updated policies; welcoming Sydney Water as a Financial Partner; managing the transition to Liverpool City Council as host; securing a five-year Riverkeeper Centre licence; rebuilding team capacity; and advocating on priority environmental issues such as plastics regulation, koala protection, PFAS, erosion and sediment control, synthetic turf, and coastal and water quality funding.





### Our goals for the future

To be a resilient, innovative and sustainable industry leading Catchment Group.

### How will we achieve our goal?

**Governance:** Georges Riverkeepers decision making process is governed by an Executive Committee and a General Committee, with representatives made up of Councillors, Financial Partner representatives, Council staff, government stakeholders, and community stakeholders.

Georges Riverkeeper must operate in alignment with the Associations Incorporation Act 2009, the ACNC Commission Act 2012, the Australian Maritime Safety Authority Act 1990 associated regulations and orders, as well as our own Constitution and suite of policies and procedures and those of our Host Council where appropriate.

**Advocacy & Lobbying:** Georges Riverkeeper will continue to monitor media and consult with other catchment organisations via the Catchment Collective to inform reactionary and strategic advocacy and lobbying opportunities. Georges Riverkeeper will also utilise existing relationships with Councillor Representatives and build on community engagement efforts to ensure effective advocacy.

**Reporting:** Utilise reporting opportunities to communicate our activities and successes.

**Operational:** There are several organisational-wide or holistic activities conducted by Georges Riverkeeper, including boat access and maintenance, staff training, managing grants and integration into Host Councils.

### The Roles of Georges Riverkeeper in implementing the Operations Management Program

- **Leader:** Georges Riverkeeper will lead the organisation in its management and governance.
- **Supporter:** Georges Riverkeeper will support Member Councils and Financial Partners in their roles in the Executive Group and Committee.
- **Partner:** Georges Riverkeeper will partner with Member Councils, Financial Partners and relevant stakeholders in its role in:
  - advocacy and lobbying
  - access to the Georges Riverkeeper boat, and
  - reporting
- **Advocate:** Georges Riverkeeper will advocate for the best interests of the Georges River, its catchment and the environment.

# PROGRAM LOGIC FOR THE OPERATIONS MANAGEMENT PROGRAM (OMP)

**ASPIRATIONAL GOAL: Best practice environmental management for a liveable urban river**

| | |
|---|---|
| LONG TERM GOAL | To be a resilient, innovative and sustainable industry leading Catchment Group. |
| INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES | To continually identify and implement improvements as required ensuring robust governance, resilience and sustainability as a catchment management organisation. |
| OUTPUTS | Efficient governance and operational management.<br>Evidence-based advocacy and lobbying in line with our policy.<br>Timely reporting: Annual Workplans, Annual Report, Program Reports, State of the Georges River 2030.<br>Review and develop a 10 year Strategic Plan 2030 – 2040 informed by the Georges River Estuary Coastal Management Program.<br>Georges Riverkeeper 50th Anniversary 2029. |
| ACTIVITIES | • Managing Georges Riverkeeper's finances, operations, and working with the Host Council; managing Member and Partner relationships<br>• Build and establish links with First Nations representative and heritage<br>• Secure an operational base by the end of the Liverpool City Council Hosting Agreement in 2028<br>• Conduct reactive and strategic advocacy and lobbying for the Georges River to local, state and federal governments<br>• Reporting<br>• Boat access and maintenance<br>• Staff training<br>• Holistic Grants |
| INPUTS | • Georges Riverkeeper<br>• Committee<br>• Executive Group<br>• Host Council<br>• Member Councils and Financial Partners<br>• National Parks and Wildlife Service<br>• Sponsorship |



# CATCHMENT ACTIONS PROGRAM

## The Challenge

**Litter** - Litter pollution is a significant and ongoing challenge for the Georges River, with wideranging social, environmental and economic impacts. Litter in the catchment and waterways reduces community amenity and enjoyment, harms wildlife and ecosystems, and costs Member Councils more than $10 million each year to collect and dispose of.

Rainfall runoff continually transports litter from urban areas into creeks and the Georges River, where it ultimately flows to Botany Bay and the ocean. Plastics do not biodegrade; instead, they fragment into microplastics that persist in the environment, accumulate in sediments and are ingested by aquatic organisms. These microplastics can then enter the food web, posing longterm risks to ecosystems and human health.

