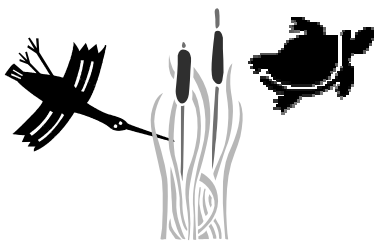




Catchment Management Authorities



Wetlands Network



Newsletter—March 05

And so it continues.....

Welcome to the second Catchment Management Authorities Wetland Forum Newsletter. The updates aim to provide an opportunity for the various members and stakeholders working with wetlands in Victoria to communicate with each other about wetland work being undertaken around the state and issues arising with wetlands.

It is also obvious that there is a huge amount of innovative and ground-breaking work going on by CMA's and DSE. We hope this newsletter will be a useful forum to maintain and improve the way we are able to learn from each other.

The aim to is provide updates through this newsletter highlighting projects from around Victoria and using our meetings to consolidate other relevant information from a range of different sources. We welcome all representatives to contribute to this bi-yearly newsletter and make it a useful source for sharing our collective experiences.

EditorNotes

Off to a slow start this time round, and apologies to the delayed release of this edition. Thank you to everyone who contributed and again we need you to Contribute, so get those stories long or short to us! The next meeting will be an opportunity to discuss the role, practicality and usability of the newsletter.

We are still looking for a catchy title for the newsletter, so put your thinking caps on and bring some ideas to the next meeting in Early June!

Articles and comments for the next Newsletter are due by the 1st August 2005. Again feel free to give me a call or email if you have any questions .

Also an opportunity to say thank you and goodbye to Eleisha Keogh, she has been a huge help in getting the network up and running and we wish her well with her future work.

Cheers,

Brooke Turner—Wetlands Project Officer Wimmera CMA



Around the Regions

CMA updates from
around the state.

North East- Eleisha Keogh

Wetlands Strategy for the North East

Work has recently begun on a project plan for the preparation of a wetlands strategy for the North East region. In 2004/05 the focus will be on the collation of existing background information on wetland extent and condition, and the identification of information gaps. In 2005/06 the strategy will be developed, and condition assessments undertaken using the statewide methodology currently being developed by DSE, providing funding is made available through the current RCIP process.

Alpine Moss Beds

Staff from the Arthur Rylah Institute have undertaken condition assessments of Alpine Moss Beds (formerly known as Sphagnum 'bogs') on the Bogong High Plains. The work was undertaken on behalf of Parks Victoria, with the aim of providing background information for the establishment of priorities for post-fire rehabilitation. The methodology that was used will also be assessed for its applicability to other geographic areas.

Au revoir

I'm heading back to my old job with DPI in Gippsland in April, so this will be my last report. It has been a real pleasure working with you guys – albeit very briefly. Happy 'swamping'! - Eleisha

Northern Environmental Water Reserve Working Group

The four northern CMAs have banded together in order to coordinate their activities relating to the management of environmental water. This is necessary because the North East, Goulburn Broken, North Central and Mallee regions each contribute to the management of environmental flows in the Murray River. In particular, we are collectively responsible for the development and implementation of a long-term operating strategy for Victoria's contribution to the Murray's environmental water reserve. A significant amount of the work undertaken by this group will relate to the hydrologic management of wetlands, given that four of the five Living Murray icon sites are large floodplain wetlands.

To date, we have conducted a training session on the northern Victorian irrigation system in November last year and are currently working on our terms of reference. We have also recently initiated discussions about the preparation of the operating strategy for the environmental water that will become available through the White Paper '80:20 irrigation sales deal' by the next irrigation season. We will work closely with DSE on this over the next six months.

Goulburn Broken—Keith Ward

Scott Morath has recently joined the GBCMA in Shepparton as the Streamflow and Groundwater Management Plan Officer, to work with **Keith Ward** in the EWRO role. This appointment will greatly enhance the development and implementation of the existing and proposed plans in the catchment. The new "EWRO – Wetlands" role has now been filled by Simon Casanelia, formerly from Parks Victoria. Simon will be involved in undertaking a range of White Paper and The Living Murray funded programs for the GBCMA, and begins Monday 11 April.

In between advertising and interviewing, **Keith** has been involved with environmental water management planning for a number of local wetlands, including Barmah Forest, commenting on a myriad of other documents (they seem to multiply exponentially these days!), attending various wetland-related steering committees (CSIRO's Ecological Outcomes project, ARI fish-research projects, MDFRC's Monitoring Environmental Flows project, CRCFE's Evaluating the Effectiveness of Habitat Reconstruction, Ramsar Ecological Character project), and overseeing a number of PhD and Honours student projects (Aaron Troy, Sarah Daniel, Jane Catford, and two others in the pipeline).

