

“HOP IN AND HELP MANLY LAGOON” PROJECT

A COMMUNITY SUCCESS STORY

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Manly Lagoon is a small coastal lagoon, located at the boundary of Manly and Warringah in Sydney's Northern Beaches area. The community enjoys the area as a tranquil haven in an intensely urbanised area. As a result of an innovative project to celebrate the life in and around the lagoon, its playground is now one of the most popular in Manly.

However, this important wetlands area has also suffered significant degradation over the years owing to rapid development in Manly. It is now just 10 percent of its original size and is considered one of the most polluted recreational waterways on the east coast of Australia.

A spate of negative publicity regarding pollution in the lagoon prompted a group of university students working with the Manly Environment Centre (MEC) to ask, “So why isn't anyone doing anything about it?” And so the *Hop in and Help Manly Lagoon* project was born.

Judy Reizes of the MEC explains, “We had lost our way in the story of what the lagoon means to Manly. Prompted by the students we started looking at the history of the lagoon from Governor Philip's exploration of the area and Aboriginal recollections, to find a path back that would show us how to celebrate the life in the lagoon today.”



Above: Plaques along the Eco-Discovery Walking Track feature the winning entries from the *Walk on the Wildside - Young Environmental Designer of the Year*.



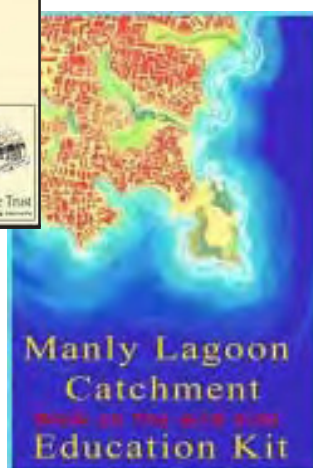
The lagoon and catchment area is home to a number of threatened and unusual species, such as the Climbing Galaxias (*Galaxias brevipinnis*) fish. The idea behind *Hop in and Help* is to accentuate the positive aspects of the lagoon and protect the flora and fauna relying on the habitat. It is hoped this will be achieved through action and education, rather than emphasising what has been lost.

The project was launched with a competition for every school in the catchment area, called *Walk on the Wildside - Young Environmental Designer of the Year*. Five schools submitted 350 ideas for interpretive signage to be placed around the lagoon. The winning designs are now featured as part of an Eco-Discovery Walking Track that links the heritage-listed foreshore of Manly ocean beach to Manly dam.

The MEC has discovered that using kids' art for interpretive signage is particularly successful for presenting information in an engaging manner. It is ideal for public places because it discourages graffiti.

To help prepare the children for the competition, and provide teachers with a comprehensive teaching resource about the lagoon, the MEC developed a unique education kit. The kit brings together for the first time into one resource the story of the lagoon. The story includes:

- Aboriginal presence and European history of the area;
- landform – past and present;
- the living things in the lagoon today;
- what Manly and Warringah councils are doing;
- paintings and poetry about the lagoon; and
- what schools can do to get involved and help.



Left: The Manly Environment Centre Education kit

Walking around the lagoon today it is an educator's paradise – the kids' art signs side-by-side with finely sculpted sandstone lagoon mascots. Also a pollution indicator continues to monitor the health of the lagoon for everyone to see.

In addition to the education kit and competition, a series of events took the message to the wider community audience. Everyone from toddlers to senior citizens took part in activities from painting picnics to clean up days. A total of 9 000 volunteer hours have been contributed by school children, sports groups, TAFE colleges, vacation care centres and the elderly, as well as scientists, university lecturers and students. Their ideas and efforts are represented in lasting artworks, depicting what the lagoon means to all members of the community, including children's paintings in the playground and murals depicting the elders' oral history.



Left: The Senior Citizen mural at the Manly Environment Centre; photograph courtesy of: the Manly Environment Centre

The *Hop in and Help Manly Lagoon* Project has significantly contributed towards reversing the trend of the lagoon's last century of ecological deterioration. Its achievements were recently recognised at the Keep Australia Beautiful Metro Pride Awards, where the catchment liaison officer for *Hop in and Help* project, Jane Murray, accepted the Sustainable Communities award. The project also won the category of Sustainable Development: Local Agenda 21 and the National Office of Local Government 2003 National Awards for Local Government.

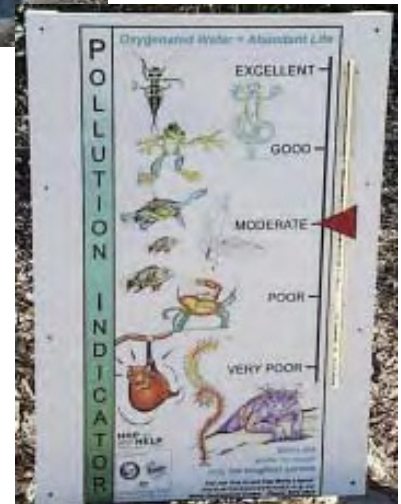
To build on the success of the project and take the message to an even wider audience, the Manly Environment Centre distributed a free postcard through Avant Card in August 2003. The postcard features the endangered Green and Golden Bell Frog, a native of the catchment. It encourages people to visit the *Hop in and Help* area of the project's website (www.wildaboutwetlands.org.au). Here you will find information on potential water pollution problems – from building and littering to gardening and car care – and the steps everyone can take to help to protect and respect our waterways.

For more information on any aspect of the project please contact Judy Reizes or Jane Murray at the Manly Environment Centre on (02) 9976 2842, email: judy.reizes@manly.nsw.gov.au, jane.murray@manly.nsw.gov.au, or visit the MEC at 41 Belgrave Street, Manly, NSW.



Left: Frog Sculpture which can be found along the Walking Track at the Manly Lagoon

Below: A pollution indicator to assist you to assess the health of the Manly Lagoon



About the Manly Environment Centre

The MEC promotes and supports environmentally-friendly living. This is achieved through educational programs, practical projects to protect and enhance the local environment, and provision of resources to support community initiatives and researchers.

The MEC aims to create links between the community, councils, industry, businesses and educational institutions.

