



Hunter Wetlands Centre

Strategic Partnerships:
Evolution of the Hunter Wetlands Centre towards
a Ramsar listed wetlands and Ecotourism
Destination

Degraded Swampland...

- 45 hectare area in Shortland, Hunter Region, NSW
- Floodplain part of Hexham Swamp Complex
- Remant Wetland area had been progressively filled over many years
- Used as garbage dump, railway, sporting complex
- Earmarked for re-opening of Sanitary Landfill and major Highway

Hunter Wetlands as it was 27 years ago

The degraded floodplain on the edge of Hexham Swamp had a history as a rubbish dump housing an abandoned and vandalised football club before community consultation earmarked the area to be rehabilitated as a wetlands reserve.



How Shortland Wetlands Centre was established



- Dr Max Maddock discovers Egret breeding colony on the site
- Site earmarked for re-opening of garbage dump and Highway Development which would damage Egret and Black Swan breeding areas
- Community consultation results in establishment of Hunter Wetlands Trust who lobbies for establishment of a wetlands reserve
- Newcastle City Council, BHP and NSW Bicentennial Fund contribute to purchase land on behalf of the community in the name of Shortland Wetlands Pty Ltd
- Clean up of the site begins
- Shortland Wetlands Centre officially opened in November 1988

Structure of the Hunter Wetlands Centre

Shortland Wetlands Centre, Ltd., trading as
The Wetlands Centre, is

- a not-for profit non-government organisation
- a community company, limited by guarantee
 - owned by its members
- managed by a Volunteer Board of Directors

Key Goals



1 Site Management

Manage the site to provide a healthy wetland ecosystem which supports biodiversity and assists in the achievement of other key goals.

2 Management Structure

Establish and maintain a management structure which will attract and sustain appropriate staff

3 Recreation

Provide appropriate recreational activities which will allow people to directly experience the natural environment

4 Education

Provide a facility for high quality education in the values of natural systems and in the ecology, management and rehabilitation of wetlands.

5 Research

Increase knowledge of wetlands and their flora and fauna by initiating and supporting research projects on wetland ecology, management and rehabilitation and related disciplines.

6 Conservation

Support conservation of wetlands through promoting the establishment of wetland reserves, supporting community initiatives to conserve wetlands, providing advice to the community and offering consultancy services to the community and offering consultancy services to a range of clients.

7 Ecologically Sustainable Management

Promote the integrity of wetlands by supporting examples of best management practice, providing consultancy services in applied ecology to government agencies and private sector clients, and providing infrastructure for other wetlands related initiatives.

8 Partnerships

Develop working partnerships with other like minded organisations to support the achievement of other key goals.

Hunter Wetlands Community Partners

The Hunter Wetlands Centre could only exist through the relationships the centre has with a number of organisations including:

- Department of Education
- Lions Club
- Hunter Bird Observers
- Newcastle & Newcastle North Rotary
- Native Animal Trust Fund
- Australian Native Plant Society and more recently:
- Hunter Region Landcare
- Greencorp
- Hunter Water
- Hunter River Catchment Management Authority

Hunter Wetlands Centre and the Department of Education

- The relationship with the Department of Education established through individual personalities with strong commitment to the centre – notably Brian Gilligan who brought teachers and sought resources for the centre
- Initial relationship with HWC was through an informal ‘handshake’ deal to bring students to the site and to use the site as a centre for wetlands education
- Establishment of the education program brought students from kinder to University to the site and created inroads into involvement in wetlands education in the wider national and international community.
- 1994 the partnership was formally recognised with a written agreement and the formalisation of the Wetlands Environmental Education Centre (WEEC)

Rehabilitation and Community Partnerships

- Community groups go to work on clean up and rehabilitation – over 100 000 trees have been planted and over 70 000 understory plants
- Paths, boardwalks, bridges, seating, BBQ areas, a canoe channel to Ironbark Creek, an Egret observation tower and a sensory trail for the vision impaired were all constructed on the site to improve infrastructure for visitors.

