

VICTORIAN CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

ANNUAL REPORT **2003-2004**

Victorian
Catchment
Management
Council



TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAIRPERSON'S FOREWORD	3
1. REVISITING <i>THE HEALTH OF OUR CATCHMENTS</i> REPORT	4
2. INTRODUCTION TO THE VCMC	6
Council Members	6
Council Staff	7
VCMC Role	7
VCMC Sub-Committees	9
3. OPERATION OF THE CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK	10
Comment On the Framework	10
Operations of the VCMC	12
VCMC Finance Report	21
Major State Activities with VCMC Involvement	22
Operations of The CMAs	25
4. STATUTORY RESPONSIBILITIES	38
VCMC Meetings	38
Freedom of Information	38
Consultancies	38
National Competition Policy	38
Multi-Cultural Statement	38
Pecuniary Interest	38
Whistleblowers Protection Act	38
Merit and Equity	39
VCMC Publications 2003-2004	39
Additional VCMC Information Available on Request	39
APPENDICES	40
Appendix 1 – Committees and Working Groups That Included a Representative of the VCMC in 2003-2004	40
Appendix 2 - VCMC Catchment Stakeholders' Forum Members in 2003-2004	41
Appendix 3 – DSE/DPI Pest Plant and Animal Compliance and Enforcement Activities	42
Appendix 4 – Compliance Index Disclosure Requirements	43
ABBREVIATIONS	44

CHAIRPERSON'S FOREWORD



This report covers Victorian Catchment Management Council (VCMC) activities for the 2003/04 financial year.

The role of VCMC is currently under review (see *Operations of the VCMC: VCMC Review*). The Council's three-year term was initially extended for one year to 30 April 2004 to allow the review to be carried out. Members have now been reappointed for a two year transition period from 1 May 2004 to 30 April 2006 while the review continues.

The focus for this year has been primarily consolidation, finalising key projects and promoting the outcomes of earlier activities including the five yearly catchment condition report *The Health of Our Catchments – A Victorian Report Card 2002*. A review of the catchment health reporting process was passed on to the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability who is now responsible for SoE reporting in Victoria.

The Council, in partnership with the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE), finalised the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality (NAP) project *Land Stewardship* (see *Operations of the VCMC: Land Stewardship*). In its final report, amongst other recommendations, the Council encourages the development of an ecosystem services approach to funding repair of our land and water resources. This innovative approach could attract both public and private partnerships and would require State and Federal Governments to put in place institutional arrangements to allow trading of biodiversity, carbon, water quality and salinity credits.

VCMC, together with the Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs), finalised a report on research and development needs of the catchment management framework and put in place a mechanism to continually update these needs and develop dialogue with research providers.

The Council prepared a submission in response to the Government's *Securing Our Water Future: Green Paper for*

Discussion and members have participated in discussions during the development of the White Paper.

Council has active committees on Weed Policy and Landcare and supports the State Water Quality Monitoring and Assessment Committee (SWQMAC). Their work is documented elsewhere in this report.

The Council relies heavily on partnerships with the CMAs, DSE, Department of Primary Industries (DPI) and Environment Protection Authority (EPA) to implement its program. We are particularly grateful to officers in the Catchment Strategies branch headed by Stella Whittaker, for their strong support during the year. I also thank my fellow Council members for their significant contributions to the work of the VCMC. Special thanks go to Executive Officer, Lisa Munro and Project Officer, Marian Pernat – their consistent enthusiasm and support are invaluable.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christine Forster". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Christine Forster
Chair, Victorian Catchment Management Council

1. REVISITING *THE HEALTH OF OUR CATCHMENTS* REPORT

In making its 2002 report to Parliament on the operation of the catchment management framework, the VCMC also included its five yearly report on the condition of Victoria's catchments. That report found that our natural resources are under pressure and, in many cases, will not be passed on to the next generation in good condition. The report noted that the Victorian Government has in place many strategies, plans and programs to encourage sustainable resource use which will make a difference to long term outcomes but, in themselves, will not be enough to ensure that our natural capital is protected.

The report outlined a vision for 2020 and indicated a pathway to achieve that vision. A key element in that pathway is a Statewide natural resources management strategy and investment plan which would contain the following elements:

- A vision for the Victorian landscape in 2050
- A vision for the future of agriculture within that landscape
- Identification of opportunities for the State
- An outline of innovative public/private partnerships to achieve the strategy
- A knowledge management plan, to include research and development and monitoring, evaluation and performance review
- Adequate resources from the public and private sector

There have been a number of significant developments addressing many of these elements which will make a contribution to the State Government's objective of achieving sustainability in Victoria within the next generation. They include:

- Establishment of \$360M Victorian Water Trust
- The development of the Government's policy paper *Securing Our Water Future Together*
- The completion of the Land Stewardship project, funded by the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality
- Pilot projects in Bush Tender (Biodiversity) and Greenhouse for Biodiversity
- The establishment of the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE)
- The adoption within DSE of an outcomes-based approach to program management and

commencement of the development of the policy framework in which this can be applied to our natural capital

- The appointment of the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability
- Further policy development within the DSE Land Stewardship and Biodiversity Division on the Rural Land Stewardship Project and the Statewide Natural Resource Management Policy Framework and Statewide Natural Resource Management Investment Model
- Renewal of the Regional Catchment Strategies for 8 of the 10 Catchment Management Authorities
- Development of the Regional Catchment Investment Planning process which integrates funding streams and encourages partnerships with a broad range of stakeholders in natural resources management
- Development of Sustainability Covenants between the EPA and a number of public and private sector organisations
- Development of governance and sustainability reporting in the private sector and the Carbon Disclosure project
- Development and Funding of Our Rural Landscapes project, \$50M program to address sustainability of our agricultural industries.

While most of these developments have been covered elsewhere in this report, here we will address three particular issues which need further attention and are essential to providing an effective policy framework. Such a framework will enable a quantum shift in the resources available to achieve sustainable land use within this generation and will also provide significant opportunities for Victoria as a leader in sustainability practice.

The 2002 report highlighted the need for an **integrated natural resources management strategy and investment plan** which would inform the implementation of Regional Catchment Strategies and Regional Catchment Investment Plans (RCIPs), providing the Victorian Government with investment guidelines. This strategy and investment plan is essential so that the State may optimise investment outcomes. We have yet to achieve the holy grail of natural resources management – integration. The RCIP process is a good tool but it needs to be guided by a rigorous evaluation of the role of the government in natural resources management where it is a key player, but by no means the only player.

We need **innovative public/private sector partnerships**. There will never be enough public sector funds to address our earth repair issues. ACF and NFF recently estimated the cost of environmental repair at about \$65 billion for Australia. Given the stress on land and water resources, we could estimate Victoria's share at about \$14 - 16 times the annual budget for DSE. Many

natural resources management objectives will be achieved by good policy development and establishment of processes and tools and support of the development of underpinning science, rather than direct funding of on-ground activities. Getting the mix of science, policy, processes and tools is essential if we are to optimise investment.

For example, the establishment of a framework for trading in ecosystem services is one such process. Trading has commenced in water as it can be underpinned by a robust measurement and register system. On a pilot basis, some trading has started in salinity, water quality, biodiversity credits and carbon credits. A framework would include caps, rules of trade and a robust register of title. Non-government participation in such a process would improve Victoria's economic capacity and assist in achieving sustainability.

The third key issue is **knowledge management**. Knowledge generation, synthesis and exchange are fundamental aspects of managing for future sustainability of natural resources, particularly healthy ecosystems. *The Health of Our Catchments* report addresses this issue in detail, and the VCMC, together with the CMAs recently advised the Minister of the urgent need to develop a comprehensive knowledge strategy to support adaptive management of catchments. Work has begun on some elements of a strategy and the development of a comprehensive approach is in progress, but this should be accelerated to ensure public and private sector investment in integrated natural resources management is soundly based.

The Council believes that current activity in these three areas needs to be expedited if we are to achieve sustainable use of our natural resources within the next generation.

2. INTRODUCTION TO THE VCMC

COUNCIL MEMBERS

Council consists of up to 10 members appointed by Governor in Council on the basis of their skills, experience and knowledge of land protection, water resource management, primary industries, environment protection, conservation and local government.

MS CHRISTINE FORSTER – CHAIRPERSON

- Member, Victorian Water Trust Advisory Council
- Director, VicSuper Pty Ltd
- Former Director, National Land and Water Resources Research and Development Corporation.
- Former Director, Rural Water Corporation.
- Sessional Member of Victorian Planning Panels.
- Woolgrower in Western Victoria.
- Governing Board Member, CRC for Catchment Hydrology.

MR ALEX ARBUTHNOT, AM

- Director, Landcare Australia Limited.
- Chair, Gippsland Agri-business Forum.
- Director, Gippsland Farm Plantations.
- Gippsland dairy farmer.
- Past President, Victorian Farmers Federation.
- Member, VFF Land Management Committee.
- Member, VFF Landcare Sub-committee.
- Member, WGCMA Wellington Implementation Committee.

DR SARAH EWING

- Geographer, Honorary Fellow, Dept of Civil & Environmental Eng., University of Melbourne.
- Churchill Fellow.
- Member, Victorian Environmental Assessment Council.
- Member, former State Landcare Committee.
- Former Member, Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council Community Advisory Committee.

MS PATRICIA GERAGHTY (DSE REPRESENTATIVE TO MARCH 2003)

- Team Leader, Catchment Planning, Department of Sustainability and Environment.
- Co-Chair, RCS Accreditation Coordinating Committee.
- Former Member, Environment Council of EPA.

- Former Chair, Program Management Committee, Riparian Management, Land & Water Australia.
- National Organising Committees for World Water Congress; International Society for Limnology.
- Expertise in river health, catchment strategies, community engagement.

PROFESSOR BARRY HART

- Director, Water Studies Centre, Monash University
- Professor of Environmental Chemistry, Monash University.
- Director of Research, Cooperative Research Centre for Freshwater Ecology.
- Member, Board of Environment Protection Authority Victoria.
- Extensive experience in water quality research and management.
- Expertise in river health, water quality management and ecological risk assessment.

MR KEVIN LOVE (DSE REPRESENTATIVE FROM MAY 2004)

- Deputy Secretary, DSE Land Stewardship and Biodiversity.
- Former Deputy Secretary, NRE Public Land, Heritage and Biodiversity.
- Former Director, Resources and Infrastructure, Department of Premier and Cabinet.
- 20 years work experience in country Victoria for the Department of Agriculture.

MS MONICA MORGAN (TO SEPTEMBER 2003)

- Manager, Basin Communities (MDBC).
- Manager, Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation.
- Indigenous person with an active interest in furthering Indigenous land management issues.

MR COLLON MULLETT (FROM NOVEMBER 2003)

- Member NAP/NHT Independent Advisory Panel.
- Indigenous person with an active interest in furthering Indigenous land & water management issues.

MR DOUG NEWTON (EPA OBSERVER)

- EPA Assistant Director Operations – Catchments.
- Major focus on catchment management and agriculture.
- Key programs – Victorian Stormwater Action Program, SEPP WoV Implementation, Western Port Action+ Program, Dairy & Irrigation Improvement.
- 16 years with EPA in senior management positions covering policy, operations and special projects.

- Expertise in recycling, waste management, strategy development, catchment management, project management, community engagement and partnership development.

Ms DIANA PATTERSON

- Management Consultant.
- Chairman Mt Buller Resort Management Board.
- Member, Alpine Resorts Coordinating Council
- Former Chief Executive Officer, Surf Coast Shire.
- Former Director of Flora and Fauna Statewide Programs, Department of Natural Resources and Environment.
- Former Manager, Land Protection Branch, Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.

DR JOHN RUSSELL

- Lecturer, Civil and Environmental Management Engineering, La Trobe University, Bendigo.
- Charter Professional Engineer.
- Fellow of the Institution of Engineers, Australia.
- Former Technical Manager, Melbourne Water.
- Former Director of Mid-Goulburn Regional Water Authority.
- NHT 1998 Technical Assessment Panelist Water/Soils.
- Member, School Board, La Trobe University, Bendigo.
- Expertise in catchments, water/wastewater, soil fertility and farming practices.

MR BILL SHARROCK

- Chairman, Portland Coast Water Authority.
- Timber Farmer, including value-adding operations and milling and construction. General farming 35 years in Western Victoria.
- Treasurer, South West Regional Housing Council.
- Many years experience on Regional Development Boards including Green Triangle and Shire of Glenelg.
- Ag Science and Commerce teaching experience.
- Former Commissioner, Port of Portland Authority.

Ms ALISON TEESE

- Director, Central Highlands Water.
- Member, North Central Catchment Management Authority Board.
- Member, Australian Landcare Council.
- Member, Independent Advisory Panel for NAP.
- Member, Committee of Management Rural Ambulance Victoria.
- Partner, Multi-enterprise Farming Business, Central Victoria.

- Member, Taskforce for Second Generation Landcare
- Extensive experience in Victorian Planning Panels, resource management and regional and local land use planning.

Ms STELLA WHITTAKER (DSE REPRESENTATIVE FROM MARCH TO MAY 2003)

- Director of Catchment Strategies, Department of Sustainability and Environment.
- Executive Director, Environs Australia.
- Former Executive Manager Environment, Hornsby Shire Council.
- Established the Local Government Group for the Institute for Sustainable Futures, University of Technology, Sydney.
- Over 20 years professional experience in the environment and Local Government, mainly in the UK and more recently in Australia.

COUNCIL STAFF

DAVID CUMMINGS

Acting Executive Officer to August 2003

LISA MUNRO

Executive Officer from August 2003

MARIAN PERNAT

Project Officer

VCMC ROLE

The VCMC is the State Government's peak advisory body on catchment management. Catchment management involves the sustainable use and management of land and water resources at a catchment level.

The VCMC was established in 1997 by the Victorian Government under the *CaLP Act*. The Council is uniquely placed, independent of government agencies, regional catchment authorities and non-government organisations, to take a long term view and influence change in working towards its vision for catchment management –

Victoria will have healthy rivers flowing through ecologically sustainable and productive catchments.

Council takes a statewide view on land and water issues and priorities related to catchment management. It facilitates integrated and coordinated catchment management through Victoria's catchment management framework.

The VCMC works closely with DSE, DPI and EPA. Council is also working to strengthen strategic catchment management planning by increasing collaboration with Local Government.

The VCMC encourages cooperation of bodies such as Non-Government Organisations involved in the management of land and water resources.

STATUTORY ROLES

The major statutory roles of the VCMC include:

- providing advice to the Minister for Environment The Hon John Thwaites, MP (and any other Minister) on matters relating to catchment management in Victoria;
- developing an Annual Report to the Minister and State Parliament on the operation of the *CaLP Act*; and
- provision of five-yearly reports on the environmental condition and management of land and water resources in Victoria.

