

MALLEE CATCHMENT



International Riverprize Hattah Lakes named as a finalist



Ongoing efforts to revive the drought-ravaged Hattah Lakes have received global recognition, after a submission to the prestigious International Riverprize 2010 was selected as a finalist.

The Riverprize recognises outstanding achievement and excellence in river management. Each year, the prize is awarded to a national (Australian) and international catchment/watershed organisation or group for the difference they make to their rivers and environment.

The Hattah Lakes submission was entered by the Mallee Catchment Management

Authority (CMA) and is one of just four finalists selected from across the globe. The other three finalists come from England, China and Russia. The International Riverprize hasn't been won by an Australian entry since 2001. In 2009, it was won by Lake Simcoe, Canada. The Hattah Lakes submission has also been named as a finalist in the national category, where it is up against two entries from New South Wales and one entry from Tasmania.

The winners of the international and national Riverprize will be announced at the 13th International Riversymposium in Perth on October 12, 2010.

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Mulcra Island

Work begins to restore better health



Above: Installation of concrete piles for the Lower Potterwalkagee Regulator, which is replacing the existing Lock 8 Track causeway. Photo: Mallee CMA.

Construction has started on an innovative project that will help rescue Mulcra Island.

Located half way between Mildura and Renmark on the Murray River, Mulcra Island provides vital habitat for rare and threatened species such as the regent parrot, the growling grass frog and the red-naped snake. The island is rich in Indigenous heritage and is also a much-loved camping and fishing destination for many people.

Construction began this week to build five environmental regulators that will enable the flooding of up to 800 hectares of drought-stressed floodplain. Subject to water availability, the regulators will be used in tandem with a variation of Lock 8 levels to reinstate a more natural frequency of flows down the Potterwalkagee Creek, which is the anabranch of the Murray River that forms Mulcra Island.

Under The Living Murray, a program of works is being developed at each of the icon sites to ensure that available environmental water is used efficiently

and ecological benefits are maximised. The Mulcra Island project is part of this program.

The Living Murray is implemented in the local region by the Mallee Catchment Management Authority (CMA), on behalf of the Department of Sustainability and Environment and in partnership with Parks Victoria. Construction works are being managed by SA Water.

“River regulation has changed the natural flooding pattern of Mulcra Island, which has left the floodplain and important plants and animals in poor condition,” Mallee CMA chief executive officer Jenny Collins said.

“The structures that are now being built will help ensure water can be returned to this area in an effective and accountable way, meaning we can maximise the use of environmental water when it is available and importantly will still be able to be operated while river flows are low.”

The package of works being built at Mulcra Island is the result of years of planning and research carried out by

the government agencies involved. This has been complemented by extensive work with Indigenous stakeholders and community members. Emergency works carried out at the island over the past six years has included delivering environmental water to important sites, which has helped maintain the health of Mulcra Island until works could commence.

Tony Martin is the chair of the Community Reference Group, which was formed in 2008 to guide community engagement around this project. He has welcomed the start of construction and says the works are a vital step toward improving an important part of the Murray River environment.

“When these works are fully operational and environmental water is available, a total of 800 hectares of floodplain will be able to be inundated and flows will be returned to Potterwalkagee Creek, which will provide much-needed habitat for waterbirds, fish, frogs and turtles,” he said.

Construction of the Mulcra Island works is expected to take about six months, during which time access at Mulcra Island will be limited. For the latest information on track access, contact Parks Victoria on 13 19 63 or visit www.parkweb.vic.gov.au To keep up to date with the project, log on to the Mallee CMA's website for regular updates and images at www.malleecma.vic.gov.au

The Living Murray is a joint initiative funded by the New South Wales, Victorian, South Australian, Australian Capital Territory and the Commonwealth governments, coordinated by the Murray-Darling Basin Authority.

Mildura West Primary School

Students lead the way

Mildura West Primary School students will represent the region at a major environmental conference, thanks to sponsorship from the Mallee Catchment Management Authority (CMA).

The “Kids Teaching Kids” conference begins in Albury on August 16 and will see thirteen Year 6 Mildura West students giving a presentation on their knowledge of local environmental issues and learning from other students’ presentations.

Mallee CMA board chair Joan Burns attended the Mildura West Primary School assembly on June 11 to present the sponsorship package, which included \$1500 to assist with travel costs as well as a reserved place at the conference and access to mentors who assist with development of a presentation for the conference.

“The conference is a great opportunity for students to learn about an environmental issue affecting the Mallee and deliver their knowledge to a large audience,” Ms Burns said.

“The Mallee CMA is pleased to be able to assist local students to attend environmental events and to represent the Mallee area.”



