

Hawkesbury-Nepean River System Coastal Management Program (CMP): Executive Summary

[Our river, our shared future](#)

The Hawkesbury–Nepean River System is much more than a waterway.

It is where people swim, fish, paddle, farm, gather, and reflect. It is a place of deep cultural meaning for Aboriginal peoples, a foundation for local communities and economies, and one of NSW most iconic natural systems.

From Broken Bay to Yarramundi, and across connected waterways such as Pittwater and Brisbane Water, the river links coastal communities, rural landscapes, and growing urban areas. What happens upstream affects what happens downstream - and ultimately affects everyone who relies on the river.

But the river system is under increasing pressure. Population growth, expanding urban development, coastal hazards, and the accelerating impacts of climate change are placing strain on water quality, ecosystems, access, and safety. Many of the issues people experience today – coastal erosion, algal blooms, declining habitat, and conflict between waterway uses - are expected to increase if we don't act together.

In response to this challenge, the 6 local councils adjoining the tidal waterways of the Hawkesbury-Nepean River System (HNRS) have joined together in an unprecedented partnership to this Coastal Management Program (CMP): a long term, coordinated plan to care for the Hawkesbury–Nepean River System now and into the future.

[What is this CMP?](#)

The HNRS CMP sets out a shared 10 year plan for how councils, government agencies, and communities will work together to protect and improve the river system.

Prepared under the [Coastal Management Act 2016](#), the CMP provides a clear framework for action - from on ground works and habitat restoration, to planning, monitoring, education and collaboration.

Just as importantly, this CMP reflects what communities have told us matters most: healthy waterways, respect for cultural heritage, safe access for recreation, resilience to hazards, and better coordination across councils and agencies

[Where does the CMP apply?](#)

The CMP covers the tidal waterways of the HNRS. This includes:

- The river from Broken Bay at the coast
- More than 145 km upstream to Yarramundi (the tidal limit)
- Connected waterways such as Pittwater and Brisbane Water
- Estuarine shorelines, wetlands, and foreshore areas within the NSW coastal zone

While the CMP formally applies to the coastal zone defined under NSW legislation, it takes a whole of river perspective, recognising that activity across the broader catchment strongly influences the health of the estuary and coast.

The Vision for the HNRS

This CMP is guided by a simple but powerful vision - one that reflects both community aspirations and long term stewardship:

To preserve and enhance the environmental, social and economic values of the Hawkesbury-Nepean River system and its catchment for current and future generations, and ensure its status as one of Australia's premier river systems.

This vision recognises that caring for the river is not only about environmental protection, but also about safeguarding culture, community wellbeing, livelihoods, and future opportunity.

What the plan aims to achieve

At its heart, the CMP focuses on outcomes people can see, feel, and benefit from over time. The key goals of the program are to:



Improve and maintain water quality - so the river is safer for swimming, fishing, and aquatic life



Reduce risks from coastal hazards - such as erosion, inundation, and climate change impacts



Protect and restore ecosystems - including wetlands, mangroves, seagrass and riparian areas



Improve recreational access and amenity - supporting recreation, tourism, and connection to place



Recognise and protect cultural heritage - particularly Aboriginal cultural connections to Country



Strengthen river governance - so councils and state agencies work together more consistently and effectively

Understanding the challenges

The issues facing the river don't occur in isolation. Changes across the catchment, increasing pressure from development and recreation, and the way the system is managed all interact, often compounding impacts over time.

Climate change is intensifying these pressures, with sea level rise, more extreme weather, and altered flows expected to affect low lying communities, ecosystems, and infrastructure.

This CMP responds by taking a long term, system wide approach, rather than treating issues reach by reach or council by council.

Shaped by community and cultural knowledge

This CMP has been informed by one of the most extensive community and stakeholder engagement programs undertaken for a Coastal Management Program in NSW. Input has been gathered from:

- Local communities and waterway users
- Aboriginal knowledge holders and First Nations groups
- Six partner councils and 18 upstream catchment councils
- State government agencies and technical experts

Community stories, lived experience, cultural knowledge, and technical science have all helped shape the actions in this program. Many of the images throughout the CMP were generously shared by community members - a reminder that the river is not just a system to be managed, but a place people care deeply about.

Development of the CMP

This CMP is more than a policy document. It sets out a practical and deliverable program of action to guide coordinated management of the river system over the next 10 years. The program includes:

- 9 overarching strategies that guide decision making
- 8 implementation plans, covering collaborative actions and local council delivery
- 141 management actions within the certifiable CMP
- An additional Catchment Companion, supporting actions beyond the coastal zone

Actions range from on ground works and monitoring to planning improvements, education, and partnerships. Some will be delivered quickly; others will roll out over time as funding, coordination and opportunities allow.

For each action in the CMP, the CMP sets out:



Key tasks involved



Costs for implementation



Roles and responsibilities for delivery



Timeframes for delivery

Together, these actions provide a clear roadmap for turning strategy into meaningful on-ground outcomes

Why this matters

Looking after the Hawkesbury–Nepean River System is about protecting what people value today, while making sure future generations can enjoy the river in the same - or better - condition.

By working together across councils, agencies and communities, this CMP provides a clear pathway to a healthier, more resilient river system - one that continues to support culture, nature, recreation, and livelihoods long into the future.

What happens next?

The CMP is a living document. As conditions change, new knowledge emerges, and community priorities evolve, the program will be reviewed and updated.

The next 10 years are critical. This CMP provides the shared direction, but its success depends on ongoing collaboration, stewardship, and community involvement.

This is our river - and this plan is about caring for it together.