VCMC SUB-COMMITTEES

The past year has seen the VCMC establish and continue to operate a number of internal sub-committees and working groups. Members of Council are also involved individually in a range of other external committees. A list of all relevant committees appears in Appendix 1. The nature and function of internal VCMC sub-committees are as follows:

INDIGENOUS LAND AND WATER MANAGEMENT PROTOCOLS COMMITTEE

Constituted by Monica Morgan, Sarah Ewing, Christine Forster and Doug Newton, this committee has supported the development of protocols for Indigenous participation in land and water management planning at a CMA level.

WEED POLICY COMMITTEE

Chaired by Alex Arbuthnot and includes Bill Sharrock, Diana Patterson and Christine Forster. The Committee provides advice on weed issues and management to the Minister for the Environment.

LANDCARE COMMITTEE

The VCMC established a Landcare working group to fulfil its advocacy role and to champion the Landcare cause. VCMC members are Alison Teese, Alex Arbuthnot, John Russell and Diana Patterson.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE

Constituted by Christine Forster, Diana Patterson and Bill Sharrock. The committee was convened to foster cooperation between local government and CMAs.

FLORA AND FAUNA REFERRALS GROUP

Group convened to provide comments on flora and fauna *Action Statements* and proposed species listing under the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988*. The group includes Bill Sharrock and Alison Teese with specialist support from Julie Kirkwood (Threatened Species Network, Victoria).

LAND STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE

The VCMC is working in partnership with DSE Land Stewardship and Biodiversity on a land stewardship project for the State through the NAP program. As part of this project the VCMC established a small sub-committee to review activities and provide comment on behalf of Council. Members are Christine Forster, Diana Patterson and Sarah Ewing.

CATCHMENT CONDITION REPORT COMMITTEE

This group comprising Christine Forster, John Russell, Barry Hart and Diana Patterson chartered the planning

and design of the 2002 report *The Health of Our Catchments: A Victorian Report Card*. The group reconvened to package key findings and learnings from the report for the benefit of future reporting on natural resources.

3. OPERATION OF THE CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

COMMENT ON THE FRAMEWORK

The *CaLP Act* provides for the development and review of Regional Catchment Strategies (RCSs), with the VCMC responsible for endorsement of guidelines for this activity. The guidelines were finalised and released in December 2001. RCSs inform regional investment for NAP, NHT and State programs.

During the last year, six RCSs, coordinated by the CMAs (Figure 1) on behalf of their regional communities, were accredited and gazetted for the period 2003-2008.

The Glenelg Hopkins RCS was the first integrated natural resource management plan in Australia to be accredited by both State and Commonwealth Governments on 17 April 2003. Since then, a further five RCSs have been launched. The Mallee RCS was launched on the banks of the Murray River in July and the Goulburn-Broken RCS at Mooroopna in November. The North Central RCS was launched south of Bendigo in early December and the Wimmera RCS was launched at Halls Gap on the same day. The Corangamite RCS was launched at the Otway Fly on 18 December 2003. The North East region's RCS was launched in June 2004.

The West Gippsland RCS is accredited and is due to be launched on 27 July 2004. East Gippsland and Port Phillip RCSs are about to undergo the public consultation phase, in preparation for final accreditation after June 2004. The Council has been kept informed of the long journey from the initial development and endorsement of the RCS guidelines, through to accreditation. The next phase will be even longer: implementation of the priority actions in the RCSs over the next 5 years, in order to achieve agreed NRM outcomes across the State.

FIGURE 1. Catchment Management Authorities in Victoria



OPERATIONS OF THE VCMC

VCMC BUSINESS PLAN and WORKPLAN

The VCMC Business Plan 2000-03 outlines Council's tasks for the period 2000-2003 in relation to its statutory functions under the *CaLP Act*. The VCMC has continued the implementation of its 2000-03 Business Plan.

VCMC developed and endorsed a new workplan for 2003-04, which outlines priority objectives. The following activities reflect priorities in the workplan.

VCMC REVIEW

DSE is coordinating the independent review of VCMC. Consultants *The Strategy Shop* were appointed by DSE in October 2003 to conduct the review in accordance with the following terms of reference:

- Assess the achievement of VCMC since its inception in 1997, and strengths, weaknesses and policy opportunities for the Council in relation to Victoria's Catchment Management Framework.
- Evaluate the role of the Council in the light of directions set out in the Green Paper *Securing Our Water Future*, the newly established role of the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability and other relevant legislative and policy developments.
- Review research and other documentation that describes or evaluates arrangements for the governance and management of Victoria's catchment framework, including the Governance Improvement Project, RCS and other catchment management processes, and the roles of other relevant bodies.
- Consult with the Council's members and other key stakeholders concerning the past and current roles of the Council, and options for the future role of the Council in statewide integrated catchment management.
- Provide a consolidated draft review report with recommendation options and comment on legislative implications to the Steering Committee for approval and implementation.
- Following consideration of Steering Committee comments, provide a final review report to the Minister.

VCMC has actively participated in the review. As part of the consultation process, Council members have provided information concerning VCMC roles, responsibilities and achievements and have contributed to the discussion on potential options for the future of Council in the context of the broader catchment management framework in Victoria.

It is anticipated that the outcome of the review and associated changes to the legislation will be finalised before 30 April 2006 when Council's term is due to expire.

WATER INDUSTRY REFORM

The Victorian Government released the *Securing Our Water Future: Green Paper for Discussion* in August 2003.

Following extensive discussions, the VCMC developed a submission in response to this paper. VCMC identified four overarching issues that required attention:

- Engaging the community.
- Urban and rural water issues.
- An integrated approach to water resource management.
- Evolution of Victoria's water resource management policies and programs.

Council explored these issues in more detail under a number of themes. Many of these themes related to the Council's primary functions while others were issues of interest to Council members:

Theme 1: Performance Assessment and Monitoring
Theme 2: R&D – Knowledge Management
Theme 3: Social Implications of Recommendations Affecting Irrigation Areas
Theme 4: Water Planning
Theme 5: Environmental Charge – Collection and Distribution
Theme 6: Resourcing of CMAs
Theme 7: Governance Issues

VCMC also provided a submission to Melbourne Water's *Planning for the Future of Our Water Resources: Discussion Starter*. VCMC recognised the need to focus on the broader catchment context as well as focussing on water harvesting, storage and distribution, ie. harvesting of Melbourne's water has a significant impact on the catchments from which it is diverted.

HEALTHY RIVERS

VCMC members Christine Forster and Barry Hart actively contributed and supported DSE to develop the Victorian River Health Strategy (VRHS) through the stakeholder and technical working groups. The final document was released in August 2002. VCMC has been monitoring progress on the implementation of the VRHS since its release.

The State Environment Protection Policy Waters of Victoria (SEPP WoV) was released by EPA in June 2003. VCMC has continued to actively progress the WoV implementation partnership with the EPA. VCMC

formalised its commitment to EPA to work together to improve water and catchment environments at its December 2003 meeting. EPA and VCMC identified the following potential areas for collaboration:

- Aligning ecosystem services, assets and beneficial uses.
- Joint information campaigns on clean catchments and water environments.
- Processes for understanding environmental risks and setting improvement targets.
- RCS reporting and auditing processes.

Furthermore, the VCMC contributed to ongoing VRHS/SEPP WoV integration discussions.

The VCMC has continued to convene the State Water Quality Monitoring and Assessment Committee (see *Operations of the VCMC: Data Coordination and Catchment Condition Reporting* for further details).

HEALTHY LANDSCAPES

VCMC's vision for healthy landscapes, as outlined in *The Health of Our Catchments*, matches land use with land capability and includes a mosaic of land uses that comprises a mix of intensive agriculture and land used for ecosystem services supporting rural lifestyles and nature conservation.

This vision was taken into consideration in the development of a statewide project by DSE to develop an integrated framework for natural resource management. VCMC has been working closely with DSE to progress this project. Sarah Ewing is a member on the INRM (Integrated Natural Resource Management) Expert Panel and Christine Forster participates on the INRM Steering Committee.

The VCMC has continued to be represented on various committees and panels concerning NAP and NHT. The VCMC Chair chaired the NAP Stakeholder Reference Group and VCMC members were represented on the State Assessment Panel for NHT Envirofund applications. VCMC has continued to play an advisory role to DSE in the development of NAP monitoring and evaluation, accountability and communications.

In 2001, the VCMC and DSE produced guidelines for the development of RCS as part of supporting regional efforts. VCMC participated on the RCS Stakeholder Reference Group and provided input into the RCS specialist support package.

BIODIVERSITY

The Health of Our Catchments argues that the maintenance of biodiversity is essential to, and underpinned by, healthy ecosystem processes required for ecologically sustainable

catchments. Council has continued to promote this case in its everyday operations.

The Flora and Fauna Referrals Group has continued to provide comment on recommendations made by DSE for listing or not listing under the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* and draft *Action Statements*. In 2003-04, VCMC provided comment on 61 species and threatening processes for listing/not listing under the Act. In addition, VCMC offered advice on 41 draft *Action Statements* developed for species and threatening processes already listed under the Act. The VCMC also provided comment in relation to the Spot-tailed Quoll final Action Statement in response to a letter received by the WorldWide Fund for Nature. Overall, VCMC has been overwhelmingly supportive of the recommendations made by DSE. The VCMC would like to formally thank the Threatened Species Network for their expertise and support offered throughout the year.

Furthermore, the VCMC has promoted integrated pest, plant and animal control with emphasis on protecting biodiversity assets through input and participation in the Victorian Pest Management Framework (see *Operations of the VCMC: Weed Policy Committee*).

LANDCARE

The VCMC has continued to support landcare activities at the statewide level.

The VCMC established a Landcare Working Group to fulfil its advocacy role and to champion the landcare cause. The group's role is to monitor progress on the implementation of the Victorian Action Plan for Second Generation Landcare (released in April 2002) and develop policy position briefings on community landcare mechanisms. The DSE statewide landcare team has provided Council with 6-monthly progress reports on landcare-related activities.

More than 300 delegates (of which over 60% were community representatives) attended the 2004 Landcare Forum held in Bendigo on 3 & 4 June. The theme of the forum was *making community landcare even stronger* and participants identified 11 opportunities for reaching this vision. VCMC was well represented at the forum and will also be attending a follow-up session on 16 July to discuss opportunities for clarifying relationships and roles between local landcare and CMAs and to further discuss action needed at regional, State and national levels.

Members Alison Teese and Alex Arbuthnot participated as members on the Australian Landcare Council (ALC) and the Board of Landcare Australia Limited respectively. Alison Teese was also a member of the Second-Generation Landcare Taskforce that developed the *Victorian Action Plan for Second Generation Landcare*.

Christine Forster is a member of the ALC Peak Chairs forum.

LAND STEWARDSHIP

The VCMC vision for Victoria outlined in *The Health of Our Catchments* is based on the ecological footprint of Victorians in balance with the natural capital that we can sustain over the long term. In order to achieve this vision, VCMC argued that radically different approaches to managing the land are required. This landscape change requirement matched well with other ongoing work around the State by CMAs in Land Stewardship.

Land Stewardship recognises that an integrated, comprehensive approach that addresses causes and drivers is required on the ground. Both the work of the VCMC and the work of the different CMAs has raised the notion of exploring ecosystem services as a service that can be valued and provided by landholders alongside other rural goods and services.

In July 2002 the VCMC attracted NAP funding to develop proposals under the Land Stewardship banner. The VCMC has been working in conjunction with the Landscape Change Team of DSE in managing the project.

The Land Stewardship project began exploring a range of concepts in June 2002. The early consultation and development phase of the project, operating closely with the Project Steering Committee and Contact Group, resulted in a published issues and options paper entitled *Ecosystem Services Through Land Stewardship Practices* in June 2003. The paper highlighted some of the options available to support positive land use change, and highlighted some areas where additional expertise and clarity was required. An additional suite of papers were also prepared and released throughout 2003-2004 to address some of the information gaps as follows:

- *Land Stewardship – Market-like Policy Options*
- *Environmental Management Systems – The Role of EMS in the Emerging Land Stewardship Concept*
- *Duty of Care: An Instrument for Increasing the Effectiveness of Catchment Management*
- *Private Investor Needs for Land Stewardship Investment*
- *Stewards of the Land: Landholder Perspectives on Sustainable Land Management*
- *Current Legislative Arrangements for Victoria (not yet finalised)*

These information papers are forming the foundation for detailed discussions and debate advising on policy formulation. A broad range of stakeholders have already been engaged at seminars across the State and their responses to the various elements of the Land Stewardship proposals are being compiled. The next

phase of the project will involve developing and testing the concepts with key stakeholders.

There are two major reports resulting from the project: A report from VCMC to government, presenting a vision and a preferred approach and highlighting opportunities and challenges for governments and community in using landscape change to achieve a more sustainable future. This was completed in May 2004 and has been circulated widely to major stakeholders. This will be followed by a DSE report to government later in 2004, which will explore some draft policy concepts.

The NAP funding includes an allocation for a trial. The Steering Committee agreed to a trial in Eskdale/Little Snowy Creek to be managed by the NECMA. A memorandum of understanding was signed by VCMC and the NECMA and budget for the trial was handed over to the CMA in May. The trial is focusing on water quality and flow, incorporating the practical issues associated with application of the ecosystem services approach.

Diana Patterson is the VCMC representative on DSE's Public Land Stewardship project's Stakeholder Reference Group. DSE's Corporate Plan details the commitment to the maintenance and enhancement of Victoria's public estate values now and into the future. The Public Land Stewardship Project has been established to help deliver on this commitment.

WEED POLICY COMMITTEE

The Weed Policy Sub-Committee (WPC) has continued to advance the VCMC's key responsibility for strategic actions outlined in the Victorian Pest Management Framework (VPMF) and the Victorian Weed Management Strategy (WMS).

Under the VPMF, VCMC has key responsibility for six strategic actions and plays a supporting role in a further seven in partnership with DSE and other agencies. Under the WMS, VCMC has ten key responsibilities and a further 24 partnership responsibilities.

One of the major strategic actions is to review and revise the list of declared noxious weeds. VCMC has worked closely with DSE throughout the year to develop the review which commenced in May 2004. VCMC is responsible for consultation with key stakeholder groups and, if necessary, facilitates resolution of the broader issues that arise in individual CMAs, eg. restricted weeds, grain receival standards, etc. Section 69 clause 3 of the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994* gives both the VCMC and CMAs a role in advising the Minister on the declaration of regional noxious weeds.

Members of the VCMC WPC convened a meeting with DSE in early 2004 to discuss the VPMF action to review

and revise the list of declared pest animals in Victoria. VCMC noted that the review has been put on hold pending the release of national pest animal guidelines.

Under its *CaLP Act* responsibilities, VCMC undertook an independent assessment of progress regarding implementation of strategic actions contained within the VPMF. It concluded that significant progress has been made so far in delivering pest management outcomes under the VPMF and is confident that new documents, systems and processes due to become operational by September 2004 will further assist the implementation of strategic actions. Nonetheless, there is room for improvement in a few key areas, namely proclamation of restricted weeds, finalisation of the Weed R & D Plan, coordination with the national pest agenda, stakeholder engagement, coordination of roadside management and adequate resourcing. A stronger focus in these areas is required if the government is to achieve its vision "[That] pests no longer threaten the State's natural assets, its social values and productive capacity of its land and waters." The Minister will be advised of the outcomes.

