



**GOULBURN
BROKEN**
CATCHMENT
MANAGEMENT
AUTHORITY

Municipal Infex

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Boom-times for Barmah.

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The largest single application of environmental water in Australia's history was used this Spring to bring major ecological benefits to the Barmah-Millewa Wetland.

Goulburn Broken CMA authorised releases of more than 400 gigalitres from late August to "top up" naturally high flows in the Murray River, extending flooding to encourage native fish breeding and improve biodiversity.

Scientists have been delighted with the result, with the early flood stimulating active breeding cycles of golden and silver perch and rejuvenating the redgum forest and its endangered native grasses.

The flood also prompted "very significant" bird breeding, with multiple colonies of ibis and egrets mating and nesting.

The flood was extended to ensure parents stayed with their nests until new chicks are ready to fend for themselves.

It is the third time since 1998 that the sometimes controversial environmental water reserve has been used to generate ecological benefits for the wetlands, which are the most significant examples of their environment on the planet.

Barmah-Millewa wetland provides breeding habitat for hundreds of species of birds, fish and reptiles, many of them rare and endangered.

GBCMA estimates 95% of environmental water used in Barmah-Millewa returns to the Murray River and becomes available for



Native Moira Grass and Red Gums at Steamer Plain are being rejuvenated by the extended flood.



Bunnydiggers is one of several regulators used to direct environmental flows into crucial wetland areas for fish and bird breeding.



More than half the wetland complex has been flooded using more than 400 gigalitres from the environmental water reserve.

Barmah Revenue

Total revenue received from commercial activities in the Barmah Wetland are less than it costs to administer their processes.

In 2004-05, revenue from 30 cattle grazing licenses amounted to \$34,800, based on a summer agistment rate of \$12.80 a head and a winter rate of \$9.20.

Cutting of 22,955 cubic metres of timber raised \$512,379 in revenue.

35% came from sawlogs, 24% residual, 22% sleepers/hewn and 19% firewood.

There are 3 sawlog licenses, 13 residual and 11 firewood.

Aerial patrols are being considered to try and stop illegal timber cutting, particularly firewood.

It is estimated two to three times the licensed amount of firewood is removed from Barmah each year.

Barmah-Millewa Consultation.

The process of developing community consultation structures for the Barmah-Millewa wetlands continues.

Goulburn Broken CMA is using its existing community-based Shepparton Irrigation Region Implementation Committee (SIRIC) to provide community advice on the implementation of the environmental management plan.

Murray CMA is establishing a Community Reference Group to provide input from the NSW perspective. It is advertising for expressions of interest to fill nine positions.

Nominations will be accepted from both sides of the Murray, with delegates to be selected on criteria established at a workshop in Moama in July.

Delegates will be picked to represent a range of appropriate skills and for a proven ability to consult and communicate with the community they represent.

SIRIC and the NSW Community Reference Group will jointly provide community advice to the Barmah-Millewa Coordinating Committee, which will oversee the management of the environmental management plan.

Responsibility for on-ground management of the world-renowned wetland complex will switch between NSW and Victoria each year.

In 2005, Murray CMA and NSW Forests have had the responsibility but, from 1 January 2006, this will switch to the Goulburn Broken CMA and Victoria's Department of Sustainability & Environment.

The combined plan will also be reviewed in 2006 providing an opportunity to include issues which were not fully included because of the very tight time-lines imposed on the establishment phase.

The review may include more consideration of land management issues, such as grazing and logging, which the GBCMA says need to be addressed if the level of ecological benefits stipulated by the Living Murray investment process are to be achieved.

Barmah Issues

Barmah Wetland last year attracted more than 640,000 visitor days.

While there are substantial benefits in recreation, community awareness and education, there is increasing concern about the harm sometimes caused to the environment.

Vehicle damage to sensitive areas, bank erosion caused by power boats, vandalism and rubbish dumping are common-place.

A major problem is illegal cutting of wood for campfires. All available dead wood has been removed and some campers have now resorted to cutting down green trees and even winching logs out of the river or wetland to burn in campfires.

95% of fire call-outs in Barmah are caused by camp fires escaping. Only 2% of fires are caused by lightning strikes.



Grazing Damage

The Goulburn Valley Environment Group has released photos which they say demonstrate damage caused by indiscriminate cattle grazing in the Barmah Wetland.

The photos were taken in Two Mile Gully, near Goose Swamp, which was still wet after the recent environmental flooding program (see Page 1).

GVEG spokesman, Nick Roberts, says native grass and red gum, which had been regenerating after the flood, were destroyed.

GVEG has consistently argued grazing and timber harvesting in Barmah are not consistent with ecological sustainability.

Changes Coming for Native Vegetation Controls

Major changes are being considered for Victoria's Native Vegetation Controls, including the shifting of some responsibility for administering the scheme away from local government planning back to the Department of Sustainability & Environment.

Elements of the controls are being reviewed in response to feedback from councils, which have had difficulties with the processes, and the resources required to administer them, since the controls were introduced in 1989.

Details of the reviews are still unclear.

