



Kooragang Community Garden

Request for expressions of interest



*Crops of mixed flowers, fruits and
vegetables flourish in*

Kooragang Community Garden



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Background

Hunter Local Land Services (HLLS), with conditional support from National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), is seeking expressions of interest from suitable organisations to become the licensees and managers of Kooragang Community Garden. The garden is a component of Kooragang City Farm which is located within Hunter Wetlands National Park on Ash Island in the Hunter River estuary. HLLS is in a process of negotiating the transition of the remaining managed grazing pasture areas comprising City Farm (40ha) to become part of Hunter Wetlands National Park under NPWS management. All parties involved see value in the community garden as a volunteer enterprise with a myriad of social and environmental benefits. Many opportunities exist to develop the community garden in the areas of education, social capacity building, cultural diversity, sustainable food production and networking. For more information about the transition of the garden to a new licence holder please complete the section at the end of this document and contact the HLLS Kooragang office on (02) 4964 9308.

Location

The Kooragang Community Garden and City Farm is currently managed by HLLS staff at the Kooragang office, located in the Schoolmasters House, Schoolhouse Rd, Ash Island, Hexham (across bridge opposite Hexham McDonalds).

The Community Garden and City Farm is about a kilometer further to the east within Hunter Wetlands National Park, accessed off Milhams Rd.



Origin & History

Kooragang City Farm was included in the 1992 feasibility study for the Kooragang Wetland Rehabilitation project with on ground works commencing in 1996. It was designed to investigate and demonstrate agricultural activities that protect and enhance natural ecosystems, especially coastal wetlands.

Kooragang City Farm was set up to demonstrate a holistic approach to farm management which includes financial, environmental, and social goals in the decision-making process. City Farm's aim was to increase agricultural production whilst conserving the function of the natural ecosystem with large scale management of 150 hectares including wetlands, protected riverbanks, wildlife corridors, landscaped gardens, an orchard and 90 hectares of pasture under managed grazing. .

The **community garden** component of City Farm covers 0.3 hectares and was established to encourage gardeners to the restoration site to give them a chance to be involved and gain a greater awareness and appreciation of the surrounding wetlands. In addition it demonstrated how food production can be complementary to natural areas.

Built largely by volunteers, the garden provides a stimulating and safe work environment, where social interaction and friendly, stress-free atmosphere are as important as the production of healthy, chemical-free food.

Organizational Structure

Historically formed and supported as part of the Kooragang Wetland Rehabilitation Project, the garden has had government support from Hunter Catchment Management Authority and more recently HLLS Kooragang Office. We are now looking to transfer the licence for management of the garden to a like-minded organization so that management of the community garden can continue in its current form. The community garden is operated by volunteers, however some support is required to recruit volunteers, oversee workplace health and safety and insurance, maintain equipment and other duties so that the garden remains productive and well maintained.

Volunteers work in the garden four days a week and on weekends for special events, growing vegetables, herbs, fruit, and flowers, and maintain the garden and surrounds including lawns and native plantings. Produce is harvested and distributed among the volunteer gardeners and other HLLS Kooragang volunteers, with excess being donated to charitable organisations.

It has links with a number of other organisations and networks including community gardens, urban farming, Slow Food, Permaculture Hunter and Hunter Organic Growers Society.

Of significant value to Hunter Wetlands National Park, volunteers contribute many hours managing garden sites, maintaining native vegetation in the vicinity of the community gardens and maintaining

a social and educational presence, welcoming visitors and small groups, recording observations (rainfall records, feral animal sightings etc) and reporting anti-social behaviour to NPWS.

Our volunteer gardeners

Current volunteers are largely recruited from Hunter Volunteer Centre, many fulfilling 15 hour/week Centrelink requirements for people aged 50-65 years. Others arrive invited by word of mouth, passionate about food growing or keen to learn. Although the garden is collectively run, occasionally special interest groups have taken on a section of the garden in consultation with the rest of the volunteers.