Council conducted an investigation to review opportunities for the use of vendor statements to alert land purchasers to potential weed problems. In the final report to the Minister, the VCMC made a series of recommendations including introduction of an awareness clause under S. 32 (2) of the *Sale of Land Act*. Such an initiative would serve to warn the potential buyer of existing weeds on the property for sale as well as alerting them to the possibility of weed escape from surrounding agricultural zones.

VCMC fulfilled its responsibility under the VPMF to advise on amending the *CaLP Act* to streamline administrative processes and focus on preventing damage to environmental, economic and social values. DSE prepared a proposal recommending a series of amendments in consultation with VCMC in 2002. Proposed amendments went before Cabinet in April 2003 and the legislation was introduced and approved in the 2003 Spring session of Parliament. Changes became operational on 5 January 2004.

As part of the 2003-2004 budget process, ERC supported a \$10 million four-year *Tackling Weeds on Private Land* initiative to assist private land managers in managing weed problems on private land in accordance with government policy objectives. VCMC hosted the first meeting of stakeholders on 31 May to plan a work program for this new initiative.

The initiative will have strong linkages to the *Weeds and Pests on Public Land Including National Parks* \$14 million program. Under this project, Government has provided funding to support community programs, protect private and public land values from weed invasion, reduce the

area of high conservation land that is threatened by weeds and pests, engage regional communities and strengthen working relationships between stakeholders with responsibilities for public land management. The VCMC Executive Officer is a member on the Working Group for this program.

The VCMC has continued to build linkages with Primary Industries Research Victoria (PIRVic) (formerly KTRI) to ensure progress in key areas. PIRVic has been developing a Pest Plant Distribution Prevention Strategy which aims to minimise the introduction of new pest plants and limit existing weed incursions at various levels of incidence. The VCMC is particularly keen to see weeds proposed for removal from sale and distribution (in consultation with the nursery and other industries) to be declared under the category of restricted weeds of the *CaLP Act*. These weeds will be the first of their kind to be declared under this category.

The PIRVic Victorian Weed Alert Rapid Response Plan for potential new and emerging weeds aims, where possible, to eradicate serious new weeds before they become established. VCMC has received regular briefings on its progress and has provided advice where appropriate. The final plan is expected to be launched in 2004.

The Chair of WPC, Alex Arbuthnot, has continued to chair the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce. This group oversaw the development of the Victorian Blackberry Strategy, which was launched by the Minister for Conservation and Environment in 2001.

Alex Arbuthnot is also a member of the National Blackberry Taskforce. The Taskforce hosted the National Blackberry Research Summit in Canberra on 3 – 4 March 2004 to explore new research options for controlling blackberry.

The VCMC also has a member on the State Good Neighbour Program (GNP) Committee, to represent the community. The GNP aims to protect private land from pest plants and animals by improving the management of adjoining public land and ensures that investment reflects catchment priorities on a CMA basis. The Committee approves the program at State level and is responsible for project reporting and evaluation.

The WPC met three times during the year 2003-2004. Funding for administrative support and to assist the implementation of strategic actions, was provided by DSE.

DATA COORDINATION AND CATCHMENT CONDITION REPORTING

State Water Quality Monitoring and Assessment Committee

In late 2001, the Minister for Environment and Conservation established the State Water Quality Monitoring and Assessment Committee (SWQMAC) which replaced the former Environmental Water Quality Monitoring Committee. The Committee is chaired by Prof. Barry Hart (VCMC) and includes representation from DSE, EPA, Melbourne Water, Parks Victoria, CMAs and water authorities.

SWQMAC has the role of developing, implementing and coordinating a statewide program to report on the condition of Victoria's aquatic ecosystems as well as assisting organisations involved in monitoring and assessment.

To facilitate coordination, the Committee has developed a draft framework, which sets out a State approach to monitoring and assessment. The draft framework covers the range of Victoria's marine and inland surface waters and groundwater aquifers and addresses activities that relate to measuring and evaluating function or change in aquatic ecosystems. It is designed to provide high level guidance to natural resource managers undertaking monitoring and assessment activities.

The draft framework sets out a three level approach to monitoring and assessment of aquatic ecosystems:

- Level 1 – the framework itself forms level 1 and provides general guidance on the fundamental requirements for monitoring and assessment of aquatic ecosystems in Victoria.
- Level 2 – strategic or technical documents providing guidance to assist in designing individual projects.

To date, SWQMAC has commissioned two documents providing Level 2 technical guidance on monitoring and assessment for wetlands and estuaries. The first of these documents *Options for the Assessment and Monitoring of Wetland Condition in Victoria* provides a review of existing programs both locally and internationally, variables used in the assessment of wetland condition, and broad guidelines on where to go from here. This report has been handed over to DSE to feed into the NAP funded project *Core Indicators for Biodiversity: Wetland Ecosystem Extent and Distribution and Wetland Ecosystem Condition*. This project is seeking to develop a statewide framework for wetlands assessment and monitoring in Victoria. So far a Steering Committee and expert technical panel including representatives from DSE, PV, and CMAs have been established and information sessions have been held throughout Victoria to involve key stakeholders. The final phase of the

NAP funded project will be to develop an implementation strategy. This is due for completion in February 2005.

A second report *Estuarine Health Monitoring and Assessment Review* was completed in December 2003. The report provides a review of estuarine monitoring and assessment and makes a series of recommendations to guide monitoring and assessment of estuaries in the future. The final report will be used to inform discussion at a workshop to discuss next steps for developing a statewide framework for monitoring and assessment of estuaries in Victoria to be held at a later date.

- Level 3 – protocols and methodologies for undertaking specific monitoring and assessment programs.

The Committee is planning to hold two full-day Research and Development Futures Symposia in 2004. These will showcase cutting edge water quality and ecosystem health monitoring and assessment approaches that could change the way we do business over the next ten years. Details will be developed over the coming months.

Catchment Condition Reporting

Every five years the Victorian Catchment Management Council is required under the *CaLP Act* to report to the Minister for Environment and to Parliament on the condition and management of Victoria's land and water resources.

So far the VCMC has produced two such reports. The first report, *Know Your Catchments*, was released in 1997. This report provides a snapshot in time of the condition and trends occurring within and across catchments. Although the report provided a significant base of information for future reporting, it became evident that information harvesting, storage and interpretation were uncoordinated. This made it difficult to collect and present data in a clear, consistent statewide format.

The gaps and difficulties uncovered in *Know Your Catchments* initiated an NHT funded project involving VCMC, CMAs, NRE and the EPA. The Resource Assessment and Monitoring (RAM) Group worked over four years to develop agreed statewide indicators to enable consistent future reporting on catchment condition. The project was completed and launched in 2001 (see www.dse.vic.gov.au/vcio).

The second report, *The Health of Our Catchments – A Victorian Report Card 2002* uses 27 (of the original 30 developed) and five additional indicators. It not only reports on the condition and management of Victoria's catchments, but also outlines a 2020 vision for Victoria's rural landscape and canvasses a range of strategies for

achieving this vision. The report finds that under current resourcing and management paradigms, our efforts to protect and sustainably manage our natural capital are not keeping pace with the breadth of degradation symptoms. The report argues that revolutionary change is required in the way we manage the landscape if we are to protect and enhance the natural capital of the State. Payment for the provision of ecosystem services is one important mechanism for achieving such change.

Upon its release, the report stimulated a great deal of media interest and the report was distributed widely across government and non-government organisations within Victoria and nationally. In 2003-2004, VCMC has continued to promote the messages that were published in *The Health of Our Catchments* report via presentations to community groups and professional organisations and in its everyday operations. Of particular importance, the messages that came out of the report have fed into major current DSE/VCMC programs including the Land Stewardship Project and the development of an Integrated Natural Resource Management Framework (see *Major State Activities With VCMC Involvement*).

DSE will be undertaking a review of the catchment condition indicators commencing in 2004. Many of the CMAs have already started developing regional indicators in order to report back on targets established in RCSs. The Department will be working with CMAs to see if regional indicators align with statewide objectives, as well as engaging with the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability and the National Land and Water Resources Audit.

DSE's initiative to appoint a Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability with SoE reporting requirements stimulated the VCMC to undertake a review of *The Health of Our Catchments* a year after its release. The final report entitled *The Victorian Catchment Management Council's The Health of Our Catchments: A Victorian Report Card 2002 – Lessons and Recommendations for Reporting on Catchment Condition in the Future* reflects on the adequacy of the process undertaken to deliver the 2002 catchment condition report and makes a series of recommendations for reporting on catchment condition in the future. This information was provided to the Commissioner upon his commencement.

Given the similarity in terms of reference between the SoE reports and catchment condition reports, the VCMC's future reporting role is being considered as part of the VCMC review.

Copies of the 1997 and 2002 catchment condition reports are available on the VCMC website at www.vcmc.vic.gov.au.

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

The *CaLP Act* requires the VCMC to promote investigation into, and research on, any matter relating to catchment management or land protection.

The VCMC has continued to convene the Catchment Management Framework Research and Development Committee to develop and provide advice on R&D needs. The Committee comprises VCMC members, representatives of the CMAs, and DSE.

The Committee has continued to provide advice and feedback on research strategies and frameworks under development by DSE and the NAP office, including a formal submission on the draft Research and Development Strategy for the NAP.

The group has worked to ensure that the research-related requirements of the CMAs are considered within the DSE and NAP research processes, by sponsoring a Statewide project to produce a report on the knowledge needs of the catchment management framework. A consultant was contracted in early 2003 to undertake the analysis. The report was finalised and submitted to the Minister in early 2004.

In addition to the report, the committee has agreed to put in place a mechanism to continually update research and development needs as well as develop a process for ongoing dialogue with research providers. The processes will assist in achieving the objective of the project – to position the Catchment Management Framework to better access, inform and apply the large annual public investment in NRM related R&D/Knowledge.

Development of the following draft documents has occurred:

- Concept submission for the development and implementation of a Knowledge Strategy for Natural Resource Management Outcomes - Using knowledge to support sustainable catchment management.
- Knowledge Strategy for Natural Resource Management outcomes: Using knowledge to support sustainable catchment management - Draft Progress Report Stage 2: Demand for Knowledge Across Victoria - June 2004 Report to Catchment Framework Research and Development Committee.
- A preliminary Victorian assessment to support the development of the eWater CRC was provided to Dr. Stuart Minchin (DSE) to refer to at the eWater CRC Interim Parties (rebid) Committee (IPC) Third meeting on 2 June 2004 in Canberra.

DEVELOPMENT OF INDIGENOUS PROTOCOLS

In 2001, the VCMC successfully applied for Natural Heritage Trust funding to carry out a project to establish a Statewide framework of protocols between CMAs and Traditional Owners for Indigenous engagement in land and water management. This led to the development of model protocols between the North Central CMA and Traditional Owner groups overlapping the NCCMA region (Yorta Yorta Nation and North West Nations), who had volunteered to participate in the pilot study.

Over a period of months of intensive discussions, the parties reached agreement on the purpose, protocols, principles and strategies underlying the agreement. The final agreement was formally signed by the NCCMA and Indigenous representatives from North West Clans Aboriginal Corporation, Dja Dja Wurrung Clan, Yorta Yorta Nation and Jaara Jaara at a ceremony held at the Victorian Catchment Management Conference in Bendigo on 22 November 2002.

An information kit containing the protocols agreement and final report was the final outcome of the project. This was distributed to a wide range of stakeholders across Australia.

The NCCMA and Signatory Nations have been working together to implement the protocols agreement. Indigenous representatives were recently involved in the launch of the North Central RCS and the CMA is planning to meet with Indigenous leaders to develop an action plan. Furthermore, it remains a goal of the CMA to involve other Indigenous Nations of the Region who are not currently signatory to the agreement.

The VCMC is still hopeful that new protocols agreements for land and water management will be entered into by other CMAs and Indigenous Nations across the State.

The VCMC has been involved in promoting a separate project *Enhancing Indigenous Engagement in the Regional Delivery of Natural Resource Management*, being undertaken by the Department of Environment & Heritage and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

The project is aimed at enhancing the capacity of Indigenous communities to effectively participate in the Commonwealth's natural resource management programs, particularly in the regional planning process intended to provide the strategic basis for large scale funding. Ultimately the project will lead to enhanced capacity of the Commonwealth and the regional processes to achieve the Commonwealth's Natural Resource Management and Reconciliation goals. The project consists of 5 linked elements:

- Indigenous NRM information and data.
- Documentation of best practice case studies.
- Guidelines for Indigenous engagement in regional NRM.
- Workshops on Indigenous participation in the regional NRM.
- National coordination of the components.

VCMC coordinated a briefing on the project at the CMA CEOs forum held in March 2004. Regional bodies were invited to become involved. Also, as part of this project, the North Central Region protocols agreement is being used as a case study to demonstrate effective Indigenous engagement and successful outcomes in the NRM context. VCMC has supplied relevant information to the project consultants.

A statewide workshop hosted by Greening Australia was held in Echuca on 1 & 2 June to commence discussions between CMAs and Indigenous representatives on the project. The event was well attended and both parties committed to holding regional workshops across Victoria to develop models for engagement. VCMC gave a short presentation on the North Central Protocols at the workshop.

The Strategy for Aboriginal Managed Land in Victoria (SAMLIV) was formally launched and handed over to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs on Tuesday 2 March 2004. SAMLIV identifies lands in Victoria under Aboriginal control and land holders' priorities and aspirations for using/developing their lands, as well as hurdles to pursuing these priorities (eg. environmental problems, community capacity needs, planning and resource needs). The project has had the ongoing support of VCMC.

Yorta Yorta Nation entered into a historic cooperative management agreement with the Victorian Government on 10 June in Echuca. The agreement is the first of its kind in Australia, which gives part responsibility to Yorta Yorta Nation for managing 50,000 ha of Crown land in the North Central Region. VCMC was represented at the launch.

CATCHMENT PLANNING

Local Government Collaboration

In 2001, the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) and VCMC initiated the *Integrating Local Land Use Planning & Regional Catchment Planning Project*.

The project sought to achieve greater integration of regional catchment management planning and land use planning by consistent interpretation of RCS in municipal planning schemes across Victoria.

The project was successfully completed in 2003. A Model Municipal Strategic Statement (MSS) was developed for five selected local governments. Additionally, a review of

RCS in the Glenelg Hopkins, Wimmera, Goulburn Broken, Mallee and Corangamite catchments was undertaken.

As a final product of the project, a CD-ROM was made available to all Victorian local government councils and CMAs to assist them in adopting the models. All councils and CMAs have been encouraged to use the project reports and materials to assist them in their MSS reviews and RCS development respectively. The project has led ultimately to improved relationships and understanding between local governments and CMAs.

A review of RCS in non-NAP regions is due to be completed in 2004. This will signify the formal conclusion of the joint MAV/VCMC project. However, VCMC will continue to encourage cross-linkages between RCSs and MSSs via contacts within CMAs and local government.

The first and second stages of the project were funded through the NAP.