Local government will be asked to comment on the proposal when it is released early in

2006

Local government support documents, outlining native vegetation processes, are also being developed. A generic document, circulated for comment in July, will be adapted for each municipality.

Other changes include:

- Operational Guidelines have been dropped and are to be replaced by Practice Notes.
- Current exemptions to requirements for planning permits for vegetation removal are being reviewed.
- Five local government support officers are being employed to assist councils. ▶▶▶▶

Native Vegetation Support Officer

A local government support officer will soon be starting work at the Department of Sustainability in Benalla specifically to assist 12 councils in the Goulburn Broken and North East regions to interpret and administer native vegetation controls.

The position is one of five for the state and is funded for two years. The officer will start work in January.

After induction, the officer will be based for six week periods at council offices throughout the region.

Municipalities interested in hosting the officer are invited to submit expressions of interest. It has been recommended the EOI's include suggestions on local accommodation that might be available for the officer during his stay at each municipality.

Further information is available from Geoff Lodge, DSE, on 5833 5222.

Council Planning & Environmental Officers Establish Goulburn Broken Environmental Planning Forum

Planning & Environmental staff from municipalities throughout the Goulburn Broken catchment have formed a discussion group to improve their understanding and coordination of natural resource management issues.

The group held its first meeting in Benalla on October 5 and its second in Tatura on December 7.

The main activities of the group are information exchange and communicating with natural resource managers, such as the Goulburn Broken CMA, DSE, EPA, DPI and water authorities.

Delegates said they found one of the main benefits of the group to be discussion of issues and activities, allowing officers to compare notes and share experiences.

Cooperating for joint projects, or better coordination of local projects, is also possible.

The forum will also provide an opportunity for council working staff to bring practical issues directly to the attention of the CMA and other agencies involved in NRM.

It has already influenced the local government content in the upcoming review of the regional catchment strategy.

At its first meeting, the group heard a presentation from the Municipal Association of Victoria's NRM Facilitator, Luke

Murphy.

The second meeting was attended by DSE Native Vegetation Officers to update council staff on the latest developments in native vegetation controls.

Similar groups operate in the North Central and North East CMA regions. The group is facilitated and chaired by the Municipal Catchment Coordinator, with assistance from the CMA's mid and upper catchment coordinators.



Natural Resource Facilitator, Luke Murphy, at the first meeting of the Goulburn Broken Environmental Planning Forum.

Managing River Frontage Crown Land.

A working group has been established in the Shepparton Irrigation Region to consider local government methods which may be available to help control development and activities on land immediately adjacent to rivers and waterways.

Some of the measures to be considered are specific points in Municipal Strategic Statements about protecting riparian land, a planning overlay for riparian areas or the use of urban or rural conservation, or environmental significance, zones.

Planning and environment officers from CoGS, Campaspe and Moira Shires have been invited to sit on the working group, which will also include the Goulburn Broken CMA and DSE Planning.

The group has been established following publication of a case-study by SKM Consultants Limited into Land Management Issues on River Frontage Crown Land in the City of Greater Shepparton.

SKM's report identified 65 parcels of crown land within the city boundaries, ranging in area from 175 to less than one hectare.

The land parcels are being managed by a number of different agencies, some of which were unaware they were responsible.

45 sites were assessed for vegetation quality, riparian and in-stream health and found to be in moderate to very poor condition.

Management issues detailed in the report include encroachment of private land onto river reserves, where urban back yards have gradually taken over the crown land and have apparently assumed ownership.

Backyard extensions, including lawns and tree planting are common. In one case, a swimming pool has been built on the crown land.

Public access to much of the crown land reserve has been blocked off by fences. In some cases, staff carrying out assessments on crown land were accused of trespassing by



Backyards, gardens and even swimming pools have gradually found their way onto river frontage crown land reserves - one of the many issues to be dealt with.

adjacent landholders.

Weed infestation, rubbish dumping and litter were also common. Numerous car bodies were found in or near the river.

The report recommended a 10-15 year program, including community education, to clearly define and police crown land boundaries, control weeds and litter and restore indigenous vegetation.

Recommended actions for local government are coordinated management practices between councils, a change in emphasis towards managing riparian land for indigenous, rather than European, values and protecting riparian land from urban encroachment and inappropriate development.

The GBCMA Shepparton Irrigation Region Implementation Committee has asked the Municipal Catchment Coordinator to establish a working group to consider local government issues and recommend what planning measures, if any, might be appropriate for protecting riparian areas.

The working group held its first meeting on 16 December at the GBCMA in Welsford Street, Shepparton.

Disappointing response to first on-site SIRIC meeting.

The first on-site meeting at a council's offices of the Shepparton Irrigation Region Implementation Committee (SIRIC) was not a success.

Responding to a request to "see more of the CMA", SIRIC re-located its November meeting to the boardroom at the City of Greater Shepparton.

The IC set aside a pre-lunch session for councillors and staff to hear relevant presentations and to raise issues of interest direct with IC members.

Regrettably, only one council staff member attended the meeting.

Despite the disappointment, SIRIC still intends to offer each council in the SIR one on-site meeting per year to encourage communication and understanding of its activities in implementing the regional catchment strategy (See Page 12)



Permanent Water Off To India - Via Sunraysia.