Above: Eleven of the Mildura West Primary School students that will be attending the Kids Teaching Kids conference in August. Photo: Mallee CMA.

The sponsorship was made possible through funding from the Australian Government Caring for Our Country program.

The “Kids Teaching Kids” concept began in Mildura and has now expanded, with various events held in regional and national formats across the country.

Mildura West teacher Marion Vorwerk has been a strong supporter of environmental education at the school for many years and will lead the students through the preparation phase.

“The Kids Teaching Kids conference provides our students with an authentic learning experience where they meet like-minded students attending the conference from many different parts of the world,” Mrs Vorwerk said.

“Sharing environmental experiences broadens our students understanding so they become more adept at thinking outside the box, problem solving and showing consideration for others’ challenges in the environment.

“They learn many valuable skills during the process and I am sure this group will also proudly and capably represent our school and the Mallee region.”

The Mildura West presentation will be about water pollutants. The presentation, titled “Ghastly Guests” will take the form of a trial by jury, debate, dance and games to teach the audience about being more responsible about keeping pollutants out of the rivers.



Above: Joan Burns (centre) presented the sponsorship package to Mrs Vorweck and Principal Brian Young at the school assembly in June. Photo: Mallee CMA.

Funding injection for four local Landcare groups



Above: Map of Dunmunkle Creek Biolink. Image: Mallee CMA.

Four local Landcare groups have received funding for vital on-ground environmental works that will help protect the unique semi-arid woodlands of the Victorian Mallee.

The Sea Lake Landcare Group tops the list of recipients with a \$42,000 grant to protect remnant vegetation along Dunmunkle Creek. This underpins the Sea Lake group's long term plan to protect inland waterways, creating a significant environmental corridor linking Lake Tyrrell to Green Lake. The first stage will involve 10 landholders, who will work together to fence off the creek line and protect habitat for threatened species, such as the Inland Carpet Python.

The Birchip Landcare Group will use its \$23,420 grant to protect isolated areas of Buloke woodlands on private land, helping to enhance over 88 hectares of priority vegetation.

The Kooloonong Natya Landcare Group's grant of \$11,550 will protect priority

woodlands along an abandoned rail line from Natya to Piangle. The old rail line has scattered natural vegetation, but this project will help restore a more even spread of vegetation, which will help small birds and mammals to move between the Natya and Piangle reserves.

The Nyah West Landcare Group will invest its \$6,600 grant into rabbit suppression works. This project builds on work already undertaken by private landholders and will see specialist equipment bought in to tackle rabbit infestations, while preserving the biodiversity values on-farm.

The grants are part of the Group Based Environmental Management Action Planning (EMAP) Grants Program, which was co-ordinated by the Mallee Catchment Management Authority (CMA), through funding from the Australian Government's Caring for our Country. "These grants help Landcare groups by giving them financial support to implement important protection works on private land across our region, while

also providing Mallee farmers with the opportunity and means to have these works carried out on their land," Mallee CMA chair Joan Burns said.

"In developing these projects, Landcare groups have been engaging directly with a number of landholders across the region and building working relationships that will benefit the community and environment." This is the first time this grants program has been offered to Landcare groups in the Victorian Mallee and follows on from a series of environmental planning workshops organised by the Mallee CMA earlier this year.

At the workshops, Landcare groups planned their priorities and projects for the next five years, which resulted in the production of Group Based Environmental Management Action Plans that allowed these groups to identify works in their local area that could be aligned with future funding opportunities, such as the Group Based EMAP Grants Program.

The Group Based EMAP Grants Program has a particular focus on providing funding for Landcare groups to conduct remnant protection works along with secondary rabbit and weed control activities in priority woodlands on private property.

The Mallee CMA hopes to offer another round of Group Based EMAP Grants later this year.

For more information on the latest grants and incentives offered by the Mallee CMA, log on to the website at www.malleecma.vic.gov.au/get-involved or phone 5051 4377.

Mallee frog calls CD



Above: Mallee frog call cd.
 Right: Aerial photo of Lake Wallawalla.
 Photos: Mallee CMA.

After the success of the Waterbird and Frog field guides the Mallee CMA have released a CD of frog calls.

Calls from 11 species of frogs that can be found in the local region have been recorded and put on to a CD to make identification possible, even when the frog can't be seen.

Species featured on the CD include the Peron's Tree Frog, the Spotted Marsh Frog and the Pobblebonk.

For copies of the Mallee Frog Calls CD contact the Mallee CMA on 03 5051 4377.



Environmental water is continuing to flow into Lake Wallawalla.

