

How the Northern Rivers is tackling mosquitoes together

COUNCIL NAME

Tweed Shire,
Ballina Shire,
Byron Shire,
Clarence Valley,
Kyogle, Lismore
City and Richmond
Valley Councils

WEB ADDRESS

[tacklingmosquitoes
together.com.au](https://tacklingmosquitoes.together.com.au)

SIZE

10,000 square
kilometres

POPULATION

250,000

FUNDING PROGRAM

Increasing
Resilience to
Climate Change

Overview

Australia has more than 300 species of mosquito – and these tiny insects are more than just a nuisance.

Some of the mosquitoes found in the Northern Rivers region of New South Wales can spread diseases, like Ross River Fever and Barmah Forest Virus. While these diseases aren't fatal, they can have debilitating health impacts.

What's more, as climate change brings warmer, wetter weather to the Northern Rivers region, the community can expect to face further risks of exotic, disease-carrying mosquitoes.

While the public health risks associated with mosquitoes are widely understood by governments, universities and public health professionals, the story was very different among the Northern Rivers communities. So, a collaboration of the seven councils of the Northern Rivers stepped in to give residents the tools and knowledge to manage the risks of mosquitoes in their own backyards.

Background

Tackling Mosquitoes Together is a community behaviour change campaign led by Tweed Shire Council in collaboration with NSW Government, the North Coast Public Health Unit and six other Northern Rivers councils: Ballina, Byron, Clarence Valley, Kyogle, Lismore and Richmond Valley.

Tackling Mosquitoes Together encourages residents to develop good habits now – with simple actions like cleaning out water-holding containers like pet bowls and bird baths, and using insect repellent – to reduce the risk of mosquito borne disease as our climate changes.

Implementation

The Social Deck was appointed in March 2020 to develop a behaviour change program to reduce backyard mosquito breeding habitats and improve personal protection behaviours.

The Social Deck conducted desktop research, interviewed public health experts, analysed barriers, benefits and audiences. These insights were used to co-design a pilot program with a broad range of community, regional council staff and key stakeholders.

Co-design was undertaken during two online workshops that explored four key themes of interventions: technology; school and community education; grassroots action; and workplaces. Participants were asked how these interventions might encourage people to take action to protect themselves from mosquitoes.

A mapping exercise prioritised and refined the most effective behaviour change interventions into one program, which combined tips, incentives and prompts. This included a simple SMS program, an education pack with print resources and free repellent. A dedicated Tackling Mosquitoes Together website was developed, which attracted more than 3,000 unique visitors during the campaign.

A series of simple text messages with calls to action, tips and reminders was developed to help people reduce and protect themselves from mosquitoes around their homes and in their communities.

The Social Deck managed the SMS program and the website, and councils were responsible for promoting the program and distribution of the education packs.

Following the success of the pilot program in Summer 2020/21, the program was rolled out again in Spring 2021, over a six-week period from October to late November.



Outcomes

Community survey results from both phases of Tackling Mosquitoes Together confirmed that the program increased residents' knowledge of the risks associated with mosquitoes and actions that could address these risks. The evaluation also found the program was very effective at prompting residents to undertake positive behaviours, such as reducing mosquito breeding habitats in their backyards and taking personal preventative measures such as correctly applying repellent.

A Northern Rivers Working Group Mosquito Education Plan 2021-2026 has since been developed to continue the education and behaviour change program.

Key Learnings

Key evaluation insights from the Tackling Mosquitoes Together program suggest SMS is an effective communication channel for community health and social campaigns. Post-campaign feedback found:

- 71% survey respondents had checked their backyard for mosquito habitats in past seven days

- 93% were confident they knew how to identify and remove mosquito habitats from their backyards
- 90% had discussed Tackling Mosquitoes Together with people outside their household
- 72% found the SMS messages very useful
- 93% took action to reduce breeding habits around house after receiving an SMS
- 87% would participate in the program again.

The evaluation also found the education packs were an effective incentive for people to sign-up to the SMS program and the backyard checklist was commonly used within households as a prompt and reminder to undertake source reduction activities.

As one community participant said: “An excellent behaviour change and awareness campaign. I loved the text messages (I saved as a contact as the ‘moszie guys’ so that I didn’t miss the texts). Congratulations very well done.”

More information

Check out the short video, [Tackling Mosquitoes Together](#), on YouTube.

Contact

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Funded by the
NSW Government
in association with
LGNSW