

The Bronte Catchment Project

Enhanced Stormwater Management Through Local Community Participation¹

The Bronte Catchment Project was a Stormwater Trust Round 3 project conducted in Bronte, Waverley LGA (WLGA). It built on the work undertaken as part of the *Effective Environmental Education Project – working with the community and small business.*² It developed, supported and evaluated community and Council activities to improve water quality at Bronte Beach.

This project tried a new approach – pollution prevention using deliberative decision making and community participation processes. It is important because it:

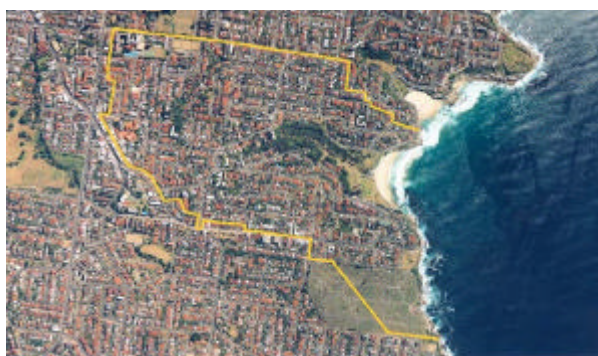
- used social research, community development, and active learning techniques, to profile community barriers to participation;
- strengthened environmental education initiatives with participatory strategies;
- tested new deliberative processes in environmental management;
- built democratic and environmental capacity across the catchment; and
- demonstrated the critical importance of Council and community commitment to participation in environmental management.

There were three main components to the project:

- community development activities with all sectors of the community, especially those who aren't usually involved in environmental management, who may be prevented from participating, or who aren't seen as having a stake or an interest in the issue (such as tenants, visitors and traditional owners)
- a trial of deliberative decision-making processes - a Citizens Jury and a Citizens Telepoll; and
- a review of Council activities and processes, to identify how Council could reduce stormwater impacts.

The project was evaluated from start to finish by community members, Council officers, the project team, and other key government and non-government stakeholders.

Where is the Bronte Catchment?



Bronte Beach is a highly valued environmental asset and is well used by local residents and visitors.

The Bronte catchment covers about one-third of the Waverley LGA, and has historically attracted a lot of attention.

It has well organised and articulate residents who are concerned about the beach, and who are committed to improving the water quality. There are a number of active community groups in the area.

When the project began, water quality was only managed with gross pollutant traps and routine Council activities. The traps were expensive to install and are very expensive to maintain.

There was considerable scope in the catchment for involving all sectors of the community in helping to prevent stormwater pollution.

What do we mean by 'community'?

'Community' was defined broadly to include everyone who has an impact on water quality in Bronte.

The community includes residents, local businesses, Waverley Council, community groups, traditional landowners and people who regularly visit Bronte.

¹ This project recognised the traditional ownership and stewardship of the Bronte Catchment by indigenous peoples. It was a joint Waverley Council and Elton Consulting initiative, supported by local community groups such as Keep Bronte Beautiful Committee; Bronte, Bronte Beach and Charing Cross Precinct Committees; Bronte Gully and Calga Reserve Bushcare groups; and the Bronte Surf Life Saving Club. The Bronte Catchment Project was assisted by the NSW Government through its Stormwater Trust. It was hosted by Elton Consulting as a non-profit project and managed by Associate Director Roberta Ryan.

² The Effective Environmental Education Project was a joint Waverley Council and UNSW initiative, assisted by the NSW Government through its Stormwater Trust Round 2 Grants Program. The project was designed, developed and delivered by the School of Social Science and Policy at UNSW, with a project team headed by Roberta Ryan.

What did we want to achieve?

- More representative and broader-based community participation and involvement;
- Positive improvements in knowledge, attitudes and behaviours about stormwater;
- Identifiable changes in Council policy and practice;
- An evaluation of the effectiveness of trial participatory processes; and
- Sustainable processes to continue community and Council pollution prevention beyond the life of the project.