Permanent trading of irrigation water may have been underway since 1992, but the impact has hardly been felt if the latest figures for anticipated water demand from Sunraysia are any indication.

Almost 200 Gigalitres (200,000 megalitres) of additional permanent water allocation is needed to satisfy demand from plantations which are either already planted or have planning approval.

At an average \$1,300 per megalitre, this amounts to more than a quarter of a billion dollars to be spent in Sunraysia alone on permanent water allocation over the next five to seven years.

Most of the demand comes from 13,000 hectares of plantations, mostly almonds, being developed to supply India, where almonds are a highly valued health food.

Almond plantations are heavy water users, requiring up to 14 megalitres a hectare when in full production. They are also unforgiving and will die if they run short of water. Some plantations already in the ground have only one third of the water they will need. Olives, vine and citrus plantings are adding to the demand.

Many almond orchards are developed by investment companies attracting large amounts of superannuation funds.

Cheap, abundant land, fertile soils and an apparently unlimited market mean there are only two factors limiting these developments: water and bee-hives.

An extra 120,000 bee-hives, almost half the hives in the entire country, are going to be required to pollinate all plantations when they come on stream.

But it is permanent water trading which is causing concern for upstream communities where much of the water is going to come from.

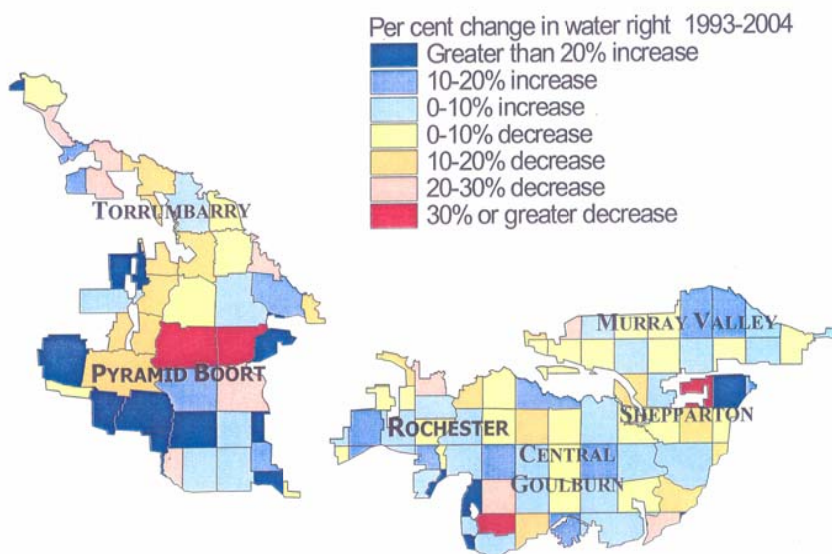
Goulburn Murray Water currently has a 2% annual cap on the amount of permanent water allowed to trade out of the region.

It is anticipated the 2005/06 limit will be reached early in the season as brokers rush to trade water before a new "exit fee" comes into force in July 2006.

The "exit fee" (possibly between \$200 and \$500 per megalitre) will be charged on all water being traded out of the region and is intended to contribute towards the cost of maintaining the present irrigation infrastructure in the face of declining local demand.

While G-M Water has yet to announce its exit fee, Murray Irrigation Limited in NSW is thought to be considering an exit fee of \$313 per megalitre.

Even those closely involved in the water industry are unsure how the water market will adjust to the supply/demand pressures.



Adding to community concern is uncertainty about water reform, legislation for which passed through State Parliament in November.

Two of the four reform measures, unbundling of water rights and reconfiguration, are yet to take effect.

Unbundling will see traditional water rights broken up into high security water shares (previously, water right), medium security water shares (previously, sales water) and delivery capacity share (a share of the delivery infrastructure). All can be traded, either temporarily or permanently, or leased.

Unbundling will also see **water use licenses** issued. First-issue licenses will have no conditions attached, but CMA's have authority to review license conditions. Factors such as basic water use efficiency and soil capability could be considered in years to come.

Reconfiguration is a process allowing for uneconomic irrigation infrastructure to be closed down.

A common concern about high levels of water being traded out of a district is the creation of "stranded assets", channels and drains which no longer deliver enough water to be viable. Such assets would be uneconomic and candidates for reconfiguration.

Local government is also going to be affected because, from 2008, permanent water right will not be included in property values, thereby reducing rates revenue.

Some shires will need to develop alternate funding strategies for hundreds of thousands of dollars to off-set the impact.

The Productivity Commission is conducting a study into the likely impacts should water trading be allowed between rural and urban areas.

The project report is scheduled to be released by July 2006.

Modelling will be used to try and understand the economic consequences of increased trading and the possible impact on water pricing as urban water demand increases.

Further information is available through Deborah Peterson on 6884 6250.

River Connect: Recognising our rivers.

For decades the expanse of river red gum floodplain between Shepparton and Mooroopna has been largely ignored.

Most of the community has not appreciated the aesthetic values of the floodplain and river, or its environmental, economic and cultural significance.

