

In spring 2017, a community survey commissioned by the North Central Catchment Management Authority (CMA), was sent to randomly selected residents from Cohuna, Koondrook, Leitchville and Gunbower.

“The survey was conducted by researchers from Charles Sturt University, to provide an independent and quantitative measure of a range of community perceptions of North Central CMA and its projects in the area,” Acting Project Manager Amy Russell said.

The previous survey was done in 2014. By using the same methods in 2017, researchers are able to compare the results with 2014 findings.

### It is no surprise that the survey found local residents love Gunbower Island:

- 92 per cent had visited Gunbower Island in the past 12 months;
- 95 per cent agreed it is important that people in the community play a part in protecting Gunbower Island. People also valued it as a place for recreation and wished to preserve it for future generations.



Gunbower Creek kayak day (Photo: NCCMA)

“The biggest concerns people had were rubbish left behind by campers on Gunbower Island, European carp, toxic blackwater events and foxes. Rubbish and carp problems were shared by more than 93 per cent of respondents,” Amy said.

### How do results compare to 2014?

Since the 2014, survey there has been an overall increase of 5.9 per cent in the knowledge the community has of environmental issues in Gunbower Forest and project activities carried out by the North Central CMA.

There has been an increase of 16 per cent in those agreeing that ‘If no action is taken in the next decade to provide additional environmental water, the condition of Gunbower Island will deteriorate’.

Other positive trends include a general increase in interest on issues surrounding the health of the forest, increasing recreational opportunities, the need for fencing projects to improve waterway health and the importance of pest plant and animal control on the Island.

“This survey suggests an increase in awareness of and concern for key environmental values associated with Gunbower Island over the past few years. Many of our projects work closely with local communities and rely on people considering the health of the forest and water bodies. It’s great to see an increase in environmental awareness reflected in the survey,” Amy said.

### We need to focus on developing people’s knowledge of some issues:

- Why environmental water will be applied in some years and not others;
- Why it is important that wetlands and lagoons in Gunbower Island dry out;
- Why action to control aquatic weeds needs to be staged, rather than large scale eradication at one time;
- Rare and threatened species on the island.

For a more detailed summary of the full results please contact Amy Russell at the North Central CMA on (03) 5448 7124 or email [info@nccma.vic.gov.au](mailto:info@nccma.vic.gov.au)



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# COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

Edition 20: Autumn 2018

**Welcome** to the 20<sup>th</sup> edition of the Flooding for Life community newsletter. This edition features plans for flooding the forest, an update on the Cockatoo Lagoon Community Working Group, erosion monitoring, carbon exchange and the social benchmarking survey.

### Gunbower Forest set to get a drink this winter

Gunbower Forest is an internationally important wetland, home to one of the few significant remaining areas of river red gums in Australia as well as many endangered plants and animals. It is also one of the most popular camping, bush walking and bird watching spots in the region and contains significant sites of Aboriginal and European cultural heritage.

However, the regulation of the Murray since European occupation, and a changing climate, has meant large-scale floods occur less frequently, and often don’t last long enough to fully replenish the forest’s water needs.

“Since the 2016 floods, Gunbower Forest has experienced two hot and dry summers, and one of the lowest winter/spring rainfalls on record in 2017. On top of this, the forest is still recovering from the Millennium Drought. It’s time to give the forest a drink,” North Central Catchment Management Authority (CMA) Acting Project Manager Genevieve Smith said.

This year, up to 82 gigalitres of water will be delivered through the forest via the Hipwell Road Channel and regulators on the lower Gunbower Creek from mid-June to early November. “About 3000 hectares of the 20,000 hectare forest will be watered, leaving a lot of space for camping and visiting. It will put these areas of the forest and wetlands in great condition for the community to enjoy this coming summer,” Ms Smith said.



Gunbower Forest during flood in spring 2014 (Photo: NCCMA)

“Water supply to irrigators will not be affected by the flow. Most of the water will be delivered in the off-irrigation season, and during irrigation season we will continue to deliver environmental water to the forest at lower flow rates to accommodate for irrigation demand in Gunbower Creek.

Access to some parts of the forest may be temporarily restricted over winter and spring due to flooding, but many popular camping and fishing spots along Gunbower Creek and the Murray River will still be accessible. There are great opportunities to see the watering in action over the spring school holidays, by canoeing, bush walking, bird watching and kayaking. For more information about the delivery of water for the environment visit North Central CMA’s website at [www.nccma.vic.gov.au](http://www.nccma.vic.gov.au) or the DELWP Loddon Mallee facebook page for track closures.

