

Newsletter September 2026

Director's Foreword

Welcome to the latest edition of the Australian Harmony Centre newsletter.

It is a pleasure to welcome **Dr Helga Simon**, who commenced with the Australian Harmony Centre in September as our new Research Fellow. Helga brings a strong connection to Macquarie University, having completed her PhD in the Discipline of Geography and Planning earlier this year. Her research focused on *reconceptualising wellbeing in the nature-positive city*, a theme that aligns closely with the Centre's commitment to exploring new ways of connecting people, nature and place.

I am also delighted to welcome **Dr Paul Govind** from the Macquarie University Law School. Paul and I have worked together for many years exploring environmental and planning law and policy, and I look forward to continuing and extending this collaboration through the Harmony Centre.

I would also like to extend a special thanks to **Hedda Paisley**, Executive Director, Philanthropy & Alumni Relations, and her team for organising *Alumni Reconnect: Nature Positive Pathways toward a Sustainable Future*. Opened by Macquarie University Vice-Chancellor, **Professor S. Bruce Downton**, the event brought together an inspiring group of new and longstanding friends of Macquarie University and the Harmony Centre.

The event provided an opportunity to connect with **Dr Nathan Ross**, Director of the Commonwealth and Asia Pacific Sustainable Markets Initiative; **Sharon Winsor**, Ngemba Weilwan woman, Macquarie University alumna and founder of Indigiearth; and **Dermot O'Gorman**, CEO of WWF-Australia. We were also joined by colleagues from across Macquarie, including **Dr Vanessa Pirotta** from the Department of Natural Sciences, **Professor Maria Kangas**, Head of the School of Psychological Sciences, **Professor Kate Lloyd** from the Discipline of Geography and Planning, and **Associate Professor James Hazleton** from the Macquarie Business School.

These connections reflect something fundamental to the work of the Harmony Centre: **the challenges facing society cannot be solved within disciplinary boundaries**. Working across disciplines, and in partnership with industry, government, communities and Indigenous knowledge holders, is essential to developing solutions that are both practical and transformative.

I look forward to sharing more of this work with you in the months ahead.

Professor Peter Davies

Director, Australian Harmony Centre for Ecosystem Futures

Centre Activities

Macquarie Uni Alumni invited to turn inspiration into action via the Australian Harmony Centre

Alumni Reconnect: Nature Positive pathways toward a sustainable future, held alongside Macquarie University Open Day on 15 August, invited the Macquarie Uni Alumni community to walk with the Australian Harmony Centre for Ecosystem Futures toward a future where nature is at the centre of our wellbeing and economies.

The day opened with a smoking ceremony led by Dharug Elder **Aunty Leanne King**. As light rain connected land, water, and sky, Aunty Leanne, assisted by Dharug woman and Harmony Centre researcher **Dr Jo Rey**, reminded guests of the responsibility to care for the Country that sustains us.

The need to take meaningful action to care for both local and global ecosystems shaped the event, including the Vice-Chancellor's welcome, and **Dr Nathan Ross'** keynote. In an expert panel discussion, MQ alumna and Ngemba-Weilwan woman **Sharon Winsor** emphasised that "AI" - Aboriginal Intelligence - is crucial to living in harmony with nature. After the panel, guests wrote postcards sharing sustainability wishes and engaged with hands-on Harmony Centre showcases featuring researchers, alumni, and professional staff. Short talks and campus tours highlighted the value of bringing interdisciplinary perspectives together, while demonstrating practical work underway to restore nature and care for Country on the Wallumattagal Campus.

Alumni Reconnect marks an important step in connecting the Australian Harmony Centre with the broader Macquarie community. We look forward to following up with alumni who are keen to turn inspiration into action and support a future where people and nature thrive in harmony.

If you missed this wonderful event, don't worry: [our highlight reel is ready for you to watch](#).



MQ alumna Cay-leigh Bartnicke shares her work at the Alumni in Sustainability Careers showcase
Photo courtesy of Macquarie University

Fire for Resilience: Dharug Cultural Burning in comparison to Hazard Reduction methods – a comparative study

Phase 1: Cultural Burn, South Turramurra, Ku-ring-gai Council

This project has attracted support through the NSW Environmental Trust Grant and will run from 2026 to 2029. It is a comparative socio-cultural and ecological study undertaken across 4 Durumbura Dhurabang (aka Lane Cove River) catchment council jurisdictions: Ku-ring-gai, Hunters Hill, Lane Cove and Hornsby, NSW.