But changing attitudes to the value of this huge, centrally-located natural resource has led to "River Connect" - a project to encourage the residents of Shepparton and Mooroopna to recognise the Goulburn River and its surrounds as the "life and soul" of their community.

A steering committee, chaired by Bill O'Kane, Chief Executive Officer of the Goulburn Broken CMA, will manage the project to improve the river and floodplain management and undertake an extensive community engagement process.

River Connect Stage One will develop a 20 year blue print for future management of the river and the floodplain.

It will obtain agreements from partnership agencies, engage the community, identify and prioritise the many opportunities and prepare a detailed business management plan.

Stage Two will roll out the business plan through community capacity building and education, works and actions to improve the river environs and the community's understanding and appreciation of it.

The River Connect model is designed to be transferable to other communities with urban river environments.



Un-noticed and generally neglected for generations, the red gum floodplain between Shepparton and Mooroopna is now coming into its own.



The Goulburn River at Shepparton - now recognised as the lifeblood of the community.

Local Sustainability Accords Launched

Minister for Environment, Robert Thwaites, officially launched Victoria's Environmental Sustainability Accords in Melbourne on 7 November.

Local Environmental Sustainability Priority Statements, which will be rolled out across the state in 2006, are formal agreements between each municipality and the state government outlining the objectives and targets for achieving environmental sustainability. An Environmental Sustainability Fund is offering \$5 million for councils to improve their capacity to develop their accords.

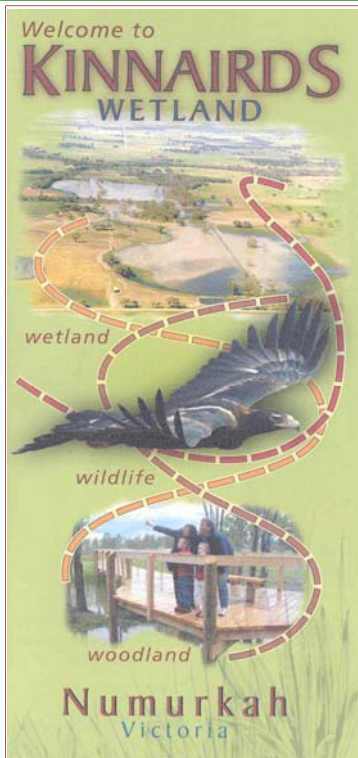
Further funding will soon be available for councils, community groups and waste management authorities for

projects reducing waste, energy and water use.

The accords will be administered by "Sustainability Victoria" which will operate a number of regional forums to coordinate activities.

The accords recognise different levels of capability between councils and will be set at levels best suited to each council's current situation. Goulburn Broken CMA recognises opportunities for local government through the accord process but is encouraging councils to consult the CMA to ensure their Accords take best advantage of material which is already available in order to avoid duplication and wasted resources.





Moira Shire Council has released a new brochure outlining their latest tourism attraction - Kinnairds Wetland.

The fold-out brochure includes a map of the newly renovated wetland and the constructed walking tracks, bird hides and picnic facilities.

The 100 hectare river red gum wetland, located on the north-east outskirts of Numurkah, provides habitat to a wide range of wildlife, including more than 300 bird species. It also has a significant stand of endangered grey box woodland which is now protected from seasonal flooding that was threatening to destroy the water sensitive trees.

Kinnairds Wetland is a striking example of a multiple outcome project.

The wetland was renovated as part of the Muckatah Catchment Surface Water Management Scheme so, in addition to its significance as a wetland, it also serves as a retardation basin and nutrient soak prior to water entering the Broken Creek.

The brochure was launched at the wetland with a guided walk attended by more than 80 people.

News from the MAV

Material from MAV Environment Bulletin.

A new reference group is to be appointed to advise on the future of the Australian Government's \$3.5 billion natural resource management programs - the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) and National Action Plan for Salinity & Water Quality (NAP). Further information is available at: www.deh.gov.au/minister/env/2005/mr13oct405.html

A booklet, "Climate Change in Rural & Regional Australia", provides an overview of activities covering risks of climate change impacts, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, integrating carbon forest sinks and NRM, and tools to measure and track action benefits.

The booklet can be downloaded at: www.greenhouse.gov.au/publications/climatechange.html

New offices for Goulburn Broken CMA.

New headquarters of the Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority were officially opened by the Victorian Premier, Steve Bracks, on 4 November.

The new offices are at 168 Welsford Street, Shepparton.

New premises were required after the CMA outgrew its old offices.

Contact details are:

Phone: 5820 1100 Fax: 5831 6254

email: billok@gbcma.vic.gov.au

The Productivity Commission is conducting an inquiry into the current waste management policy framework in Australia. The inquiry will cover issues associated with solid waste, including municipal waste (such as household collections, electrical and consumer items); commercial and industrial waste; and construction and demolitions waste. Submissions close on 8 February 2006. Further information from www.pc.gov.au/inquiry/waste/index.html

Campaspe 3A Surface Water Scheme Launch

Federal Member for Murray, Dr Sharman Stone, launched the Campaspe 3A Surface Water Management Project on 13 December.

