

WHY WETLANDS?

Once upon a time when all the rivers were healthy, there were wetlands along either side. These swampy, muddy areas with long, slender reeds and spiky sedges were places where dragonflies and spiders, frogs and baby fish, eels, snakes and tortoises could hide. Ducks and other birds built their nests and rested among the reeds. The water was clean.



A **wetland** on Wollie Creek.

Photo: Judi Rossi

Then people came along and saw the reeds near the water. "This is a good place for a farm," said Henry and so he set about clearing the reeds. He dug some soil from the higher ground and dumped it down near the river.

The soil next to the river was dark and rich and Henry's crops grew lush and green. He had cabbages and beans, parsnips, turnips and spinach.

His farm grew so many vegetables that he was able to sell some at the market and in time, he had enough money to buy three brown cows and two pink pigs.



Cows grazing along the Cooks River, some time before 1900
Photo courtesy of Canterbury Council Local History Library. No. 011173.

The cows and pigs liked the food on the farm and they grew strong and healthy.

Unfortunately, it wasn't the same for the river.

Henry noticed how the birds and ducks had gone because they no longer had any protection among the reeds. There were no more baby fish in the river because the water was brown and murky from the waste from the farm.

When it rained, there were no reeds to slow the water down and it washed across the land, taking the soil with it. The river was filled with sediment and the fish found it difficult to breathe.

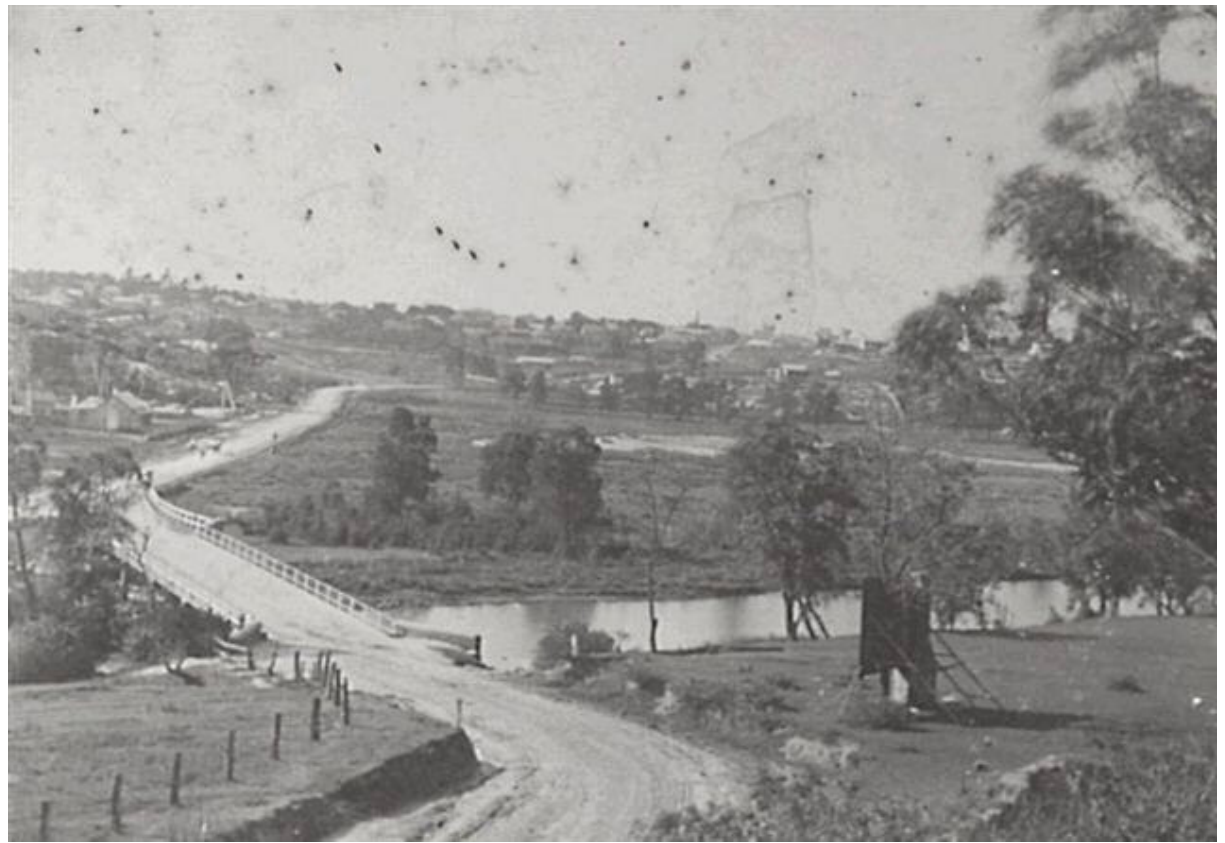
Henry saw all these changes happening and he decided to make things better.

Instead of burying all the reeds near the river, he decided to let the reeds grow there. The frogs and the fish and the ducks came back.

Instead of letting the pigs and the cows graze near the river he moved them to higher ground far away from the river bank. He still grew his fruit and vegetables but now he placed straw over the land so the rain wouldn't wash it away.

The water became clean again.

The fish came back and the river was healthy again.



Looking towards Marrickville, wetlands along the Cooks River, 1901, where Steel Park is today. Photo courtesy of Canterbury Council Local History Library. No. 030013.



Wetlands along the Cooks River, 1910
Photo courtesy of Canterbury Council Local History Library. No. 010226.

Now, do **YOU** know why wetlands are important?