As part of the MDBC's The Living Murray Initiative, Keith has assisted in compiling a Significant Ecological Asset Plan for Barmah Forest and co-managed a hydrologic modelling consultancy of Barmah-Millewa Forest. The development of a detailed Water Management Plan for Barmah Forest is now beginning to occur.

The Victorian Rural Water Reform program of Murray Floodplain Rehabilitation between Hume Reservoir and Tocumwal is still being progressed in conjunction with NECMA. Planning for the construction of one regulating structure, removal of a fish barrier, and extensive revegetation activities are close to being finalised. Fencing re-alignment issues between Crown Land and adjoining private land are also being investigated (funny how the current fence alignments always seem to benefit the private landholder at the expense of Crown Frontage!). Two other proposed regulating structures have recently been discounted given the unfortunate results from Electromagnetic Induction Surveys that revealed the areas that the regulators were to be constructed are underlain by sandy seems and aquifers that will thwart surface water management activities. Better to find out now rather than after the regulators were constructed, I suppose.

The recent heavy rainfall across the state has been particularly welcomed in our catchment, with at least one EWA pending delivery following trigger events such as has now occurred. Unfortunately the rain was about one month too late for some breeding waterbirds near Shepparton, who abandoned nests prematurely despite EWA being ordered. Impatient lot! At least the vegetation and frogs seem more appreciative.



North Central—Emer Campbell

Works to start in Gunbower Forest

The North Central Catchment Management Authority (CMA) is responsible for managing the Gunbower Forest project, which aims to protect and enhance the ecological communities within the Forest by providing a flooding regime based on pre and post river regulation flooding patterns.

Gunbower Forest is the second largest river Red Gum Forest in Victoria, spanning 20,000ha. It is home to many endangered colonial waterbirds and other rare and threatened species and is a wetland of international significance recognised under the Ramsar Convention. It is also a Living Murray significant ecological asset.

While under 'normal' conditions the Forest would have been flooded nearly nine years out of ten, regulation of the River Murray has reduced the frequency, duration and magnitude of flooding. This has degraded the Forest ecosystem and threatened the breeding of colonial waterbirds.

Following intensive planning and design, the coming months will see the upgrading of existing regulators. It will also involve the removal of the failed Wattles regulator and the construction of a regulator on Little Gunbower Creek to enable more effective delivery of existing environmental water into a key significant wetland in the forest.

The minor works will enable safer operation of structures and more control over the delivery of existing environmental water. Further investigations and planning will continue to explore additional options for improving water management within the Forest.

In 2003, flooding enhancement demonstrated many ecological benefits to the Forest. This success led to delivery of approximately 15,000ML of water delivered across Gunbower Forest in 2004, reaching populations of stressed River Red Gum not affected by the 2003 flood.

Field inspections identified an increase in frog larvae, tad-



poles and tortoise populations. Waterbirds took advantage of the feeding opportunities created by the water. While regulation of the River Murray continues to occur, artificial flooding provides significant ecological benefits to the health of Gunbower Forest.

Wetland plan released for community comment

The wetlands on the lower Avoca River are internationally significant and are an important natural asset for North Central Victoria. An Avoca Wetlands Salinity and Water Management Plan is to help protect and improve the wetlands is currently being finalised following a community consultation period.

The Plan, which was produced by the North Central CMA in partnership with the Department of Primary Industries, outlines the future management actions for these wetlands. It has been developed after considerable background investigations and community consultation, and identification of issues and priorities for inclusion.

These wetlands are an important natural asset to North Central Victoria. However, they face a range of threats, including increased salinity, degraded water quality, and pest plants and pest animals. The Plan identifies management actions and priorities for the wetlands, and will integrate with existing programs being undertaken within the catchment.

The Plan also aims to improve the biodiversity and other environmental values of the wetlands so that they are around to enjoy for years to come.

Corangamite—Rebecca Sheldon

PlainsTender

Expressions of interest for round one of PlainsTender have been received and all sites have been assessed. Four field officers, including myself, were kept busy during the last few months of 2004 conducting site assessments for the project.

Forty-three eligible landholders have proposed to provide conservation services for a total remnant vegetation area of approximately 3700ha, over 85 sites, for the next four years.

Wetlands have featured well throughout the project with approximately 700ha of wetland ecosystems assessed over 45 sites. Twenty-nine of these sites were mapped as Plains Grassy Wetland (presumed extinct in the bioregion).

Management plans documenting conservation service agreements have been sent to landholders whom are in the midst of preparing their bids. Bids will be assessed in the coming month and successful landholders will be notified in March. Bid assessment will consider the conservation value of the site, the amount of service required and the cost of the bid. Expressions of interest will be sought for the second round in August 2005.