The \$500,000 scheme, funded through the National Action Plan, was built by Goulburn Murray Water and was finished on time and below budget.

3,000 hectares is serviced by the primary drain, with a number of community schemes also to be constructed. 1.1 kilometres of constructed primary drain connects to a 3.5k section of an anabranch of the Campaspe River (right).

The project was a partnership between NCCMA, GBCMA, G-M Water, Shire of Campaspe, landholders and traditional owners.

Extensive archaeological and environmental assessments were carried out.



Draft National Guidelines for Water Recycling have been released for public comment following recent meetings of the NRM Ministerial Council and the Environment Protection and Heritage Council.

www.ephc.gov.au/water_recycling.html

"Indigenous Participation in Natural Resource Management" guidelines, funded through the Natural Heritage Trust, have been released by the federal government. The aim is to encourage indigenous communities to participate in natural resource planning and activities. www.nrm.gov.au/

Going, Going - But Definitely Not Gone

The latest map of watertable contours in the Shepparton Irrigation Region shows a continuing reduction in the depth and salinity of the regional watertable.

Watertable contours in 2004 show a marked reduction in the area with watertables are less than two metres below the surface, particularly compared to 1996 when there had been a series of wet years. (mid-right).

While some of the improvement can be attributed to the region's Groundwater Management Plan, it is acknowledged most of the impact is a result of reduced rainfall and limited irrigation during the drought.

But scientists say there is no room for complacency as there is little doubt the situation would quickly reverse if a series of wet years were to occur and the region could again face the dire consequences of the 2020 "do nothing" scenario (middle right).

Salinity remains the single biggest environmental threat to the region and is the foundation of the regional catchment strategy.

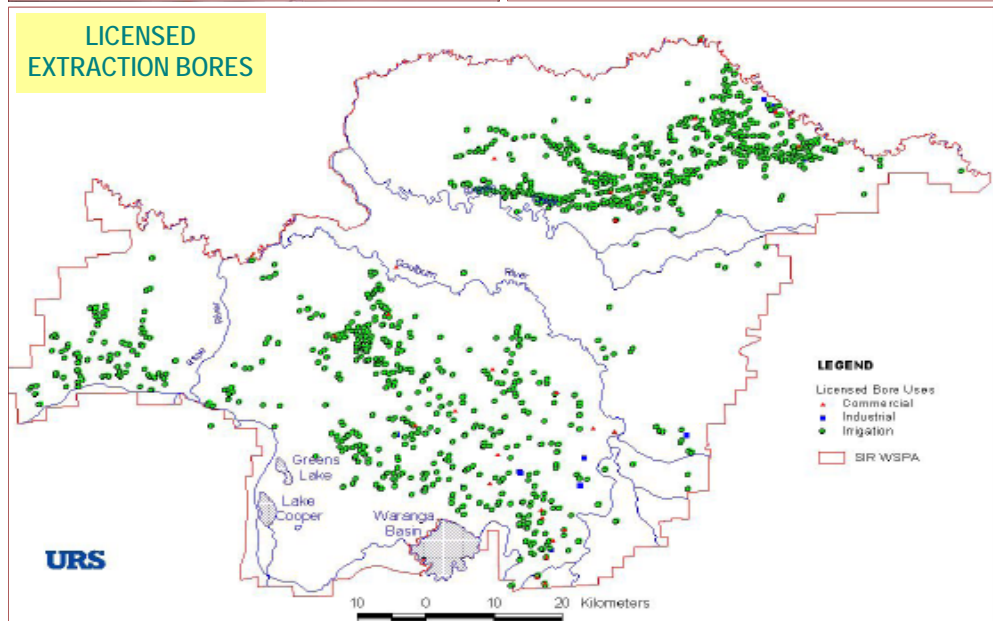
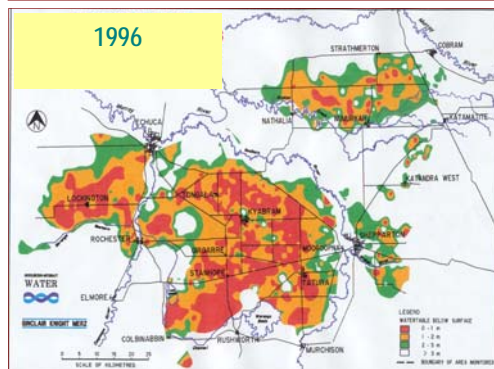
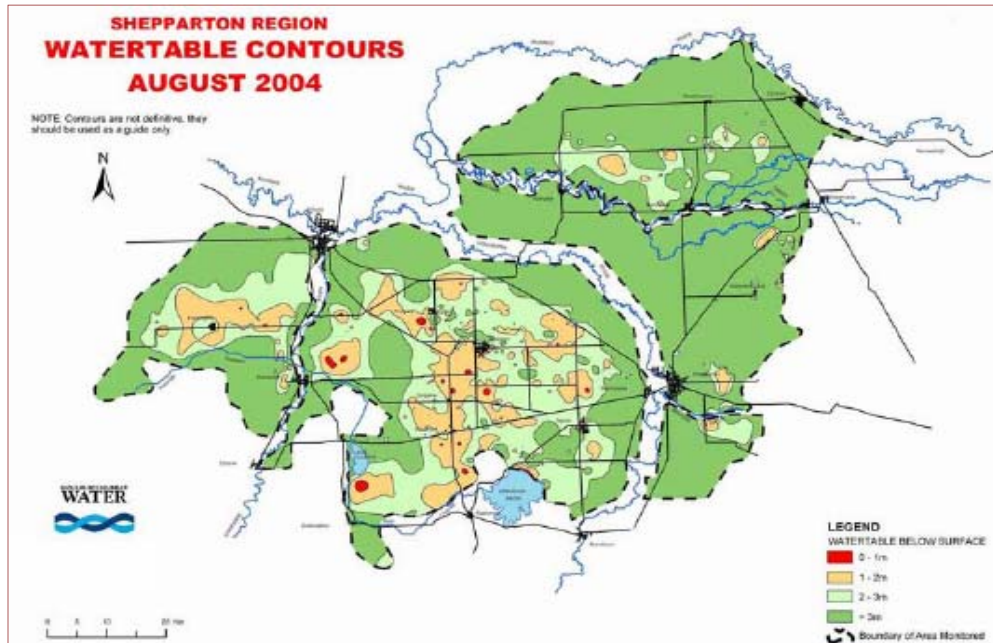
197 public groundwater pumps have been installed to dispose of up to 5,400 megalitres of saline groundwater per year through the region's salt disposal entitlement.

