

WEEDER'S DIGEST

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF HRCC

Welcome!

Welcome to the Spring edition of Hawkesbury River County Council's quarterly newsletter, showcasing our recent activity and some of our stand-out moments.

Putting the spotlight on our recent achievements, we show you the tools in our arsenal to beat priority weeds and report on recent Landcare events for local youth, made possible by funding from Western Sydney Primary Health Network. Meanwhile, our Biosecurity team has been on the ground conducting crucial inspections across Western Sydney to battle the never-ending war on weeds.

In this issue, we also unpack how County Councils work - looking at the value unlocked by this innovative shared resource model that has been unique to Australia's local government system for over 75 years. We hope you enjoy this month's edition, and we welcome any feedback you might have!



Chris Dewhurst
General Manager

*Established in 1948, HRCC is the
Local Control Authority for
priority and invasive weeds
under the NSW Biosecurity Act
2015.*

In this issue:

- »»» Spotlight on Q4
- »»» What is a County Council?
- »»» Landcare Update
- »»» Biosecurity Bulletin
- »»» Five Minutes with: Chris Dewhurst
- »»» Weed Watch: Water Buttons
- »»» Weed Wisdom: Boneseed

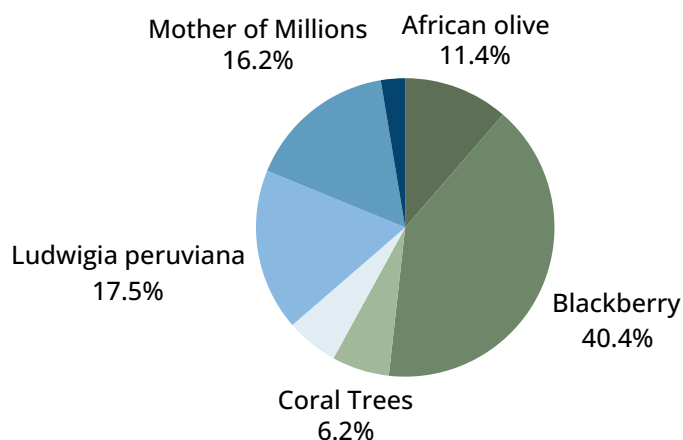
Join us on 

To subscribe to our newsletter or send us feedback, email us at council@hrcc.nsw.gov.au

SPOTLIGHT ON Q4

Spring has sprung and the weather is getting warmer, creating perfect conditions for weeds to spread.

Boneseed season has come early due to warmer-than-normal conditions, and HRCC weed control staff are on the lookout for emerging plants. We're commencing this season's work after removing a whopping 170 plants between October 2023 and April 2024. Mature Boneseed plants can drop thousands of fast-growing seeds around this time of year, so treating them early is essential. HRCC staff were also on the lookout for African olive, blackberry, coral trees, lantana, Ludwigia peruviana, Mother of Millions and Salvinia.



Control of terrestrial weeds April - June 2024	
Total Hectares Covered	5.38
Total Hours	304

Control of aquatic weeds April - June 2024	
Total Hectares Covered	185.33
Total Hours	114

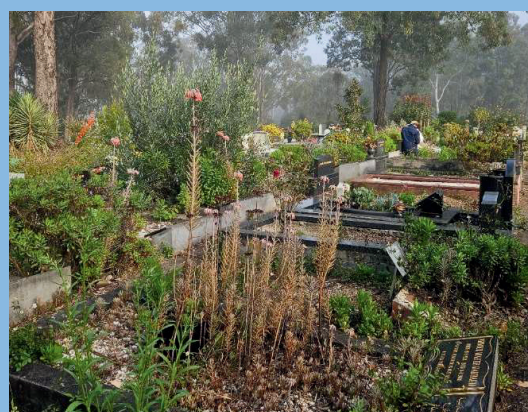
Blackberry has been a big focus for the team, with its prickly thickets and edible berries providing a haven for vermin. Blackberry bushes accounted for 40% of our weed management activity last quarter, with staff using high-volume herbicide spraying to ensure the shrubs don't spread out of control.

➤➤➤ FIGHTING THE WAR ON WEEDS

There are a number of tools in our kit when it comes to battling weeds. Sometimes we hand-remove herbaceous weeds, as we did with Mother of Millions at Riverstone Cemetery last quarter. But this isn't the only method we use.

