



Lake Macquarie
Landcare

Case Study

Foreshore Site

Coon Island Management Board Landcare site



Project Partners:

- Coon Island Management Board Landcare group
- Landcare Resource Centre & Lake Macquarie City Council



Background

Coon Island is a low-lying estuarine area at the head of Swansea Channel, opposite Pelican. The Awabakal people would have used the island due to its richness in seafood, which also later attracted Chinese fishers.

The island was named after Herbert "Coon" Heaney, who was the first person to live permanently on the island under a lease from the Lands Department, which were issued from 1915. Residents lived in about 70 leased houses between 1915 and the 1990s, battling erosion and frequent inundation. The houses were demolished gradually, once leases expired and residents moved from the Island. The last resident left in 1994.

Coon Island Management Board took up the maintenance of the island and later became a Landcare group.

Site Information

The Coon Island Management Board Landcare site extends across the low lying land at the end of the peninsular, as shown on the map opposite. The main focus of the site for Landcare works is the North Eastern edge.

Lake Macquarie

Lake Macquarie is located on the NSW east coast, It contains mountains, forests, waterfalls, extensive beaches, and a large coastal estuarine lake with an area of approximately 110 square km, and a catchment area of 605 square km.

These areas support a wide range of habitats and uses including nature conservation, recreation, residential and commercial development and rural activities. As a result, the natural environment has suffered a high degree of modification and degradation.

Aboriginal Heritage

Lake Macquarie is rich in Aboriginal cultural heritage dating back tens of thousands of years. The people who lived around Lake Macquarie and Newcastle were known as the Awabakal which means "*the people of the flat surface*" presumably referring to the Lake and its flat surrounds.



Above: Site locality map (Landcare site outlined in orange)

Vegetation

The natural vegetation communities vary from Salt Marsh, to Grey Mangrove Shrubland (*Avicennia marina*), to Swamp Oak Forest (*Casuarina glauca*) but there are also areas where the natural topography has changed because of filling for housing (now removed) and building rubble. The Coon Island Management Board maintain three distinct areas within the Coon Island site – wetland, bushland, and parkland.

Bell & Driscoll mapping has most of the site as Map Unit 47a Saltmarsh with edges of Map Unit 40 Swamp Oak- Rushland Forest, and Map Unit 47 Mangrove- Estuarine Complex



Above: Saltmarsh on Coon Island consisting of *Sarcocornia quinqueflora* Samphire, *Juncus kraussii* Sea Rush, with *Avicennia marina* var. *australasica* Grey Mangrove in the background.

Below: A close-up of the beautiful native Samphire (*Sarcocornia quinqueflora*)



Fauna

The mangrove and saltmarsh area of Coon Island provide important food and breeding grounds for fish, crabs and other estuarine invertebrates. The site is plentiful in birdlife, providing habitat to forest dwellers like Pardalotes and small Honeyeaters as well as to water-birds like the White-faced Heron.



Above: White-faced Heron fishing in Saltmarsh area

Landcare group

The Coon Island Management Board commenced work in 1991, with members of the Board forming a Landcare group to specifically manage natural areas of the site. Team Leader Keith Graham and his team work every Tuesday on the Coon Island site. The group completes around 80 hours of work per month. They list their greatest achievements as transforming a degraded area into a beautiful passive recreation area for public use for picnics, walks, fishing and other activities, as well as their impact on the increased health of Lake Macquarie after reducing run-off and stabilising banks through the planting of more than 1000 native trees.

The Coon Island Management Board follow the recommendations of a Management Plan undertaken with Lake Macquarie City Council (LMCC) in 2002. Council has also supported the Management Board (in it's capacity as a Committee of Council under the NSW Local Government Act 1993 sec 355) with the maintenance regime for this site, appreciating the efforts of the board to maintain the parkland area by mowing and removing rubbish.

Coon Island Management Board Landcare group list their greatest

challenges as control of weeds, in particular Lantana, Bitou Bush, and Morning Glory, as well as the maintenance of their site due to high public visitation rates within the fragile wetland.

Projects and achievements

The Office of Lake Macquarie Catchment Coordinator (OLMCC) have undertaken environmental works at the Coon Island site, including a foreshore stabilisation and vegetation project and a rock groyne construction and beach nourishment project.

In 2007-8 The Hunter Central Rivers Catchment Management Authority funded a \$9000 bush regeneration project at Coon Island. Contract bush regenerators successfully completed primary, secondary and tertiary weeding of invasive weeds (including Coastal Morning Glory, Lantana, Bitou Bush) over a 8 hectare area. The Coon Island Management Board, with the assistance of the Lake Macquarie Landcare Green Team, planted 2000 native provenance tubestock and undertook maintenance weeding.



Left: Planting day with the Green Team in May 2008

Below: After planting in 2008, through the CMA project



Coon Island 2007 to 2014

Revegetation project alongside the road near the northern boundary of the caravan park.



August 2007: Site 2 - View looking south east before work commenced



8 December 2007: Site 2 - View looking south east land leveled and partly mulched, following poisoning of weed grasses



15 April 2009: Site 2 - View looking south east, planted area established



August 2014: Site 2 - View looking south east, planted area mature

References and Further Information

Australian National Botanic Garden - www.anbg.com.au

Buchanan, R, 2009, [*Restoring Natural Areas in Australia*](#)

LMCC, 2004, *Lake Macquarie Coastal Planting Guide*, available at www.lakemac.com.au

NSW Department of Primary Industries, 2013, Coastal [*Saltmarsh Prime Fact*](#).

Val Hall, 2009. "History of Coon Island."

Weeds Australia - www.weeds.org.au

The Lake Macquarie Landcare website www.lakemacquarielandcare.org provides links to newsletters, environmental programs, grants, Landcare, weeds and trees.

If you wish to know more about this and other projects in Lake Macquarie please contact the Landcare Resource Centre.

Produced at the Landcare Resource Centre September 2014

Landcare Resource Centre

Cnr Toronto and Five Islands Rds, Teralba, NSW
2284

Postal Address: Box 1906 HRMC NSW 2310

Phone: (02) 4921 0392

Email: lro@lakemac.nsw.gov.au

www.lakemacquarielandcare.org



Lake Macquarie Landcare is proudly supported by Lake Macquarie City Council