



13 September 2021

Hunter Water encourages feedback on five-year Paxton project

Hunter Water is asking the communities around Congewai and Quorrobolong creeks, near Cessnock, to help shape future environmental projects following the completion of five years' worth of work to improve water quality and catchment health.

Since 2016, Hunter Water and Hunter Local Land Services have worked together to provide grants and advice to local landholders in order to protect and enhance creek banks and adjoining lands.

The partnership has rehabilitated 18 kilometres of stream bank, led to the planting of about 13,000 trees, and encouraged platypus to reside in this area of the Lower Hunter.

Hunter Water Managing Director, Darren Cleary, said it was important to hear the community's thoughts about the \$900,000 Paxton Catchment Improvement Program.

"Congewai Creek was in a deteriorated condition because of vegetation clearing, agricultural activities, urban stormwater runoff, and general erosion.

"Traditional thinking would have seen Hunter Water complete a further costly upgrade to the already advanced Paxton Wastewater Treatment Works.

"However, in a first for NSW, the EPA endorsed our proposal to instead invest in environmental improvements by remediating the creek, in partnership with local landholders. This saved Hunter Water customers around \$1 million.

"By choosing to fund environmental projects over treatment process upgrades, we have invested more than \$400,000 in the program, with landholders contributing over \$500,000 towards on ground project work. Hunter Local Land Services invested a further \$148,000.

"We are now wanting to understand what the landholders and residents of Congewai, Quorrobolong, Ellalong, Millfield and Paxton think about the program and what it has achieved," said Mr Cleary.

One local landholder, Brad Bell, owns a 330-hectare cattle grazing property in the Congewai Valley.

He said the most recent drought led to dry dams and uneven grazing around the property.

"In early 2019, we applied for, and received, a combined grant from Hunter Water and Hunter Local Land Services, which was essentially about protecting the riparian zone [land along the banks of creeks] but also improving our productivity on the farm," said Mr Bell.

He added the grant proved beneficial to his grazing operation, as well as Hunter Water and Hunter Local Land Services.

“Operations now are much more sustainable and, the other thing is, the water quality in the creek is obviously much improved.

“The result could not have been achieved without the grant funding, so I’d have to say that it was a blessing and, in the end, a win-win for both Hunter Water and us,” said Mr Bell.

The survey on the Paxton Catchment Improvement Program has been distributed to local landholders and can also be completed [online](#) before midnight on Monday 18 October 2021.

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