

3. *Challenges and responses*

3.1 *Overview*

Implementing any major project is not easy. Challenges are made more complex when the project is coordinated by a voluntary community based organisation relying on collaboration with diverse stakeholders whose interests must be managed to produce desired project outcomes. Generally, relationships are harmonious and productive, but various conflicts arise that must be addressed.

Greenlink, managed by Northern Beaches Envirolink (NBE), is an example of a collaborative community based project that encountered significant challenges and displayed flexibility in responses. In an attempt to learn from this experience this section examines the following challenges and associated responses:

- *administrative constraints*
- *bureaucratic obstacles*
- *environmental variables*
- *maintenance burdens*
- *recruitment*
- *supervision / training of volunteers*
- *commitment to ongoing maintenance*
- *long term planning*
- *public support.*

3.2 *Administrative Constraints*

The original Greenlink administrative support arrangements were removed with the disbanding of the original project proponent (Sydney Northern Beaches Catchment Management Committee) (CMC). Whilst NHT funding for a dedicated part time project officer remained, ***Northern Beaches Envirolink Incorporated (NBE)*** confronted the dilemma of no longer having access to an administrative officer and resources support, as originally provided by the Department of Land and Water Conservation (DLWC).

NBE had to establish itself as a new entity with broader membership and a modified strategy (*Appendix A*). In addition, unanticipated expenses arose for accommodation, phone and other running expenses that would otherwise have been met by the CMC. Fortunately DLWC responded to lobbying by providing minor funding support (\$2,000) to aid NBE's administration. Greenlink's budget was also altered to accommodate some of these new expenses.

3.3 *Bureaucratic Obstacles*

Various bureaucratic issues have led to **extensive delays** to the Dee Why Lagoon Wildlife Refuge project. Initially caused by uncertainty over the necessity to submit a Development Application, problems with communications between Warringah Council departments and concern about some of the specifications of the design exacerbated the situation.

Design specifications were resolved, but the other problems were not. This was further complicated by the listing of an Endangered Ecological Community in bushland adjacent to the project site. This resulted in the necessity for an Eight Part Test. The proximity of project area to the lagoon body meant that it was considered to be Integrated Development, and therefore also had to go to DLWC for technical advice.

After this was done in March 2001, it was discovered that as the Reserve did not have a Plan of Management, no approval could be given for any work, owing to a clause in Warringah Council's new Local Environment Plan.

Many of these problems may have been more easily dealt with if the right questions had been asked of the right people at the grant application stage. Better coordination of internal communications and external advice within Council may also have assisted. In spite of these difficulties, it is still planned that this very deserving project will go ahead in 2002, albeit later than intended.

Parking in "pay and display" locations has caused problems, as some of the volunteers do not have parking stickers. Lobbying of Warringah Councillors has led to a proposal for a change in policy which will allow "Friends of the Bush" from outside Warringah to be issued with the stickers so that they can park free of charge. This will hopefully eventuate in early 2002.

3.4 *Environmental Variables*

The **Long Reef grassland rehabilitation** project has been dependent on the supply of *Themeda triandra* (kangaroo grass) from two local tubestock nurseries. At times, supply of *Themeda* did not keep up with demand, owing to lower than anticipated seed yields and germination rates and variable growth rates experienced throughout the year. Therefore at times, there have been serious shortages of tubestock for several months. This inhibited the rate of the project progress substantially.

However, the slowing of this work has had environmental benefits, as it stimulated earlier focus on maintenance of previously planted areas and led to a modified overall approach. This is now likely to have better potential for long term success. Maintenance of this site is obviously a key task that will ultimately determine the success of the rehabilitation effort.

3.5 *Maintenance Issues*

Many of the groups found that **summer weed growth** of 2000 / 01 was more vigorous than they had previously experienced. This created problems in some areas, as the maintenance burden was heavier than expected.

This issue is common in bush regeneration work and can cause groups to lose heart, as they see the good work they did in winter get overrun by weeds in summer. Clearing only small areas and working at a pace that allows the native vegetation to take the place of weeds can reduce this possibility, however the enthusiasm of some groups can be hard to control, especially in revegetation works.

In the initial phases the rate of clearing on the Long Reef project was too ambitious, creating the potential for erosion and other negative outcomes. This has mainly been the result of large numbers of enthusiastic participants on the monthly workdays.

In order to overcome this problem, areas to be cleared on the workdays were more clearly delineated and other activities planned (such as hand weeding, watering etc). The group also imposed a moratorium on clearing on two occasions in order to focus on maintenance weeding.

Watering the revegetated areas has also been a huge chore for Reefcare. They have managed to keep up with it, but as the group has planted over a vast area, this has become more difficult. A new irrigation system, installed November 2001 has made this job more manageable.