Activation of the project recently begun, with the first Dharug and allies cultural burn taking place in South Turramurra (Ku-ring-gai Council), undertaken between 27th August and 29th August inclusively. It commenced with a smoking ceremony for all participants, Dharug family, National Parks and Wildlife Service representative, Ku-ring-gai Council management representatives as well as their fire team who were observing and learning. **Dr. Jo Anne Rey** conducted several interviews of Dharug participants concerning the socio-cultural aspects of cultural burning undertaken by the Yanama Budjuri Gumada (YBG) Aboriginal Corporation, while **Dr. Gabrielle Brennan** led the ecological research.

Overall, it was a great success. The cool fires enabled resident other-than-humans time to remove themselves from any danger – an important point of difference to mainstream burning outcomes. Evidence of these residents included sightings of the red-backed toadlet, a legless lizard, wallaby presence, and green Carpenter bees' nest. It was also an educational opportunity for Ku-ring-gai Fire team participants, who were extremely supportive in assisting, especially with the enormous amount of paperwork that State agencies require, providing the required safety equipment and managing ground operations, and general interest in learning a different approach to fire: not seeing it as a threat, but as a positive process for land and nature management. Thanks to the team and all involved.

The comparative Hazard Reduction burn within the Ku-ring-gai jurisdiction is anticipated to take place at the end of September/early October, 2026.



Left to right: Cool Burn, Legless Lizard, Dharug Community and YBG Fire participant

Back Row: From left to right: Dr. Venessa Possum, Aunty Corina Norman, Uncle Lex Dadd, Aunty and Dr. Rosemary Norman-Hill, Dr. Jo Rey, Shannon Norman

Front row: Eli Norman-Dadd.

Photos courtesy of Dr. Jo Rey

Wildfire Resilience

The Harmony Centre joined the [Circular Bioeconomy Alliance Wildfire Resilient Landscape Network](#) to submit a collaborative grant to help manage the impacts of wildfires. This comes on the back of a number of significant wildfires affecting parts of Europe over their 2026 summer, builds on many Living Lab models from around the world and for Australia, it aims to capture some of our experiences in managing fire risks and more recently how Indigenous fire and landscape knowledge can be used to create more resilient landscapes.

Passive Acoustic Bird Monitoring Begins on Wallumattagal Campus

The Harmony Centre commenced passive acoustic monitoring of birds across Macquarie University's Wallumattagal Campus on 12 August, using BirdWeather Portable Universe Codec (PUC) autonomous recording units. These weatherproof bioacoustic devices record environmental sounds and use the BirdNET artificial intelligence system to identify bird vocalisations to species level, with detections available online in near real time.

One BirdWeather PUC has been permanently installed near Macquarie Lake, providing continuous 24/7 monitoring of campus bird activity. Its live detections can be explored through the [Macquarie University Lake BirdWeather station](#). The identification data can also be explored and downloaded using [BirdWeather's Data Explorer tool](#).

A further six PUC devices have been temporarily deployed at locations across campus, including the Ecology Reserve. Five of these are being deployed by **Dr Caragh Threlfall** for use in biology teaching, where the acoustic data can be integrated with other biodiversity data collected by students across campus. Together, these datasets can contribute to establishing a biodiversity baseline for the Wallumattagal Campus and support future biodiversity monitoring, research and teaching.



BirdWeather PUC deployed for passive acoustic bird monitoring on Macquarie University's Wallumattagal Campus.

Photos by Tselmeg Tumendelger

Macquarie at GSDC Jakarta: Sustainability in Action on the Global Stage

Macquarie University partnered with Times Higher Education at the [Global Sustainable Development Congress \(GSDC\)](#) in Jakarta, a leading international forum advancing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Held from 22–25 June 2026 at the Indonesia Convention Exhibition, the Congress brought together universities, government, industry, civil society and sustainability leaders to drive practical action through dialogue and collaboration.

With more than 5,000 participants, the event provided a major platform to share ideas, showcase innovative solutions and build the partnerships needed to tackle pressing sustainability challenges. For Macquarie, it was a valuable opportunity to highlight our sustainability expertise, strengthen our profile across the Asia-Pacific region and connect with partners from around the world.

Led by **A/Prof Fatemeh Salehi**, Associate Dean, Engagement and Sustainability (Faculty of Science and Engineering), Macquarie showcased its work under the theme “**Sustainability in Action**” through an exhibition booth and targeted discussions. Featured research and initiatives spanned biodiversity, ecosystem futures, smart green cities, Living Seawalls, synthetic biology, environmental law, nature-positive finance, emerging risks, energy markets and the net-zero transition—demonstrating how Macquarie is translating bold ideas into real-world impact through cross-disciplinary research, education, policy engagement and partnerships.