**Biodiversity** - The Georges Rivers waterways support significant biodiversity, including numerous recreationally important fish species and endangered species such as the Macquarie Perch. The river mouth contains some of the last remaining oyster reefs in NSW, while Tonbridge Creek supports Sydney's second most important fish nursery. The catchment also includes the largest area of saltmarsh in the Sydney Basin, extensive seagrass beds, and vital habitat for migratory birds—many of which are threatened or endangered—that roost in fringing vegetation and feed on estuarine mudflats.

Biodiversity in the Georges River faces ongoing threats from invasive species, stormwater runoff, pollution events, recreation pressures, erosion and sedimentation. Addressing these threats and protecting ecological values requires coordinated effort and substantial resources across multiple agencies.





## What has been done by Georges Riverkeeper in the past?

The Catchment Actions Program (CAP) is a cornerstone of Georges Riverkeeper. It delivers onground litter removal across river corridors and tributaries, preventing waste from entering downstream waterways. Building on this, the Program is expanding its focus to include behaviour change initiatives, informed by the Georges River Litter Prevention Strategy and Roadmap. CAP also coordinates grant funded bush regeneration and revegetation projects, aligned with Member Council natural resource management plans.

## Our goal for the future

Protecting and improving the amenity, aesthetics, biodiversity and ecosystems functions of the Georges River is a key goal which can be addressed by the CAP. By committing to improve the amenity, aesthetics and functions of the Georges River, we are placing importance on the liveability of the river.

Specifically, the CAP aims to:

i) Reduce the volume of litter within the river system, and

ii) Restore, expand and protect the biodiversity of the Georges River and its catchment

## How will we achieve our goal?

The strength of Georges Riverkeeper is a holistic catchment approach to natural resource management that fosters regional outcomes. Georges Riverkeeper facilitates proactive waterway management that is adaptive and integrated across other areas of council, rather than being reactive and piecemeal.

## The Roles of Georges Riverkeeper or the Catchment Actions Program

- **Leader:** Georges Riverkeeper will lead a litter prevention approach to the removal of litter from around the waterways of the Georges River catchment.
- **Supporter**: Georges Riverkeeper will support Council biodiversity and bushland management plans and support relevant Council Programs, including Litter Prevention initiatives.
- **Partner**: Georges Riverkeeper will partner with:

  - Corrective Services NSW in the delivery of on-ground litter removal

  - Councils and other relevant stakeholders to implement litter prevention projects

  - Councils and other relevant stakeholders to apply for grant funding to deliver biodiversity works, including bush regeneration projects.
- **Advocate**: Georges Riverkeeper will advocate for issues where the intended outcome is to reduce litter, preserve and protect biodiversity, and improve natural resource management.

# PROGRAM LOGIC FOR THE CATCHMENT ACTIONS PROGRAM (CAP)

**ASPIRATIONAL GOAL: Best practice environmental management for a liveable urban river**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **LONG TERM GOAL** | Protect and restore the aesthetics and biodiversity of the Georges River and its catchment, particularly the riparian zones. | |
| | **LITTER** | **BIODIVERSITY** |
| | Lead a coordinated litter prevention approach to achieve a cleaner catchment.<br>Reduce the volume of litter within the river system. | Restore, expand and protect the natural area ecosystems, native vegetation and biodiversity within the Georges River Catchment. |
| **INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES** | Reduce the volume of litter within the Georges River, tributaries and catchment, by 60% reduction in plastic litter by 2030. | Preserve, expand and protect biodiversity in the catchment.<br>Conserve and improve the condition of fragmented bushland and riparian corridors. |
| **OUTPUTS** | Rubbish removed from the environment.<br>WHS approved worksites by GRK and Corrective Services.<br>Quarterly statistical report on litter removed, to be distributed to Members, Financial Partner, and stakeholders.<br>Targeted behaviour change programs to reduce littering. | Bush rehabilitation, regeneration and revegetation of native ecosystems across the catchment.<br>Projects that seek to protect, promote and monitor the biodiversity of the Georges River and its catchment. |
| **ACTIVITIES** | • Annual WHS approval of litter collection sites<br>• Review of litter collection sites and addition or removal of worksites as required<br>• Continue coordinated and equitable rubbish collection at litter collection sites.<br>• Implement the Georges River Litter Prevention Roadmap<br>• Develop evidence to apply for NSW EPA Streets to Sea grant<br>• Partner with a Member to deliver a Clean Up Australia Day event annually | • Grant driven biodiversity restoration, specifically bush-regeneration projects<br>• Monitoring of endangered migratory shorebirds within Sutherland Shire and Bayside Councils and National Parks estate in collaboration with Greater Sydney Local Land Services (GSLLS) and the Australasian Waders Study Group<br>• Assist councils with priority weed surveillance<br>• Advocate for and implement natural resource management in partnerships<br>• Investigate community partnerships for riparian creek restoration |
| **INPUTS** | • Legislation (state and federal) policy and plans<br>• Council strategies and priorities<br>• Corrective Services NSW<br>• NSW EPA Grants and Tools<br>• Grants and related Steering Committees<br>• Volunteers and community organisations<br>• Stakeholder partnerships (i.e. government organisations, Conservation Volunteers Australia, Local Aboriginal Land Councils, GSLN, GSLLS, NSW EPA Litter Prevention Unit)<br>• Member Councils and Financial Partner<br>• Georges River Estuary Coastal Management Program | |

