



NORTH EAST
CATCHMENT
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AUTHORITY

MEDIA RELEASE

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Little Snowy project improves water quality for Eskdale

The unveiling of a simple sign at Eskdale Caravan Park this Friday will mark a three-year journey for local residents, farmers and agencies who have worked together to improve water quality in their area.

Those involved in the Little Snowy Creek project will gather at 12.30pm (Friday 30 March) to celebrate their achievements.

The project has focussed on practical solutions to issues arising from the condition and usage of the Little Snowy Creek - a tributary of the Mitta Mitta River and water supply to the township of Eskdale.

Their approach has delivered results.

As a direct result of this project, the Eskdale/Little Snowy Creek community has

- secured funds from the Victorian Government to carry out feasibility studies into the water supply for Eskdale and wastewater disposal;
- developed a Neighbourhood Environment Improvement Plan endorsed by the Victorian EPA – only the third of its kind in Victoria;
- undertaken works to open up the Creek – making it more accessible to the community;
- amalgamated two water trusts in the town,
- improved the understanding of the rural community regarding the effects of farming on waterways and;
- developed a sense of cohesion and common goals among urban and rural populations.

Initial funding for the project came from the Australian Government's National Action Plan (NAP) for Salinity and Water Quality. Work began in 2004 when the Victorian Catchment Management Council provided the North East CMA with \$200,000 in NAP funding to test the principles of land stewardship among the rural landholders of Little Snowy Creek and the urban residents of Eskdale.

According to Chris Reid from the North East CMA, water quality was and is a critical issue for the people of Eskdale and surrounding area.

“Eskdale has no treated, reticulated water supply and, for many years, Little Snowy was polluted with E. coli and related pathogens,” said Chris.

“ There is a system that distributes untreated creek water to households and businesses and a number of residents pump directly from the Creek. Water quality is therefore potentially affected by failing and leaky septic systems, storm-water, grey water and farming practices, including irrigation run-off, dairy effluent discharge and stock access to waterways.”

In its early stages, the Little Snowy Creek project concentrated on works in the agricultural sector, including willow removal, fencing of creek frontage, revegetation and the set up of off-stream water supplies to prevent stock from polluting the water supply.

“ These works demonstrated a clear commitment from rural landholders to tackle issues that would improve the condition of Little Snowy,” said Chris.

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The next phase was the use of a self-assessment tool by the people of Eskdale. This allowed community members to drive the project by identifying programs that would target areas they saw as most important. This work led to development of the Neighbourhood Environment Improvement Plan.

Despite the ongoing drought, work on the Little Snowy Creek project has continued over the last year. Willows have been removed and fencing and revegetation has occurred at four sites along the Creek in the middle of the township, including in front of and downstream of the Bowls Club.

According to Chris Reid, 'Little Snowy' has drawn together an interesting mix of rural and urban issues and proved that community and agencies can work together for a common cause.

“ From the beginning of this project, we realised that we need to adopt a co-operative inter-agency approach to achieve results. We certainly wanted to avoid having 'too many cooks' ! “

The Little Snowy Creek project was led by the North East CMA, Towong Shire Council and the Victorian EPA and supported by Goulburn Murray Water, North East Regional Water Authority, the Departments of Human Services, Primary Industries and Sustainability and Environment.

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Photo opportunity:

The Little Snowy Creek Project celebration will take place in Eskdale on 30 March, starting at 12.30pm. Towong Mayor, Mr John Mitchell will also attend the event Waterwatch Coordinator Carolyn Humby will be in attendance to conduct some water quality testing with the Eskdale Primary Grade 4-5's..

For further information or to arrange an interview/photograph contact:

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Key points about the Little Snowy Creek

- The township of Eskdale, within Towong Shire, is located on Little Snowy Creek near its' confluence with the Mitta Mitta River in North-East Victoria. The stream is a focal point for many activities in the catchment; the farming community, primarily dairying and beef production, relies on it for a range of uses including irrigation, stock and domestic water, and the township of Eskdale, situated near the confluence of the creek and the Mitta Mitta River, relies on it for its water supply, recreation and visual amenity.
- The issues facing the catchment include elevated nutrient and pathogen loads within the waterway from township wastewater and agricultural activity, bank erosion and a lack of native riparian vegetation.
- The water supply that is reticulated to the Eskdale community is not treated
- In 2001 the North East Catchment Management Authority approached Towong Shire Council and other agencies to properly study the catchment with a view to addressing the issues. Work with the community commenced and in 2003 it was decided to establish a Neighbourhood Environment Improvement Plan (NEIP) (released 2006).
- The Eskdale–Little Snowy Creek Advisory Committee was established as a committee of Council and has been leading the planning of the NEIP, with the assistance of the EPA, North East CMA and Towong Shire Council and support from other agencies.
- It has been identified that Mountain Galaxia and River Blackfish are rare and threatened species that were in the Little Snowy system.
- Platypus have been sighted by local residents.