



ADDISON ROAD
COMMUNITY ORGANISATION



ECO FEST INNER WEST



INSIGHTS

Celebrating Urban Ecology

2026

"I shall endeavor to find out how nature's forces act upon one another, and in what manner the geographic environment exerts its influence on animals and plants." - Alexander von Humboldt, 1799

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Gathering

The Inner West community is showing policymakers and industry that they are serious about environmental action

Climate policy is too often framed at a distance, in headlines, statistics and national targets. EcoFest Inner West brings it to street-level, to see what environmental impact looks like up close and what locals can do to drive it. The program offers accessible knowledge on urban ecology, environmental science and climate policy with the public, giving a voice to the community groups, residents and small businesses leading environmental work from the ground up.

Inner West Sydney has seen a number of changes over the last year. To name just a few, the Greenway opened to the public in December 2025. On the Cooks River, large regeneration plantings and a wetland re-creation design were installed, and critical discussions held on commercial developments and data centres, pollution management and conservation needs. At Addi Road Community Organisation the 9-acres of urban green space underwent a community-driven greening program to improve the biodiversity and address the aging tree canopy. Around our neighbourhoods, the community submitted a number of proposals for street calming and active transport corridors in connection with the opening of Sydenham Metro Station. And in July the release of [NSW Tree Canopy Data](#) gave rise to concern across many Sydney suburbs, where canopy cover is stagnating or declining.

Where science and tech find application in the community

The objective of ECO FEST was to cover a range of fields under urban ecology and community-level environmental action, to seek information on the current status and trends from experts, and to bring together the environmental groups that work in these fields across the Inner West. We attracted excellent speakers on urban greening, bushcare and regeneration, tree canopy strategy, important plants, weed management, pest awareness, social/cultural/artistic engagement with the environment, hydraulic and hydrology issues facing our cities, air quality and nature-based solutions. We included a range of actors from community groups, private sector, science and academia, and government.

Speakers shared first-hand insights and engaged with the audience, giving the local community a chance to find out more. Opened by Rosanna Barbero and Tarunna Sebastian, and moderated by Ashley Wearne, the program was held as part of Addi Road's 50th anniversary year, with support from Landcare Australia Bupa Healthy Cities.

Opening	Ashley Wearne. Environment & Sustainability Manager. Addi Road. Rosanna Barbero. CEO. Addi Road Community Organisation. Taruna Sebastian. Lecturer of Indigenous Studies. University of Sydney.
Invasive Weeds Management	Dr. Juliane Pereira Ribeiro. Ecologist. Dragonfly Environmental.
Invasive Pest threats	Jordan Gillian & Dr. Zac Hemmings. Biosecurity. NSW DPIRD.
Local Environmental Projects	Bruce Ashley. Lead Consultant. The Green Way. Peter Munro. Co-Founder. Cooks River Valley Association. Erryn Blacklock. Co-Founder. Bushy Landscapes.
Sonifying Living Organisms	Sofie Loizou. Sound Engineer/Musician. Radical Nature Records.
Edible Native Plants	Greg Smith. Founder. Yama2You.
Selecting Native Plants	Erryn Blacklock. Co-Founder. Bushy Landscapes.
Technical Foundations	Gwilym Griffiths. Senior Consultant. Good Canopy Company. Dr. Fiona Johnson. Statistical Hydrologist. UNSW. Dr. Peter Irga. Environmental Engineer. UTS.
Guided Walks	Bioretention Systems & Rain Gardens: Alexa McAuley. Engineer. Community Gardens: Graham Hunt. Architect.



Engagement from community keeps places alive

One of the strongest threads of the day was that restoration lasts when people feel ownership. Peter Munro described Mudcrabs sites handed back to council that began failing within a year once community care stopped. Bruce Ashley described the GreenWay as a vision the community keeps shaping, 25 years on. Ashley Wearne pointed to the years-long commitment from local residents, working weekly to prepare the depleted soil at Addi Road, and add 3000 plants to the site over the last 12 months.

Erryn told of one resident's nature strip planting that spread down the whole street, and the learning happening in Australian gardening, with practitioners going back to wilder, native formats. Several speakers reached for the idea of custodians or guardians, people who take ongoing responsibility for Country. A **key interest voiced by participants** is how this sense of connection between community and its environment can be strengthened, and what we need to do to make our environmental work stick.



