

# MIDDLE ROCK LITTORAL RAINFOREST PROTECTION AND RESTORATION

## Overview of the project

This project by Port Macquarie-Hastings Council has restored a 4.5 hectare area of Littoral Rainforest which is identified as a significant community under SEPP 26 (Littoral Rainforest). The rainforest adjoins the dunes and beach at Middle Rock Point at Lake Cathie, 10km south of Port Macquarie. The core of the remnant was in good condition with low levels of weed infestation. However, the margins of the remnant were highly degraded, particularly on the northern side where they adjoined private property, and on the eastern side where a car-park and roads had exposed the vegetation community to salt spray and wind causing dieback of the canopy. A Management Plan for Lake Cathie had previously identified the Middle Rock site as the highest priority for restoration work.

The project established a vegetation buffer around the eastern margin to provide protection from wind and salt spray, consolidated the sand dune by controlling erosion and beach access, and was successful in educating and involving the local community and neighbouring properties in weed control and vegetation restoration activities.



Council staff and bush regenerators with the new fence which controls access to the remnant

## How the project was carried out

Extensive weed control works were carried out during the project with a total of 220 hours of weeding and spraying completed and over two hectares of Bitou Bush removed. Around 2,300 locally indigenous plants were planted within the rainforest remnant. Screen fencing and additional plantings were established next to the road and carpark to provide a windbreak and allow existing areas of dieback to regenerate.



New stairway controls pedestrian access to the beach

Several informal walking tracks and a disused four-wheel drive track were closed and revegetated. Access to the dune area has been controlled with the installation of bollards, fencing, and a new stairway and viewing platform. Most of the revegetation work

was carried out by professional contractors while construction work was undertaken by 'Work for the Dole' teams.

## Outcomes now and in the future

The project has resulted in greater protection of the littoral rainforest and has renewed community interest in rehabilitating the local area. The rehabilitation work has reduced the impacts of carparking and vehicle access along the eastern margin, revegetated to provide a wind and salt buffer to prevent exposure, and controlled beach access and erosion of the foredune area.

Follow up weeding of all revegetated areas will be undertaken by the local Landcare group. All the new fencing, stairways, pedestrian and vehicle access points will be maintained as part of Council's regular maintenance program.

The rehabilitation work has encouraged the reformation of the previously inactive Lake Cathie Dune Care Group who has developed a fresh enthusiasm for helping to restore the local area. The group have held regular working bees to consolidate the revegetation and weed control work.

## Benefits, challenges & lessons learned

The project was successful in involving a wide cross-section of workers including professional bush regenerators, council staff, Work for the Dole participants, Landcare and Dune Care volunteers, and adjoining property owners. Significant cost savings were achieved by making use of the 'Work for the Dole' program to construct the new stairway, viewing platform, and carpark works. These savings were used to provide additional regeneration works and to replace plants that had failed during the drought.

Demonstration sites were developed on neighbouring properties to show local residents correct bush regeneration methods. However work at these sites was less extensive than originally planned due to difficulties in accessing the rear of the properties bordering the remnant. It was also found that most local residents who were interested in regeneration work preferred to join the Dunescare group where they could work as part of a team rather than work on their own properties in isolation.

The ongoing drought posed a challenge for the planting program. The extensive nature of the replanting works and the difficulty of getting a nearby water supply during drought conditions meant that it was more cost-effective to use a contractor for planting rather than using community volunteers. However the community were pleased with the outcome and a framework is now in place