MAV is undertaking a separate study of the capacity and needs of Victorian local government to deliver key elements of sustainable natural resources management, with a particular focus on native vegetation management and roadside conservation. The project, funded under NAP, is supported by a Project Steering Committee with representation from councillors, CEOs and officers of Victorian local government, the DSE Native Vegetation Policy Unit and Planning Systems Unit, and the VCMC (Diana Patterson). A report outlining findings and recommendations provides an excellent overview of the current application of native vegetation controls and identifies resourcing of local government and key agencies as a major inhibiting factor in implementing the controls. An Executive Summary of the report will be forwarded to relevant organisations for comment in July and the MAV will host a forum later in 2004 to develop a Local Government position on native vegetation management to put to government.

Rural Water Authority Collaboration

The VCMC held preliminary discussions with DSE Water Sector Services to foster closer links between Rural Urban Water Authorities and the CMA framework. It was agreed that, while there is a close working relationship between CMAs and some water authorities, there is scope for further collaboration. This should be pursued when arrangements for the role of the Essential Services Commission in the water industry are in place. Specifically, there is an opportunity to explore the purchase and provision of environmental services in respect of water quality management.

COMMUNICATING WITH STAKEHOLDERS

VCMC has continued to develop relationships across all government departments with an interest in resource management. The Chair and Executive Officer have continued to meet with Departmental Executive staff to provide information updates as appropriate, and have participated in the CMA CEOs and CMA Chairs/CEOs forums.

VCMC continues to convene the Catchment Stakeholders' Forum to provide the regular opportunity for organisations with a Statewide natural resource management focus to come together to share information and ideas on relevant catchment projects and activities throughout the State.

The objectives of the forum are:

- To gain a common understanding of the priorities of member organisations and their business activities;
- To build relationships between members;
- To facilitate cooperation on contemporary activities where there are common ideals, goals and agendas;
- To enable members to keep abreast of government activities and initiatives.

Currently there are 40 organisations represented on the forum (including former members of the Victorian Bush Practice Forum). A list of participating members is attached in Appendix 2.

The meetings are held on a quarterly basis and cover a wide range of topics. These include overviews of member organisations, State government policy under development, and general land and water management issues. Relevant native vegetation/bush practice items have been incorporated into the agenda over the previous year.

The NAP Stakeholder Reference Group is an independent body established for the purpose of providing external advice on the development and implementation of the NAP in Victoria. The Group reports through the NAP Steering Committee, DSE. The role of the Group is to:

- Advise the Steering Committee and the Minister on the stakeholder requirements for planning and implementation of the NAP;
- Advise the Steering Committee and the Minister on Statewide priorities;
- Disseminate information on NAP planning, implementation and evaluation to stakeholders.

VCMC Chair, Ms Christine Forster, is chair of the group and membership includes representatives of CMAs, EPA, Environment Victoria, VFF, Departments of

Infrastructure and Innovation, Industry and Regional Development. Representatives of Rural Water Authorities and Indigenous Peoples are also included.

CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE

Although VCMC was due to hold a major biannual conference in 2004, Council agreed to postpone this event pending the outcome of the VCMC review. VCMC, however, worked closely with DSE in planning and designing the conference program for the 2004 Victorian Landcare Community Forum to ensure that catchment management issues were captured on the agenda (see *Major State Activities With VCMC Involvement: Victorian Landcare Program*).

SUBMISSIONS

In the last year, VCMC has provided comment on:

- Inquiry into the Impacts of Native Vegetation – Australian Government Productivity Commission.
- Securing Our Water Future Green Paper for Discussion – Victorian Government.
- National Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan – National Task Group on the Management of Climate Change Impacts on Biodiversity.
- ENRC Inquiry into Impacts and Trends in Soil Acidity (Witness)
- Draft Strategic Plan for Management of *Phytophthora cinamomi*
- Draft Great Ocean Road Region Strategy

VCMC PLANNING

VCMC, together with DSE representatives, held a facilitated planning session on 17 June. The primary purpose of the day was to develop a workplan for Council for the duration of the transition period and identify areas of focus. The next step is for VCMC to discuss these proposed areas of focus with the Minister for Environment and seek endorsement.

VCMC FINANCE REPORT

The following table outlines operating revenue and expenditure for the 1999-2000, 2000-2001, 2001-2002, 2002-2003, and 2003-2004 financial years.

Table 1. VCMC Financial Report 2003-2004

	1999-2000	2000-2001	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004
Operating Revenue	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$
DSE Allocation	256,000	278,546	315,753	344,703	303,417
RCAC Service Fee		50,000			
Trust Funds	52,219	41,187	40,908	49,887	46,775
NHT			43,200 ¹	29,023 ²	
NAP (Land Stewardship Project, Catchment Conference grant, and contribution to Catchment Condition Report)			147,000 ³	492,903 ⁴ 25,000 25,000	374,390
Total Revenue	308,219	369,733	546,861	966,516	724,582
Expenses					
DSE Allocation	256,000	329,545	314,984	348,643	268,098
Trust Funds	71,394		-14,152	5,174	0
Natural Heritage Trust			14,177	26,777	N/A
National Action Plan			2,642	168,513	374,390
Total Expenses	327,394	329,545	317,651	549,107	642,488

Notes:

- (1) Unspent Natural Heritage Trust – Indigenous Protocols funding in 2001-2002 carried forward to 2002-2003.
- (2) Unspent Natural Heritage Trust – Indigenous Protocols funding (\$2,246) in 2002-2003 returned to NHT.
- (3) Unspent National Action Plan – Land Stewardship funding in 2001-2002 carried forward to 2002-2003.
- (4) Unspent National Action Plan – Land Stewardship funding from 2002-2003 carried forward to 2003-2004.

Operating revenue was considerably higher than usual this year because of the VCMC undertaking the NAP funded Land Stewardship project.

The VCMC, in conjunction with DSE, has commenced transitioning its accounting policies and financial reporting from current Australian Standards to Australian equivalents of International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS).

MAJOR STATE ACTIVITIES WITH VCMC INVOLVEMENT

NATIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR SALINITY AND WATER QUALITY (NAP) AND NATURAL HERITAGE TRUST STAGE TWO (NHT)

NAP and NHT have made considerable progress during the past 12 months, laying down strategies, streamlining processes and funding practical projects.

NAP/NHT Program Office achievements for 2003/04 include:

- Eight of Victoria's 10 CMAs have achieved the accreditation of their Regional Catchment Strategies (RCS). Accreditation for the remaining two is imminent, and Victoria is the only place where State and Commonwealth accreditation is done as a single process – cutting down on red tape.
- Combined spending on NAP and NHT passing the \$100 million mark, thanks to Victoria's regional model for the effective delivery of funding to projects.
- Providing ongoing funding for 129 Facilitators and Co-ordinators to assist volunteer Landcare, Coastcare, Waterwatch and Bushcare groups, giving continuity for the highest priority regional natural resource management programs in the 2003/04 investment plans.
- The instigation of Regional Catchment Investment Plans, as a one stop shop for funding regional projects. In Victoria, the RCIPs are further advanced than all other States.
- The complex task of marshalling the 1,200 final reports from Natural Heritage Trust One (NHT1) projects is complete. NHT1 directed more than \$200 million to hundreds of individuals, volunteer groups, consortia of groups, government agencies and research institutions.
- The NAP/NHT Program Office supervised Victoria's successful applications for more than \$4 million in National Landcare Program funding, much of which went to local Landcare groups.

The VCMC has been involved at a number of levels. These included providing advice, participating in meetings and workshops, and involvement in the NHT Independent Advisory Panel and NAP Stakeholder Reference Group.

VICTORIAN PEST MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

The Australian landscape has been changing for millions of years in response to climatic, geological and biological factors. Invasion by introduced terrestrial and aquatic

animal and weed species or 'pests' has been a significant component of this change. Pests reduce farm, fishery and forestry productivity, displace native plant and animal species and contribute to land and water degradation – significantly impacting on economic, environmental and social outcomes.

The Victorian Pest Management – A Framework for Action (VPMF) was launched in 2002 by the Victorian State Government as a means of providing a whole-of-Government, strategic, coordinated approach to the development and implementation of pest management programs on public and private land and water. To achieve this the VPMF has 2 components:

1. The overarching policy and planning framework document that provides principles and directions for management of existing and potential pests in Victoria; and
2. Specific species or issue-based pest strategies developed according to the overarching policy and planning framework document. These specific strategies are the Weed Management Strategy, Public Land Pest Management Strategy, Fox Management Strategy, Rabbit Management Strategy, Wild Dog Management Strategy and Feral Pig and Feral Goat Management Strategy.

Since its launch, there has been a realignment of pest management priorities to those detailed in the VPMF and the specific strategies. This has resulted in a significant amount of key projects being developed and implemented in Victoria between a wide range of Government agencies, industry and community groups. Some of these projects include:

- Completed amendments to the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994*, the principal Victorian legislation relating to declared noxious weeds and declared pest animals. The amendments have strengthened controls over the introduction and spread of noxious weeds, improved enforcement powers and streamlined the process for enforcing the Act;
- Development and implementation of a Weed Alert Rapid Response Plan for Victoria to improve the surveillance and response to potential, new and emerging weeds;
- Commencement of a review of the existing noxious weeds list, including the determination of criteria for weed declaration as part of the decision-making process;
- Commencement of projects focused on weed spread prevention, including development and trial of a vendor declaration system for the movement of material, produce, machinery and livestock to ensure purchasers are aware of the risks of weed spread;
- Commencement of a Local Government trial wash down project to allow Local Government to improve

hygiene controls on equipment that has the potential to spread weeds;

- Completion of an Indigenous engagement process for dealing with pest management issues, including reporting and developing regional and local working relationships with Indigenous groups;
- Commencement of Southern Ark, a large public land project that aims to assist the recovery of a wide range of native wildlife, improve ecological processes, reduce the spread of weeds and diseases and assist farmers through large-scale, cross-tenure and continuous fox control;
- Establishment of a Weeds sub-committee of the VCMC;
- Implementation of Regional Action Plans across Victoria for weeds and rabbits;
- Development of a costing model to determine the financial benefits of rabbit management;
- Establishment of community-based Wild Dog Management Groups to facilitate community input into ongoing management of the wild dog issue;
- Completion of Draft Wild Dog Action Plans for the North East and Gippsland regions of Victoria; and
- Continued implementation of the three-year Enhanced Fox Management Program, which focuses on an integrated approach to fox control underpinned by coordinated community baiting programs but also supported by the use of other techniques such as shooting and den destruction.

In addition to these outputs, there has also been an increased focus on weeds and wild dogs under the Bushfire Recovery Program as well as a significant amount of work being undertaken at the framework coordination level to improve governance and coordination of the implementation of the VPMF.

This work has been focused on developing documents, systems and processes that will enable clear understanding by all stakeholders on all aspects of the implementation of the VPMF, from overarching governance and communication to individual project development, implementation and reporting. The most significant of the developments that have commenced include:

- Formation of a Pest Management Coordinating Committee to ensure there is a cross-departmental and cross-agency approach for investment in, and coordination of, pest management activities on all land types across Victoria.
- Development of Implementation Guidelines for the VPMF to ensure Investors, Lead Agencies and Partners involved in the implementation of projects under the VPMF understand their respective roles and responsibilities in implementing the framework.
- Improved governance arrangements for pest management in Victoria to ensure there is a

coordinated, consistent approach to the development, sign-off, communication, implementation, reporting and evaluation of projects.

- Development of an overarching Communication Strategy for the VPMF as well as a project-specific Communication Plan Guide to assist staff in the development of individual Communication Plans for projects.

In addition to the aforementioned developments there are also a number of key initiatives commencing under the VPMF that include:

- Implementation of a statewide Tackling Weeds on Private Land Initiative.
- Implementation of a statewide Weeds and Pests on Public Land Initiative.
- Development of an Evaluation Strategy to measure the outputs and outcomes of the VPMF.
- Release of a VPMF Case Studies publication highlighting achievements-to-date under the VPMF.

STATE ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION POLICY (WATERS OF VICTORIA)

In June 2003 the Government released a State environment protection policy (SEPP) to protect Victoria's rivers and streams, lakes and wetlands, and estuaries, bays and coasts.

The SEPP acknowledges and supports the key role that CMAs play in improving the quality of Victoria's water environments. EPA has allocated specific resources to continue to build on EPA's relationship with the CMAs and to support and assist the CMAs as appropriate.

Regional Catchment Strategies and associated plans and strategies (such as river health strategies) are identified as the key tools for implementation of SEPP at the regional level. EPA has been working with the CMAs to provide input into regional catchment strategies and regional river health strategies. This has included information on the level of achievement of SEPP environmental quality objectives, to help inform the development of the strategies and their associated improvement targets.

The SEPP adopts a risk-based approach to protecting water environments, and EPA's Freshwater Sciences Unit is working with the CMAs to support the application of risk assessment in protecting water environments. This has included developing guidelines, conducting workshops with each of the CMAs to outline the approach, and working with some CMAs to conduct ecological risk assessments.

EPA has been working with CMAs on the Land Stewardship Project - which devised a conceptual framework for land stewardship and then sought to test the concepts in a catchment. The town of Eskdale was

selected based on prior work done by EPA with stakeholders in this catchment. Now EPA is working to align the Neighbourhood Environment Improvement Plan and the land stewardship tools as part of this project. EPA also made a presentation to VCMC on how it is working across the state to improve dairy effluent management.

VICTORIAN LANDCARE PROGRAM

Victorian Action Plan for Second Generation Landcare

The Victorian Action Plan for Second Generation Landcare: *Healthy Landscapes – Sustainable Communities* (2002) outlines the Victorian Government's commitment to supporting Landcare over the next decade. The annual commitment of \$1.5 million to implement the Action Plan is fundamental in providing local support to Landcare groups. The Statewide Landcare Team, consisting of ten Regional Landcare Coordinators and a Statewide Landcare Facilitator, has continued to implement the Action Plan throughout 2003/04. The Team has developed ten Regional Landcare Support Strategies; completed guidelines for the employment of Landcare Support Persons in Victoria, developed an Occupational Health and Safety Code of Practice, and convened the 2004 Victorian Landcare Forum.

2004 Victorian Landcare Forum

Over 450 Landcarers came together to 'make community landcare even stronger' at the Victorian Landcare Forum held in Bendigo on 3-4 June and in Melbourne on 16 July.

The State Landcare Team, the Victorian Landcare Network and the Victorian Catchment Management Council invited the Landcare community to reflect on 20 years of success and consider Landcare's role in natural resource management in the years ahead.

In Bendigo the 'voices' of community Landcare told their stories of success, considered challenges on the horizon, and developed actions to 'make community Landcare even stronger'. Eleven opportunities were identified including 'Raising the profile of Landcare' and were presented to the 'ears' (those supporting the community such as government) for a response on 16 July. The outcomes of these discussions will be outlined in a report to be prepared in the coming months.

Minister for Environment, John Thwaites, closed the proceedings of the Forum on 16 July and announced that the Bracks Government would invest \$15.6 million into the Department of Sustainability and Environment's Victorian Landcare Program over the next three years.