# RIVER HEALTH & RESEARCH PROGRAM

### The Challenge

Urbanisation continues to place pressure on the Georges River catchment, impacting water quality, habitat, and ecosystem health. Report cards show freshwater systems are generally in fair condition (C+), while the estuary performs better (B to A–), though signs of decline are emerging. Multiple pressures contribute, including stormwater runoff, sedimentation, nutrients, litter, altered hydrology, and contaminants. Urban creeks are typically in poorer condition than bushland areas, and conditions vary with rainfall and flow.

### What has been done by Georges Riverkeeper in the past?

Georges Riverkeeper delivers a long-term, scientifically robust monitoring program assessing freshwater health (water quality, macroinvertebrates, riparian condition) and estuarine health (chlorophyll *a* and turbidity). Consistent, standardised methods enable reliable trend analysis and support biennial Report Cards which inform council planning and investment, strengthen partnerships, and build a valuable long-term dataset.

### Our goal for the future

The program will evolve into an outcomes-driven approach that not only reports on condition but actively informs waterway management. We will continue to maintain high-quality, accessible data while strengthening its translation into practical guidance. The focus will be on identifying priority hotspots, guiding targeted interventions, and investigating key pressures to support evidence-based management.

### How will we achieve our goal?

Georges Riverkeeper will continue delivering a consistent monitoring program while strengthening the application of data to drive on-ground outcomes. Report Card findings will guide investment, restoration, and pollution management. Data accessibility will be improved through streamlined systems and improved visual outputs. Complementary datasets (e.g. litter, land use, stormwater infrastructure) will be integrated to better understand drivers of decline. Partnerships, alongside community and volunteer involvement, will support ongoing data collection and research. This approach will strengthen the program by maintaining monitoring while actively improving river health outcomes.

### The Roles of Georges Riverkeeper for the River Health & Research Program

- **Leader:** Georges Riverkeeper will identify priority knowledge gaps and lead a coordinated monitoring and research agenda, ensuring waterway management is informed by robust, consistent, evidence-based data.
- **Facilitator:** Georges Riverkeeper will translate monitoring and research findings into clear, accessible information to support informed decision-making, policy development, and targeted actions.
- **Supporter:** Georges Riverkeeper will provide technical advice, data, and guidance to support research and on-ground projects, assisting councils, partners and the community to prioritise actions and resources effectively.
- **Partner:** Georges Riverkeeper will collaborate with councils, universities, and agencies to co-design and deliver projects that address priority issues and strengthen a coordinated, catchment-wide approach.
- **Advocate:** Georges Riverkeeper will use data and research to advocate for evidence-based policies, investment, and actions that improve river health and liveability.