To kill invasive trees, we use the **basal bark** method, spraying a mix of herbicide and diesel onto their trunks. The diesel allows the herbicide to penetrate the inner layers of the trunk. For smaller trees and plants with woody stems, a small section of the plant is cut out and herbicide is applied, known as the **cut and paint** method.

Some aquatic and terrestrial weeds sit close to native vegetation, so we use a **pump pack**. This is also known as a 'backpack sprayer' and applies herbicide on small, targeted patches using a nozzle. To treat larger, hard-to-reach areas, we might use a **spray unit** – a motorised unit that is attached to a vehicle and can spray up to 600 litres of herbicide.



Mother of Millions at Riverside Cemetery.

WHAT IS A COUNTY COUNCIL?

HRCC is a bit different to your local Council in the Hills, Hawkesbury, Blacktown or Penrith LGAs. Here we unpack how we function, and why the County Council model is a highly effective way to deliver our crucial weed management work.

What is a County Council and how does it work?

It's a group of Councils sharing one or more services across a larger area – in our case, weed management. They've existed in Australia since the late 19th century, and many still operate effectively today. County Councils operate under the same laws as all local government in NSW - each employs a General Manager and has a governing body or 'Board', made up of 'county councillors', elected by their respective member Councils.

Why use the County Council model?

Priority weeds are estimated to cost the State over \$1.9 billion a year because of their risk to our environment, health and primary industries. In many cases, it's more cost-effective and strategic to service a wider community instead of a single Council area - especially when it comes to weed management. The County Council model enables us to conduct important weed management without being restricted by Council borders. It also means that our staff can dedicate the majority of their workday to treating priority weeds, without needing to take on the broader functions of other Councils.

How cost-effective is a County Council?

Most Councils tackle weeds within certain assets like parks and reserves. Instead, HRCC covers entire landscapes and handles weeds depending on priority, using our resources much more efficiently. Almost all our staff are operational, with no middle management. Over time, these things greatly reduce weed management costs for everyone in the County Council area.

Our average budget is \$1.3 million annually, with 12 staff currently employed - equating to around one dollar per year, per ratepayer.

	HRCC	Hawkesbury City Council	Penrith City Council	Blacktown City Council	Hills Shire Council
Average annual employee cost	\$71,000	\$86,000	\$123,000	\$173,704	\$100,000
Annual mayor/councillor fees	\$68,000	\$398,000	\$673,000	\$1,030,000	\$690,000
Per capita annual cost to resident	\$1.34	\$1,319	\$1,021	\$857	\$713

Source: Audited Annual Financial Statements, 2022-23

If other Councils were to do our work, it would cost them at least double, and many Councils will also spend additional money on weeds management - potentially raising the cost even more! The County Council model ensures that we can keep doing the same crucial work we've been doing since 1948: eliminating weeds, protecting biodiversity, preventing economic loss and creating healthier bushland for Western Sydney.

LANDCARE UPDATE



HRCC's Local Landcare Coordinator (LLC), Monique Bailey, facilitated numerous events for the community last quarter.

These events were made possible thanks to funding from Western Sydney Primary Health Network and ranged from bush crafts and storytelling through to possum-spotting and bug-hunting.

➤➤➤ CONNECTING OUTDOORS WITH LORIEN NOVALIS STEINER SCHOOL



Students wearing their very own natural crowns.

Students at Lorien Novalis Steiner School in Dural enjoyed a series of four nature-based events from April to June. These events helped students gain skills, acquainted them with Landcare, and immersed them in the natural environment.

The first workshop, "Connecting with the Land for Wellbeing", involved bushwalking, storytelling, nature craft, free play and sensory activities for both children and their parents. The second, "Knowledge and Know-How in the Bush", involved kids picking local bush tucker from the school grounds, learning how to make a friction fire, and listening to a didgeridoo performance.

Monique then facilitated two more workshops - "Taste of Bush School" and "Night Walk in the Lorien Forest" - with activities including yoga, bushcraft, a night walk, and stories by the campfire.

These events were a great way to get students and their families engaged with Landcare, and were attended by close to 30 people. They're now scheduled to happen more regularly due to their success amongst students, teachers and parents alike.



Free play and exploration in the bush.

Bilpin workshop - Tickets available now!

