

# Collaborations

LCP23-015\_LLC

## Putting wetlands on the school radar!

Hawkesbury-Nepean Landcare Network



The HNLN Schools Wetlands Challenge is a hands-on, community-driven education program that empowers schools across the Hawkesbury-Nepean region to adopt, study, and restore local wetlands through citizen science and environmental learning. Launched in 2025 by HNLN with support from CHEN, the program fosters student connection to local ecosystems and culminates in an annual awards event celebrating conservation achievements and leadership.

### The issue

Within Hawkesbury Nepean Landcare Networks (HNLN) 4 LGA's there are, 159 significant wetlands in the Hawkesbury region, 2,000 hectares of wetlands in the Penrith region, 12 natural and constructed wetlands in the Blacktown region, 39 major water sub-catchments and over 900 kilometres of natural and constructed waterways in the Hills Shire region, yet there are no current programs educating and highlighting the importance of wetlands and their function in our ecosystem, within our local schools!

### The solution

With the support of the Cattai Hills Environment Network (CHEN), HNLN is committed to connecting young people and their communities with the natural landscapes of the Hawkesbury-Nepean River system. In 2025, HNLN launched the inaugural HNLN Schools Wetlands Challenge to engage local schools in wetland conservation through education, citizen science, and habitat restoration. The HNLN Schools Wetland Challenge (SWC) is a hands-on, community-driven program that empowers each participating school to "adopt" a wetland and develop a relationship with the site over the course of the challenge. Students learn to monitor and care for their wetland using nature-based solutions and scientific methods. The program culminates in the HNLN SWC Awards, where schools present their work and compete for the title of "HNL Wetland of the Year." Judging criteria include the level of citizen science undertaken, how environmental education has been integrated across the school, and demonstrated care through restoration efforts and cultural learning. More than a competition, the Challenge creates a meaningful, long-lasting connection to place, nurturing students' environmental awareness and leadership.

### The impact

The HNLN SWC puts wetlands back on the school radar by offering a fun, accessible and achievable model of engagement that is deeply place-based and community-driven. Through the HNLN SWC initiative, HNLN seeks to create a generation of young environmental leaders who understand the importance of wetlands in sustaining biodiversity, mitigating climate impacts, and protecting water quality. By bringing together students, teachers, local councils, Landcare groups, environmental educators, and scientists, the HNLN SWC builds a community of care around local wetlands. Each year, students grow their ecological literacy and strengthen their sense of agency through real-world action. These cumulative efforts result in tangible environmental outcomes—such as improved wetland habitat—and personal growth, as young people come to see themselves as part of a wider movement for environmental resilience.



### Project Partners



This initiative is made possible by the NSW Landcare Enabling Program, a collaboration between Local Land Services and Landcare NSW supported by the NSW Government.

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