Despite the pumps, the irrigation region continues to import 60,000 to 80,000 tonnes of salt per year.

As well as public pumps, there are 1254 licensed private groundwater extraction bores (right) operating in areas where the water is suitable for irrigation. They are eligible

to use up to 190,000 megalitres per year. Private pumps are not used for salt disposal.

Watertable levels are monitored through a network of 3,400 observation bores at an annual cost of \$192,000.



Pssst...Would you like to see an addendum?

An addendum specifically designed to make the regional catchment strategy a more useful resource for local government planning is to be included in the current strategy review.

The special addition is a response to feedback from council planning and environmental officers about difficulties in finding concise references within the catchment strategy and its sub-strategies.

A need for a more effective link was also identified in a combined Municipal Association of Victoria and Victorian Catchment Management Council project which investigated alignment of municipal and catchment planning.

The addendum will specify potential roles of local government, particularly strategic and statutory planning, to assist implementation of the catchment strategy.

It will provide specific information tailored to guide and support local government officers in their planning activities. The addendum will be a one-stop summary of those elements of the catchment strategy which the CMA would like to see as a foundation of councils' environmental and land

development planning.

A desired consequence of the addendum is to raise the status of the regional catchment strategy to become the basis of councils' environmental planning activities. To this end, it may be recommended the addendum be an incorporated, rather than a reference, document.

It is probable the addendum would be adopted into municipal planning schemes through the regular review process to avoid the need for stand-alone planning amendments, thereby reducing complications and costs.

A working group, managed by the Municipal Catchment Coordinator, is to be established to provide advice on the specific requirements of planning and environmental officers.

DSE Planning will also be invited to join the working group.

Invitations to participate will soon be sent to councils' planning and environmental managers and DSE Planning.

Ouch !\$\$!\$!\$!\$!

Catchment Management Authorities throughout Victoria are feeling the pinch after having significant funding diverted to the "Airborne Geophysics Project".

Goulburn Broken CMA had \$200,000 of agreed funding and \$600,000 of contestable funding removed from its 2005-06 budget.

Total cost to all CMA's in Victoria this financial year is between \$2.2 and \$2.4 million, with \$6.6 million being diverted over the next three years.

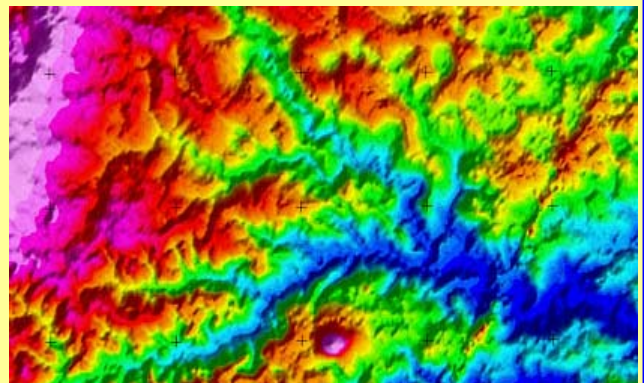
CMA's in New South Wales and Tasmania were also heavily impacted.

Airborne Geophysics is an un-funded promise made during the last federal election campaign.

It uses remote-sensing aircraft to map sub-surface geophysical and some chemical properties.

It has been in common use in the mining industry for years but has only recently been adapted for environmental programs.

The Airborne Geophysics project is using the technology to measure salinity levels and elements of stress on biodiversity. There has been considerable debate over the cost - effectiveness of the process.



Typical output from an airborne geophysics survey showing sub-surface characteristics of the terrain. It is now being used to map salinity and biodiversity stress.



