

# Loddon Stressed River Project

## PROJECT UPDATE - MAY 2010

Welcome to the second update on the Loddon Stressed River Project 2009-10.

**This North Central Catchment Management Authority (CMA) project is progressing well, and the project team highly values your input and involvement.**

Since the last update there has been plenty happening on the ground, in addition to several community events and forums.

The Loddon Stressed River project focuses on protecting and rehabilitating riparian (or riverside) areas, community involvement and improving aquatic health and migration paths for native fish.

**While the project has achieved a lot since its commencement in 2003, recent highlights include:**

- Continued fencing and revegetation along the Loddon River. This year, 35km of fencing was erected. This means that over 290km of fencing (approximately 40 per cent of Loddon River waterway frontage) has been undertaken as part of the Loddon Stressed River Project since 2003
- 20ha of Tamarix removal works completed at Lake Meran in conjunction with an Indigenous trainee crew
- Continuation of Tamarix removal on Lake Murphy, which is still in progress
- 4ha of riparian willow removal in Baringhup, Bridgewater and Durham Ox
- Social survey research to evaluate community restoration activities with the Loddon River
- Habitat improvement on Tullaroop Creek- works are underway to enhance River Blackfish habitat through the reinstatement of timber into the creek
- Review of the Environmental Flow Recommendations for the Lower Loddon

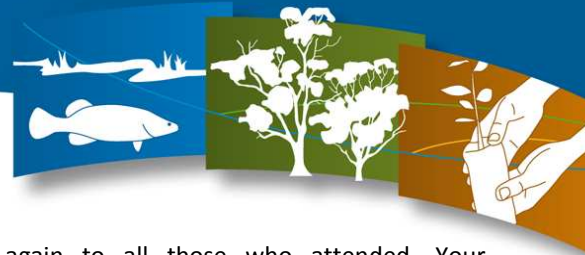
The project has also supported the following community activities in recent months:

- October 2009: Baringhup Loddon River expo organised by the Baringhup Landcare Group (in particular Cathy McCallum)
- October 2009: Four community meetings were held along the Loddon – for more detailed information about these community meetings, refer to the following pages
- November 2009: Environment Victoria's *Celebrate Your River* event held in Boort
- February 2010: *Revive the Loddon* photographic competition and display at Newstead
- April 2010: Birds Australia field day at Campbell's Creek
- Organised numerous tours of project sites
- Working group meetings to discuss project delivery, community engagement and technical information. This working group includes community members and representatives of the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE), Department of Primary Industries (DPI), Parks Victoria and Goulburn–Murray Water.

***The project is also currently developing a fish monitoring program for the Kerang Weir fishway. The project team is keen to capture information of local habitat pools or other fish data. Anyone with this information is encouraged to pass it on to North Central CMA or DPI staff.***



*The Kerang Weir fishway, established in 2008.*



### Upcoming project activities

In the coming months we will also be holding two field days focusing on riparian management. The first field day will be held in Appin South on 23 June and the other will be held on 29 June in Baringhup. These will provide landholders with the opportunity to discuss different fencing techniques and the range of environmental incentives available to improve river health. The project will also hold an Indigenous field day to highlight culturally significant aspects of the river. Anyone interested in attending these field days can contact the North Central CMA on 03 5448 7124.

The Loddon Stressed River project has been nominated for a Riverprize award. This is a prestigious international award for river health improvement programs. The winner will be announced at the International Riversymposium in Perth in October 2010.

### Loddon Stressed River Community Meetings

Four community meetings – at Serpentine, Newbridge, Kerang and Benjeroop – were held in October last year to provide community members with an overview of the Loddon River, discuss the Loddon Stressed River project, and to listen to community interests and concerns about the river. In all, 113 community members attended the meetings. We all enjoyed the active, stimulating and open discussions in a positive atmosphere.

These meetings were well received by those who attended and there was an appreciation of the opportunity to be consulted and be part of the discussion. We now know you would like these meetings to be a little shorter, but you liked the presentation topics. We also understand community frustration when we cannot provide answers or respond with immediate action.



Geoff Earl presenting on environmental flows at Serpentine

Thank you again to all those who attended. Your information is really valuable and will be incorporated into the Loddon River Restoration Plan, as well as forming the basis for further community activities such as field days.

Each meeting involved a series of brief presentations, a guest speaker who spoke on a topic of interest and a facilitated workshop session to hear community views, which were captured on butcher's paper during the sessions.

Local landholders, Garry Addlem, Jack Hewitt, Geoff Curnow, and John Baulch spoke at each meeting. Guest speakers included: Rob O'Brien from DPI, who spoke about local issues around the Serpentine and Kerang areas; Geoff Earl, Environmental Flows Coordinator for northern Victoria, who spoke about environmental flows in the lower Loddon system; and Phil Dyson from North Central CMA, who did a presentation on geomorphology at the Newbridge meeting.

