

Catchment Knowledge Exchange

Fact Sheet 4: The Soil Knowledge Broker Service is alive and kicking

Background to the Catchment Knowledge Exchange

The National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality (NAP) is funding a three-year project, the **Catchment Knowledge Exchange Project** (or CKE), which focuses on knowledge management and the concept of knowledge brokering. The Victorian Catchment Management Council (VCMC) is managing the project on behalf of NAP. EWR have been engaged to undertake the project.

The VCMC has a particular interest in knowledge management. The *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994* defines a role for Council in this area, and Council has also identified knowledge management as critical in working towards its vision for catchment management in Victoria. Knowledge generation, synthesis and exchange are fundamental aspects of managing the future sustainability of natural resources, particularly healthy ecosystems.

Knowledge brokering

Knowledge brokering is gaining interest and acceptance across Australia. A number of organisations such as Land and Water Australia, Cooperative Research Centres and Catchment Management Authorities have appointed knowledge brokers. In the CKE project, the objective is to test the case that a purposeful knowledge broker service will improve the availability and accessibility of knowledge for decision-making across Victoria's Catchment Management Framework. Part of the CKE project involves the trial of a knowledge broker service in the area of soil health.

As a result, the Soil Knowledge Broker Service was launched in mid 2006 and, as the name implies, is focussed on the area of soils and soil health. The Service is being trialled over the next year, with a major outcome the development of an 'operational plan' including activities, protocols and procedures.

The Soil Knowledge Broker Service

The Soil Knowledge Broker Service (or SKBS) trial functions to improve the flow of information and knowledge so that, across Victoria, we can work towards more sustainable management of the soil resource, using best available advice and information. To achieve this, the SKBS deals with a range of soil health topics, including soil management, inventory, capability, physical processes, measurement, reporting and risk.

Ideally, a knowledge system should be able to manage NRM knowledge in an integrated way, rather than considering a single component, such as soils. However, for the purpose of the trial, the focus is on a single issue in an area where existing knowledge is not used effectively and there remain critical gaps in understanding.

So far, products from the trial include

- creation of a soil health 'statement'
- a social network analysis (SNA; refer Fact Sheet #3)
- a Soil Health Forum (for further information and copies of documents, see www.vcmc.vic.gov.au)
- CKE website at www.catchmentknowledgeexchange.net.au
- Soil Knowledge Broker Service through the website and through a dedicated mobile number at 0437 988 137

Until November 2007, the trial SKBS will seek to meet the needs of CMAs and others with an interest in and responsibility for soil health in Victoria. Activities include the bringing together of people to share ideas and questions, promoting communication across the networks, synthesising knowledge, and helping to shape research questions.

The two main features of the Soil Knowledge Broker Service are the website and the 'human' Soil Knowledge Broker.

The 'Soil Knowledge Exchange'

As well as providing background information about the CKE Project, the website provides a collection of soils-related resources and links relating to soils, and functions as a 'portal' linking the soils community (the 'Soil Knowledge Exchange'). It's easy to register and become a member of the community – you'll have access to high-quality, up-to-date soils information as well as being able to exchange information with others interested in soil health.

The main features of the website are

- the Wiki, a feature that allows users to collaboratively create and edit soils-related articles
- the Reference Manager, a dynamic and growing inventory encompassing the broad range of soils-related knowledge resources (users can provide input to the Reference Manager and use it as a source of information)
- links to soils-related websites, particularly in Victoria but also nationally and internationally
- an events calendar, to which users can add upcoming seminars, conferences and other soils-related events
- a Discussion Board made up of a number of forums, including technical topics, feature forums, and specific soils queries
- frequently asked questions (FAQs) and
- a Gallery of soils-related photos, to which users can add.

The Soil Knowledge Broker

The Soil Knowledge Broker is Shawn Butters, whose role is to connect people to share and exchange knowledge across the catchment community. Shawn can be contacted:

- through the website
- by e-mail (knowledgebroker@catchmentknowledgeexchange.net.au)
- by telephone, 0437 988 137

The SKBS is supported by a Soil Health Reference Group, which comprises representatives from CMAs, the VCMC and the Departments of Primary Industries and Sustainability and Environment. Given the trial nature of the SKBS, an important task is an evaluation of the utility and outcomes of the Service. In turn, this will inform the outcomes of the CKE Project as a whole.

Use the Knowledge Broker Service!

We encourage you to use the SKBS, including registering to use the website and contacting the Broker with any soils-related queries you may have. We would also appreciate any feedback you may have including your thoughts about the concept of the Broker Service or features of the site including suggestions for added material or links.

Contact Shawn with your soils-related questions and he will find answers for you – by linking you with the relevant network of people, organisations and information sources. Already there are people who have had their many and varied queries about soil health answered.

Soil knowledge broker service contacts

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