A/Prof. Fatemeh Salehi, A/Prof Fiona Miller, Prof Abhay Singh, Feargal Caley, Prof Kristian Ruming

Photo courtesy of A/Prof Fatemeh Salehi

King's Foundation Australia, Hillview Estate Projects Continue

The Harmony Centre continues its work with the King's Foundation Australia with Macquarie's Masters students in the *Environmental and Sustainability Consulting* unit, working on projects that specifically focus on developing activities at the Hillview Estate. Projects include proposals for:

- A road map for a Regenerative Agriculture Demonstration Framework for Hillview Estate
- Monitoring and evaluation for Regenerative Agriculture project at Hillview Estate
- Developing an Integrated Agricultural and Horticultural Curriculum Framework for Hillview Estate: From Market Garden to Paddock
- A strategy for the development and implementation of a heritage trade and crafts program for Hillview Estate

The *Capstone Agility and Excellence in Business* unit welcomed **Alexander Douthwaite**, the King's Foundation Australia's Design and Education Director as guest lecturer. The students learned about the Foundation's work with First Nations communities and their vision for growth across Australia. This set the basis for students to develop proposals and ideas for the Foundation.

Community action creating more 'platypossibilities' for the Lane Cove River

More than 30 volunteers rolled up their sleeves on 20 September for World Cleanup Day to remove plastic and other waste from Terrys Creek – demonstrating the kind of community action that is central to creating a healthier Lane Cove River catchment. The cleanup brought together Macquarie University's Head of Sustainability, members of Friends of Lane Cove National Park and Parramatta Bushcare, Rotarians and local residents concerned about the amount of plastic and other rubbish making its way into the creek and surrounding bushland. For Harmony Centre,

the event highlighted the importance of connecting research, community knowledge and on-ground action to improve the health of local waterways.

The scale of the challenge was evident at Terrys Creek, where volunteers collected an enormous amount of waste in under two hours. The cleanup provided a striking demonstration of how plastic and other rubbish from across an urban catchment can find its way into creeks and, ultimately, the wider river system.

For the Harmony Centre and Platypossibilities, activities like the Terrys Creek cleanup are about more than removing rubbish. They help build awareness of the pressures facing urban waterways, strengthen connections between researchers and communities, and demonstrate what can be achieved when people work together to improve the places they share.

Each bag of rubbish removed is a small but tangible step towards a healthier Lane Cove River catchment – and more ‘platypossibilities’ for the future.



Photos courtesy of Rachel Sullivan

IUCA's Living Labs as Climate Policy Accelerators

The [International Universities Climate Alliance's](#) (IUCA) September 2026 Global Thematic Dialogue explored how university-led “living labs” can accelerate climate policy and on-the-ground action, bringing together speakers from across the Alliance. The session showcased several initiatives; Pathways to Water Resilient South African Cities; PaWS (University of Cape Town), Fire to Flourish (Monash University) and Geothermal Campus Living Lab (University of Leeds).

Professor Melanie Bishop from Macquarie University presented the Living Seawalls, a nature-inspired approach to redesign marine infrastructure to improve habitat and biodiversity, with broader benefits for clean water, fisheries, education, and community “blue spaces”.

Overall, the dialogue highlighted how living labs connect research, teaching, policy and partnerships—creating practical pathways to climate impact while opening new opportunities for student learning and collaboration.

You can watch the webinar [here](#).



Photos courtesy of Prof. Melanie Bishop

Upcoming Events

Nature-positive agenda for urban low-carbon masterplans

Organised by the [United Nations Academic Impact SDG 15 Hub](#), this webinar on Thursday 8 October 2026 at 11am explores how cities can move beyond low-carbon development towards a nature-positive urban future. **Professor Melanie Bishop** joins experts from Australia, Malaysia and the United States. Further information and registration is [here](#).

Harmony Centre Event

Save the date on **Wednesday 11 November** and join us for a nature-inspired event. Expect short talks, practical insights, and time to connect with people working at the intersection of nature, design, and impact.

Keep an eye on our website [event page](#) for further information when available.

Smart Cities Council NSW Chapter Launch – Smart Green NSW

Hosted by **NCS Australia**, the official Chapter Launch will establish a new local platform for collaboration, thought leadership and practical action across NSW and the ACT. **Professor Peter Davies** is a featured contributor on *Urban Reforestation: The Science Behind a Greener, Healthier NSW*. The launch will be held on **Tuesday 13 October 2026, from 5pm – 7:30pm**. Further information is [here](#).