Second Generation Landcare Grants

The Victorian Landcare Program for 2003/04 invested nearly \$3.4 million in the Second Generation Landcare Grants. The Grants are administered through CMAs to ensure regional priorities are met. For 2003/04, this

resulted in more than 240 community projects. The Program also invested \$0.5 million into Statewide weeds projects.

2003 Victorian Landcare Awards

The Victorian Landcare Awards offered individuals and groups a great opportunity to reflect on their achievements and celebrate their successes during National Landcare Week. The winners were announced at a ceremony hosted by John Landy, Governor of Victoria, at Government House on 19 August 2003. The nine winners of the national categories will represent Victoria at the National Landcare Awards in September 2004.

VICTORIAN COASTAL STRATEGY

The Victorian Coastal Strategy 2002, developed by the Victorian Coastal Council (VCC), establishes the overall framework for sustainable planning and management of the Victorian coastal and marine environment.

The VCMC provided input to a major report released by the VCC titled the Victorian Coast Report 2004. This reports on the implementation of the Victorian Coastal Strategy 2002 and the implementation of the objectives of the Coastal Management Act 1995. The Report identifies that 81% of the actions in the Victorian Coastal Strategy are either completed, underway or ongoing.

A number of meetings of the Independent Assessment Panel, established to consider Regional NRM plans and Regional Catchment Investment Plans, provided good opportunity for both the VCMC and the VCC to promote integrated planning and management approaches to issues facing the catchment coast and ocean continuum.

STATEWIDE NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT POLICY FRAMEWORK AND INVESTMENT MODEL

A key suggestion from *The Health of Our Catchments* was that the State Government continue with the development of a statewide integrated natural resource management framework.

Responding to the VCMC, the Department of Sustainability and Environment is in the process of developing a statewide natural resource management framework in a catchment context to complement the suite of Regional Catchment Strategies and guide strategic policy, planning, management and investment in land, water and biodiversity. A key theme for the framework is the convergence of innovative and integrative practices.

During the course of 2003-2004, a draft framework along with a statewide investment model has been developed for internal Departmental consideration. A draft statewide model for investment based on an assets and threats approach has been developed.

OPERATIONS OF THE CMAS



The 2003-2004 year has been one of challenges and opportunities for the Corangamite CMA.

The CMA's role as a regional leader in integrated catchment management entails a raft of important responsibilities, from on-ground works and partnership development, to capacity building and strategic planning. The organisation has not only met this challenging agenda but, in many cases, exceeded expectations.

The CMA is well placed, therefore, for the opportunities ahead. The State Government's White Paper on water industry reform, for example, will have far-reaching impacts and the Corangamite CMA stands ready to play its part in the plan's implementation.

Likewise, a new five-year CMA Corporate Plan presents exciting opportunities to improve the health of its unique, asset-rich region. This strategic document, which was finalised in the latter part of the year, will ensure investor funds are channelled into crucial projects and activities.

A number of other important plans and policies, such as the River Health Strategy, were completed and will drive our operations over the next 12 months and beyond.

The watershed for the CMA, however, has been the development of a Regional Catchment Strategy, which provides the future direction for natural resource management in the Corangamite region. Accredited by State and Federal governments, the strategy clearly identifies threats to our natural resource base and sets out priority responses. Further, it outlines actions that will enhance those vital resources to the benefit of regional communities. The strategy is the culmination of extensive community consultation and an outstanding contribution by CMA staff.

The year also was highlighted by a significant works program, which addressed a host of issues across the catchment. More than \$13.61 million was provided through various State and Australian government programs, including the National Action Plan for Salinity Water Quality and National Heritage Trust.

These works delivered tangible outcomes to improve the landscape and ensure the sustainable use of our natural resources.

A further highlight was the regional partnership program, which was enhanced and expanded. The Corangamite CMA is fortunate to have nurtured productive relationships with federal, state and local government, the private sector, educational and research institutions, community groups and individuals.

The community especially is integral to the success of the CMA and natural resource management. The CMA greatly values the interest and contribution of its communities and will continue to treat this aspect of its operations as a priority. Accordingly, the CMA will increase its emphasis on building the capacity of the community to help achieve meaningful long-term change in catchment health.

Further highlights include:

- Major projects completed under the National Landcare Program, Envirofund, Second Generation Landcare and National Heritage Trust
- More than \$5 million spent on projects through the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality
- Significant river improvements undertaken
- River health monitoring program completed; more than 300 sites tested as part of a State-wide review
- Corangamite CMA partnership program saves one of Victoria's most valuable vegetation communities
- Key studies into the region's unique RAMSAR wetland system completed
- Corangamite CMA and partners won a prestigious Victorian Coastal Award for Excellence



The East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority (EGCMA) continued to consolidate efforts in the 2003-2004 year, focusing on;

- Governance & Strategic direction
- Monitoring and Evaluation – State of the Region Reporting
- Collaborative Achievements
- River health – On ground works

Governance & Strategic Direction:

The board completed its first strategic business plan for 2004 to 2009, which details the CMA's mission, strategic outline for the next five years and detailed actions for 2004/05. The plan outlines a clear and firm direction for authority operations into the future.

The East Gippsland Regional Catchment Strategy (RCS) is in final stages of preparation. The exhibition draft, released in April 2004, received sufficient support to proceed to a final draft. The RCS will be completed in the 2004/05 year.

The East Gippsland River Health Strategy has been completed to final draft stage and awaits final comments from government before completion.

The role of the Authority's four community Catchment Management Groups has been reviewed and restructured. They now serve as advisory committees to the Board. The responsibilities and scope of their activities include:

- work as advisory committees on catchment works and strategic issues; and
- review work plans and strategic issues and documents as required by the EGCMA.

Strategically, the authority has achieved a great deal in 2003/04.

Monitoring and Evaluation – State of the Region Reporting

A joint venture between the West and East Gippsland CMAs and the Gippsland Coastal Board, has lead to Project MERGe – Monitoring Evaluation and Reporting for Gippsland's natural resources. The aim of this project is to implement a flexible monitoring, evaluation and reporting framework that informs current and future strategic direction for natural resource management in the Gippsland region. This project includes the production of a State of the Gippsland Lakes report, which will test the MER Framework. The project aims to be completed by October 2004. The final framework will be used to develop Monitoring and Evaluation Reporting for the range of projects that are conducted throughout the region.

The Index of Stream Condition (ISC) which assesses the health and quality of waterways five yearly, has been successfully completed. The ISC data has been collected from 243 sites across the region.

Collaborative Achievements

The East and West Gippsland CMAs have committed to developing collaborative efficiencies in several areas which include the following:

- Joint water quality officer position to complete and implement the Gippsland Water Quality Plans.
- A combined Statutory Referrals Unit which will perform floodplain, drainage, waterways referrals and licensing for Gippsland. This Unit will strengthen the skills and resources required to perform these functions consistently and effectively at a high standard.
- A Gippsland Water Resources Unit will also be developed to assist in delivery of the "Our Water Our Future" water reform, detailed in the White Paper.

The Authority has been actively involved of the Snowy River Rehabilitation works plan which is nearing completion. The plan has been developed across government agencies and determines priorities based on the Victorian and East Gippsland River Health Strategies.

The Authority has brought together representatives from various agencies in Gippsland to prepare a Communications Strategy for the Gippsland Lakes. Implementation of the communications strategy will commence in 2004/05 with funds made available for implementation of the Gippsland Lakes Future Directions and Actions Plan.

Waterwatch this year increased its profile among the community by placing many articles in the local newspapers, with a number ending up on the front page around the region. East Gippsland and West Gippsland for many years now have produced a Gippsland based newsletter which is distributed across the whole of the Gippsland region.

River Health – On Ground Activities

The Authority has continued to carry out works on behalf of state and national investors in each of our four catchments including:

Snowy Catchment

The first stage of an on-going major willow control program commenced on a 32 km stretch of the upper Snowy from the Victorian/New South Wales Border to McKillops Bridge.

The Rainforest Restoration Trial project on the lower Snowy has proceeded very well; weeds are largely under control across most of the project sites and sixty thousand rainforest plants were established despite the record breaking drought. The success of this year's work has led to the program being funded for the second year and works will include more planting to conclude the trial.

Mitchell Catchment

Bank stabilisation works on the lower Mitchell, trial establishment of waterline vegetation and pest and weed

control works on riparian areas have been conducted this year.

A collaborative willow control project with Parks Victoria has commenced in the upper Mitchell tributaries as part of a strategic willow control program. The project has seen a 60 km stretch of the Dargo river treated.

In April 2004, heavy rains in the southern lowland areas of the Mitchell River basin resulted in major flooding in a number of tributary streams on the Red Gum Plains and surrounding districts. The EGCMA is currently seeking funding to assist with rehabilitation of the flood affected waterways.

Tambo & Nicholson Catchments

Bank stabilisation works on the lower Tambo, pest and weed control works and willow control works have been conducted this year.

Rainforest restoration works in two Gippsland Lakes tributaries at Metung and Lakes Entrance have also been conducted. These projects are designed to trial rainforest restoration techniques and to also provide nutrient trapping services for the Gippsland Lakes.

Far East Catchment

Riparian plantings, weed and pest control and willow control works have occurred in the Cann & Genoa rivers. Additionally we have been involved in protection works for the endangered species Slender Lignum in the Cann river catchment and willow control works to control avulsion risks on the Combienbar river, a tributary of the Bemm River.



Strategic Planning

A final draft of the Native Vegetation Plan was endorsed by the Department of Sustainability and Environment's South West Regional Manager and will be presented to the Minister for Environment, the Hon. John Thwaites, MLA, for endorsement.

Biodiversity asset mapping for all municipalities within the catchment was completed with the Ararat Shire project. The Glenelg Hopkins CMA and councils will now work to have the mapping information incorporated into planning schemes.

Several key waterways strategies were finalised, including the River Health Strategy incorporating community and agency comments. The strategy has been forwarded to the Environment Minister for endorsement as the first regional River Health Strategy in Victoria.

After several months of consultation, the Glenelg Hopkins CMA and local government partners have signed off on the Strategy for Existing Drainage Schemes. The strategy establishes priorities and a future management framework for drainage schemes within the state.

Regional Partnerships

Two significant partnerships in 2003-2004 were the South West Sustainability Partnership and the Lake Condah National Heritage Project. The former was successful in attracting funding to undertake greenhouse awareness raising and gas emission reduction projects in the Warrnambool area. The latter is a showcase partnership between the Glenelg Hopkins CMA, Glenelg Shire Council, Portland Aluminium and Winda-Mara Aboriginal Corporation. In addition to protecting a cultural heritage site of international significance, the project represents enormous tourism and employment potential as well as an opportunity to expand the habitat of endangered and threatened species.

In partnership with the Department of Primary Industries, the organisation began implementing the Salinity Plan to reduce recharge and discharge in areas of highest concern. To date, 60 landholders have participated.

The Glenelg Hopkins CMA initiated EnviroNet, which is an electronic conduit for communication between groups involved and interested in natural resource management. It aims to enhance communication through co-operative planning and co-ordination of activities.

Ongoing Works

The Land and Biodiversity program expended \$5.3 million, with extensive works under the Native Vegetation, Wetland Management and Salinity Plans resulting in: 95 hectares of remnants enhanced or protected; 415 hectares of discharge control; 420 hectares of recharge control; 25 hectares of wetlands enhanced or protected; 640 hectares revegetated; 143kms of waterways protected or enhanced.

Waterways personnel again delivered a large Partnership Projects program, resulting in: 246kms of protected waterways; 161,550 plantings; 254kms of direct seeding.

Another milestone was finalisation of the Wimmera Mallee Bulk Entitlement after several years of stakeholder negotiation. This will translate into improved security and flexibility for environmental flow allocations for the Wimmera and Glenelg Rivers.

Community Engagement & Capacity Building

The second Glenelg Hopkins CMA Environmental Achievement Awards recognised the exemplary work of individuals, groups and organisations in environmental management and protection in South West Victoria. There were six major category winners, with a Lifetime Achievement Award acknowledging the work of the late Graham Pizzey, noted conservationist, photographer and author.

The Hon. Dr Sharman Stone, MP, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Heritage and Environment, launched the Regional Catchment Investment Plan. Approved by State and Federal Governments, the plan is the springboard for more than \$10 million investment in major projects in South West Victoria.

The Glenelg Hopkins CMA's Waterwatch program continued to grow in numbers and stature, with more than 6,135 school students and 900 adults involved. There are now 215 monitoring sites across the region. The community facilitator program saw 11 facilitators, including one specifically for indigenous affairs, provide support to Landcare and other community groups, assist with funding applications, encourage a strategic approach to on-ground works, act as information brokers, raise awareness and facilitate community input into regional strategies and plans.

Monitoring Evaluation & Reporting

One of the most significant projects was the Index of Stream Condition to determine waterway health. CMA staff assessed more than 350 sites and the data is being analysed by the Department of Sustainability and Environment.

The Glenelg Hopkins CMA initiated a comprehensive survey on community awareness and perceptions of environmental and natural resource issues. More than 600 people in urban and rural communities were interviewed, with the data to be used to develop future strategies. The Glenelg Hopkins CMA also commissioned the Bureau of Rural Sciences to provide social data to underpin catchment planning.



Goulburn Broken CMA delivered an impressive array of on-ground works in the year 2003-2004, achieving all key

targets and reducing its carry forward by \$1.2 million. The success of the works programs is the result of strong and ongoing partnerships with the Department of Sustainability and Environment, the Department of Primary Industry, Goulburn-Murray Water, Goulburn Valley Water, local government and the EPA.

During 2002, the Goulburn Broken RCS was reviewed and a new RCS for the period 2002-2007 was developed and accreditation was achieved in November 2003.

The document was launched by Minister John Thwaites at a launch attended by some 250 landholders, community and Landcare members, catchment partners and representatives of government.

The accreditation process ensures that the strategy meets State and Commonwealth natural resource management plan criteria. The strategy is supported by a range of sub-strategies, investment plans and reports.

Development of the draft Regional River Health Strategy was another major achievement for the year. The Strategy builds on existing river-related action plans, implementation plans and strategic documents and is supported by a series of sub-strategies and discussion papers. It will provide a framework for integrated works to enable high quality rivers to be protected and others to be improved for current and future generations. This is the first attempt to combine all elements of river management under one integrated document providing direction for protection and enhancement of the region's river systems.

The Victorian Government's release of the White Paper *Securing our Water Future Together* is an important milestone that identifies and strengthens the future role of the GBCMA. Water is unquestionably our greatest resource and the CMA has been given an important role in managing environmental water reserves and stream flows. This new role will require even closer co-operation with partners such as Goulburn-Murray Water.

Links between the Goulburn Broken CMA and local government continue to grow, strengthened through the joint employment of a Municipal Catchment Co-ordinator. A major project this year resulted in the development of a Matrix for Action Document to link the GBCMA Regional Catchment Strategy objectives and targets to municipal corporate plans.