On average people are committed for around two to five years, some up to twelve. Average hours are 15 hours per week per person usually for around 5 hours per day. Currently the garden is attended Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Fridays, with occasional additional times as approved. Gardeners operate with a minimum number of two people for workplace health and safety reasons.

Current attendance:

Monday 2-7 people

Tuesday 2-3 people

Wednesday 2- 9 people

Friday 2-10 people

Support – current

The goal of HLLS is to work with a new host organisation to develop a smooth transition to keep the community garden working, by developing a plan for sustained activity. In 2017 HLLS will continue to provide additional resources to equip the facility so it can run with greater autonomy into the future.

Assets

Asset	Gardens	Gardens shed	Bushfood Area
Shipping container sheds	2		
Roof /awning	1		
Water tanks	2		1
Stand-alone sink	1		
Steel bar gate	1		
Gazebos	1		1
Town water infrastructure*	Yes (management		No

	cost to be transferred)		
Accessible portaloo*	1 (management cost to be transferred)		
Bridges			3
Damaged boardwalk footings	Yes		Yes
Wooden picnic tables	2		1
Wooden sleeper garden beds, various sizes	Yes		
Vineyard trellises	3		
Fencing			Yes
Compost bins	8		
Manure storage bins	2		
Pump		1 (to be stored in secure location)	
Mower		1 (to be stored in secure location)	
Cultivator		1 (to be stored in secure location)	
Linetrimmer		1 (to be stored in secure location)	
Chainsaw		1 (to be stored in secure location)	

Community garden components

Vegetable gardening: vegetables are grown year-round in shared and purpose-built plots. Gardeners strive to adhere to organic methods where possible, for example using natural materials such as manure and compost to nourish the soil, and comfrey and garlic sprays to help manage insect populations.

Orchard: a diverse range of fruit trees are grown and maintained for fruit production

City Farm Food Forest garden: designed by Permaculture Hunter, the food forest garden features dozens of unusual edible species integrated in a dense and biodiverse 'forest' assembly.

Bush Food garden: Bush foods found in this $\frac{3}{4}$ hectare garden include Cumbungi; Native Ginger; Wild Quince, Lillypilly, Sandpaper Fig; Warrigal Greens; Mat Rush; Lemon Myrtle, Aniseed Tree, Maclura.

As well as providing food for people and wildlife, the bush food garden offers a major environmental education opportunity relating to Australian native foods and Aboriginal natural resource management.

Composting: Organic matter is placed in aerated heaps where it is broken down by organisms such as bacteria, fungi and worms. The freed nutrients from old plant matter make compost a 'natural' source of nutrients (fertilizer) for new plants.

Educational gazebo: Educational groups and tours can be accommodated in a gazebo which features signage on the environmental concepts demonstrated in the gardens' design.

Community capacity building: community gardens add interest and beauty to the city, serve as neighbourhood landmarks, provide opportunities for fun, and help to build community. Some aspects of community building provided include:

- Connect residents to each other and the land/nature, building community through gardening.
- Outdoor "community centre" e.g. enhancing family time, casual mother-and-young-children groups, environmental education for tour groups, clubs, schools, cyclists, bushwalkers, and other recreational hobbyists.
- Foster inter-generational relationships and cultural understanding among participants.
- Providing a positive project and sense of belonging outside of the paid employment sector.
- Meeting resident demands for land and education.

Environmental Stewardship: The principles of organic gardening used in the community gardens promote care of the soil and plant management in accordance with natural systems.

Removal of invasive species and replacement with native plants surrounding the gardens is a key component to the educational and physical activity on site. Waste reduction through composting, rainwater collection, and other practices provide examples of green living for the gardeners and the surrounding neighbourhood.

