

The Bank Job continues

By Su Wild-River

The Friends of Mongarlowe River (FMR) "Bank Job" is project that has improved knowledge, water quality and community engagement and that continues to do so.

The idea for the project came from an earlier FMR project to protect the Macquarie Perch in the river. That project involved a 'downriver assessment', in which three FMR members—Su Wild-River, Paul Dann and Paul Bott—paddled kayaks the length of the river, looking for Macquarie perch habitat and threatening processes. We found over 40 sites that were ideal Macca breeding grounds, weeds that came and went along the length of the river, a largely intact riparian zone and very few other threatening processes. One stood out starkly. A 10m high vertical wall, towering above us just upstream of the Mongarlowe's convergence with the Shoalhaven.

The active bank erosion was being caused largely by a massive, old crack willow, growing in the river bend, and diverting water into the eastern river bend of highly erosive sodic soils. Ongoing erosion, with water quality impacts seemed sure to continue in the absence of remedial work. And this was one of the few sites where Macquarie perch breeding had been confirmed as still occurring.

The Catchment Management Authority and Upper Shoalhaven Landcare Council helped FMR to put in a grant application under the Fish Habitat Action Program in 2009, but we were unsuccessful. The grant feedback helped us to improve the application for the 2010 round and we were successful in receiving \$26,650 for The Bank Job rehabilitation works.

The final design was first to remove the willow, and then to install 5 rock groins along the bend, to stabilise the bank and enable sedimentation instead of erosion.



Sandra von Sneider and Neale Pryor at the Bank Job



The Bank Job—before—above, and after, below, taken from opposite ends of the eroded bank.



Removing the willow was no easy first task. This was made difficult by the thick blackberry vines guarding its base. The Willow Warriors were called in for expertise in removing the beast. The final design for bank stabilisation involved bringing in rock and making five rock groins. These can be seen in the second photo above.

Eight major rain events later, the rock groins are holding, and sediment has built up behind them. Many of the trees and shrubs we planted are growing well.

The bad news is that the river continues to undercut the bank which has now moved back from the groins. This suggests that the project may have been under-engineered for its task. The battered banks both upstream and downstream of the cliff bank appear to be holding their form through floods. Discussions suggest that we need to evaluate the outcomes of the first project to inform the design of further work to reduce erosion at this site.

To be continued.....