# PROGRAM LOGIC FOR THE RIVER HEALTH & RESEARCH PROGRAM (RHRP)

**ASPIRATIONAL GOAL: Best practice environmental management for a liveable urban river**

| | |
|---|---|
| LONG TERM GOAL | Act as a secure custodian of Georges River catchment environmental data.<br>Drive research to increase the evidence base required to support best practice waterway and catchment management.<br>Be recognised as a leading urban waterway monitoring program that informs decision-making and delivers measurable outcomes. |
| INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES | Provide high-quality data that directly informs urban waterway management, planning, and investment.<br>Identify priority knowledge gaps and guide targeted research to address key pressures in the catchment.<br>Strengthen partnerships that link science, policy, and on-ground management to support coordinated and evidence-based action. |
| OUTPUTS | Produce River Health grades and reporting outputs, including the 2026 and 2028 Report Cards and the 2030 State of the River Report.<br>Evidence-based research communicated through conferences, technical reports and stakeholder engagement.<br>RARC (Rapid Assessment of Riparian Condition) data to support catchment planning, restoration prioritisation, and management decisions.<br>AUSMAP Microplastic Summary Report Georges River catchment for 2026, 2027, 2028 and 2029. |
| ACTIVITIES | Undertake seasonal freshwater monitoring in Spring and Autumn, alongside regular estuary monitoring.<br>Undertake annual AUSMAP microplastics monitoring.<br>Undertake reactive water quality monitoring in response to incidents, spills, and environmental events.<br>Conduct RARC surveys to inform restoration priorities and improve data use.<br>Investigate and trial complementary monitoring approaches, such as e-DNA.<br>Support university partnerships and student internships to build research capacity and investigate priority issues.<br>Align monitoring outputs with strategic frameworks, including the Coastal Management Program and complementary datasets to inform targeted water quality management. |
| INPUTS | Long-term baseline dataset dating back to 2009.<br>Council strategies, waterway management plans, and planning frameworks.<br>Clean Water Taskforce.<br>Legislation and policies (local, state and federal)<br>Georges River Estuary Coastal Management Program.<br>Stakeholder datasets and partner contributions.<br>River Health Working Group.<br>Data management systems (e.g. Ecoserver).<br>University partnerships and research projects. |

# STORMWATER & SEWAGE PROGRAM

### The Challenge

Urbanisation is the dominant land use influencing waterway condition across the Georges River catchment. Stormwater from urban areas is a major source of diffuse pollution, including sediment, litter and plastics, pesticides and other contaminants collected from roads, rooftops and hard surfaces. Sewage systems also contribute point source pollution, with nutrient and pathogen loads entering waterways during wet weather overflows or dry weather system failures.

Research shows increasing urban imperviousness is strongly linked to ecological degradation in the Georges River, with traditional stormwater systems altering flow regimes, transporting pollutants and triggering sewer overflows through illegal or cross connections. As one of Greater Sydney's fastest growing regions, coordinated action is essential to improve stormwater and sewage management and protect the health of our creeks and the river.

### What has been done by Georges Riverkeeper in the past?




In earlier Strategic Plans, Georges Riverkeeper focused primarily on stormwater management. With Sydney Water now a Financial Partner, workplans expanded to also address sewage impacts across the Georges River catchment.



Key achievements have included sharing best practice guidance on stormwater management, sewage overflows and Water Sensitive Urban Design; delivering regular *Get the Site Right* campaigns; contributing to floodplain investigations; and integrating stormwater outcomes across projects, including the *Zero Litter in the Georges River* initiative focused on Gross Pollutant Traps. Further work sharing best practice guidance on stormwater management will continue with the newly established Clean Water Taskforce.

### Our goal for the future

Stormwater and sewerage infrastructure is the shared responsibility of individual councils or Sydney Water and other State Government agencies. Georges Riverkeeper's goal is to collaborate with Members and lead the development of consistent policy and controls to increase strategic WSUD uptake and compliance in Members' on-ground works and private WSUD across the catchment, to improve the stormwater quality entering the Georges River and its tributaries.

### How will we achieve our goal?

Georges Riverkeeper will remain an active leader within the stormwater sector, supporting members and stakeholders to understand and implement best practice management standards that contribute to a healthy and liveable urban river. Delivery of the Georges River Estuary Coastal Management Program, alongside the collaborative Clean Water Taskforce, will be a key focus of this Strategic Plan period and central to achieving this goal.

### The Role of Georges Riverkeeper for the Stormwater & Sewage Program

- **Leader:** Georges Riverkeeper will continue to influence best practice waterway management regarding diffuse and point source pollution..
- **Facilitator:** Georges Riverkeeper will facilitate Member collaboration and the coordination of any grants for stormwater when available.
- **Supporter:** Georges Riverkeeper will support Members in implementing best practice stormwater and sewage management to ensure that sustainable urban water management is embedded into development and Member activities and share lessons learnt.
- **Partner:** Georges Riverkeeper, Sydney Water and Member Councils will communicate and work together to deliver best practice stormwater and sewage management.
- **Advocate:** Georges Riverkeeper will advocate for the river in stormwater and sewage issues, to inform planning regulation and trial new technologies for water quality and catchment improvements.