Responsibilities of site managers

Community Garden Support

Key to the operation and sustainability of the Kooragang Community Gardens is regular maintenance by volunteer gardeners. A regular team of at least 10 people is estimated as the base level staffing required to maintain existing garden beds, orchard, lawns and native vegetation within the licence area. Maintenance may additionally extend to building and replacing raised garden beds, installing and/or repairing fencing, locks and other security measures, irrigation, sheds, and signage. Financial support will be required to maintain ownership of an accessible toilet located at the site. Additional funding might be required for support materials (e.g. tools, mowers, fuel, gloves and other PPE) as well as garden input products (e.g. blood and bone, dolomite, mulch), depending on the methods employed by gardeners.

Site management

Tasks for the site manager would include:

- Liaise with National Parks and Wildlife Service through Hunter Wetlands National Park regarding site licence and conditions
- Liaise with other stakeholders, including HLLS during the transition of licence
- Ensure that volunteer gardeners are supported and recruited sufficient to maintain gardens and garden infrastructure.
- Assign garden plots, and manage allocation of work areas within shared garden context.
- Facilitate garden participants in the sharing of ideas, problem-solving, democracy and balanced authority and leadership.
- Build partnerships and help leverage fundraising capacity.
- Identify ways to operate with financial independence or to pay staff coordinator.
- Build partnerships with growers, markets, nursery people and others.
- Ensure that gardeners establish and adhere to safe working methods and WHS policies.
- Administrative tasks including public liability insurance and Centrelink reporting requirements and security.
- Promote and advocate community gardens and network with like-minded organisations.

Water

The current water usage of the garden is around 150-200,000 litres per year (3000-4000 litres per week). As much as possible this is supplied by rainwater captured from several structures, mostly from two 22000L tanks that capture rainwater from the roof of the HLLS shed and transported to the gardens via water tank trailer. This shed and water tanker will not be available for water catchment and supply in the long term beyond 2017.

Rainwater is collected at the gardens site from one small shed roof (66m²) into a 15,000 litre tank and one small gazebo roof (24m²) into a 5,000 litre tank. This rainwater is pumped for irrigation. Additional town water is used to supplement rainwater, with usage dependent on availability of rainwater and tanker. The host organization will be invoiced by NPWS for any town water used. Measures to increase rainwater harvesting and reduce town water use may be considered – for example installing roofing for rainwater catchment on additional shed, relocating gazebo from bushfood garden and connecting its roof to additional 10,000 litre tanks. Options can be discussed with HLLS and NPWS.

Security

The community garden site is currently fenced only with a bar gate at its entrance off Milhams Road. It is readily accessible by pedestrians who have 24 hour access (limited only when gardeners, NPWS staff and other stakeholders are present). Theft of vegetables and low cost infrastructure (irrigation fittings, bird netting, hoses) is occasionally occurs when these are left visible and unattended. Medium value tools (\$20-\$200 items) are kept in one of two locked shipping containers on site. High value tools and machinery (\$200-\$1000+) are currently stored in HLLS shed which is locked, fenced and has back-to-base security. These items are noted in the assets list “to be stored in secured location”.

Flood risk

The community garden site is on floodplain between the north and south arms of the Hunter River within a wetlands site on Ash Islands in the Hunter River estuary and therefore should be noted that various areas in the area flood periodically. The highest point on Ash Island is 2m AHD, such that the host organization would require a flood readiness plan. Swales and artificial ponds cover part of the proposed Community Gardens licence area.

References

Hunter Local Land Services	http://hunter.lls.nsw.gov.au/
Kooragang Wetland Rehabilitation Project	http://www.kooragangwetlands.com
Australian Community Gardens Network	http://communitygarden.org.au/

Map 1: Option 1- Map of licence area for Community Garden including Bush Food area



Option 1: Ash Island Community Garden including Bush Food Corner and connecting path; boundaries for amended NPWS licence and Management of Community Gardens EOI 11/5/17

Map 2: Option 2- Map of licence area for Community Garden only



Option 2: Ash Island Community Garden including vegetable beds, orchard, food forest and native buffers only; boundaries for amended NPWS licence and Management of Community Gardens EOI 11/5/17

Map 3: Kooragang Community Garden site plan



Map 3: Ash Island Community Garden existing elements 2017.