Corangamite Draft Wetlands Strategy

Strategy development to date has been limited but it will now occupy the majority of my time until June. A Steering Committee is driving the project and we expect to incorpo-

rate the services of a facilitator to conduct regional workshops throughout the coming months.

It is envisaged that the Draft Strategy will be fairly concise and include the following components: regional background information; wetland assets and threats; risk assessment and prioritisation frameworks; and some broad-based strategies and recommendations.

Next year the Strategy will be finalised and an Action Plan developed for the implementation of the Strategy. This Plan will detail the who, what, and when in terms of how we go about achieving regional priorities.

World Wetlands Day Festival (Kanang Takeeyn)

The Corangamite Wetlands Festival was held on Saturday February 5th on the shores of Lake Colac. The day kicked off with a Birdo's Breakfast from 7.30 - 10am. Birding spots included the Colac Bird Reserve and Boar's Dam. The tour wrapped up with a barbequed pancake brunch.

The festival recommenced in the afternoon from 3 - 6pm with face painting, community collage, wetland activities, NRM stalls and more. From 6pm-late festival goers could kick back and relax to African drummers, Aboriginal dance, and the sweet melodies of Neil Murray and other local musicians. The day was capped off with the cinema spectacular 'Travelling Birds'.

Considering the crazy summer weather and our first attempt at running a wetlands festival, all went extremely well. The hope is that this festival becomes an annual tradition and grows bigger and better from year to year!

West Gippsland—Wendy Hayne

Regional Wetland Strategy

The West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority has recently advertised for an internal secondment for a Wetlands Officer position to develop a Regional Wetland Strategy for West Gippsland. Funding has been made available from a range of sources including, the Governments White Paper and internal re-allocations.

The Wetland Plan will identify priority wetlands across West Gippsland based on their environmental, social and economic values. Specific action plans will be developed to protect these values and ensure ongoing sustainability into the future.



Heart Morass

The Heart Morass is located on the lower floodplain of the Latrobe River. A small portion of the Heart is managed by Parks Victoria, however the majority of the wetland is in private ownership. The CMA is currently negotiating the purchase of the privately owned Heart Morass in partnership with Field and Game Australia and a local community group, Watermark.

Diary Dates

Next Meeting Proposed 3-4 June—Melbourne - contact Greg Bain (Melbourne Water) for more details

Page One

“Gowandargie Weir on the Broken River between Shepparton and Benalla earmarked for removal to improve fish passage”. - Keith Ward Goulburn Broken CMA

Page Two

Top left— Black Winged Stilt—Ian Morgan

Bottom right— “Not everyone is as pleased about the White Paper outcomes as the EWROs in Shepparton!”.—Keith Ward Goulburn Broken CMA

Wimmera—Brooke Turner

Research finished

The Geomorphic Investigation of wetlands in the Wimmera CMA Section of the Millicent Coast Basin and Social and Economic Drivers of Wetland rehabilitation are now available to the public.

The Geomorphic Investigation of wetlands in the Wimmera CMA Section of the Millicent Coast Basin’s focus of this study was to explain how the wetland system formed, identified the geomorphic types and explain how the geomorphology influences the wetlands here today and the way we manage them.

The Assessment of Wetland Condition is in draft form and will be available by the end of may. This research developed a method for assessing condition in wetlands in the Wimmera and assessed 83 wetlands in the west Wimmera region.

World Wetlands Day

Horsham 298 and Lutheran primary school pupils were among special guests at the WWD event, which took about 250 people on a tour of urban wetlands at different stages of development. The 298 pupils gave their own spin on what urban wetlands offer to their community such as fishing, yabbing, photography, bird watching and relaxation. The Lutheran pupils brought to life a dream-time story based on the creation of Wimmera landforms and fauna. The story had an Indigenous perspective on the living things that inhabit our wetlands.

How urban wetlands affect the real estate market, how a litter trap works, managing stormwater, water sensitive urban design and wetland birds and plants were among topics covered at the event. This was the first time our World Wetlands Day celebration focussed on urban wetlands and it was very well received.



Photo Credits

Page Three

Gunbower Forest Wetlands in Spring 2003—Emer Campbell North Central CMA

Page Four

Left—People taking samples at the Heart Morass during a Wetland Workshop with Michelle Casanova—Wendy Hayne—West Gippsland CMA

Bottom right— Heart Morass—Wendy Hayne—West Gippsland CMA

Prepared by CMA Wetlands Network - Contact Brooke Turner 03 5282 1544, turnerb@wcma.vic.gov.au with any queries or contributions

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