# PROGRAM LOGIC FOR THE STORMWATER & SEWAGE PROGRAM (SSP)

**ASPIRATIONAL GOAL: Best practice environmental management for a liveable urban river**

| | |
|---|---|
| LONG TERM GOAL | Contribute to State and National Stormwater policy.<br>Improve stormwater management towards regulatory and best practice management standards to improve the quality and quantity entering the Georges River and its tributaries.<br>Improved water quality from fewer diffuse and point source inputs by maintaining or improving compliance of WSUD and dry weather overflows and improve Sydney Water's response to incidents. |
| INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES | Lead the development of consistent policy and controls to increase strategic WSUD uptake and compliance in Members' on-ground works and private WSUD across the catchment.<br>Protect and increase the potential for swimming and recreational sites in the Georges River catchment. |
| OUTPUTS | Collaborate and advocate with Member Councils, Sydney Water and State and Federal agencies for implementation of best practice management of stormwater, sewage, flood, catchment and coastal management.<br>Develop the Georges River Estuary Coastal Management Program (GRECMP).<br>Reduction in the risk and impact of wet weather overflows and improved communication and response to dry weather overflows and a reduction in their frequency.<br>Incorporate community values and risk assessment process conducted in GRECMP development to set priorities around recreation and determine risks for integration into infrastructure planning. |
| ACTIVITIES | • Development of the Georges River Estuary Coastal Management Program<br>• Continue collaboration with Member Councils and state agencies on regional projects such as the 'Get the Site Right' and Georges River Floodplain Sub-Committee<br>• Engaging with Sydney Water for updates on plant upgrades, and other operational works relevant to waterway health<br>• Use and strengthen modelling to track diffuse pollutants through the catchment and guide effective management responses<br>• Work with the Clean Water Taskforce, Member Councils, Sydney Water and other stakeholders to develop a consistent approach to the installation, maintenance and reporting of stormwater and Water Sensitive Urban Design infrastructure<br>• Apply River Health findings to assess the performance of Stormwater Quality Improvement Devices (SQIDs) and WSUD assets, and identify opportunities for optimisation, maintenance, and targeted actions to improve water quality with the Clean Water Taskforce |
| INPUTS | • Sydney Water<br>• Council strategies and policies<br>• Clean Water Taskforce<br>• Botany Bay Water Quality Improvement Plan<br>• Georges River Estuary Coastal Management Program<br>• Stormwater NSW<br>• River Health Research Program data – driving evidence-based activities<br>• Botany Bay integrated catchment and waterway model<br>• Sydney Water data<br>• Community values surveys |

# EDUCATION & CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAM

**The Challenge**

To achieve best practice environmental management, Georges Riverkeeper must engage a diverse and growing catchment community with varying levels of water literacy, cultural perspectives, and connection to waterways.

While previous programs have successfully built awareness, key challenges remain: Perceived low water literacy across parts of the community, particularly among newly arrived and culturally diverse populations; A gap between awareness and action, where many people value waterways but lack clear, practical ways to contribute; Limited direct experience of waterways, reducing personal connection and stewardship; Increasing complexity of urban pressures (e.g. growth, heat, impervious surfaces) requiring more sophisticated understanding among both the community and decision-makers; A need to strengthen internal Council capability and cross-disciplinary collaboration.

To address these challenges, education needs to evolve from information delivery to place-based, value-driven, and action-oriented engagement, while also strengthening capacity across Member Councils.

**What has been done by Georges Riverkeeper in the past?**

The Education & Capacity Building Program has established a strong foundation during the 2022-2026 period, including:

- Achieving substantial audience reach through ongoing communications including the Georges Riverkeeper website, e-news, social media, media coverage and key organisational publications.
- Activating volunteers for clean ups, removing significant amounts of pollution; and engaging the community at multiple community and council events such as stalls and presentations, walks and talks.



- Supporting the education of primary school students through new curriculum aligned resources and partnerships with Environmental Education Centres.

Building on this, the next phase will further expand reach, deepen engagement, and strengthen pathways from awareness to action.

**Our goal for the future**

To foster a deeply connected, water literate community and a highly capable network of Councils and partners who can collaboratively deliver best practice urban waterway management.