Stormwater pollution at Bronte Beach, 18th of January 2001 – photo taken by community volunteer David Ellison.

How did we do this?

The project had several distinct phases:

- Preliminary information gathering, or 'getting to know the community';
- Community and Council engagement and development activities;
- Education campaigns with residents and small businesses
- A trial of deliberative democracy including a telepoll and citizens jury;
- Council and community capacity building; and
- Development of strategies for sustainable and integrated project outcomes.

Preliminary information gathering, or 'getting to know the community'

This phase was crucial as we needed to find out how to work with the range of existing community groups and interests.

We went to every community meeting, attended community events and school fetes, and hung about on the beach and in the park, talking with people to find out what they felt, knew, and did, about local environmental issues.

We surveyed over 300 households, interviewed over 50 key community figures, attended numerous community groups, and every precinct committee meeting. We visited swimming groups, local businesses, spoke with visitors and traditional owners. We even met local legends at the surf club!

We continued to work with all of these groups throughout the project, asking them to help us plan activities, inviting them to participate, and feeding back what we learned as we learned it.

Community and Council engagement, development and activities

We worked with key community groups and residents to monitor pollution hot-spots, take water samples, educate people about the issues, and identify key policy and planning priorities.

Community volunteers took photographs of pollution problems with disposable cameras we supplied, and sent them in to be used in project newsletters, posters and displays.

The local surf club volunteered to have a rain gauge installed on their roof, and a local resident donated his time and professional expertise to undertake water quality sampling and analysis.

Members of the community attended meetings to discuss local stormwater pollution and project findings. They circulated project information and introduced the topic to community group and precinct committee agendas. They also sent us unsolicited emails and letters about particular pollution problems.

Community representatives and other stakeholders participated in project planning groups and ongoing project evaluation.

Citizen involvement in local decisions about stormwater management

Improving water quality by changing ordinary practices at 'source' is a relatively recent approach to stormwater management. If source control approaches are to be sustainable, everyone who has an impact must be involved in the solution.

The community is often involved in broad consultation processes, such as public meetings, plans and reports advertised for comment, or submissions to council.

However, these forms of consultation do not work for everyone, and can often suit only the most vocal, educated and recognised 'players' in established community and council forums. They can also result in polarised responses that emphasise difference and special interests, rather than consensus and collaboration.

Why deliberative democracy?

The state government has recently outlined a number of innovative models of community consultation in its proposed 'Planfirst' framework for local and state government planning. However, many of the proposed models are largely untested at the local government level.

We set out to trial two such processes based on notions of 'deliberative democracy' – a Citizens Tele-poll and Citizens Jury. This was an Australian first, never before conducted with a local community around water quality and environmental management issues.

What makes a deliberative, democratic process?

A process of deliberative democracy brings together a range of so-called 'ordinary' people to consider detailed evidence, deliberate together in depth to test the evidence, and produce recommendations to inform decision-making.

Such a process may involve complex social, technical and scientific questions. It is often assumed that 'ordinary' people are not able to contribute to these questions because they do not have the necessary experience and expertise. It is better to leave the issues to those most qualified to assess them – in the stormwater management area, for example, to the 'experts' such as Council officers, environmental scientists, engineers, and elected representatives. However, community consultation can be extremely valuable in offering perspectives and solutions that may not otherwise have been considered, or assumed to be supported.

A process of deliberative democracy assumes that citizens who are given comprehensive, detailed information can produce high quality recommendations that can be implemented and achieved. Most importantly, the process emphasises the importance of bringing individual and collective experience to bear on the evidence, to think 'outside the box' and produce recommendations in the 'general interests' of all.

Community education

Before conducting the Citizens Tele-poll and Citizens Jury, we carried out an extensive community education campaign across the catchment. The campaign delivered detailed, locally-focussed and targeted information to households across the catchment. It aimed to inform the community about the issues both processes were to consider.