Residents are the early warning system

ECO FEST presented two talks on invasive species: Juliane Pereira Ribeiro (Dragonfly Environmental) on weeds in native landscapes, and Jordan Gillian and Zac Hemmings, Plant Biosecurity Officers with NSW Department of Primary Industries, on exotic pests and diseases.

A definition of invasive species is that they reproduce, disperse and grow quickly to outcompete the native flora and fauna. Three Inner West weeds that meet this definition are Asthma Weed (*Parietaria judaica*), Madeira Vine (*Anredera cordifolia*), Cobblers Pegs (*Bidens pilosa*). They can be managed largely by hand-weeding and regular monitoring. The key is to remove weeds before flowers disperse dry seeds.

Reference images and management advice can be found on [NSW WeedWise](https://www.nsw.gov.au/weedwise).

NSW DPI works with around 90 community gardens to spot pests early. The pests they monitor for can develop chemical resistance quickly, with unique life history traits like asexual reproduction.

Pests tend to be generalists, feeding on a wide range of crops or host plants, and tolerating a broad range of environmental conditions. They grow faster and appear earlier in the season than native species.

An example provided, the Lanternfly (*Lycorma delicatula*) – was discovered in Pennsylvania, USA in 2014, causing ~500 jobs lost annually. It has just been discovered in Europe in September 2026.

The Brown Marmorated Stink Bug (*Halyomorpha halys*) is a top priority for NSW DPI. Each year, a handful of sightings are recorded and eradicated forcefully.



*Without bushfoods,
it won't be a good
future for people,
plants and
animals*

The right plants for an environment

While Australia has an incredible range of plants and animals, it is unfortunately a world leader in biodiversity loss, with 55 wildlife species and 37 plants lost to extinction since colonisation.

Greg Smith (above) specialises in bush food, a global industry valued at over [\\$80m by USYD](#) in 2020. While the market increases rapidly, and bush food offers compelling solutions for food security, we have paid little attention to Australian edible plants, and Aboriginal ownership in the industry is very low.

19% of Australia's [natural ecosystems are collapsing](#) due to invasive exotic species, land clearing and climate change. Agriculture and horticulture are in urgent need of saving the biodiversity that Country and people depend on.

Bush regenerator Erryn Blacklock broke down the basics of ecological gardening:

- Let gardens be bushy for wildlife;
- Assess a site before planting, and keep natives that are already there;
- Procure local Plant Community species and avoid cultivars.

Listening to nature's living pulse

Sofie Loizou is an internationally acclaimed composer, audio engineer and radio host in Marrickville. She captures the sound of Sydney with a huge body of ground-breaking work featuring the socio-environmental. Using synthesizers and the *Pocket Scion* galvanometer, Sofie sonified biofeedback from the plants we are using

to regenerate the natural landscape at Addi Road. The audience heard the influence of humans on plants. Technology like this allows us to experience the physical nature and life of plants through the sense of hearing, giving artists and researchers more ways to engage and interact with nature.





Intersections: water, air, flora & society

The Technical Foundations panel looked at the current trends and technology across air quality, tree canopy and hydrology and flood forecasting in cities. Fiona Johnson leads research that allows us to understand the probability of flooding and assess the impact and need for hydraulic infrastructure. The evidence shows that Australian cities need to invest more in measures that allow water infiltration, where the historic practice has sought to move water quickly away.

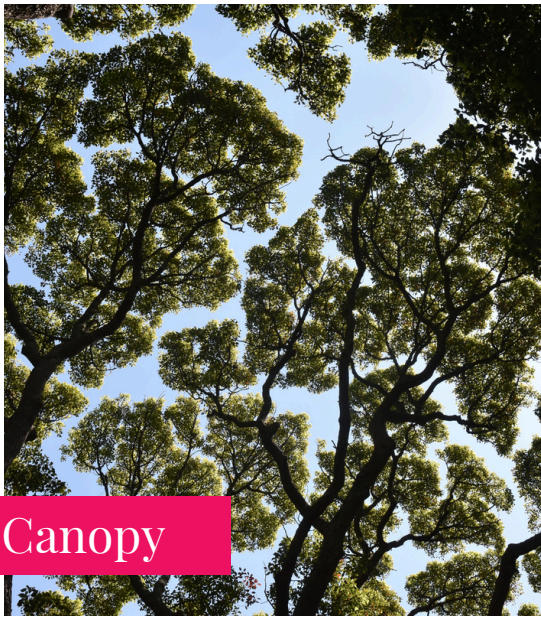
Alexa MacAuley was on hand to demonstrate how engineering firm, Civile, designed the bioretention ponds at Addi Road, which slow the flow of stormwater from the Stanmore and Marrickville catchments, and filter pollutants headed towards the Cooks River. Rivers need more space than we give them: the hydrosphere, atmosphere, and geosphere intersect at the earth's surface,

where plants, humans and animals spend most of their time. The example of a concreted riverbank is an interruption of a natural system that would otherwise sustain itself, keeping water, plants, air and soil healthy through ecological processes.