Landcare NSW and the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust are working together to support private land conservation across the State. As part of this effort, the Hawkesbury-Nepean Landcare Network is holding an interactive workshop - **and you're invited!**

'Private Land Conservation Matters!' is a plant identification, seed collection and germination workshop which will be held in Bilpin on **Saturday, October 19th** at a registered Land for Wildlife property. Running from **10am - 2:30pm**, attendees will learn to identify weeds and native plants while collecting and nurturing native seeds.

Visit tinyurl.com/plcmbilpin to register - we'd love to see you there!

LANDCARE UPDATE

>>> TOGETHER IN NATURE WITH THE 1ST KINGS LANGLEY SCOUTS

LLC Monique also facilitated “Nocturnal Spotlight Night” with the 1st Kings Langley Joey Scouts - a group of 13 young nature lovers aged five to eight years old. She organised for Tom Covell, an expert from Hooked on Nature, to take the Joeys and their families on an after-hours bush expedition.

During their walk, the Joeys were given special red torches to spot possums, as well as nets to catch and examine insects. Meanwhile, Tom taught them about the importance of biodiversity, sharing achievable things they can do to protect our environment and even nabbing a few bugs himself. The night was met with enthusiastic feedback from the Joeys.

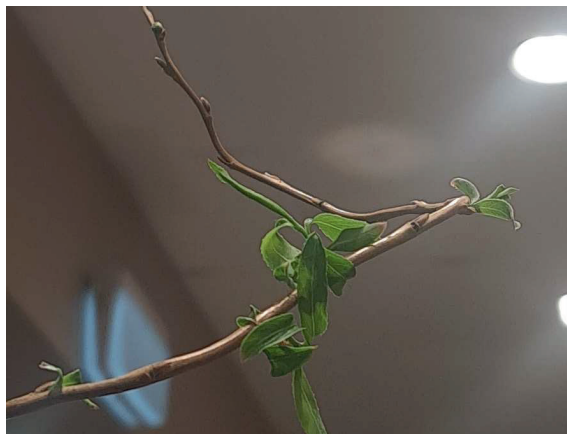
“It was great! I rate it 5 stars. I liked using the nets to catch the bugs in the bushes and looking at them. The possums Tom showed us were very cool, but the spider in Tom’s hat was the coolest,” said Teddy, Joey Scout.



Tom and the Joeys.

BIOSECURITY BULLETIN

>>> WILLOW



The Willow sample.

The Biosecurity team recently discovered a live Willow (*Salix spp.*) sample at a well-known grocery retailer.

Many species of Willow are prohibited from sale in NSW. Some can be sold if treated correctly but can otherwise grow into large trees – digging their roots into wet areas like dams, creek lines and lagoons. The Black Willow (*Salix nigra*) in particular is considered a Weed of National Significance and favours the wetland conditions of the Hawkesbury-Nepean region, making it a key target for eradication. The Willow was swiftly seized, and the retailer was educated about the plant’s potential risks.

>>> MEETING WITH THE MACQUARIE TOWNS GARDEN CLUB

More recently, HRCC’s Biosecurity Team Leader presented to the Macquarie Towns Garden Club at Windsor Library. Members of the Club regularly convene to share their love for gardening and had reached out to HRCC to organise an information session on priority weeds.

On September 5th, equipped with a PowerPoint presentation and identification booklets, Team Leader Toby Walker showed Club members which weeds to watch out for - and how to safely remove any specimens that are found.

FIVE MINUTES WITH: CHRIS DEWHURST

Chris Dewhurst has been HRCC's General Manager since 2010 and is a lifelong lover of all things nature. Having worked in local government for over 25 years, he leads the HRCC team with a wealth of knowledge and passion for natural resource management.

1. WHAT BROUGHT YOU INTO WEED MANAGEMENT?

I've always been interested in the natural environment. I fell in love with plants when I was in high school, so naturally when I entered University I studied a Bachelor of Science specialising in Horticulture, and went on to do bush regeneration afterwards.

My work in local government started in 1997 when I joined Blue Mountains City Council as a Bushcare Team Leader, and then a Bushland Operations Coordinator. Eventually, I moved into management, and that's when I joined HRCC. That was in 2010, and I've been here ever since.

2. WHAT DOES AN AVERAGE DAY LOOK LIKE FOR YOU?

I primarily focus on staff management - developing strategy for the organisation and teams, reviewing results, writing reports and ensuring that we meet our statutory obligations. I also stay up to date with the broader weeds sector and any updates from our member Councils.