An introductory letter, five-page pamphlet and catchment-specific postcard were directly addressed and sent to over 3000 households randomly selected from the electronic White Pages.

Key messages included community concerns about local stormwater pollution; the impacts of visible, non-visible pollutants, urban design and planning issues; source control solutions; and community participation initiatives. The campaign also invited volunteers to participate in the Citizens Tele-poll and Citizens Jury.

A range of deliberations

The education campaign was followed by a Citizens Tele-poll. An independent research company telephoned households to invite them to participate. They were asked to consider the material received, discuss it with family and friends, and then to respond to a series of questions. These questions were the same as those to be considered by the Citizens Jury.

358 residents agreed to participate (over 40% of those contacted).

The aim of the Tele-poll was to test a range of deliberative views across the catchment, against the outcomes of in-depth deliberation in the Citizens Jury.

The Tele-poll demonstrated high levels of knowledge and understanding of source control, an emphasis on integrated and sustainable approaches to stormwater management, and established the importance of urban planning and design issues, as well as the impact of non-visible pollutants, as key issues of concern.

In-depth deliberations

We advertised broadly across the catchment for volunteers to participate in the Citizens Jury. This included:

- articles in local newspapers;
- presentations to community groups and precinct committee meetings;
- flyers distributed at school fetes, in local shopping areas, cafes, parks and at the beach;
- posters displayed in businesses, bus stops, Council chambers, the library, surf club and other community centres; and
- invitations to households across the catchment in the education campaign.



Pre-Jury activities, with Jurors at Bronte Beach, September 9th, 2001.

The Citizens Jury

Over 70 residents volunteered to participate in the Citizens Jury. Of them, 15 were selected as Jurors on the basis of availability for all three days of the Jury and to ensure a balance of demographic characteristics, environmental attitudes, community participation and involvement in local government.

We were not looking for the 'right' people, but for a balanced **range** of views and perspectives. The selection criteria was informed by a Planning Group made up of representatives from the EPA and Stormwater Trust, cross-factional Councillors, Council Officers, community and precinct committee representatives, an observer from UNSW, and the project team.

The Planning Group also informed the preparation of detailed reports and papers for the Jury to consider, developed criteria to define the range of witness perspectives, and recommended questions for the Jury to address.

The Citizens Jury met for three days from 14 – 16th of September, 2001. They considered specialist briefing material, heard and questioned expert witnesses, deliberated together and tested the evidence, and produced a series of recommendations around key questions.



Bronte Gully, 9th of September 2001 – pre-Jury activities with Jurors, experiencing the catchment.

At the close of the Jury, Jurors presented over 50 recommendations to an audience of Councillors, Council Officers, community representatives, friends and family, and representatives from the EPA and Stormwater Trust. Recommendations were directed to community groups, Council, state government agencies and departments, and non-government agencies.

The Jury recommendations prioritised integrated solutions to stormwater pollution, involving community, Council, businesses, visitors, and state government agencies. They emphasised source control approaches, especially in the areas of community education, participation and urban design and statutory planning controls.

Deliberating together to recommend sustainable solutions to stormwater issues, 15th of September 2001

Recommendations included:

- a coordinated Council community education strategy, involving residents, businesses, visitors and council staff;
- an interactive and guided eco-walk at Bronte Gully;
- a community mulching station;
- a free public car-washing space;
- an annual Water Festival, similar to 'Sculpture by the Sea';
- the use of film canisters for people to 'butt their butts in' while at the beach;
- ongoing water quality monitoring and research, involving community volunteers;
- increased support for regulatory staff;
- ongoing support for community participation in environmental management initiatives; and
- community consultation in the implementation and review of recommendations.



The Bronte Catchment Citizens Jury, 14 – 16th of September 2001.

Members of the Citizens Jury formally presented a report to Council in October, 2001. Their report was received with unanimous support and praise from Councillors across all political parties, senior Council Officers, and state government agencies. There was also widespread support across community groups.