About 4.5 billion litres of environmental water has been delivered to Lake Wallawalla since May, with the remaining 7.5 billion litres expected to be delivered just in time for spring. The Mallee CMA has been delivering the environmental water on behalf of DSE and in partnership with Parks Victoria.

Catch a Carp Day preparations underway

Get the fishing rods ready, the Sunraysia Marine, Mallee Waterwatch Catch A Carp Day 2010 is on again.

First held in 2004 this annual event is going to take place on Sunday 24th October at the Apex River Beach Holiday Park.

Catch a Carp Day plays a crucial role in raising the community's awareness about the impacts carp have on our local waterways. This event attracts participants from the Victorian and New South Wales sides of the river, giving them a chance to fish for carp along a very popular local section of the Murray River, while also enjoying a positive, family-friendly atmosphere with plenty of entertainment and environmental activities.

The 2010 event will offer some exciting new developments, including a focus on

encouraging volunteers to be involved in natural resource management; a cultural heritage tour of the riverbank area; and the use of a big screen to show live interviews with participants and sponsors throughout the day, along with short DVDs

promoting environmental issues and projects relevant to the local area.

Pre-registration will open in early October, more details will be posted on the Mallee CMA website at: www.malleecma.vic.gov.au



Above: Catch A Carp Day 2009 at Apex Park, Mildura.
 Inset: Just one of the 61 carp caught last year. Photos: Mallee CMA.

Work continues to save Murray Hardyhead



Above: Cardross Drainage Basin 1 East prior to environmental water being delivered. Photo: Mallee CMA.

Environmental water will be used to top up the Cardross Drainage Basin as part of ongoing efforts to protect the nationally-threatened Murray Hardyhead.

A total of one gigalitre (GL) of environmental water will be delivered to Cardross Basin 1 East and spill into the adjoining Cardross Basin 1 West, creating the saline conditions Hardyhead need to survive.

The move has been prompted by changes in the water quality in Basin 1 East, which is becoming too fresh for the Hardyhead to survive in. Hardyhead need salinity levels in water to be about 5000 to 6000 EC, but an increase in drainage into Basin 1 East means the water is currently approximately 1000 EC.

The Mallee Catchment Management Authority (CMA) is co-ordinating the environmental water delivery, on behalf of the Department of Sustainability and Environment, and in conjunction with Lower Murray Water.

“If salinity is not increased, the population of competing fish will increase and the wetland habitat will not support the Murray Hardyhead population, which could

ultimately lead to the Murray Hardyhead extinction at Cardross,” Mallee CMA chief executive officer Jenny Collins said.

“By allowing Basin 1 East to spill into Basin 1 West, the overall EC level of the basin will increase and effectively double the area of habitat suitable to the Murray Hardyhead ahead of the breeding season later this year.”



Above: Adult Hardyhead caught and released during monitoring in May this year. Photo: Mallee CMA.

The water to be delivered will come from the Victorian River Murray Flora and Fauna Bulk Entitlement, which is water legally set aside to preserve the environment. It is subject to the same allocations as irrigation water and using it does not affect anybody else’s water allocations.

The water will be delivered via existing irrigation infrastructure from early July.

Efforts to protect the Murray Hardyhead have been underway since 1996, when it became apparent that the future survival of the species was under significant threat. As the Cardross Drainage Basin was one of only four Murray Hardyhead populations remaining in Victoria at that time, environmental water was delivered to sustain the population.

Initially, the entire basin (East and West) held environmental water for this purpose, but the area of inundation has decreased over time due to water availability. A levee bank was constructed in 2007 to split the basin into two pools (East and West), ensuring environmental water could be delivered to a smaller area to preserve the Murray Hardyhead population.

While the upcoming delivery of environmental water will return the Cardross Basin 1 East and West to a single body of water, future deliveries of environmental water will be subject to water availability.

“We will be keeping a close eye on how this environmental water affects the population of Murray Hardyhead within the Cardross Basin,” Ms Collins said.

“As part of ongoing efforts to save this important fish from extinction, the Murray Darling Freshwater Research Centre will conduct regular monitoring of Cardross Basin 1 East and West, taking into account EC readings and fish populations.”

For more information on this and other environmental watering projects in the Victorian Mallee, contact the Mallee CMA on 03 5051 4377 or log on to the website at: www.malleecma.vic.gov.au

Reports confirm irrigation reduction



Above: Irrigation Status Reports available from the website. Photo: Mallee CMA.

Two recently-released reports show large areas of irrigable land between Nyah and the South Australian border were not irrigated during the 2009-10 season.

The 2009-10 Irrigation Status Report for the Pumped Irrigation Districts revealed 32 percent of irrigable land in Sunraysia's pumped irrigation districts did not receive water (other than rainfall) during the 2009-10 season. Of the four pumped irrigation districts, Merbein had the largest area not irrigated at 43 percent.