**How will we achieve our goal?**

The aim of this program is to be focused on four main audiences: our catchment community, students, Member Council staff, and Councillors.

Community: Expand audiences, focus on place-based engagement, develop a community vision for the Georges River catchment, use value-based messaging and provide clear actions people can take to reduce impacts.

Students: Continue to collaborate with partners to update, develop and deliver primary school resources and expand resources for high schools.

Member Council staff: Use forums such as the Clean Water Taskforce to share tools, case studies and lessons learned. Facilitate cross disciplinary knowledge sharing within Councils.

Councillors: Provide practical tools to improve dissemination of key information and success of initiatives.

**The Roles of Georges Riverkeeper for the Education & Capacity Building Program**

- **Leader:** Georges Riverkeeper will lead the development of materials and methods to educate a range of audiences about values, challenges and actions for healthy waterways in the Georges River catchment.
- **Facilitator:** Georges Riverkeeper will enable community engagement and cross-Council knowledge sharing.
- **Supporter:** Georges Riverkeeper will support opportunities for people to experience the river and natural environment and to appreciate, understand and connect with the river.
- **Partner:** Georges Riverkeeper will partner with Member Councils to engage the community, and with stakeholders and environmental educators to increase inter-generational awareness of the values of waterways across the Georges River catchment.
- **Advocate:** Georges Riverkeeper will promote the intrinsic value of waterways and advocate for a liveable urban river.

# EDUCATION & CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAM (ECBP)

**ASPIRATIONAL GOAL: Best practice environmental management for a liveable urban river**

| | |
|---|---|
| LONG TERM GOAL | Deep, intergenerational connection to waterways.<br>A water-literate community that actively contributes to waterway health.<br>Strong cross-sector collaboration supporting best practice management. |
| INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES | Improved community water literacy and connection to place.<br>Clear, practical action pathways result in behaviour change.<br>Expanded participation across diverse communities.<br>Students (primary to tertiary) understand both values and pressures on waterways.<br>Increased capability across Council staff and informed decision-making by Councillors.<br>Community co-designed engagement approaches embedded in practice.<br>Exploration of the intrinsic value and rights of waterways. |
| OUTPUTS | A Community Vision for the Georges River.<br>Communications promoting Georges Riverkeeper programs.<br>Experiential engagements and events.<br>School education modules and resources.<br>Capacity-building collaborations, forums and tools. |
| ACTIVITIES | • Stakeholder Engagement for the Georges River Estuary Coastal Management Program<br>• Maintain and evolve digital platforms and produce targeted communications<br>• Seek and support opportunities for place-based groups to connect with the river in ways that reflect diverse interests<br>• Expand and promote education programs for schools<br>• Collaborations, forums and tools to promote best practice, facilitate knowledge sharing and partnerships<br>• Explore the concept of recognising the river as an entity with its own rights |
| INPUTS | • Georges Riverkeeper Programs and Strategic Plan<br>• Georges Riverkeeper Communication Framework<br>• Partnerships (eg. Sydney Water, Member Councils, Stakeholders, Environmental Education Centres and schools, placed-based community networks and groups)<br>• Grants and funding opportunities<br>• AUSMAP and other relevant data (environmental and socio-economic) |






Georges Riverkeeper wishes to thank everyone who was involved in

Sydney WATER

Bayside Council
Serving Our Community

SUTHERLAND SHIRE COUNCIL

FairfieldCity
Celebrating diversity



developing the Strategic Plan, particularly the Council staff involved.

GEORGES RIVER COUNCIL

CAMPBELLTOWN

CANTERBURY BANKSTOWN

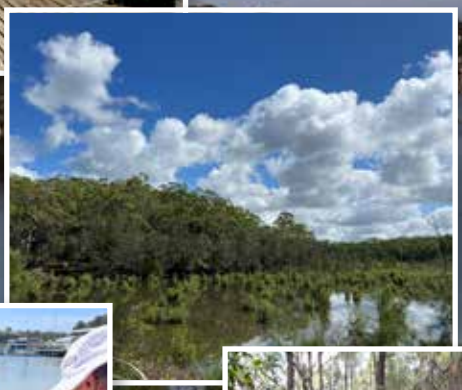
LIVERPOOL CITY COUNCIL

# STRATEGIC PLAN 2026-2030













Georges Riverkeeper

www.georgesriver.org.au