The Citizens Jury recommendations have been used to develop a new Integrated Stormwater Management Plan, to direct Environment Levy-funded priorities, and to establish an ongoing community consultation forum to review the implementation of environmental initiatives, resulting from the project.



A review of Council activities and organisational support

The success of the community participation and deliberative democracy processes would not have been achieved without significant support across all sections of Council, and at all levels.

About one-third of project time and resources was devoted to working with Council staff and Councillors:

- reviewing the impacts of council policy and practice on stormwater quality in the catchment;
- consulting with staff (particularly operational and front-line staff) about opportunities for change;
- developing an evidence base to inform the community; and
- engaging cross-factional, multi-level support for the Citizens Tele-poll and Citizens Jury.

We talked to front-line staff, supervisors, managers, directors and councillors across all sections of the Council. We conducted a formal survey with all groups, and focus group discussions with front-line and operational staff. The emphasis was on the coordination, planning and integration of different activities across Council.

This resulted in the establishment of a new cross-departmental and Director-led Officers Stormwater Working Party, to support continued coordination and planning of stormwater management initiatives.

It also resulted in significant organisational support for the implementation and integration of project outcomes into ongoing Council initiatives.

Outcomes for the community

The project demonstrated a shift in perspectives across community groups and precincts, from minority and special interest views, to a position of collective and general interest.

Extensive pre and post-test social surveys conducted at the beginning and end of the project demonstrated improvements in environmental attitudes, knowledge and self-reported behaviour across the catchment, particularly regarding non-visible pollutants and urban design and planning issues.

The project broadened the representativeness of community participation in local environmental issues, extending beyond the traditional participation of established interest groups to include 'non-traditional' participants in source control initiatives. They included tenants, visitors, businesses, traditional owners, schools, the surf club, swimming and sports groups. They also included the range of community volunteers who participated in 'hotspot' photographs, and most particularly, residents who acted as Jurors in the Citizens Jury. They will continue to have a consultative role in ongoing environmental planning.

Outcomes for the Council

The project identified new community-endorsed directions for environmental management policy and practice.

Outcomes informed high-level Council policy and planning reviews.

The project informed the establishment and terms of reference for a new Director-led Officer Stormwater Working Party, for integrated, cross-departmental stormwater planning and resourcing.

Project recommendations formed the basis of an Integrated Stormwater Management Plan.

It led to policy and procedures changes in catchment activities.

It acted as the basis for a trial of locality-specific planning across Council for integrated environmental outcomes.

Lessons Learned

Sustainable changes in catchment outcomes must involve community and Council, together, reviewing and changing what they do.

'Community' needs to be defined more widely than simply rate-paying residents – to include all groups who impact on stormwater quality.

Ordinary citizens, supported by good process and information, can move beyond a position of 'special interest' to general interest.

Ordinary citizens, supported by good process and information, can produce highly relevant and achievable recommendations, and Council can be willing to support the process and its outcomes.

An evidence-based approach, finely detailed planning, and clearly structured processes are critical features of effective community participation and deliberation.

Successful community consultation and participation initiatives require significant and intensive resources and support from Council, the community, and other key state government and non-government agencies.

Ambitious community consultation and deliberative processes, such as the Citizens Jury, require high-level organisational and cross-factional political support.

These processes are potentially deeply threatening to officers (who are currently charged with managing stormwater issues) and elected representatives (who may see it as a potential threat to representative democracy).

Any specific community engagement process must occur in tandem with, and be supported by, Council organisational analysis, changes to operational practice, and broader political and institutional support.

Trans-disciplinary approaches and perspectives from a range of 'players', including community development workers, volunteers and participants, environmental scientists, engineers, elected representatives and others, critically enrich the outcomes.

Ongoing, integrated evaluation of what you are doing, why and how, is paramount.

This should be open, transparent, and informed by all participants.