Thank you to our other North Central CMA and DPI colleagues who supported these meetings, and also to Laurie Maxted, Shane O'Loughlin and Charlie Gillingham, of North Central CMA's Natural Resource Management Committee, who helped us plan, chair and facilitate the meetings. After the meetings, we took your comments and consolidated into themes:

- Community / agency interactions
- Environmental flows
- Flora and fauna
- Fencing and stock management
- Flooding
- Instream conditions
- Water quality
- Pest plants and animals

There were also some themes specific to local areas:

#### *Serpentine*

- Instream conditions
- Environmental flows

#### *Kerang*

- Instream conditions
- Fencing and stock management

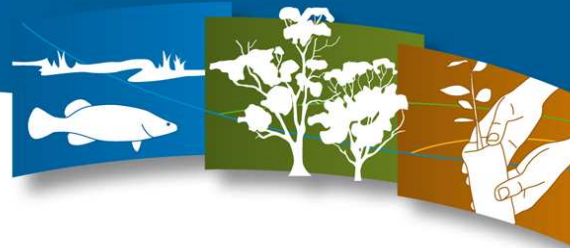
#### *Benjeroop*

- Instream conditions
- Declining and remaining fish populations

#### *Newbridge*

- Community and agency interaction
- Water quality

***Since these meetings, we have spent a lot of time working on responses to the many queries that arose at the community meetings. Responses are provided on the following pages.***



## Responses to community topics and queries

Our responses to queries include feedback sourced from external agencies on topics outside the North Central CMA's authority.

Topic	Response
<p><b>Community / agency relationships</b></p> <p>It was clear that community members value their involvement in the river and the Loddon Stressed River project.</p> <p>Generally there was a feeling that there is a need to generate more ownership, involvement and education around river health.</p>	<p>The North Central CMA appreciates the community's input into the Loddon Stressed River project and is committed to delivering the project in partnership with the community.</p> <p>To ensure that we maximise the level of community involvement with the resources available, project staff will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to hold working group meetings to seek advice on the project</li> <li>• Attend and participate in Landcare and other community events to provide updates and seek feedback</li> <li>• Organise theme-orientated field days and community events</li> <li>• Develop and distribute project fact sheets and regular reports.</li> </ul> <p>We will be organising field days focusing on riparian management in June 2010.</p> <p>Through the North Central Waterwatch program, we will continue to work with the community to monitor changes in the river and help people understand and respond to issues such as drought and climate change.</p> <p>Environmental Watering Plans have been developed for selected river reaches and wetlands by North Central CMA staff in conjunction with the Northern Victoria Irrigation Renewal Project (NVIRP). Local field naturalists clubs, field and game groups, and adjoining landholders have been consulted in the development on these plans. Information will be provided to community members once the plans are finalised.</p>
<p><b>Environmental Flows</b></p> <p>There was some discussion and points raised around understanding environmental flows at all meetings, and at Serpentine in particular.</p>	<p>Environmental flows for the lower Loddon River are currently under review via the Lower Loddon Environmental Flows Review project. This review will address some of the queries raised at the meetings, such as the 12 Mile Creek regulator. However, the review focuses on the main stem of the Loddon River, which does not include Serpentine, Sheepwash and other associated creeks. Community knowledge was included in the environmental flows review and we will communicate the recommendations when the report has been finalised.</p> <p>Further information on environmental flows is available on the North Central CMA website: visit <a href="http://www.nccma.vic.gov.au">www.nccma.vic.gov.au</a> then click on 'What We Do', 'Rivers' and then 'Environmental Flows'</p>

