

COASTAL WETLANDS



A message from Coastal Wetlands Community Organiser, Sam Johnson

Coastal Wetlands is a new campaign for NCC so this year our priority has been to lay the groundwork for turning a grassroots campaign into a powerful political force. We have been meeting with dedicated community campaigners, elevating their work to a broader audience, learning about the many issues facing wetlands and educating the broader public on how integral wetland health is to both community and planetary health.

We have been getting word out about these lesser-known climate change superheroes. Wetlands sequester carbon 40 times faster than rainforests and also protect the coast from increasingly severe storms. Sadly, 90% of wetlands worldwide have been dredged or destroyed since the Industrial Revolution. And this year we produced an interactive map showing that the extent of wetland loss on the NSW coast is over 50% across the state and up to 85% in some catchments

Through our community outreach and research we found that Coastal Wetlands are facing many threats:

- Historic wetland drainage schemes have crashed water quality and decimated wildlife habitat.
- Impenetrable regulations are blocking wetland restoration.
- Water pumping extraction limits are based on how much water has been taken in the past, not how much water the rivers and wetlands need to be environmentally sustainable.
- Zombie developments are dodging modern planning laws and going ahead in inappropriate areas.
- Pollution from intensive horticulture is off the charts.
- Sea levels are rising and wetlands are blocked from retreat.
- Traditional Owners are losing access to culturally and socially important Country.
- Weeds, invasive species, dogs off leashes during migratory bird breeding and careless 4WDers are all impacting coastal wetlands.

In 2024 we focused on getting to know our community of wetland warriors. We found many incredible, dedicated people, who after decades of battles to restore wetlands are handing over the torch to the younger generation. There are some success stories, but there are many more roadblocks to restoration. Our goal is to remove them so NSW can restore our wetlands and save our coasts.

Thank you for your invaluable support.

Sam Johnson

Coastal Wetlands Community Organiser

Nature Conservation Council NSW



Image by Calumn Hockey

2024 at a glance

Meeting the community on the ground was a critical part of the coastal wetland campaign's first year. Through reaching out to the community campaigners in our networks we were able to connect with some Traditional Owners of wetland Country and enrich our relationships in the community.

We secured additional oversight to pumping limits in NCC's settlement of our water and climate court case. Sustainable limits to pumping are now being established for the coast. Climate change projections and the ecological requirements of the rivers and the wetlands have never been assessed, so the pumping limits were simply based on an estimate of how much water has been pumped in the past.

We also contributed to the Upper House Inquiry into Historical Development Consents in NSW, recommending that historic development approvals in environmentally sensitive areas be reassessed under current legislation. The report into the inquiry is expected before the end of the year.

Our challenges

The biggest problem preventing wetland restoration is the impenetrable planning system. Approvals for removing old floodgates and decommissioning wetland drainage systems are extremely difficult to get. A new course through the regulatory system is urgently required.

What we did

We hit the road for a fact-finding mission to the North and Central Coasts



Our coastal wetlands trips to the North Coast and Hunter Central Coast were a great opportunity to strengthen our relationships with coastal communities and see the variety of issues facing coastal wetlands in NSW. This is the groundwork needed to build a strong grassroots campaign for legislative change so we can get on with the job of restoring our wetlands.

Supported NCC's member network



Through the year we supported local groups with their existing campaigns through supporting letters, spreading awareness to our statewide network of supporters, hosting webinars, advocacy training for groups working on wetland protection, making submissions for inquiries and writing submissions against inappropriate developments that would impact sensitive wetlands if passed.

Secured policy change



NCC water and climate court case was settled with the NSW Government in March 2024 and included wins for coastal rivers and wetlands. Water pumping extraction limits are now to be set based on the ecological requirements of the rivers and wetlands and to consider climate change impacts. There will also be a review of the way water is allocated from public dams so all drought data is considered.

Created important resources for the movement



We created a suite of social media videos, newsletters and an interactive map to educate the community on the condition of coastal wetlands. Some catchments have lost over 75% of their wetlands, and are suffering acidic water, black water, fish deaths.

We conducted polling and found that people in NSW don't realise there is a problem. Our interactive map shows the extent of wetland loss across the state and will be crucial in illustrating the magnitude of wetland loss and the necessity of changes to our planning system to protect and restore wetlands.

Our goals for 2025

In 2025, we continue our critical work of building the movement through our outreach efforts, and meeting communities and groups who are working to protect and restore wetlands in their local area. We will create opportunities for networking and collaboration to build a unified campaign for legislative change. We will use our platform to bring awareness and attention to local campaigns in our member network. And we will provide advocacy training to resource the grassroots campaigners who are doing so much for their local environment.

We also aim to secure more positive policy changes. There urgently needs to be a regulatory pathway in NSW to allow more coastal wetlands to be restored. We will be commissioning a report on the environmental benefits of restoring wetlands. They clean our water, protect the coast from huge seas, provide fertile habitat for wildlife, and critical feeding grounds for fish and prawns. They are climate change superheroes!

And we will be advocating for metering of all irrigation pumps on the coast with a licence to pump water.