The Goulburn Broken Region Landcare Forum held at Dookie College was among the highlights of the year. It was attended by 220 people from across the catchment. Landholders were presented with information about the Past, Present and Future issues of the catchment, with workshops giving practical advice and a chance to learn from farmers who are balancing environmental issues and productivity.

Local Area Planning as a means of delivering strategic planning aligned to the Goulburn Broken Catchment Strategy at a sub-catchment scale continues to gain momentum. This Shepparton Irrigation Region project is a joint activity between the Goulburn Murray Landcare Network, DPI and the CMA with eight LAPs progressed through 2003/4.

A Memorandum of Understanding for Irrigation Drainage and Water Quality was signed by DSE, G-MW, GB CMA, NC CMA and EPA on June 22, 2004. The Irrigation Drainage MOU is a landmark in land and water management in Northern Victoria. It provides a framework for implementing the Government policies and directions needed for effective surface water management. The MOU provides for better accountability for the environmental performance of the program.

Since the early 1990s there has been a steady reduction in the proportion of irrigation run-off getting into our surface water management systems. This is because of improvements in farm irrigation infrastructure and management. A total of 199,780ha or 63.1% of the irrigated area is now whole farm planned.

Despite the drought conditions, the incentives for the construction of drainage reuse systems have continued to be strongly supported by landholders. Incentives were paid for seventy-three drainage reuse systems that were installed to drain 4,654ha and brings the total number to 244 systems draining 17,448ha.

In the Dryland, Heartlands and the South West Goulburn are combining intensive scientific investigation with community engagement campaigns to achieve wide-scale landscape change.

In March, 2004 Federal Agriculture Minister Warren Truss visited the south West Goulburn region while announcing \$12 million in NHT and NAP funding for the Goulburn Broken catchment.



Mallee Regional Catchment Strategy

The Mallee RCS sets the strategic direction for Natural Resource Management in the Mallee for the next five years. This project was completed on time and within

budget in April 2003. The Mallee RCS 2003-2008 was recommended for Accreditation in April 2003 by the joint Commonwealth-State Steering Committee.

The process to prepare the Strategy had a strong emphasis of engagement and involvement of key stakeholders. Local Government and Water Authorities were represented on the Steering Committee for the project. Formal public consultation occurred between 4 November and 13 December 2002.

Other milestones included workshops with partner organisations for target setting, research and development, and linkages to planning schemes. Supporting documents for the Regional Catchment Strategy were completed as follows:

- Communications Strategy
- Monitoring and Evaluation Framework
- Research and Development Needs Analysis
- Investment Framework
- Risk Assessment

The Catchment Condition Report and Review of the Mallee RCS 1997 were completed in the previous year. The project was funded by the NAP.

Biodiversity Programs

Highlights for the year included:

- Completion of the North-West Ecological Vegetation Class (EVC) Mapping project.
- Completion of the collaborative Vegetation Condition Mapping project involving the four northern CMAs; Mallee, Goulbourn-Broken, North Central and North East.
- Successful delivery of the Mallee Ecology Course.
- Participation and support of Trust for Nature's two day community workshop discussing future management priorities of Ned's Corner Property.
- Implementation of the Black-eared Miner Recovery Plan (Victorian component): Monitor and control threats to the Black-Eared Miner
- Corporate sponsorship and representation at the National Malleefowl Forum held in Mildura. Key outcomes of the forum have been the re-formation of the National Malleefowl Recovery Team. The team has met twice since February 2004.
- A total of 180,000 (288 hectares) planted.
- Three Green Corp team for implementation of on-ground works was established in the Nangiloc Colignan and Millewa Carwarp Zone in partnership with Greening Australia and Job Futures.
- Protection of 3741 ha of remnant vegetation, slightly exceeding the level of protection achieved last year.

- 854 ha of remnant vegetation was enhanced by revegetation, exceeding the level of protection achieved last year.

Waterways, Wetlands and Floodplains Program

- 17 km of on-ground works undertaken to improve river health along the Murray River, included 12 km of fencing and 2 km of revegetation to improve the condition of the riparian zone.
- Frontage Management Grants Program launched in April 2004 with a call for expressions of interest from landholders, community groups, schools and individuals to undertake river health projects along the River Murray frontage between Nyah and the South Australian border. 37 grant applications/Expressions of Interest were received during this process.
- Draft Victorian Mallee Salinity and Water Quality Management Plan submitted to the Minister for Government endorsement.
- 2 Gross Pollutant Traps (GPTs) installed at Merbein and Red Cliffs, including educational signage.
- Delivery of an Environmental Water Allocation (EWA) of 2000 ML to the Cardross Lakes.
- Preliminary investigation into Blue Green Algae mitigation options in the Mildura weir pool completed.
- Audit and trend analysis of Murray River water quality data completed.
- Joint Mallee and Wimmera CMA review of the 1998 Yarriambiack Creek Management Plan and revised 2004 Management Plan completed.
- First round of priority water management options identified for the Hattah Lakes and Lindsay Wallpolla Living Murray "Icon" sites.
- Audit of water diversion infrastructure along the River Murray completed.
- 2004 Index of Stream Condition (ISC) 5-yearly benchmark surveys completed.
- Regional wetland prioritisation scoping study completed.
- Population of the Rivers Values and Environmental Risk System (RiVERS) completed.
- Approximately 4,000 people involved in water quality monitoring and education under the Mallee Waterwatch program.

Water Resources Program

The Quality of Surface Water and Groundwater is Maintained and Enhanced

- Regional water resource monitoring program implemented and development of a *Water Resource Catchment Condition* report finalised.

- Draft Victorian Mallee Salinity and Water Quality Management Plan finalised as a draft regional document and submitted to the Victorian Government seeking formal endorsement.

The 'Legacy of Clearing' impacts on River Murray Salinity Minimised and a Net Reduction in Other Regional Contributions to River Murray Salinity

- Undertook field trial of new water borne geophysical technology that identifies River Murray salinity inflows between Nangiloc-Colignan and the South Australian Border as a joint venture project between the Murray Darling Basin Commission, New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia.
- Interstate workshop held for second stage of the 'Hydrogeological Benchmark Assessment' project that consolidated and reported on the recommendations of the first stage of the project and identified the investigation objectives needed for the second stage of the project between Wentworth (NSW) and Renmark (SA).
- Completion of Tol Tol coordinated drainage scheme and Merbein west drainage line replacement.
- Success for the Mallee region in developing a salt disposal entitlement claim case for 'Sunraysia Drying up the Drains' which resulted in a credits being secured by Victoria.

Surface Water and Groundwater Securely Allocated for Consumptive Use within the Sustainable Capacity of the Water Resource

- Targeted water quality monitoring campaigns undertaken within the Murrayville region of Victoria.
- Regional contributions to 'Living Murray' processes undertaken through a culmination of activities.

Production Systems Developed that Maintain or Enhance Water Quality and Prevent and Manage Salinity

- Report generated on 'Next Generation High Water Use Efficiency Techniques' which identified potential benefits of subsurface drip irrigation and an evaluation of the associated impacts on deep drainage and salinity within root zones of the Victorian Mallee.
- Market research report finalised on 'Training in Irrigation Best Management' which acknowledges the most pressing needs of irrigators in terms of knowledge and skills. The output of this report forms the basis for which two new Mallee irrigation courses have been designed.

Land Resources Program

- Acquisition of high-resolution orthophotography and digital elevation data for both regional and local planning.
- Ten-year bore decommissioning program in the Murrayville area completed.

- Continued effective implementation of the Mallee Rabbit Action Plan and Weed Action Plan.
- Implementation of information projects to improve knowledge of baseline conditions, quantify target levels and prioritise on-ground works.
- Delivery of projects to validate and demonstrate improved land management practices.

Development of a process for delivering Cultural Heritage Program

- Steering committee formed to oversee the development of protocols for engaging Indigenous Communities in NRM document.
- Above Steering Committee to have input into the future direction of Indigenous cultural heritage focused projects.
- Board Chair and Acting CEO attended the *Enhancing Indigenous Involvement in Natural Resource Management* conference. The conference brought together CMAs from across the state with Indigenous groups to provide an opportunity to increase awareness of CMA processes and Aboriginal NRM issues.
- A commitment was made by the Board chair to host a regional version of the above conference.

Community Capacity Program

- Community Capacity is the driving force of Landcare in the Mallee region. With over 1000 active members participating in Landcare activities during this financial year.
- Landcare, through the community capacity's asset class has secured 8 full time locally employed coordinators to continue Landcare's success in engaging the community and implementing natural resource management projects. Steering committees have been developed to ensure Landcare groups are involved with delivery of on ground projects in their regions.
- The Mallee Regional Landcare Network is nearing completion of a Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Plan. This plan will be a guiding document for Landcare at ground level.
- With great community input and support, a Mallee Regional Landcare Support Strategy is also nearing completion. This document will identify future support requirements for Landcare at all levels.
- Mallee Waterwatch Program involved 3,500 people in water quality monitoring and education



A highlight of the year was the completion and accreditation of the North Central Regional Catchment Strategy. It was developed over a two year period, involving a broad range of community, industry and government stakeholders.

This year also saw the North Central Catchment Management Authority draw closer to completing its organisational restructure, which is based on an integrated catchment management approach. Part of the restructure involved the appointment of the current Chief Executive Officer, Gavin Hanlon.

There has been a continued focus on building partnerships with the community and environmental agencies in the region. A crucial milestone was the restructure, appointment and operation of the current Implementation Committees. There are now three Committees based upon communities of interest representing the:

- Loddon/Campaspe irrigation area
- Loddon/Campaspe dryland area
- Avon-Richardson/Avoca catchment area

Waterways

Significant onground works have been achieved targeting key geographic areas within the North Central region. Works included erosion and sediment control, waterway rehabilitation through fencing, stock management and revegetation. Other achievements include the development of the Draft North Central River Health Strategy, which will provide the overall direction for management of waterways within this region for the next 5 to 10 years.

Through the statewide Index of Stream Condition project, stream condition assessments have been completed at over 300 sites in the North Central region. This information will be used in the statewide Index of Stream Condition project to gain an understanding of waterway health throughout Victoria.

Biodiversity:

The biodiversity program takes a bioregional and landscape scale approach to habitat and remnant vegetation management, conservation of threatened species and revegetation that will provide better natural resource management outcomes and contribute to the social and economic sustainability of rural communities. The program contributes to:

- a reversal across the regional landscape of the long-term decline in the quality and extent of native vegetation
- ensuring that ecological processes are maintained and enhanced across the region
- ensuring the present diversity of species and ecological communities and that their viability is maintained or improved across each bioregion
- ensuring that there is no further preventable decline in the viability of rare or threatened species or ecological communities

Floodplain management

Key achievements:

Increased planning permit and flood level referrals by 15% from the previous year, to 771.

- Of the above, 10 were denied consent, 20 were asked for more information, six were for planning scheme amendments, two were for compliance issues, 91 were for flood levels only, 35 were for subdivisions, three were for VCAT hearings and 607 were for no objection responses with or without conditions
- Handled approximately 1,200 counter or phone enquiries for flood level and risk reports.
- Processed four referrals for new farm dam licenses under the Farm Dams Legislation.

North Central Landcare

The region's 150 Landcare groups are supported by six Landcare Coordinators based in Local Government and a Regional Landcare Coordinator at the North Central CMA.

Key achievements:

- The North Central Landcare Support Strategy, using highly innovative methods to engage the community in its development including story telling and cartoons.
- *Developing Robust Dynamics in Landcare groups in Hepburn and Central Goldfields*, a pilot project funded by the Victorian Government which has identified effective ways to work with groups in improving the way that they run themselves
- Developing partnerships between Landcare groups and a wide range of agencies, organisations and community groups including industry, schools, men's health groups, progress associations and many, many more.



Landcare workshop participants surround a map of North Central region (Photo: Chris Pollock, North Central CMA).

Dryland salinity

Dryland salinity is a serious problem in the North Central region, with around 32,000 ha of salinity currently mapped. Across the region salinity threatens to cut agricultural production by \$20 million and to damage up to 2,800 km of roads. About 40,000 ha of native vegetation is also under threat, with 1,000 kg per ha of salt exported into our waterways from large areas of the catchment.

The five-year program is progressively implementing the Second Generation North Central Dryland Salinity Management Plan. Program staff are working with the regional dryland Implementation Committees to ensure community ownership and continued commitment to the salinity program.

Now in its third year of implementation, is an innovative program that takes a targeted approach to salinity control through modifying groundwater systems in ten priority areas to protect key regional assets and improve the quality of water leaving the region.

Despite challenges such as drought, outstanding success has been achieved, particularly in the Glenloth and Pentall Hills targeted projects (where more than 90% of landholders are now participating) that have gained significant momentum over more than three years of implementation. Although there is varying implementation progress between the 10 areas, most program-wide targets for onground works have been exceeded.

Irrigation

Key achievements:

- Further development and implementation of the Loddon Murray Land & Water Management Strategy. Coordinating land and water management under the Strategy builds upon more than 15 years of success by the previous salinity management plans of the region.

- Completion of the Kerang-Swan Hill Future Land Use Pilot Project. The project aimed to develop a range of strategies, incentives and policy instruments to improve socioeconomic and environmental outcomes, biodiversity values, water use efficiency, flood mitigation, farm viability and infrastructure rationalisation.
- Completion of the Loddon Murray Wetland prioritisation framework. The framework identifies the priorities for managing the highly complex internationally and nationally significant wetlands of the region. A Loddon Murray Wetland Strategy is currently being developed and will be finalised by the North Central CMA Loddon Campaspe Irrigation Implementation Committee.
- Initiated construction of the Pyramid Creek Saline Groundwater Interception Scheme. A scheme that has been specifically designed to intercept saline groundwater intrusion into the Pyramid Creek for the saline water to then be used by a private commercial salt harvester. The concept behind the \$12.8 million project was initiated by one of the previous regional salinity management plans and will reduce the River Murray salinity at Morgan in South Australia by 4.3 EC. The scheme is being constructed by Goulburn-Murray Water on behalf of the MDBC.

John Thwaites, along with the Federal Member for Indi, Sophie Panopoulos representing the Commonwealth. Over 150 Community and Agency people attended.



Acting Premier the Hon. John Thwaites with Sarah Nicholas (Chair of the CMA) and Sophie Panopoulos (Member For Indi)



**NORTH EAST
CATCHMENT
MANAGEMENT
AUTHORITY**

The CMA has benefited from strengthened support by the State Government in its *White Paper Securing Our Water Future Together*, with 3 year funding from the Natural Heritage Trust and from the community in the development of the Regional Catchment Strategy.

Highlights for the year included the launch of the Regional Catchment Strategy, bushfire recovery program, roll out of the rural land stewardship program, implementing the river health initiative and continuing the integrated vegetation program.

Launch of Regional Catchment Strategy

The RCS launch was held on Friday 11th June 2004 at Apex Park in Wangaratta. The Strategy is jointly funded by both the Commonwealth and Victorian Governments. It was launched by the Victorian Acting Premier, Minister for Water and Minister for the Environment the Hon.