In an effort to incorporate more plants into urban landscapes, research on green roofs and walls is showing promising signs for the improvement of air quality and microclimate, but these solutions are still financially out of reach in mainstream building. Stronger efforts are needed to green cities via trees in the ground. While the evidence for this has been acknowledged by Australian governments, the resources devoted to urban greening are inadequate, and many Sydney suburbs cannot meet their targets.

Community resistance is often the biggest barrier to increasing the number of trees or allowing a river or greenspace to function naturally. Councils need residents' support.

Resources



Canopy

Tree canopy trends across suburbs are easily viewed by suburb in the [NSW Seed spreadsheet](#).

For Greater Sydney, an [urban tree canopy target of 40%](#) by 2036 is set by the NSW Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure. Current canopy is at 21.9%, and the coverage in some LGAs is actually declining. A canopy of 30 - 40% is believed to deliver urban cooling effects. Plants over 3 meters meet our [canopy definition](#), which varies across councils.

[Gwilym Griffiths summarised](#) the data.



Plants

The Inner West local **Plant Community** is [Sydney Turpentine-Ironbark Forest](#) (STIF). 0.5% of original remnants remain.

IWC has a [quick local plant reference](#).

Ecologist Doug Benson's [Missing Jigsaw Pieces](#) provides broad, deep local plant info and images.

Nurseries that stock STIF plants include:

- [IndigiGrow](#)
- [Sutherland Shire Nursery](#)
- [IWC Community Nurseries](#)
- [Harvest Seeds Native Plants](#)
- [Western Sydney Bush Native Nursery](#)



Community

The Inner West has a large number of **community environmental groups** that anybody can take part in. These are excellent touchpoints for residents looking to work on various environmental projects. They cover activities like bushcare, lobbying & campaigns, street calming and active transport. Visit:

- [Cooks River Valley Association](#)
- [Inner West Environment Group](#)
- [Friends of the GreenWay](#)
- [Addi Road Environment Group](#)
- [Better Streets Inner West](#)
- [Bike Marrickville](#)

Recommendations

Collaboration

Many presenters and audience members highlighted the benefit of collaboration, whether with council, local businesses, research institutes, or between the local environment groups. They also recalled challenges maintaining good partnership. A key recommendation was for further efforts to promote collaboration between environmental practitioners in the Inner West, including events that bring the different groups together for exchange.

Council & Community

Environmental partnership with the Inner West council was explored in several discussions between presenters and audience. Challenges included 'silo' structures and fragmentation, whereby a project or a project site falls under the responsibility of various teams on the council's side, making it difficult to coordinate a partnership. In some cases, it's a matter of inadequate awareness about the environmental work done by community.

Engagement

Commentary and feedback pointed out a desire from within the community to become more engaged with the environmental work being done by researchers, resident groups, and Council, raising questions about how others can get involved in all the things happening.



Most useful part of ECO FEST?

Being inspired to attempt more native planting in my landscape design practice / potential to change direction professionally.

It was scary but heartening to see the passion of government employees working in pests and biosecurity.

Discussions around bush regeneration and the need for an ecological strategy for the Inner West.

Thank you to all involved - the speakers, the fantastic audience, the volunteers, and the Addi Road Environment Group who inspired all this!

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About Addi Road

The Addison Road Community Organisation is a registered charity and leading multicultural community centre based in the Sydney suburb of Marrickville which has been responding to community needs since 1976. Addi Road spearheads a rights-based approach to community development programs in arts, culture, environmental and social justice.

About the Author

Ashley Wearne manages clean development projects with a focus on nature-based solutions deeply integrated in the local community. He has worked with land managers, community groups, farmers, local and national governments, energy regulators and ministries across Australia, Africa, Asia and Europe. Contact: a.wearne@addiroad.org.au