Survey aircraft cover large areas - the cost in is interpreting the data they collect. Airborne geophysics has been commonly used in the mining industry.

NRM Induction Workshop for Council Staff.

More than 20 planning and environmental staff from municipalities in the Goulburn Broken catchment and various agencies involved in the local government partnership attended an induction workshop on natural resource management (NRM) at DPI Tatura on 24 November.

The aim of the workshop was to familiarise and update staff on the workings of natural resource management in the Goulburn Broken catchment.

The workshop was organised by the Municipal Catchment Coordinator in response to feedback from staff that it was difficult, particularly for new staff, to quickly understand the many roles and responsibilities in natural resource management.

Agencies represented at the workshop

included Goulburn Murray Water, Environment Protection Authority, Goulburn Broken CMA, Shepparton Irrigation Region Implementation Committee, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Department of Primary Industries and the Goulburn Murray Landcare Network.

While the workshop had a strong emphasis on the regional catchment strategy, a wide range of issues were canvassed, including the evolution of the GB CMA, structure of natural resource management, funding systems and opportunities, native vegetation controls and the, impact of dairy effluent and nutrients on water quality,

Feedback from the day was positive, with everyone attending saying they would recommend new staff attend similar

workshops when they become available.

Attendees were also unanimous that it would be beneficial for municipal councillors to attend a similar workshop to familiarise them with issues of natural resource management and the workings of the CMA and other agencies involved in implementing the regional catchment strategy.

Anyone with new staff who would like to attend an induction workshop should notify Colin James (colinj@gbcma.vic.gov.au).

Further workshops will be organised when enough people (about 15) have expressed interest.

An additional workshop will be held in early 2006 for new and re-elected councillors (see below).

NRM Workshop to Inform and Update Councillors

Gone are the days when councils were interested only in the "three R's" - roads, rates and rubbish.

Local government is now a key partner in environmental management and is becoming increasingly involved in hands-on issues, often through its strategic and statutory planning processes.

At last count, there were 23 different single-issue or broad environmental programs in which local government can be involved, many of them a pre-requisite for future funding.

To assist in understanding this increasingly complex situation, an information workshop on natural resource management will be held early in 2006 specifically for new and re-elected councillors from the Shepparton Irrigation Region.

Topics will range from an outline of the Goulburn Broken CMA and the Regional Catchment Strategy, the role and activities of local government and the latest issues affecting them.

The information and discussion session is designed specifically to inform and update councillors on the issues and people involved in natural resource management and to hear the latest on environmental issues and activities, particularly the implementation of the regional catchment strategy.

It will also be an opportunity for councillors, CMA board members and senior staff to meet face-to-face, particularly to discuss local government issues in the CMA partnership.

The workshop will be discussion, rather than presentation, based.

Local Government's increased environmental role is reflected in the fact that most councils now either employ, or are considering employing, a dedicated environmental officer.

Local government's relationship with the myriad agencies and funding sources is increasingly complex and there is a steep learning curve for councillors recently elected to office.

Even councillors with years' experience will find the workshop informative as it will update them on the latest issues and their impact on local government and the community it represents.

The information workshop will provide a quick, one-stop session where the fundamentals will be outlined.

As soon as the date is set, probably in early February, all councillors in the Shepparton irrigation region will receive a personalised invitation to the workshop.

An advisory report to the GBCMA Sub Surface Drainage Working Group has recommended indicative salinity tolerance levels of different fruit trees. The table below shows the EC levels for zero and 15% productivity losses. Some varieties may vary.

Crop	Apple	Almonds	Apricots	Grapes	Oranges	Peaches	Plums	Pears
0% Productivity Loss	500	800	850	800	900	900	850	500
15% Productivity Loss	960	1,200	1,170	1,600	1,400	1,270	1,230	960

Weeds on Roadsides - Out of Control



Roadside reserves are among the most significant stands of native vegetation left in the region, but the risk of weed invasion is high.

Unresolved issues over weed management on roadside reserves are allowing large-scale weed invasions of our most significant stands of remnant vegetation to go almost unchecked.

With 97% of the Shepparton Irrigation Region's native timber gone, road reserves are among the region's most important surviving vegetation corridors.

Most shires have developed, or are developing, roadside management strategies, with many also involved in biodiversity and weed mapping. But these strategies all stop short of taking responsibility for weed control which, legally, is the responsibility of others.

Local government is responsible for weed control on undeclared roads, but this confined to the road and its immediate verge. Adjoining landholders are responsible for the area between the road verge and the private land.

Depending on the weed status and type of road, the Department of Primary Industries can be responsible for controlling roadside weeds or for ensuring adjoining landholders do. Some shires believe DPI is not meeting those responsibilities, especially given recent cutbacks in weed control staff.

A lack of coordination and community awareness means weed management on road reserves is ad hoc and inconsistent, often ill-timed and counter-productive or simply non-existent. Even those with legal responsibility seem unwilling to take on the job.

Local governments in the catchment fears the responsibility and onerous costs for weed control on undeclared roads will end up with them.

Some shires have declined to apply for funding under programs such as "Tackling Weeds on Private Land" because they believe it could start the cost-shift process by providing short term funding to encourage local government involvement in a long term problem.