Because we're working in the natural environment, we often battle different weather events, sometimes funding issues, even issues with our equipment – and then we also have to respond to requests from the community and our member Councils. A fair portion of my day involves managing those variables!

3. FAVOURITE ASPECT OF YOUR JOB?

My favourite aspect has to be working with my team. I have so much respect for my staff because they're all experts and leaders in their own right, and you can tell that the team really care about what they do. I always look forward to coming to work because of that.



Chris Dewhurst and the HRCC team.

4. WHAT'S THE MOST CHALLENGING ASPECT OF BEING HRCC'S GM?

I'm responsible for the governance of HRCC, which can be a double-edged sword.

I'm passionate about my work and leading my team, but being GM can be stressful because we're answerable to a lot of people, including member Councils, State government and the broader community. Outside of that, I think the biggest challenge in being a GM is managing external change. There are always things outside of our control that can impact how we operate, and I have to make a judgement as to how we respond.

FIVE MINUTES WITH: CHRIS DEWHURST

5. WHAT'S A COMMON MISCONCEPTION ABOUT YOUR JOB?

A lot of people tend to think that managers get paid more to do less work! It might seem that way because I'm not 'on the ground'. In reality, most of my work is done in the office and behind the scenes – planning, staffing, overseeing our statutory requirements, preparing for Council meetings and liaising with our Board. While I'm definitely involved in my team's work, I ultimately want to empower them to do their jobs effectively and independently. At an operations level, if things are going smoothly without my input, it means I've done *my* job well!

6. WHAT'S THE KEY TO SUCCESS IN MANAGING A COUNTY COUNCIL?

I think the key is to maintain an absolute focus on results. Our work on the ground is crucial and our focus always needs to come back to that. Relationships are also essential - we're a small team that's up against an infinite problem, and the only way we can be effective in the fight against weeds is to expand our influence. On a personal level, this starts with me developing strong working relationships with my staff. At an organisational level, it involves building ongoing relationships with landholders and community groups, such as Landcare.

WEED WATCH

>>> WATER BUTTONS

Water Buttons (*Cotula coronopifolia*), also known as Brass Buttons or Golden Buttons, are a perennial weed native to South Africa and New Zealand. While they might sound cute, they're a hardy introduced species that can spread quickly.

How to spot it

Water Buttons produce fragrant yellow button-shaped flowerheads that mainly bloom around Winter and Spring. They can grow up to 60cm tall and have a succulent stem with vibrant green jagged leaves.

How it spreads

These weeds can reproduce via their stems, roots and leaves, which allows them to rapidly populate new areas – especially when carried by heavy rainfall, wind and native animals. Predominantly found in waterlogged soils, they often end up forming mats over shallow waters which can endanger aquatic life.

What to do

It's important that Water Buttons are appropriately controlled to reduce their risk of spreading further. If you see them, report them to HRCC.



FOUND IT? TELL US

(02) 4574 9600

WEED WISDOM

>>> BONESEED

It's springtime, which means Boneseed (*Chrysanthemoides monilifera subsp. monilifera*) is in full bloom. It's a Weed of National Significance and spreads an abundance of seeds from September to February, so be sure to keep an eye out and report any findings to us.



How to spot it

Boneseed is a 2-3-metre tall evergreen shrub with woody branched stems and bright green leaves. It has small, daisy-like yellow flower clusters which turn into little round fruits that change in colour from green to black. Once the fruits drop, they leave a bone-coloured seed, giving the plant its name.

How it spreads

Each Boneseed plant produces up to 50,000 seeds that are spread by birds, flooding events, dumped garden waste and soil disturbance from machinery. The seeds often emerge after rainfall, and their hard shells allow them to travel long distances without being damaged. The state of NSW is a Boneseed Control Zone, meaning that any Boneseed found *must* be reported. It also can't be imported into the State, exchanged or offered for sale under the NSW Biosecurity Act 2015.

GET IN TOUCH

Call us
02 4574 9600

Email us
inspections@hrcc.nsw.gov.au
council@hrcc.nsw.gov.au

Write to us
PO Box 6021, South Windsor DC 2756

HRCC operates on the traditional lands of the Darug and Darkinjung peoples.

Be weed wise!
To easily identify weeds,
check the **NSW WeedWise**
directory.