<p><b>Fauna</b></p> <p>It was apparent that there is some really good local community knowledge of fish and other species in the area. The meeting held in Benjeroop provided us with some good local information on fish populations that was previously not known.</p> <p>The increasing kangaroo populations and management options around this topic was also brought up.</p>	<p>The Loddon Stressed River project has a strong focus on maintaining and restoring fish habitat, refuges and migration paths are important components of the project.</p> <p>Landholders concerned about increases in kangaroo numbers and their effects on fences, stock and farm incomes should contact the Department of Sustainability and Environment office in Epsom on (03) 5430 4444 to discuss kangaroo management.</p>
<p><b>Flora</b></p> <p>This was discussed at all four meetings, and community members provided some great information about what is surviving and regenerating in the current tough conditions.</p> <p>The observation of remnant vegetation under stress was also highlighted.</p>	<p>Native vegetation plays a major role in the function of waterways and riparian zones. Protecting existing high quality vegetation and patches of remnant vegetation along waterways helps preserve seed sources that are vital in the natural regeneration process.</p> <p>Vegetation along waterways provides vital habitat for our native birds, reptiles and mammals as well as playing a role in stabilising waterways and maintaining good waterway health. Project revegetation works, including consideration of species selection and planting densities, are done in consultation with landholders.</p> <p>Remnant vegetation is under stress due to lack of water and other influences such as insect and corella damage. The current dry conditions we are experiencing are a major factor contributing to this stress.</p>
<p><b>Fencing</b></p> <p>There was some conversation on fencing principles, including fence location, ongoing management and access to crown land.</p>	<p>Placement of fences along riparian zones is done in consultation with landholders, and with their agreement. Consideration is given to the management needs of the property, type of stock, and potential flood levels. This has been identified as a topic for future field days or information sheets.</p> <p>Crown frontage licensees are still obliged to allow public access to crown land whether a fence has been erected or not.</p> <p>Fences constructed under the Loddon Stressed River project become the property of the landowner on completion of the works. The North Central CMA provides all the materials and labour required for the construction (up to a maximum value). The landowner's contribution is generally the ongoing maintenance of the fence to ensure it continues to provide the service for which it was intended.</p> <p>North Central CMA and DPI staff are available to discuss any fencing issues or concerns.</p>

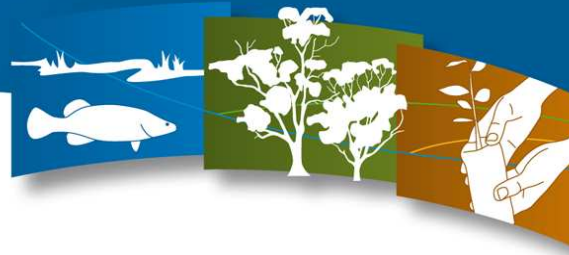
<p><b>Fencing (continued)</b></p> <p>Concerns were also raised, particularly at the Kerang meeting, about electric fences being a potential fire hazard.</p>	<p>A national supplier of electric fencing equipment provided the following information:</p> <p><i>Electric fencing can in some unusual circumstances cause plant material to ignite. The chance of a fire being started from properly erected and maintained fences is extremely small. To reduce fire risk in areas where bushfires are a hazard it is recommended;</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Fence lines be kept clear of vegetation and in good repair; and</i></li> <li>2. <i>During periods of high fire danger the energizer reduced output terminals be used, if provided, or energizer switched off.</i></li> </ol>
<p><b>Flooding</b></p> <p>Questions were raised about floodplain management plans and their implementation, levees, and maintenance of levees and other infrastructure.</p> <p>What is the current condition of the levees?</p> <p>Who is responsible for maintaining the levees?</p>	<p>The Serpentine to Boort Floodplain Management Plan made a number of recommendations to improve the management of flooding.</p> <p>Guidelines have been prepared to ensure that North Central CMA approves development in a consistent manner. These guidelines are aimed at minimising the impact of flooding, and ensure an acceptable level of protection for development. Work is currently progressing to incorporate these guidelines, as a local floodplain development plan, into the council planning scheme.</p> <p>Design works have been undertaken for Kinypanial Creek floodway, Serpentine township levee and connection of Johnsons Swamp to the Loddon Floodplain. However, funding for these works has not yet been secured.</p> <p>Levees vary in condition. The drought had a significant impact on levees in the lower Loddon/Murray River floodplain. A study undertaken around Kerang indicates that some levees have shrunk by up to 20 percent. It is important to understand that levees cannot be relied upon to provide the same level of protection that they previously provided.</p> <p>To summarise, there are three broad categories of levees:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Public strategic township levees</b> that protect townships are the responsibility of local government.</li> <li>• <b>Public strategic rural levees</b> are regionally significant in providing flood protection to rural farmland communities. There is no clear ownership of these levees and no maintenance has been undertaken on them. The issue of their management has been raised at the state level and it is proposed that recommendations for future management will be addressed through the Victorian Flood Strategy (currently under review).</li> <li>• <b>Private levees</b> are located on private land and maintenance is the landholder's responsibility.</li> </ul>