Rural Land Stewardship Program

The Rural Land Stewardship program continued to engage landholders in 2003-04 by promoting the principles of land stewardship and sustainable agriculture. A successful Outlook conference was held at Lake Hume Resort, attended by 130 people. The CMA was successful in gaining federal funding for a pilot program to trial Environmental Management Systems (EMS). A major project to improve stream health and water quality along Little Snowy Creek at Eskdale was advanced. This project is being funded as a major trial to test Land Stewardship principles. This project is being managed in conjunction with the VCMC. This involved a co-operative approach between agencies and the local community including duty of care principles, EMS and the use of multi targeted grants.

Monitoring Evaluation and Reporting

The CMA trialed a new third party audit approach for its natural resource management programs with the help of the Environment Protection Authority. This together with a monitoring and evaluation framework being developed with the assistance of the Bureau of Rural Sciences will bring together more streamlined reporting processes and improved accountability of the CMA.

Community Benchmarking

Community support of the North East CMA has increased 5% to 72% over the past two years. With regard to CMA waterways operated activities, there was an 83% satisfaction rate for works under landholder agreements. In the development of the Regional Catchment Strategy there was wide community involvement.

Community Engagement Plan

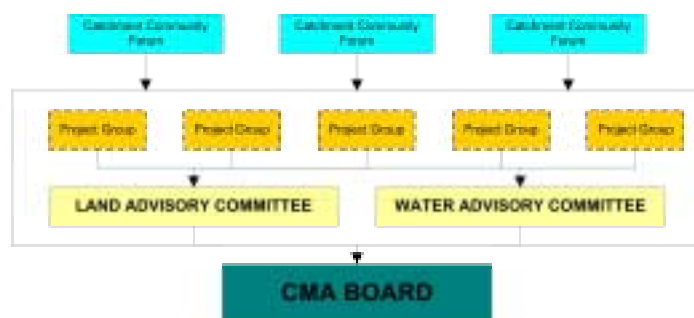
The Board and management of the North East Catchment Management Authority has developed a Community Engagement Plan (CEP) to help implement the Regional Catchment Strategy (RCS) efficiently and effectively. The aim of the plan is:

- To continue to develop and improve the inclusive culture in the CMA
- To further enable the CMA to have confidence that it understands and appreciates the community's values.
- To improve overall efficiency of the CMA
- To help create change ready communities.
- To further develop a supportive community.

Advisory Committee Structure

After much consideration the Board has determined to change the geographic implementation Committee structure to an issues based advisory committee structure supported by project orientated action groups and catchment community forums.

This new structure will assist the CMA in better achieving the roles defined and the targets outlined in the Regional Catchment Strategy.



During 2003-2004, a time of significant reform in the water industry in Victoria, Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority also underwent substantial change.

The start of the financial year marked a new era for PPWCMA embarking on its first full year of operation as an independent and incorporated statutory authority, with several new staff positions created, several new Board members and its first bank account.

The Board and staff of the newest Victorian CMA was required to develop new processes, establish an appropriate governance framework and ensure it met compliance requirements. It developed financial management and payroll systems, risk management and internal auditing processes.

Throughout the year, PPWCMA continued to address these challenges while working to complete its renewed Regional Catchment Strategy. At June 2004, the RCS was nearing completion as a public consultation draft.

The 2003-2004 year began with the appointment of a new Board of Port Phillip and Westernport CMA, by the Minister for Environment, The Hon. John Thwaites. The new Board retained its Chair Dr Mick Lumb plus five members from the previous Board, and added nine new members with a range of skills and experience. This resulted in important continuity and stability in Board level operations while also bringing fresh ideas to Board activities.

October 2003 saw the release of several important sub-strategies to the Port Phillip and Western Port Regional Catchment Strategy. The Parliamentary Secretary for Environment, Ms Elaine Carbines and the Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Mr Geoff Howard launched the *Rabbit Action Plan*, the *Weed Action Plan*, and the *Strategy for support and coordination of Landcare and Community Groups*. The Business Plan for the major land regeneration program *Grow West* was also launched at the October event.

PPWCMA played an increasing role in managing grants processes in the region including the Natural Heritage Trust, through the annual development of a Regional Catchment Investment Plan. It helped ensure grants monies have been allocated to priority projects through an efficient, consultative and transparent process with increased accountability for receiving bodies to

demonstrate progress reporting on activities and outcomes.

Through its activities during 2003-2004, PPWCMA has also further established its leadership role in supporting the region's 500-plus Landcare and community groups and strengthened its relationships with other regional stakeholder organisations in developing major on-ground projects for landscape improvement.

In June 2004, the Victorian Government introduced a suite of reforms for the management of water resources throughout the State. Entitled *Securing Our Water Future Together*, these reforms endorsed PPWCMA's strategic role in integrated catchment management across the region. It also established much-needed consistency of arrangements for whole-of-catchment waterway, drainage and floodplain management in the region – an initiative welcomed by PPWCMA.



The West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority (WGCMA) is very supportive of the initiatives outlined in the White Paper, in particular the new role identified for CMAs as the Environmental Reserve Manager. We also believe the proposed *Statement of Obligations* is an important initiative that will clarify responsibilities, focus efforts and strengthen the governance framework for CMAs. In view of this, WGCMA looks forward to working with the State Government to implement the initiatives in the White Paper.

In this context, the WGCMA Regional Catchment Strategy will play a key role in guiding investment in the region and will assist in delivery on a number of the catchment outcomes detailed in the White Paper. The RCS was accredited by the relevant State and Australian Government Ministers in June 2004. The Strategy is the culmination of two years work by the WGCMA in partnership with the community, industry and government, and the CMA looks forward to using the RCS in the development of the Region's Catchment Investment Plan. In addition, the CMA will be working with regional stakeholders to ensure that the principles outlined in the RCS are understood and used in the development of Local and Regional Action Plans.

One of the regional plans the CMA has been working on in the past twelve months is the Regional River Health

Strategy (RRHS). This document is a requirement of the Victorian River Health Strategy and provides detail on the priority rivers, streams and reaches in the region. It also details the proposed actions for these priority areas and has been developed with stakeholders and the community in the region. The Public Exposure Draft of the RRHS was released in February 2004 and the CMA has been reviewing the feedback and finalising a draft for the Board to consider in early 2004/2005 before seeking Ministerial endorsement.

During the 2003/2004 financial year, WGCMA has further progressed a number of other plans including the Native Vegetation Plan, the Salinity Management Plan and the Central Gippsland Water Quality Plan. The CMA anticipates that this will all be finalised and endorsed by the State Government in the first half of the 2004/2005 financial year.

Community engagement has again been a key focus for the WGCMA in 2003/2004. Implementation Committees and Portfolio Groups have been reviewed to ensure their effective operation and there has been a realignment of Portfolio Groups to ensure they reflect the Asset Classes contained in the RCS. This means that there are now four Portfolio Groups that focus on the following areas: Biodiversity, Water, Land and Production and People and Communities.

Two other important pieces of work in the past twelve months from a community engagement perspective include a review of Co-ordinator and Facilitator positions in the West Gippsland Region. This review covered Landcare, Waterwatch, Bushcare and Coastcare. The review has made a number of recommendations that we will be pursuing in the 2004/2005 financial year. The Board has also endorsed a Regional Landcare Support Strategy which outlines how we will support this important community based movement in our region. This Strategy is now with the State Government for endorsement.

During 2003/2004 we received additional grants from the Stressed Rivers and Healthy Rivers Initiatives. This saw nearly one million dollars expended on instream work on the Thomson, Macalister and Tarra Rivers. This funding was in addition to our normal work program and our operations crew have done an excellent job in ensuring this additional work was completed successfully.

As mentioned earlier in this report governance is a critical issue for the WGCMA and we have implemented a new project and financial management system called Axapta. This is a Microsoft based product that went live in June 2004 and will assist in integrating our project and financial management activities and meet all our reporting requirements with Government.

During the latter part of the financial year we reviewed our management structure and we have agreed a revised executive structure that will be in place from July 2004. The key changes will see us with a clear focus on our partnership activities and catchment strategy activities. In addition we will have our operations group directly represented on the executive team.

Finally, it is important to recognise the collaborative efforts we have supported in the last financial year. This includes our continued support of the Gippsland Integrated Natural Resource Forum which provides opportunities for all stakeholders across the whole Gippsland Region to share information and discuss issues related to natural resource management. This is ensuring agencies take an integrated approach where appropriate and ultimately provides better value for money for investors in our region.

We have also been working with the East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority to identify areas that make sense for the WGCMA and the EGCMA to have a collaborative effort. We are doing this in relation to the Water Quality Plans around the Gippsland Lakes, development of a monitoring and reporting framework and we have advertised a shared Water Quality Officer which will service both CMAs.



The signing off in December 2003 by the State and Commonwealth Ministers of the Wimmera Regional Catchment Strategy 2003-2008 must rank as the single greatest achievement of the past year. The Regional Catchment Strategy is the culmination of an extensive consultation process with all key stakeholders and community groups and sets the priorities that will guide regional natural resource management through the immediate future. In accord with these priorities, the Wimmera CMA has prepared a Regional Catchment Investment Plan for 2004-2007 and commenced work on a 2004-2005 Regional Management Plan. The stage is now set for achievement of budget and outcome targets for the years ahead.

Expanded networks including establishment of quarterly local government forums, a Regional Landcare Advisory Committee; a new Landcare Facilitator position with Horsham Rural City Council; an Indigenous Landcare Facilitator, a Community Education Officer and Natural

Resource Management Facilitator with Wimmera CMA, have provided the region with new capacity to engage all sectors of the community in natural resource management. Additionally during 2003-2004, the filling of Flood Management Officer and Waterwatch Coordinator vacancies as well as restructuring the Healthy Waterways Incentive Scheme project with a full time coordinator and three part time facilitators has also increased our capacity to link with key stakeholders and landholders in river health and floodplain management. In administration, we have increased our capacity with a new Office Manager and established a full time Receptionist role.

Waterway Management

The Yarriambiack Creek Flood Study was completed to add to the Horsham and Dimboola Flood Studies and the Glenorchy to Horsham Flood Scoping Study completed in the previous year. A major highlight for the year has been the Victorian Flood Management Conference, jointly hosted by Wimmera CMA and Horsham Rural City Council, under the theme *Healthy Floodplains-Wealthy Future*. Attended by 200 delegates from across the state and interstate, a well coordinated and informing event was enjoyed by all who attended. It demonstrated how well partnerships between key agencies can work in the region.

Important liaisons have been established with regional agencies and the University of Ballarat to develop a cooperative research program to undertake targeted research into ecological, economic and social issues emerging from the implementation of the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline Project. This important project also involving Grampians Wimmera Mallee Regional Water Authority, Mallee, North Central, Glenelg Hopkins and Wimmera CMAs, Wimmera Uniting Care and Department of Sustainability and Environment will reach into the community and ensure priority issues are addressed through relevant research projects. This exciting program will add significantly to the region's capacity and knowledge.

Key processes are underway building knowledge and greater understanding of regional wetlands. With about a quarter of the State's wetlands in the region, Wimmera CMA is working hard to assemble all information possible so that it can gauge the values of and risks to these important biological refuges. Threats to and opportunities for enhancement of significant wetlands within the region will be described that will assist the landholders and the community manage and protect where necessary the key assets. World Wetlands Day was again celebrated in February with in excess of 300 Wimmera people in attendance.

Significant expansion of the waterways works program has been facilitated through new investment and well developed science and strategic planning. High levels of community engagement are a feature of the works

program as work sites are negotiated with landholders and future management arrangements agreed to.

Land and Biodiversity Management

The completion of the Wimmera Region Salinity Action Plan has been a satisfying outcome. Significant scientific skills have been utilised in providing the technical basis for this plan which is based on a groundwater flow systems management approach. Consequently, the management actions are derived from a risk benefit assessment. This planning approach will serve the region well over the next decade.

Three additional trial sites were established in 2003-2004 of pumping groundwater from high relief granitic terrain in the upper catchment to reduce down slope salinity. A project to develop uniform 1:100,000 scale soil mapping across the Wimmera region was commenced and a review conducted with the aim to revitalise whole farm or property management planning and the uptake of these approaches by farmers. The Land Protection Incentive Scheme has continued to provide support for a diverse range of projects targeting improvement in biodiversity, water quality, salinity and sustainable agriculture outcomes.

Community engagement and understanding of Landcare has continued to be improved through consultation, participation in key Landcare events and the building of strong partnerships between key people and organisations involved in Landcare. There have been significant developments in extending the engagement of the Indigenous Community in natural resource management issues through employing the Indigenous Landcare Facilitator and the possible formation of an Indigenous Advisory Group to Wimmera CMA.

Partnerships that provided a large number and array of volunteers and community groups to work on Landcare projects throughout the region have continued to make a crucial contribution to achieving the land and biodiversity objectives of Wimmera CMA.

The CMA's biodiversity program has witnessed more than 1,000 hectares of high quality native vegetation being protected under management agreements, a further 1,100 hectares permanently protected under Trust for Nature Covenants, the enhancement of 300 hectares of degraded native vegetation, and a further 300 hectares of native vegetation established. Monitoring and surveys of threatened flora and fauna on both private and public land and an extensive campaign to control bridal creeper over more than 1,000 hectares have been carried out.

Strategic Planning and Investment

Aside from its pivotal role in the development of the Regional Catchment Strategy and Regional Catchment Investment Plan, the Strategic Planning and Investment

unit has also facilitated direct and devolved funding for regional NRM project work and reported to investors against budgets and outcomes.

The Wimmera CMA's engagement with project partners, especially Local Government, has continued to expand rapidly through conduct of four Local government forums over the past year and the considerable development of capability to support and supply data from digital elevation modelling and GIS systems.

Significant development has occurred throughout the year in project and contract management with new skills and experience being gained by staff and consequently greater capacity to manage projects and contracts has been developed. Better processes for quality assurance and monitoring and evaluation have also been developed during the past year.

Agribusiness Achievements

A key development in the Sustainable Regional Development program was to establish a discrete Executive Officer Position for Wimmera 2020. The effectiveness of this role has been critical to reviving the support to the Group and implementing the schedule of projects funded through the Victorian Agribusiness Network. Revision of the business plan for Wimmera 2020 has refocused the group and set a strategic framework for the future.

Wimmera 2020 is proud to list among its achievements in 2003/2004 the Young Agribusiness Achiever Awards, hosting a study tour of the region by RMIT University students, organising and conducting the fifth Victorian Agribusiness Forum in Horsham with more than 90 delegates in attendance, and facilitating a motivational dinner for regional agribusiness leaders. This group was also responsible in 2003/2004 for the production of three significant reports: a Scoping Study for Organics, Business Management Tools for Adverse Seasonal Conditions, and the Bioterrorism Information Package.

Looking Ahead

A busy and effective year's work has been achieved and the Wimmera CMA is satisfied that it has met all of the key challenges for 2003/2004 recognised in its report to the VCMC last year. We look forward to our next set of challenges and an even more successful year in 2004/2005.