Other issues are roadside slashing and ploughing which, until recent times, have been seen as good housekeeping and fire prevention practices. Ploughing roadside reserves causes long term damage by destroying regrowth, burying indigenous seed and leaving bare soil primed for weed invasion.

Slashing and/or burning can be a help or hindrance, depending on the timing and type of vegetation involved. It can also make it difficult for spray contractors to identify target weeds.

Planning permits are now generally required for all roadside works, including ploughing and slashing, with ploughing actively discouraged or prohibited, depending on the shire. However, inconsistent bylaws and enforcement allows many inappropriate practices to continue. A common problem is for workers not to recognise the difference between weeds and native grasses.

The next meeting of the Goulburn Broken Environmental Planning Forum (see page 5) will consider what actions can be taken to raise the priority of roadside weed management.



The "Tackling Weeds on Private Land" seminar at Wangaratta in October included demonstrations of weed hygiene. Some councils have not applied for this funding for fear it might encourage a shift of responsibility for roadside weeds onto local government.



With 97% of native vegetation already gone in the Shepparton Irrigation Region, roadsides and rivers are our most important wildlife corridors.

A quarterly newsletter about local government issues and involvement in natural resource management in the Shepparton Irrigation Region. For the information of municipal councillors and staff, Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority and other agencies involved with local government in the natural resource management partnership.

Edited by Colin James
Municipal Catchment Coordinator
Goulburn Broken CMA
Phone: (03) 5833 5244
Fax: (03) 5833 5971
Mobile: 0418 561679

Vegetation Futures Conference.

Local government has been invited to attend a conference on: "The Role of Vegetation in Productive Landscapes: From Regional Planning to Practice", in Albury - Wodonga from 19-23 March 2006.

Further information is available from:
Haydn Burgess on (02) 6281 8585, or
www.greeningaustralia.org.au

COMING EVENTS

January 2006

9 - SIRTEC

27 - SIRIC

February

15 - MCC Steering Committee
NRM Information workshop for new and re-elected councillors

27 - SIRTEC

March

• 6-8 Australia Pacific Extension Network International Conference, Beechworth. "Exploring footprints, pathways and possibilities for sustainable communities".

• 17 - SIRIC

• 19 - 23 Conference: "The Role of Vegetation in Productive Landscapes: From Regional Planning to Practice", Albury - Wodonga

• 29 - Goulburn Broken Environmental Planning Forum

April

10 - SIRTEC

28 - SIRIC meeting at CoGS.

May

17 - MCC Steering Committee

22 - SIRTEC

June

16 - SIRIC

28 - Goulburn Broken Environmental Planning Forum

July

28 - SIRIC meeting at Campaspe

10 - SIRTEC

August

17 - MCC Steering Committee

28 - SIRTEC

September

15 - SIRIC

25 - Goulburn Broken Environmental Planning Forum

October 2006

2 - SIRTEC

8-11 International Landcare Conference, Melbourne Exhibition & Convention Centre.

21 - SIRIC meeting at Moira

November

15 - MCC Steering Committee

December

1 - SIRIC

13 - SIRTEC

Draft Yarrowonga Landscape Plan.

The draft Yarrowonga Conservation Plan is ready for comment.

The plan, which covers an area of almost 112,000 hectares, identifies seven key biodiversity assets: waterways, wetlands, public land, woodlands, riverine woodlands, grasslands and sand woodlands.

It is one of eight Biodiversity Action Plans being developed in the Shepparton irrigation Region.

The plan identifies 267 priority environmental sites, which have been ranked from low to very high priority. In general, sites were found to have low understorey or fallen timber (habitat) and high numbers of pest plants and animals.

A number of rare and endangered species, including broilga and superb parrot, have also been identified.

The plan also includes proposed management actions.

Draft Conservation Plan for the Yarrowonga Landscape Zone

Biodiversity Action Planning
in the Shepparton Irrigation Region



Department of Sustainability and Environment
Department of Primary Industries



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Local Government on the GBCMA web-site.

The role and activities of local government in natural resource management will soon be recognised on the Goulburn Broken CMA website.

A special local government page has been prepared, outlining the contributions councils have made to environmental management, particularly in the implementation of the regional catchment strategy.

The page will include links to each council's home page.

The website will also host an electronic discussion group for council planning and environmental staff to discuss natural resource issues and ideas. The group will be based on the recently-established Goulburn Broken Environmental Planning Forum, with staff from the CMA and agencies also invited to participate.

The new CMA website will be unveiled early in 2006.



Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority
168 Welsford St., Shepparton
P. O. Box 1752
Shepparton 3632
(03) 5820 1100



GREATER
SHEPPARTON

City of Greater Shepparton
90 Welsford St., Shepparton
Locked Bag 1000
Shepparton 3632
(03) 5832 9700



Shire of Campaspe
Cnr. Hare and Heygarth Streets,
P. O. Box 35
Echuca 3564
(03) 5481 2200



Moira Shire
44 Station St., Cobram
P. O. Box 578
Cobram 3643
(03) 5871 9222