Saltmarsh plants

Saltmarsh – an estuary habitat that reduces smells

A saltmarsh is a habitat of plants such as grasses, reeds, sedges, succulents and shrubs found in the high tide zone of estuaries and lagoons such as Tuggerah Lakes where they act as a buffer between the brackish water environment and the land. The estuary's water edge is fringed by three distinct habitats. As we move up the shore seagrass gives way to saltmarsh, then becomes wetland. These habitats work together to cycle nutrients and provide homes for many animals. Saltmarsh plants can tolerate high levels of soil and water salinity as well as periods without moisture.

Saltmarsh habitats are as vibrant as rainforests

Once seen as wastelands, saltmarshes are now known to be as biologically productive as many rainforests. They provide important habitat for local and migratory wildlife. Vulnerable Threatened Species such as the wetland bird Pied Oystercatcher visit Tuggerah Lakes. The saltmarsh environment is also important to fish species for food, shelter and nursery grounds.

More saltmarsh – less smell!

Saltmarshes cycle nutrients very efficiently and so play a very important role in maintaining the health of Tuggerah Lakes Estuary. The dead leaves and branches of the saltmarsh vegetation are broken down by bacteria and fungi. This material is then eaten by mussels, oysters, snails, crabs, prawns and mullet, which inturn become food for other animals.

Located directly behind seagrass, saltmarsh is crucial to trap and dry wrack (dead seagrass material) to help it breakdown naturally and quickly. Without saltmarsh, the wrack builds-up in the water and settles on the mud bed, which then produces rotten egg gas. The wrack promotes the growth of saltmarshes, providing mulch and soil nutrients.

Saltmarsh

tuggerah lakes estuary
Get into the habitats

Wyong Shire Council is working to rehabilitate Saltmarsh

Tuggerah Lakes has lost 85% of its saltmarsh habitat

The loss of saltmarsh worldwide is significant. It is classified as an Endangered Ecological Community.

Factors that have led to the loss of local saltmarsh include: Illegal clearing of saltmarsh plants, weed invasion, stormwater run-off, changed drainage patterns, trampling by animals and humans, and excessive mowing.

Decades of urban development in the catchment of Tuggerah Lakes has impacted on the lakes' health through pollution, increased nutrient and sediment loads and reclamation of wetlands for industrial, recreational and housing development.

As part of the Estuary Management Plan, Wyong Shire Council has been working in numerous locations to rehabilitate the estuary's saltmarsh communities. Community awareness and responsible use of the foreshore will play a crucial role in the success of the regeneration program.

How You Can Help

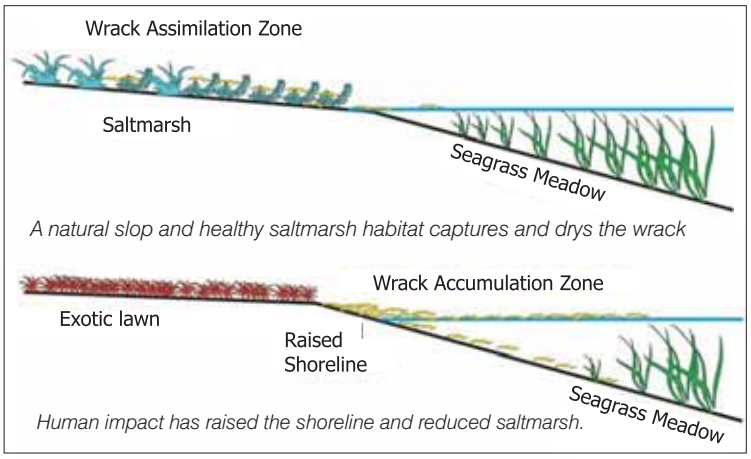
- Boats and trailers must not be stored on lake foreshore reserves. It damages saltmarsh.
- Boats must be launched and retrieved from public boat ramps only.
- Allow the saltmarsh to regenerate - don't mow the foreshore to the water edge.
- Don't modify the shoreline in any way. Keep it as natural as possible to help the seagrass wrack breakdown on the saltmarsh as quickly as possible. This includes unauthorised wharfs, jetties, boat ramps and the illegal mooring of vessels.
- Don't dig up saltmarsh plants or plant any other plants that aren't saltmarsh plants.
- Don't be a tosser- take all your rubbish with you.
- Only ride your bike on the designated bike tracks.
- Don't leave green waste/clippings on the ground or throw them into the lake. They add harmful nutrients to the water. Use your green waste bin.

An unhealthy mown saltmarsh

Why not mow to the edge of the lake?

Saltmarsh is low growing, with most plants reaching approximately 30cm high and a few varieties growing to around 50cm. Saltmarsh provides a structure where wrack is naturally suspended and dried out. Mowing to the foreshore prevents saltmarsh from regenerating.

Human activity has also led to a change in the natural slope where the water and land meet. This means that seagrass wrack is not able to wash up on the shore to the saltmarsh where it can breakdown naturally in the Wrack Assimilation Zone. Instead it stays in the water to suffocate the mud it settles on, which as a result produces rotten egg gas.



In conjuction with public awareness and the responsible use of the foreshore, it is expected that Council's program to regenerate saltmarsh will reduce the odour and black ooze.

WYONG SHIRE COUNCIL

CARING FOR OUR COUNTRY

This project is coordinated by Wyong Shire Council, through funding from the Australian Government's Caring for our Country.