4. STATUTORY RESPONSIBILITIES

VCMC MEETINGS

VCMC met nine times throughout the year, on the third Thursday of each month except November 2003, January 2004 and March 2004.

Council members also participated on various VCMC sub-committees (see *Introduction: VCMC Sub-Committees*). The sub-committees meet as required.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

During 2003 – 2004, no requests were received for access to documents under the *Freedom of Information Act* 1982 (FOI Act).

Documents which are maintained in the possession of Council include:

- Internal working papers
- Correspondence from Ministers and Members of Parliament, Government Departments and agencies, members of the public and the private sector
- Reports prepared by consultants commissioned by Council
- Accounts records
- Personnel and salary records
- Organisation and accommodation records

You have a right to apply for access to documents held by VCMC and covered by the FOI Act. This applies to both documents created by VCMC as well as those supplied to VCMC. You may apply for the original or for a copy.

FOI requests must be made in writing and should be as specific as possible to enable the FOI Officer to identify relevant documents as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Once VCMC has received your letter requesting access, the Council must respond to you as soon as possible, but not later than 45 days, outlining its decision on your request. If VCMC refuses you access to the documents sought, you can appeal to the Principal Officer for an internal review, but you must do so within 28 days of the letter sent to you. VCMC must then reconsider your request and respond to you within 14 days.

If you wish to appeal further to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal, you must do so within 60 days of the date you were notified of the internal review.

CONSULTANCIES

The VCMC commissioned 3 consultancies in 2003–2004.

- EWR – for land stewardship project. Overall cost \$36,161.
- EWR – for CMA/VCMC Research Review. Overall cost \$23,550.
- Chandris Consulting – for preparation of Green Paper response on VCMC's behalf. Overall cost \$2,100.

NATIONAL COMPETITION POLICY

National Competition Policy requirements have been taken into account when reporting to the Minister.

MULTI-CULTURAL STATEMENT

The Victorian Catchment Management Council is committed to policies, programs and strategies aimed at delivering culturally appropriate services to all Victorians. No special initiatives were needed by the Council in response to the Premier's circular regarding community inclusiveness.

PECUNIARY INTEREST

Declarations of pecuniary interests have been duly completed by all relevant members and officers.

WHISTLEBLOWERS PROTECTION ACT

The *Whistleblowers Protection Act* 2001 came into effect on 1 January 2002. The Act is designed to protect people who disclose information about serious wrongdoing within the Victorian Public Sector and to provide a framework for the investigation of these matters.

The protected disclosure coordinator for DSE acts as an agent for the Authority to receive disclosures under the Act, and applies DSE procedures in managing disclosures. Disclosures of improper conduct by the Authority or its employees may be made to the following:

- Deidre Egan, Protected Disclosure Coordinator
DSE, PO Box 500, East Melbourne Vic 3002.
Telephone: 9637 8575 Facsimile: 9637 8129 Email: Deidre.Egan@dse.vic.gov.au
- The Ombudsman Victoria
Level 22, 459 Collins Street, Melbourne Vic 3000.
Telephone: 9613 6222 Toll free: 1800 806 314.

MERIT AND EQUITY

Victorian Public Service merit and equity principles are applied in the appointment and management of staff.

The VCMC follows the merit and equitable principles used by DSE, in accordance with Government directives.

Four primary goals have been assumed by DSE with regard to people management practices:

- Develop and sustain an organisational culture in which policies, practices and services are adapted to the needs of the community;
- Ensure that the diversity of the workforce reflects the diversity of the community;
- Ensure a workplace free from policies and practices that discriminate against staff or potential staff;
- Ensure that staff have access to a fair and efficient grievance review process to resolve perceived breaches of merit and equity.

VCMC PUBLICATIONS 2003-2004

- VCMC Annual Report 2002 – 2003
- Land Stewardship – Market-like Policy Options
- Environmental Management Systems – the Role of EMS in the Emerging Land Stewardship Concept

- Duty of Care: An Instrument for Increasing the Effectiveness of Catchment Management
- Private Investor Needs for Land Stewardship Investment
- Stewards of the Land: Landholder Perspectives on Sustainable Land Management
- The Land Stewardship Project (Report)

Copies are available on the VCMC website at www.vcmc.vic.gov.au or contact VCMC for hard copies (03 9412 5045).

ADDITIONAL VCMC INFORMATION AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

In compliance with the requirements of the Ministerial Directions of the Minister for Finance, details in respect of other Council operations not disclosed in this report have been retained by the Council and are available to relevant Ministers, Members of Parliament and the public (subject to the Freedom of Information requirements, if applicable).

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 – COMMITTEES AND WORKING GROUPS THAT INCLUDED A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE VCMC IN 2003-2004

Group Name	VCMC Representative
Australian Landcare Council	Alison Teese
Australian Landcare Council Peak Chairs	Christine Forster
Box-Ironbark Implementation Committee	Alison Teese
Central Highlands Rural Water Authority	Alison Teese
CMA CEOs	David Cummings/Lisa Munro
CMA Chairs and CEOs	Christine Forster, David Cummings/Lisa Munro
Council for Sustainable Vegetation Management	Alison Teese
DSE Environmental Weeds Working Group	Lisa Munro
DSE Public Land Stewardship Stakeholder Reference Group	Diana Patterson
EPA Victoria Board	Barry Hart
Gippsland Agri-Business Forum	Alex Arbuthnot
Glenelg River Environmental Flows Project Group	Bill Sharrock
Infrastructure Planning Council	Christine Forster
Irrigation Farm Dams Steering Committee	Christine Forster
Land Stewardship Critical Reference Group	Christine Forster
Land Stewardship Project Steering Committee	Christine Forster, Sarah Ewing, Diana Patterson, David Cummings/Lisa Munro
Landcare Australia Limited	Alex Arbuthnot
Landcare Foundation Victoria	Alex Arbuthnot
Landcare Taskforce	Alison Teese
Local Planning – Regional Catchment Planning Steering Committee	Christine Forster, David Cummings/Lisa Munro
Marine Parks Reference Group	Bill Sharrock
Mt Buller Resort Management Board	Diana Patterson
NAP/NHT Independent Advisory Panel	Christine Forster, Collon Mullett
Native Vegetation Framework Reference Group	Diana Patterson
North Central Catchment Management Authority	Alison Teese
Portland Coast Water Authority Board	Bill Sharrock
Resource Monitoring and Assessment Committee	Diana Patterson, Christine Forster, Barry Hart
State Assessment Panel	Christine Forster, Alison Teese
State Water Quality Monitoring and Assessment Committee	Barry Hart
Victorian Blackberry Task Force	Alex Arbuthnot
Victorian Environmental Assessment Council	Sarah Ewing
Victorian Farmers Federation Land Management Committee	Alex Arbuthnot
Victorian Greenhouse Strategy, Agriculture and Sinks Reference Group	Alison Teese
Victorian Pest Management Strategy Steering Committee	Christine Forster
Victorian River Health Strategy and SEPP Waters of Victoria Reference Committee	Christine Forster (Chair)
Victorian River Health Strategy Technical Advisory Committee	Barry Hart
VicSuper Pty Ltd	Christine Forster
Victorian Water Trust Advisory Council	Christine Forster

APPENDIX 2 - VCMC CATCHMENT STAKEHOLDERS' FORUM MEMBERS IN 2003-2004

Australian Conservation Foundation
Australian Water Association
Bird Observers Club of Victoria
Birds Australia
Conservation Volunteers
Conservation Volunteers Australia
Department of Sustainability and Environment
EarthWatch
Environment Defenders Office (Victoria) Ltd
Environment Victoria
Environs Australia
Field and Game Australia
Friends Network
Friends of the Earth
Greening Australia Victoria
Indigenous Flora and Fauna Association
Land for Wildlife
Landcare Australia Victoria
Marine and Coastal Community Network
Municipal Association of Victoria
National Trust – Landscape Committee
Native Fish Australia
Natural Resources Conservation League
Parks Victoria
Prospectors and Miners Association of Victoria Inc.
Public Land Council of Victoria
River Basin Management Society
Strategy for Aboriginal Managed Lands in Victoria
Threatened Species Network
Timber Communities Australia
Tree Project
Trust for Nature (Victoria)
Victorian Association of Forest Industries
Victorian Farmers' Federation
Victorian Field Naturalists Club Association
Victorian Minerals and Energy Council (formerly Victorian Chamber of Mines)
Victorian National Parks Association
Victorian Water Industry Association
Victorian Wine Industry Association
VR Fish (Victorian Recreational Fishers' Peak Body)

APPENDIX 3 – DSE/DPI PEST PLANT AND ANIMAL COMPLIANCE AND ENFORCEMENT ACTIVITIES

The Compliance Program was initiated in December 1997 to gain a higher level of landholder compliance with the requirements of the Catchment and Land Protection Act for pest plant control. The Program combines extension and enforcement activities targeted at priority species and/or priority locations. The program was extended to include rabbit control in 1998/99.

The Program was further refined in 2001/02 to support community implementation of priorities in Weed and Rabbit Action Plans that have been prepared by Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs) in consultation with the department.

As part of the total compliance effort, a specific and increased focus on enforcement activities has been provided through an Enhanced Enforcement Program. A total of \$1.55 million has been provided in 2002/03 under the Enhanced Enforcement Program. This is in addition to the recurrent base funding allocated to the Compliance Program.

A Compliance Leader co-ordinates the Program on a statewide basis and is assisted by six senior DPI CAS compliance officers.

Enforcement combines a mixture of activities under the Catchment and Land Protection Act - issuing Land Management Notices, Warning Letters, Directions, forced entries, as well as the joint preparation of specific Works Agreements between the land manager and regional staff. Works Agreements are a very successful mechanism to obtain landholder compliance without resorting to court action.

Amendments made to streamline the administrative deficiencies and complexities of the existing Catchment and Land Protection Act were enacted in January 2004.

Issues arising from the July 2003 - June 2004 Compliance Program:

Compliance effort is directed to support the implementation of the CMA Weed and Rabbit Action Plans in accordance with Victorian Pest Management - A Framework for Action, and has targeted the more difficult and recalcitrant landowners whose inaction continues to compromise the efforts undertaken on adjoining land.

Rainfall inconsistency was a major factor during this period. The unseasonably dry conditions adversely impacted upon the treatment of many weeds.

A total of 30 weeds identified as priority species under CMA Weed Action Plans were targeted resulting in 13,534 priority property inspections, covering approximately 1.38million hectares with 8952 landowner contacts made. Subsequent enforcement activity resulted in 3029 enforcement actions. Works Agreements are increasingly being used by the Department to gain landholder compliance.

Compliance activity relating to rabbits resulted in a total of 1590 property inspections in priority rabbit areas, covering approximately 899,000 hectares, with 1267 landowner contacts made. Subsequent enforcement activity resulted in 682 enforcement actions.

There were 21 successful rabbit and weed prosecutions.

The Department has often been criticised for lack of enforcement action on specific weed and pest animal problems. The results of the Compliance Program now demonstrate the benefits of a targeted, outcome-oriented approach to enforcement. Enforcement action in priority areas against high priority pests, backed by strong community support, is leveraging a higher level of compliance from the wider community.

APPENDIX 4 – COMPLIANCE INDEX DISCLOSURE REQUIREMENTS

The VCMC Annual Report is prepared in accordance with the Financial Management Act 1994 and the Directions of the Minister for Finance. This index has been prepared to facilitate identification of compliance with statutory disclosure and other requirements.

Disclosure	Clause	Page No.
Charter and Purpose		
Manner of establishment and relevant Minister	FRD 22	7, 8
Objectives, functions, powers and duties	FRD 22	7, 8
Nature and range of services provided	FRD 22	7, 8
Management and Structure		
Organisational structure	FRD 22	6, 7
Financial and other information		
Statement of workforce data and merit and equity	FRD 22	39
Summary of financial results for the year	FRD 22	21
Significant changes in financial position during the year	FRD 22	*
Operational and budgetary objectives and performance against objectives	FRD 22	21
Subsequent events	FRD 22	*
Major changes or factors affecting performance	FRD 22	3, 12
Application and operation of <i>Freedom of Information Act</i> 1982	FRD 22	38
Application and operation of <i>Whistleblowers Protection Act</i> 2001	FRD 22	38
Compliance with building and maintenance provisions of <i>Building Act</i> 1993	FRD 22	*
Statement on National Competition Policy	FRD 22	38
Details of consultancies over \$100,000	FRD 22	N/A
Details of consultancies under \$100,000	FRD 22	38
Disclosure of major contracts	FRD 12	N/A
Statement of availability of other information	FRD 22	39
Occupational health and safety	FRD 22	*
Executive officer disclosures	FRD 15	N/A
Disclosure index	FRD 10	43

*See Department of Sustainability and Environment 2003-04 Annual Report.

ABBREVIATIONS

AFFA	Agriculture, Fisheries, Forestry Australia
BAP	Biodiversity Action Plan
CaLP Act	Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994
CCMA	Corangamite Catchment Management Authority
CFA	Country Fire Authority
CLPR	Centre for Land Protection Research
CMA	Catchment Management Authority
CRC	Cooperative Research Centre
DPI	Department of Primary Industries
DSE	Department of Sustainability and Environment
EA	Environment Australia
EBA	Enterprise Bargaining Agreement
EGCMA	East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority
EMS	Environment Management System
EPA	Environment Protection Authority
GBCMA	Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority
GHCMA	Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authority
GNP	Good Neighbour Program
IC	Implementation Committee
INRM	Integrated Natural Resource Management
ISC	Index of Stream Condition
KTRI	Keith Turnbull Research Institute
MAV	Municipal Association of Victoria
MCMA	Mallee Catchment Management Authority
MDBC	Murray Darling Basin Commission
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MSS	Municipal Strategic Statement
NAP	National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality
NCCMA	North Central Catchment Management Authority
NECMA	North East Catchment Management Authority
NHT	Natural Heritage Trust
NRM	Natural Resource Management
OH&S	Occupational Health and Safety
PPCMA	Port Phillip and Western Port Catchment Management Authority
R&D	Research and Development
RBMS	River Basin Management Society
RCIP	Regional Catchment Investment Planning
RCS	Regional Catchment Strategy
RRHS	Regional River Health Strategy
SAMLIV	Strategy for Aboriginal Managed Land in Victoria
SEPP WoV	State Environment Protection Policy Waters of Victoria
SMP	Salinity Management Plan
SoE	State of the Environment Report
SWQMAC	State Water Quality Monitoring and Assessment Committee
VCMC	Victorian Catchment Management Council
VCS	Victorian Coastal Strategy
VFF	Victorian Farmers Federation
VPMF	Victorian Pest Management Framework
VRHS	Victorian River Health Strategy
WCMA	Wimmera Catchment Management Authority
WGCMA	West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority
WONS	Weeds of National Significance
WPC	Victorian Catchment Management Council Weed Policy Committee

Front Cover Photography by Peter Kinchington: (i) Yan Yan Gurt Revegetation Site, Victoria; (ii) *Burchardia umbellata* (Milkmaids)

Victorian Catchment Management Council Annual Report 2003-2004

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