Avalon Preservation Association

Professor Peter Davies will be a special guest speaker at the Avalon Preservation Association AGM on the topic, *Where have all the trees gone? The cumulative impact of suburban redevelopment*. It will be held on **Thursday 12 November 2026, 7pm**. Further information is [here](#).

Researcher Spotlight

Meet Dr. Alex Carthey

I'm a Senior Lecturer in the School of Natural Sciences at Macquarie University. My background is in behavioural and sensory ecology of wildlife, and much of my fieldwork uses camera traps and other monitoring methods to understand how native animals use their habitat. I also co-founded [ReHabitat](#), a profit-for-purpose company making biodegradable shelters for wildlife and seedlings after bushfire and other disturbance.

I've always been curious about how animals read their surroundings and decide where it's safe to live and feed. Cities make that question more interesting, because the pressures are obvious and yet some species still manage to hang on.

I'm currently working on the Durumbura Dhurabang Platypossibilities project that sits within the Dharug Durumbura Dhurabang (Lane Cove River) Wellbeing Project, led by Dharug scholar **Dr Jo Rey**. Our team contributes to that wider Dharug-led work.

The idea for this project was sparked by my colleague, Rachel Sullivan and her hope that the river could one day be healthy enough to support platypus. Rachel knows the Durumbura Dhurabang and its creeks well, she walks them all the time and regularly pulls rubbish out of them. Platypus have a way of capturing people's imagination, and that makes them a powerful rallying point for people to get behind in caring for a river. Platypus need clean, permanent water with plenty of waterbugs to eat, and stable banks held together by native vegetation where they can dig burrows. Whether or not platypus ever turn up, working towards a river that could support them means cleaner water, healthier banks and better habitat for everything else that lives there, from rakali and frogs to fish, turtles, birds, bats and the half a million or so people who live in the catchment, that's something a lot of people can get behind.

The first step is understanding where things stand. This semester, third-year placement students are helping establish a baseline by searching historical records, assessing habitat across the river and its creeks, and designing an environmental DNA (eDNA) survey to detect platypus from traces in the water, alongside planned camera-trap monitoring at the spots that look most promising.



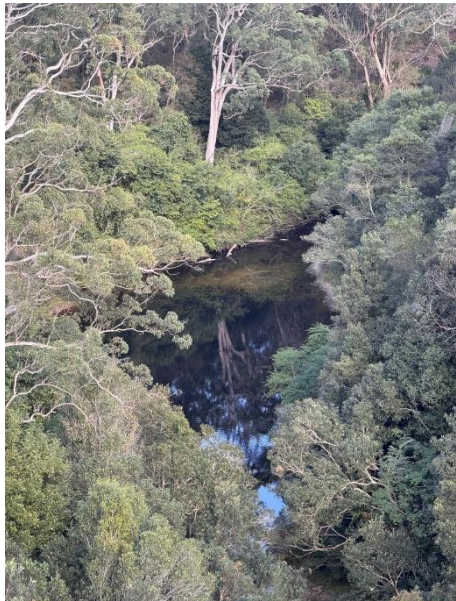
Dr. Alex Carthey

The big challenge is that no single organisation can look after a whole river. The Durumbura Dhurabang flows through several council areas, a national park, business parks and a lot of suburbs, and each part is managed by someone different. What excites me is the chance to bring all those people together around one shared goal: councils, National Parks, Bushcare and Landcare groups, businesses, residents and researchers, all working within the Dharug-led Durumbura Dhurabang project. Cleaner water, less litter, healthier banks and better-connected creeks are worth working towards in their own right. The platypus just gives everyone a good reason to pull in the same direction, and helps build the vision of catchment restoration, done right.

We'd love to hear from students interested in any part of the project. That could be history, habitat, water quality, wildlife monitoring, community engagement, or an angle we haven't thought of yet. Placement, Honours and Masters projects can be shaped around your interests. Councils, community groups and organisations interested in the health of the catchment are also very welcome to get in touch.

If you or your family have old photos, diary entries or clear memories of platypus in the Lane Cove River or its creeks, we'd love to hear about them. Rakali (native water rats) are often mistaken for platypus, so photos help a lot.

Contact alexandra.carthey@mq.edu.au.



Potential "platypossible" site along part of Lane Cove River
Photo courtesy of Dr. Alex Carthey