

EXCELLENCE IN THE ENVIRONMENT AWARDS



Kempsey/Upper Macleay Tropical Soda Apple (TSA) Control and Landholder Resilience Program

COUNCIL NAME

Kempsey Shire Council

WEB ADDRESS

www.kempsey.nsw.gov.au

SIZE

3,376 square kilometres

POPULATION

29,921

Overview

Key aims were to bring the Kempsey Shire community together with a social inclusion program, landholder resilience training and best practice farming training events. A comprehensive control program of the riparian zones was implemented to eliminate infestations of Tropical Soda Apple and protect the local environment as well as preventing further spread to private lands.

Background

This project was designed following the devastating 2019 bushfires, to support, assist and build opportunities for effective management of future natural disaster events.

Implementation

Landholders were consulted and involved with the identification of objectives and development of suitable training and events. These landholders were primarily those affected by the bushfires and known to have TSA in the bushfire areas, those in the bushfire scar zones established in the LGA as well as those owning or managing land where TSA grew or had the potential to grow.

Local weed control contractors were engaged to carry out the program's TSA control function. During implementation, flooding became a key vector of spread of TSA fruit and seed which was more exposed by bare lands. Firstly by fire, then disturbed by flood. Despite challenging conditions, contractors were able to maintain continual control programs when conditions were normal and at other times by manual control, pulling plants and collecting fruit to prevent further spread.

Landholder Resilience and Best Practice Training included: photography training, operating a quad bike, operating a side-by-side, off-road 4WD training, machinery hygiene, SMART Train chemical application, chainsaw – trim and cut and chainsaw – fell trees manually. Training events were planned to be held in various areas around the Shire, however most were in the Upper Macleay at Willawarrin which was one of the communities worst affected by the bushfires in 2019.

Council engaged a second Project Weeds Officer to be able to carry out the additional inspections for the TSA inspection program.



Quad bike training at Willawarrin

Outcomes

With the engagement and commitment of local weed control contractors, TSA was removed from 200km of riparian zone along Five Day Creek and Macleay River, amounting to 400km on both sides, three to six times. Terrain in this area varied from easy access to very heavy and rugged. Two Project Weed Officers completed 1685 inspections. The program facilitated a high level of engagement with landholders (with and without TSA) checking in on progress and maintaining a high level of motivation.

Twelve resilience and best practice farming training programs were conducted, with 120 participants completing this training. There were 356 participants across five Social Inclusion events. This was a 400% increase on the expected number of participants. A Farming – Insights and Inspiration event was held in May 2023, celebrating the success of the project.

The training courses and social engagement activities were very popular. This indicated that the initial outcomes the project intended to achieve, including mental health impacts and a community who were desperate for support following a natural disaster, were effectively met. Training on high-risk activities such as chainsaw and quad bike operations contributed to a higher degree of community safety awareness.

Key Learnings

If embarking on this project again, Council would seek alternate training programs covering different rural/farm management topics.

The next steps are to continue to seek funding for the eradication of TSA to ensure it doesn't negatively impact on or monopolise farming land and native vegetation; aligning with aims of the updated Biosecurity (Tropical Soda Apple) Control Order 2022.

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This project was the 2023 winner of the 'Innovation in Planning, Policies and Decision Making Award' at the LGNSW Excellence in the Environment Awards.

This award was supported by our category partner NSW Department of Primary Industries.