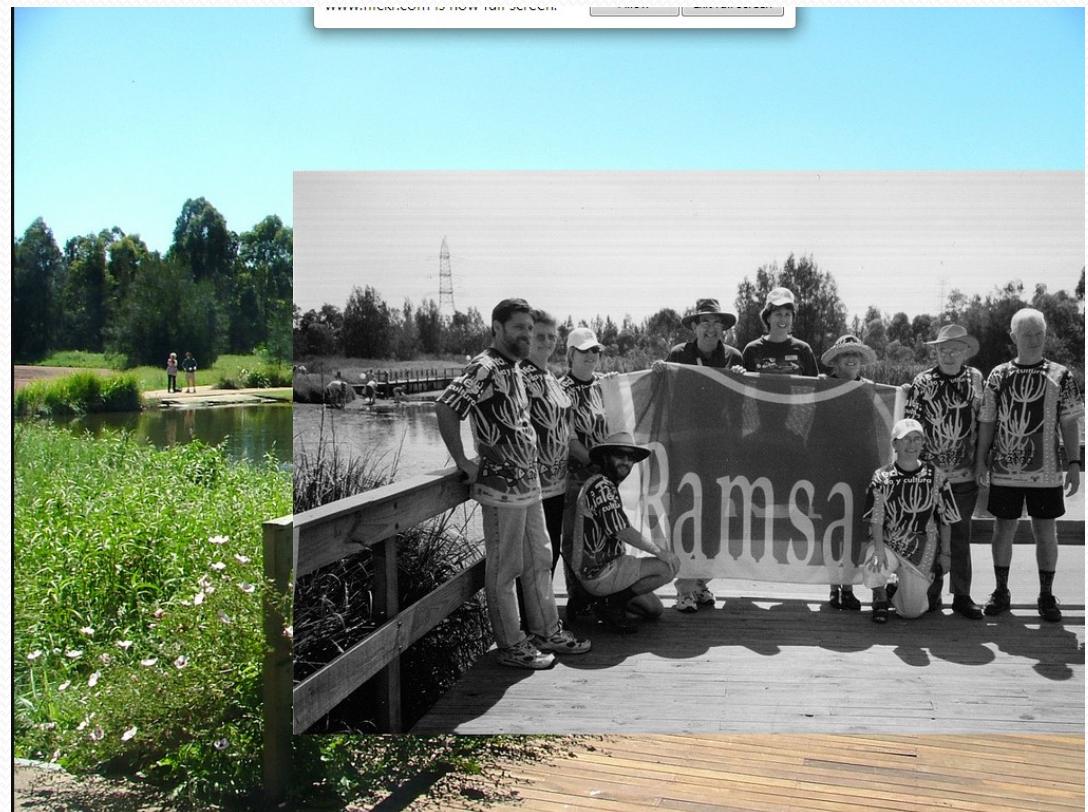
Ramsar Signing 2002

Support given from WEEC
Hunter Bird Observers
Native Plant Society
National Parks and Wildlife Service

Signing of the agreement gave a 'scientific legitimacy' to the site

Gave the centre inroads into further involvement in wetlands organisations and to set itself up as an internationally recognised centre for excellence in wetlands education

Also gave the centre a 'hook' for marketing the site as an ecotourist destination



Move Towards Ecotourist Focus



- Grant/ project funding not sustainable in the long term
 - new focus needed for the centre to be largely self-funding
- Engagement of staff member to promote tourist aspect of the centre
- Memberships of Hunter, Lake Macquarie, Maitland, Port Stephens and Newcastle Tourism organisations expand partnerships to include tourist focus
- Advance Ecotourism certification 2006
- Winner of the 2007 Hunter Tourism Awards in Ecotourism; Special mention and Awards of Distinction in 2008 & 2009
- New tourism partnerships formed with East Coast Xperiences (also an advanced ecotourist accredited organisation)

Purpose Built Environmental Education Centre



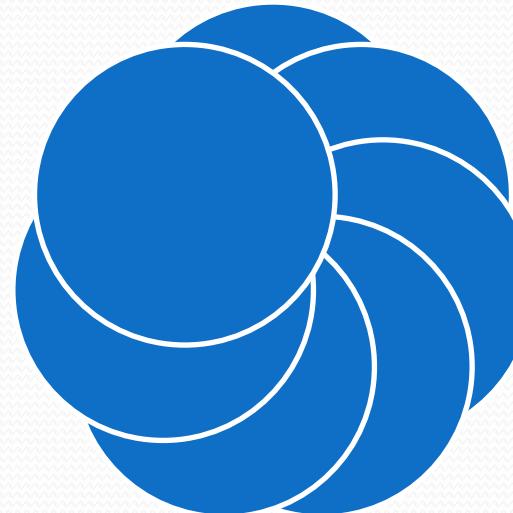
New Ventures for a Financially Sustainable Future

Building of 'The Wetlands' allowed for renovation of original classroom & office areas into function and conference facilities

Ropes course DA under consideration

Butterfly Garden under construction

Bush Tucker Garden established and opened in 2011



Team Building activities offered for corporate groups – run by wetlands staff

Wetlands on Wheels travelling program to promote wetland awareness to pre-schools, community groups, event days and private functions

'Educational' Orienteering course set out with the assistance of Newcastle Orienteering Club

Challenges

- Retaining community status and working closely with community groups whilst operating as a business that needs to make money to survive.
- Challenge of balancing the ‘good value’ tourism destination as well as fulfilling the role of education provider.
- Changing of the ‘old guard’ of dedicated volunteers who have retired from volunteering
- Finding new volunteers willing to invest the same commitment and dedication
- Funding paid staff to ensure ‘consistency’ as a quality destination

Future Directions

- Through the close partnership with the DET the centre has attained standing a centre for excellence in Wetlands education on a national and international scale.
- Support from invested organisations enabled the centre to attain a Ramsar listing giving the centre credibility as a site of interest
- Strategic partnerships need to be constantly reviewed to ensure the benefits of the community organisations and the centre
- The successful financial future of the Hunter Wetlands Centre lies in it's success as a tourist destination

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