In other areas, particularly the **Warriewood Wetlands** (in Pittwater), Greenlink funds have paid for large areas of primary weed clearance in areas that were dangerous for volunteers to work. This work was essential in the wetlands, as there are some highly degraded patches of very valuable bushland, some of which is listed as Endangered. However, the maintenance burden created by this initial work is significant and will need to be addressed for at least five years if the work is to have a lasting benefit.

Pittwater Council has agreed to sustain this maintenance work into the future, as the volunteer group in the area cannot extend itself to this level. Long term monitoring will have to ensure that this work is carried out satisfactorily.

3.6 Recruitment

Owing to Warringah Council fiscal restraints, **Warringah Friends of Bush was unable to recruit new members for the 2000 / 2001 financial year**. Greenlink was therefore unable to recruit any new members in Warringah during this period.

This was a serious issue that was not able to be resolved, as Warringah Council's decision was irreversible. As a result, Greenlink concentrated on recruiting and supporting existing groups in the area and adding them to the project effort and the goal of regional conservation.

This approach proved successful, as these groups had already demonstrated commitment. Concentrating on existing groups may therefore be a better approach than trying to recruit new members. Furthermore, this tactic may represent better value for money.

Long Reef Golf Club withdrew support for all community groups in January 2001 owing to various legal issues regarding a Development Application that the Club had lodged. Reefcare's Thursday Club was unable to work on land leased to the Golf Club from that time forward.

Furthermore, pledges made by the Golf Club at the project development stage were not honoured. This meant that certain elements of the project had to be scaled back and budget items reallocated to cover items such as herbicide and irrigation equipment. Other support for the project (eg water supply) was left in place for the main grassland restoration effort.

3.7 Supervision / Training of Volunteers

Many of the volunteers lack sufficient expertise to work unsupervised. A training program run in conjunction with Warringah Council attempted to address this, but attendance levels were somewhat disappointing.

Furthermore, the participants in the training sessions tended to be the volunteers who had the most involvement in the project, and therefore had less need for the training. This seems to be a common issue in volunteer management and in projects similar to Greenlink.

This training schedule highlighted **the need to train people in supervision skills**, recognising that some people may be reluctant or uncomfortable with such a role because of personal confidence, perceived self competencies or preferences including the desire to socialise making regenerating efforts more pleasurable. Furthermore, some group leaders have expressed concern that if they are not able to maintain their level of commitment, there will be no one to take their place.

There is still a clear need to address this issue, to provide volunteers with the skills and confidence to lead a group to achieve a stated aim over a long term project.

3.8 *Commitment to Ongoing Maintenance*

Warringah Council's Parks and Gardens unit was unable to commit to more extensive revegetated areas due to **concern over their ongoing maintenance resources**. Although the planted areas were designed to minimise maintenance, we were still unable to plant as many tubestock as we had planned. This will continue to be an issue in Warringah, as Council's budget does not allow for such areas to be maintained.

Further complicating this was the fact that Council will only allow trees to be planted in public parks. Shrubs and groundcovers are perceived as having public risk. This meant that although the revegetated areas were designed to enhance habitat connections, the benefits of the revegetation may have been reduced somewhat, as only canopy species were planted.

On a positive note, Warringah Council's Conservation and Land Management staff have indicated that the Dee Why Creek revegetation area will continue to be used for the annual National Tree Planting Day. Thus in the long term, this area will be well maintained and completely revegetated.

3.9 *Long Term Planning*

For any environmental works to have a lasting benefit there must be a strong commitment on the part of the land manager to maintain and build on the works. This is especially the case with weed control and bush regeneration.

Certain key elements of the Greenlink area (such as South Creek and Dee Why Wetlands) are of great ecological significance in the region and are in desperate need for a variety of remedial works and weed control. However, these areas do not have management plans in place, so there is no long term commitment to maintain the condition of these areas.

There was perhaps an expectation on the part of some Greenlink members that the grant funds could be used as a lever to encourage financial commitment from the councils to these areas. However, although Greenlink has been successful in strategically targeting regional environmental issues across the region, land managers were unable to influence bureaucratic processes to support work on some of these sites. Greenlink funds were therefore not spent in these areas, in spite of the need.

This has been disappointing for some groups as they have seen the positive effects of their work diminished by weed invasion in adjacent land.

A weakness of the NHT process is the lack of funding support for community groups wishing to strengthen strategically oriented planning and actions, including influencing key stakeholders to embrace appropriate approaches, in particular resources / funding allocations.

3.10 Public Support

Public support for the project has generally been very positive. However, some community members were concerned about the construction of the Greenlink track along Narrabeen Lagoon in Pittwater. The main issue was that the track would allow dogs into an area that is known to be habitat for various water birds.

These concerns led to a rapid change in the design and specifications of the track. Pittwater Council also fenced and gated the area and designated it a 'sanctuary' in which dogs must be kept on a leash.

Money set aside (by the contractor) for Bushcare establishment in the area was lost in the changes, owing to cost blow outs. Better consultation with the public may have avoided the conflict, although it was difficult to foresee owing to a high level of support for prior works in the area.