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The North Central Catchment Management Authority acknowledges Aboriginal Traditional Owners within the region, their rich culture and spiritual connection to Country. We also recognise and acknowledge the contribution and interest of Aboriginal people and organisations in land and natural resource management.

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## Gunbower Creek carbon exchange trial

During the operation of Hipwell Road this year, North Central CMA will trial a project to deliver carbon-rich water from the forest into Gunbower Creek. The trial is being undertaken in collaboration with river and wetland specialist Dr Darren Baldwin.

“Dissolved organic carbon (DOC) is an important part of the food web of streams and wetlands. It provides food for bacteria and other microorganisms which support larger organisms and ultimately fish populations,” Dr Baldwin said

“When floodplains are flooded, dead leaves that have built up on the ground start to decompose, releasing carbon into the water.”

Gunbower Creek is considered to be low in DOC and this could be limiting productivity in the creek including native fish.



*Example of carbon-rich water from Benwell Forest (Photo: NCCMA).*

The aim of the trial project is two-fold. The trial will provide an indication of how much carbon is coming off the forest into the creek and the effectiveness of delivering through the lower creek regulators.

If we find that this is an effective approach, then in future years we can establish a more comprehensive monitoring program to provide further detail of the carbon exchange process and how much of the carbon is being used up by organisms in the creek.

## Monitoring erosion along the Narrows

Over the past few years, local community members have been noticing erosion along Gunbower Creek, in a reach known as the Narrows.

“We are hoping to learn more about how the rate of erosion at the Narrows compares to other parts of the creek,” Project Officer Sophia Piscitelli said.



*Erosion pins at the Narrows, Gunbower Creek.*

“To get a better idea of what’s happening, North Central CMA installed a number of erosion pins so that we can monitor this area. However, the results so far have indicated some inaccuracy using this method.

“Consequently, a more rigorous erosion monitoring program has been established to enable accurate measurement and understanding of the rates and patterns of erosion and deposition.”

GMW will undertake bathymetric and laser scanning surveys of Gunbower Creek in autumn. This will provide a good idea of the shape of the creek’s bed and banks, both above and below the water. The survey will provide baseline data which will be compared against results from future surveys to better understand rates of erosion.

However, it is difficult to determine what is causing erosion as many factors likely contribute. The lack of riparian vegetation, human activity, carp muddling behavior and other factors may all be contributing to destabilising banks and accelerating the erosion process.

## Cockatoo Lagoon Community Group work continues

The Cockatoo Lagoon Community Working Group has recently agreed to investigate two options to secure water supply for the region’s irrigators and the environment.

The chair of the Community Working Group and local irrigator Neville Goulding said the group is working to look forward in an attempt to limit rationing.

“The creek is at capacity at the moment, and the capacity of Cockatoo Lagoon is also declining. If the creek capacity continues to decline then rationing will occur and nobody wants that,” he said.

GMW Customer Operations General Manager Scott Barber said “historically, the creek has passed 1650 ML/day below Gunbower. At this point in time, flows downstream of Gunbower are restricted to 800 ML/day due to the potential to impact private land.

“The capacity constraint has the potential to limit water allocation deliveries for both irrigators and the environment during peak periods. This is a problem particularly for irrigators downstream of Gunbower,

who can already experience waiting periods of several days to access water even in an average season such as the 2017-18 irrigation season,” Mr Goulding said.

“Irrigation contributes a lot to our regional economy, and we have a great opportunity now to not only secure delivery capacity for our irrigators but also ensure there is enough capacity to water the Gunbower Forest as well.”

One of the options being looked at is the removal of Thompsons Weir and other complementary works. The other option, which was presented by community members on the group, is to remove Thompsons Weir and replace it with a gated weir upstream near Cockatoo Lagoon.

Both options are currently being investigated to see how they compare in terms of benefits for the environment and irrigators, and how they stack up financially.

## World Fish Migration Day event at Koondrook



*Merv Hughes with Harrison Parsons at the World Fish Migration Day event.*

On 21 April, the North Central CMA Native Fish Recovery Plan held an event at Koondrook to celebrate World Fish Migration Day. This was one of more than 50 events held across the world to celebrate the day. More than 100 people attended the event, including cricketer legend and keen fisherman Merv Hughes and fish ecologist Ivor Stuart, who were keynote speakers.

Project Manager Nicole Bullen spoke about the North Central CMA’s Native Fish Recovery Plan - a blueprint for the recovery of native fish species in the Gunbower and lower Loddon system.

Some native species need to migrate long distances to spawn, and fish passage on weirs and other structures in streams is critical to allow migration. Koondrook and Cohuna Weirs are two of the key barriers remaining in the Gunbower system. Fishways at these two structures would open passage for fish to access 120km of prime habitat in Gunbower Creek.