Meanwhile, the 2009-10 Irrigation Status Report for the Private Diverters and Nyah District captured information on private diverters from Nyah to Lock 10 and showed 17 percent of irrigable land in this river reach did not receive water. This was the first time irrigation status across this broader part of the region has been surveyed.

Both reports were commissioned by the Mallee Catchment Management Authority (CMA), with support from the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) and Lower Murray Water. The reports were completed by SunRISE 21 INC.

"The purpose of this research was to develop credible data to help understand the extent to which current conditions are impacting on irrigated horticulture

within the pumped districts and the private diversion areas," Mallee CMA chief executive officer Jennifer Collins said.

"This report will ensure local irrigators and agencies have reliable information on which to base decisions about their future activities and programs."

A breakdown of the figures from the 2009-10 Irrigation Status Report for the Pumped Irrigation Districts also indicated that 34 percent of irrigable land in Mildura was not irrigated; 31 percent in Red Cliffs; and 15 percent in Robinvale.

The report also highlighted a marked change in the irrigation methods used by local growers.

This report also captured information on the take up of the small block irrigators exit grant, revealing a total of 80 properties are subject to this grant. Twenty-seven properties in Merbein are subject to the grant; 22 properties in Mildura; 27 properties in Red Cliffs; and four in Robinvale.

Ms Collins said the report also highlighted a marked change in the irrigation methods used by local growers, with drip irrigation increasing from 17 percent of irrigated crops in 2005-06 to 33 percent of irrigated

crops in 2009-10, while furrow irrigation declined from 22 percent of irrigated crops in 2005-06 to nine percent of irrigated crops in 2009-10.

"Overall, 70 percent of crops were irrigated by the more water efficient methods of drippers or low level sprinklers in 2009-10," she said.

The 2009-10 Irrigation Status Report for the Private Diverters and Nyah District looked at changes in irrigated horticulture in five reaches of the Murray River: Nyah to the Wakool Junction (i.e. the Nyah river reach including the Nyah pumped irrigation district); Wakool Junction to Euston Weir (i.e. the Boundary Bend river reach); Euston Weir to Liparoo (i.e. the Wemen river reach); Colignan to Koorlong (i.e. the Colignan river reach); and private diverters from Nichols Point to Lock 10 (i.e. the Mildura river reach).

A summary of results from this report showed 42 percent of irrigable land in the Nyah river reach was not irrigated during the 2009-10 season; seven percent of irrigable land in the Boundary Bend river reach did not receive water (other than rainfall); five percent of the Wemen river reach was not watered; and 18 percent of the Colignan reach was not irrigated.

This report also showed the irrigated area decreased in the Colignan and Mildura private diverters river reaches, while increases were recorded in the Wemen and Boundary Bend reaches. The irrigated area increased by 4,265 hectares in the Wemen reach and 6,090 hectares in the Boundary Bend reach between 2005-06 and 2009-10, mostly for almond and olive tree plantations.

Locals urged to log on to new online survey



Above: Adult White-bellied Sea-eagle. Photo: Mallee CMA.

A NEW online survey has been launched to help unearth more information about one of the Mallee's threatened species.

The White-bellied Sea-eagle (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*) is a large, white bird of prey, with greyish wings, that is found along the Murray River, as well as nearby wetlands, creeks and lakes.

Relatively little is known about this threatened species, but it is hoped the online survey will help gather more information by recording sightings and collecting information on bird numbers, behavior and habitat.

The survey, along with a supporting White-bellied Sea-Eagle fact sheet and reference card, has been developed by the Mallee Catchment Management Authority (CMA). Funding for this project was provided by the Victorian Government.

"The reference card is laminated and small enough to fit into a tackle box or

back pack, so anglers, campers and bushwalkers can take this information with them and know how to correctly identify a White-bellied Sea-Eagle," Mallee CMA chair Joan Burns said.

"We are really encouraging people who do see these birds to then access the online survey on our website to record the sighting.

"It is a quick and simple survey that could really make a difference in improving the knowledge we have about the White-bellied Sea-Eagle."

The reference cards and fact sheets are available on the Mallee CMA website or from a number of outlets in Mildura, including the Visitor Information and Booking Centre, Ray's Outdoors and Got One.

For more information on the White-bellied Sea-Eagle, log on to the Mallee CMA website at www.malleecma.vic.gov.au or contact (03) 5051 4377.

Upcoming events

August

1 National Tree Day

4-5 Speed Field Days

September

Biodiversity month

October

14-17 Mildura Show

17-23 National Water Week

24 Catch A Carp Day

Project Partners



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