



# Seagrass

## Signals for Seagrass Positive

**The signs for the future of seagrass beds in Lake Macquarie are becoming positive, with emerging government and community recognition of the vital role that seagrasses play in Lake Macquarie's ecosystem.**

Seagrass areas have decreased since the 1960's. While precise figures are unknown due to seasonal variations and differing measurement techniques, it is generally agreed that almost 20% of seagrass meadows have been lost. The losses of seagrass meadows can be rapid and recovery in some species is very slow, as young plants rely on larger plants for protection. In fact, damage to some seagrass meadows can last for over 50 years. Seagrass meadows form the foundation of the Lake's food chain and are an essential element of the ecosystem. In areas where seagrasses are lost, marine life is lost too.

Seagrass protection has been on the agenda for a number of years. A State Government strategic initiative introduced 10 years ago to protect fisheries included special habitat protection plans for seagrasses. The aim of the plan was to ensure no net loss of seagrasses.

The action plan recommended by the Premier's Task Force on Lake Macquarie to improve the Lake's health, has been under implementation for over four years as a joint initiative of the State Government, Lake Macquarie City Council and Wyong Shire Council. Although still subject to significant variability, the signs are positive for the future of our seagrass, with annual monitoring of seagrass beds between 2000 and 2003 showing early signs of improved coverage.

Although progress is clearly being made, there is still room for improvement. Seagrass protection is something we can all contribute too. The biggest threats to seagrass beds



are erosion and stormwater run-off containing sediments and nutrients entering the Lake from common household practices like fertilizing lawns, hosing down paths and dumping grass clippings into waterways that enter the Lake. When excess sediments and nutrients contained in stormwater run-off enter the Lake it can cause excessive growth of algae. Some types of algae increase the turbidity of the Lake and prevent light from penetrating the water and reaching the seagrasses, which in turn reduces their capacity for growth. Algal blooms occasionally grow in enclosed areas of the Lake where there is excessive nutrient content. This process is known as eutrophication and can be caused by accelerated nutrient injections from urban and rural land uses.

Other ways boat owners can help protect seagrass meadows are by remaining in marked boating channels, avoiding motoring over seagrass in shallow water, avoiding anchoring in seagrass meadows and avoiding dragging mooring chains across seagrass beds.

The Lake is constantly changing, as all living things do. The location and size of seagrass beds is not fixed, and is always evolving. Through working together we can help preserve the life of this vital element of the Lake's ecosystem.