<p><b><i>Instream conditions</i></b></p> <p>Instream vegetation proved to be a topic of interest across all four community meetings.</p> <p>Discussion was based around a range of instream conditions, from the impact of siltation on waterholes and the loss of pools, to the recognition of the value of logs in the river as a part of river ecology. Concerns were also raised about River Red Gum saplings, Cumbungi, Lignum and Phragmites in waterways.</p> <p>The issue of siltation (build up of silt) of the river is of concern.</p>	<p>The North Central CMA has a policy for managing problem instream vegetation. This is currently being reviewed and needs some modification to address instream vegetation issues that have arisen in recent dry years.</p> <p>While direct management of instream vegetation may appear straightforward, we have a challenge to ensure any works undertaken meet state and local policies and legislation, and local concerns, and provide environmental benefits.</p> <p>The North Central CMA recognises that the prolonged dry and major changes in river flows have had an impact on the growth of instream vegetation. We are continuing to work with DSE to consider management options for emergent River Red Gums in the dry bed of the Loddon River.</p> <p>Siltation is the legacy of a system that has been highly modified over many years, and it will take time to correct. The release of environmental flows, and the presence of instream timber, may be used to scour out deep holes. However, there is a need to recognise that correcting the siltation issue will be an ongoing battle.</p> <p>Logs and instream vegetation provide diverse habitats to suit a variety of aquatic life. Native vegetation such as Cumbungi, Phragmites, and Lignum will take the opportunity to become more invasive in low flow conditions; however, they will die back when water levels increase. In the meantime they play a role in providing habitat and soil stability.</p>
<p><b><i>Stock Management</i></b></p> <p>Stock management along waterways generated conversation at all four meetings. The main issues were general stock management, grazing regimes, and grazing to control fire hazards.</p>	<p>The North Central CMA recognises that controlled grazing may be appropriate in some cases within a fenced riparian zone. Grazing and stock management arrangements are negotiated and included in agreements with landholders receiving project incentives.</p> <p>North Central CMA is participating in the development of state - wide guidelines to consider riparian grazing and how it will be included in landholder agreements. We will also be addressing this topic at future field days and/or in our new information sheets.</p>
<p><b><i>Water Quality</i></b></p> <p>The impacts of waste water treatment plants and towns on waterways were discussed. This topic was of particular concern at the Newbridge community meeting.</p>	<p>It is important to note that the North Central CMA has no authority or jurisdiction in terms of waste water outfalls, although our activities and those of community members, such as fencing, revegetation and erosion control, all help to improve water quality. However, it can take years for improvements to be realised.</p>

<p><b>Water Quality (continued)</b></p>	<p>Evidence suggests that some water quality trends in the area may be exceeding State Environment Protection Policy objective levels. The respective water authorities hold EPA corporate licences that regulate the operations at the Castlemaine (Coliban Water) and Maryborough (Central Highlands Water) waste water treatment plants. Licence conditions are specified to appropriately and sustainably manage identified environmental risks associated with a site's operations.</p> <p>Each licence holder must comply with the conditions specified in the licence and provide evidence to this effect on an annual basis via submission of a signed annual performance report/statement. The EPA may also require the licence holder to undertake a detailed ecological risk assessment to further investigate the potential risks associated with a site's operations, and implement remedial actions to address further identified risks.</p> <p>Should there be an incident or change in condition at the site, the licence holder must notify EPA of this and investigate the cause until the issue is rectified. In this situation, it is likely that the EPA will require the licence holder to prepare and submit an incident summary report. Should the issue continue at the site unabated, EPA will commence an investigation and then pursue the licence holder via its enforcement policy.</p> <p>EPA is the appropriate authority to contact for any concerns about wastewater discharges. For more information visit <a href="http://www.epa.vic.gov.au">www.epa.vic.gov.au</a> or call EPA's North West office: 5438 1000</p>
<p><b>Pest plant and animals</b></p> <p>Pest plant and animal management was discussed, and there was particular concern about absentee landowners not controlling pests on their land.</p> <p>Concerns were raised about the impact of carp on waterways.</p>	<p>North Central CMA acknowledges that the lack of action by absentee and other landholders can be a serious issue. Landholders are responsible by law for managing pest plants and animals on their land, including licensed waterway frontages, in particular regionally controlled and regionally prohibited weeds.</p> <p>The DPI is the agency responsible for pest plant and animal advice and enforcement. It conducts enforcement programs but often only where all other methods of engaging landholders and generating action have failed.</p> <p>The local Landcare group is often very active in managing pest plants and animals, and engaging and supporting landholders in this work. For further information on your nearest Landcare group, contact the Regional Landcare Coordinator Jodie Odgers on 5440 188. For pest plant and animal advice, contact DPI on 5430 4444.</p> <p>The Loddon Stressed River project team will talk to fish management experts about the impacts of carp in the Loddon system, and review current management options. We will keep you informed of progress through our project updates.</p>

**The next project update will be distributed in August 2010.**

**For more information about the project or to discuss your potential involvement, contact Jon Leever or Emma Wolters at the North Central CMA on 03 5448 7124 or Matt Hawken at DPI on 03 5450 9528.**



# Loddon Stressed River Project – area map

