

Free assistance for farmers to help manage dry times

Hundreds of farmers across the Goulburn-Murray Water area can benefit from a free and independent service to help them cope with the current, and future, dry conditions.

The Plan2Farm program helps farmers and their families make decisions about all aspects of their enterprise, including drought resilience and preparedness.

North Central Catchment Management Authority (CMA) Project Manager Shari Rankin said for a lot of farmers across the region, planning has never been more important.

“The great thing about Plan2Farm is that it brings independent experts and advisors to your kitchen table, for free,” she said.

“Water prices are high and fodder is hard to come by, and indications are it will remain that way for a while. Plan2Farm can provide you with advice now, to help you and your family get through the current conditions, and get ready for the next tough period as well.

“It considers all aspects of your farming business, so it’s flexible enough to cope with any factors, either in the short term or the long term.”

Ms Rankin said a key to the project was that it was focused on the health of the whole farm business.

“At the end of the day, that’s what it’s all about. We will meet with you, work out exactly what you need and get the experts to come to you as soon as possible,” she said.

“We focus on making sure you get the advice you need to come up with a plan for your business, without delay and without being drowned in paperwork.”

And acting quickly can make a big difference, as Tyntynder farmers Kevin and Jeanette Burge know well.



The Burge family at their Tyntynder dairy farm

The dairy farmers have not just planned for their future, but they have begun acting on it already.

“Since we started Plan2Farm we have added Aussie Reds to cattle mix, closely monitored cow condition at calving, increased our herd by 30 cows, purchased a block we were leasing and secured a lease on additional block,” Kevin said.

“We have also hooked up a computer monitor in the dairy, registered for Building Better Regions Succession Planning, and spoken with the North Central CMA about revegetation”.

“We have learnt it is important to set goals and tick them off. Even if you have had a bad day, tomorrow is a new day and you start again on your list. We’re very satisfied with what it has enabled us to do on our farm and in our business.”

For more information visit the North Central CMA’s website www.nccma.vic.gov.au or phone Shari Rankin on 03 5440 1885.



NORTH CENTRAL
Catchment Management Authority
Connecting Rivers, Landscapes, People

COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

Edition 22: Summer 2019

Welcome to the 22nd edition of the Flooding for Life community newsletter. This edition features an update on the Gunbower Forest watering, colonial waterbird breeding, fish spawning in the Creek and information about free assistance to help farmers manage dry times.

Colonial waterbird breeding in Gunbower Forest

Gunbower Forest has supported successful colonial waterbird breeding this spring and summer!

In December 2018, more than 120 cormorant chicks and several Australasian darter and ibis chicks were observed within the Little Gunbower Complex area. By early to mid January, most of these had successfully fledged and were seen lingering and feeding nearby.



Cormorant chicks nesting in Little Gunbower Wetland Complex in December 2018 (Photo: Damien Cook)

In early 2018, Gunbower Forest was very dry after two long and hot summers and low winter rainfall. But the lower part of the forest received water for the environment in mid 2018. Large wetland areas are critical to provide enough foraging area for waterbirds to build up their energy reserves before they breed. It is also important for maintaining the health of existing waterbird populations that are estimated to have declined by 70 per cent in the past 30 years. Water in the landscape has meant that thousands of waterbirds have been able to forage and roost across the forest this year.

With the drought in Queensland and New South Wales, waterbirds are having to fly further in search of water. Providing wetland habitat and food at Gunbower is especially critical at the moment to support our waterbird populations during dry times, and provide a place for them to take refuge until water in the landscape becomes more available once again.

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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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Healthy Parks Healthy People



Study finds native fish spawning in Gunbower Creek

In late 2018, the North Central CMA engaged fish ecologists to monitor the spawning success of large-body native fish in Gunbower Creek.

“The project was first conducted in 2014, and this year we are repeating it to see whether the conditions in Gunbower Creek result in successful spawning of Murray cod,” Project Officer Will Honybun said.



Murray cod meta-larvae collected during the 2018 survey

Two techniques are used to collect eggs and larvae: drift nets and light traps.

Drift nets are fine mesh nets that are suspended from a snag in the creek and left overnight to capture eggs and larvae. Light traps are also deployed overnight and attract and catch larval fish by using a glow stick to lure larvae into the chambers.

“A lot of work has been done to ensure both irrigation and water for the environment are supporting native fish in Gunbower Creek”.

The North Central CMA has been delivering water for the environment in Gunbower Creek, targeting key periods in native fish life cycles – from spawning and the nursery period to supporting the growth of juveniles and maintaining habitat over winter.

“Prior to water for the environment, creek levels would fluctuate dramatically, which is not preferable for Murray cod breeding. The creek would also draw down to small pools over winter and fish would get stranded in the pools. This meant native fish had less food and shelter from predators, and had to compete more with other fish, particularly carp,” Will said

“This put a lot of pressure on the young native fish that spawned the previous spring, and we were once at a point where no small native fish were detected in our surveys.”

“This year a minimum base flow has been trialed over spring and summer and Murray cod larvae have been found in the survey. This is encouraging, but they were captured in fairly low numbers, so we need to keep working towards a Murray cod population in Gunbower Creek that has a diverse range of ages and sizes”.

Winners of the Gunbower Island photo competition

Congratulations to each of the Gunbower Island photo competition winners. The photo competition was advertised in local shops and social media in spring this year and entries closed in October. We received more than 50 entries and it was fantastic to see so many wonderful photos. The winners each received a \$100 gift voucher from a local store of their choice. Their photos are below.

Winner of the people’s choice award, out of 158 votes from the Big Cohuna Festival, was nine-year-old Billie O’Brien with her beautiful photo of kayaking in Gunbower Forest (photo a).

The best close-up photo winner was Lyn Golden, for her photo of a curious lace monitor (photo b).

Eight-year-old Amber Sansome won the under 16s category with her photo of frog spawn (photo c).

And the best landscape photo award went to Richard Flinders for his photo of azolla carpet at Black Swamp (photo d).



Gunbower Forest after water for the environment was delivered in 2018. The left-hand side shows river red gum forest that has received water compared to forest on higher ground that missed out to the right.