

8.1. MM01: 25th Anniversary of a remarkable Bushcare/Landcare partnership - Building Bridges to Booroowa

Early last Friday morning, 27 bushcare volunteers, six Council staff members from the Bushcare team, and four councillors set off on a really special annual pilgrimage to Booroowa.

That afternoon, 1,200 trees were planted at Hawk Hill. At dusk, after the planting was completed, we stood on a hilltop on the property and looked out over a landscape of thousands of mature trees that have been planted by North Sydney Council Bushcare volunteers and staff in partnership with the Booroowa Landcare Group over the last quarter century.

Before returning to Sydney yesterday, the group planted 4,000 trees over two properties.

The Building Bridges to Booroowa programme began 25 years ago, partly in response to the shrinking habitat of the Superb Parrot. It has been a remarkable partnership between rural and metropolitan councils.

Through drought, flood, freezing weather, bushfires, and a global pandemic, the Building Bridges to Booroowa project has endured. Over the years, hundreds of volunteers have planted more than 72,000 local native plants across 45 properties. This work has made a tangible contribution to the local environment – landscape-scale change. Green connections are forming across the land, improving biodiversity outcomes, and addressing issues of salinity, erosion, stock exposure, and weed competition.

More importantly, the project has touched the lives of the hundreds of people who have been involved over the years. Deep connections have been forged between the North Sydney and Booroowa communities. For those of us from North Sydney, the partnership has opened our eyes to the challenges and the joys of rural life. Longtime participants have shared that through first-hand experience, they have improved their understanding of the environmental hurdles faced by our rural partners. Long time friendships have been fostered while working in the paddocks in rain, wind, or sleet; or over dinner and drinks at the end of the day. Relationships have developed over the years between the organisers, volunteers, landholders, and the wider Booroowa community. The project has led to the rediscovery of past connections, reciprocal visits between Sydney and Booroowa unrelated to the annual planting weekend, and even marriage proposals.

Every volunteer knows how rewarding it is to see corridors of native trees and bushes across the district out of the bus windows travelling between work sites – the results of their work planting from previous years. There is, too, an enormous satisfaction not only in the “instant gratification” hit of looking back at hundreds of tree guards in place at the end of the day, but also in the teamwork required to plant the trees. The first half hour on the first afternoon is a little clunky but within an hour everyone finds their place and a productive rhythm develops.

Council has funded a bird survey of sites that have been planted through the project as a follow-up to a 2014 survey, which found that some of the more mature planted sites had become havens for local animals.

Through Council's Environmental Sustainability Strategy 2030, we are committed to not just promoting environmental rehabilitation and sustainability, but also engaging our community in this work. North Sydney residents have a long history of working together towards positive outcomes for the environment. There is no better example of this than the grassroots community work of the Building Bridges to Boorowa project.

On Saturday night, North Sydney Council, Hilltops Council. and Booroowa Landcare signed a Memorandum of Understanding committing to work together for another five years.

I therefore recommend:

- 1. THAT** Council acknowledge the longevity and endurance of the extraordinary partnership with Hilltops Council and Booroowa Landcare Group.
- 2. THAT** Council thank and acknowledge the passion, commitment and hard work of the North Sydney Bushcare volunteers, the participating property owner, Hilltops Council (and its predecessor, Booroowa Shire Council), Booroowa Landcare Group Council members, co-ordinators, and volunteers both past and present.
- 3. THAT** Council extend acknowledgement and appreciation to the entire North Sydney Bushcare team for their dedication, patience, unfailing generosity, knowledge and experience.

COUNCILLOR ZOË BAKER
MAYOR