

Communique 15 - June 2021

Message from the Chair

At the time of writing this communique some of our regions are dealing with the after effects of storms and floods. Our thoughts are with everyone who has been impacted and those working hard on the ground. As always, our CMAs will be supporting each other and their communities during another challenging period.

In our last communique in March, we did hope that things were becoming more certain around Covid-19. Whilst we continue to have setbacks, we are still grateful to live where we do as there are many others worse off than us.



Once again, we had to take our Vic Catchments meeting online as the most recent outbreak made a face-to-face meeting uncertain. Despite this we did hold a very successful gathering over two days which brought together some of our partners for very productive discussions (more detail is included later). It was significant that we were joined for this session by Harriet Shing, Parliamentary Secretary for Water, who heard first-hand the collaborative leadership approach Vic Catchments strives for.

Covid-19 also impacted our planned trip to Canberra to meet with Australian Government officials and Kate Andrews from NRM Regions Australia. This was to be an opportunity to discuss how CMAs can help deliver the Australian Government priorities and build relationships. We will look to reschedule this soon. Separately, I was lucky enough to meet with Minister Ley on her recent visit to the Mallee, who stressed the value of our work.

We have been collaborating with numerous partners through this period as Vic Catchments is increasingly recognised as a point of contact for those wishing to engage with our industry.

At the end of June, I come to the end of my two-year term. This period seems to have flown by. While Covid-19 has made collaboration and engagement challenging we are proud of what

we have been able to achieve, particularly in forming new partnerships. This includes an MOU with the VEWH, joint projects with Vic Water, direct contributions to the CES State of the Environment reporting processes and an ongoing partnership with Landcare Victoria. I would like to thank everyone for their support.

Sharyon Peart

Vic Catchments meeting May 31 to June 1

Our meeting was run over two days to alleviate the fatigue that occurs with online meetings.

May 31

The first day of our meeting was largely an update with standing items.

We reflected on our submission and presentation to the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Environmental Infrastructure where we communicated concrete examples of what the community cares about, what the environment brings to the community and how we play our role in securing the two. This was a perfect example of the role Vic Catchments plays in promoting the work CMAs do and the benefits that come with it.

We also reflected on the CMAs' ability to quickly get jobs on-ground and how effectively we can get budget out the door. This is something we recognise even more when we strive to recover from the impacts of the pandemic.

During this last period Vic Catchments has been actively participating in partners' forums and contributing to government engagement

processes. More details are outlined in the recent activities below.

We were pleased to be joined by Landcare Victoria Inc (LVI) CEO, Andrew McLean. Vic Catchments and LVI have an ongoing MOU. Andrew presented on the role of LVI and its Strategic Plan. Andrew and our Executive Officer, Tony Baker, have been working together on an action plan which aims to deliver our MOU but may also help deliver the LVI and Vic Catchments Strategic Plans.

June 1 - guest presenters

During our Tuesday session we heard from our partners about their priorities and areas for potential collaboration and effort. It was pleasing that they could stay for the entire session and hear from each other.

Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability (CES) - Dr Gillian Sparkes (Commissioner) and Scott Rawlings (Head of Science and Research)

Vic Catchments has been assisting the CES with some of its reporting efforts related to biodiversity, environmental water and marine and coasts.

Gillian presented on the “Victorian State of the Marine and Coastal Environment 2021 Report”. Gillian explained the genesis of the Marine and Coastal Act 2018 was the State of the Bays Report in 2016, which recommended that a marine knowledge framework for integrated research be developed. This, along with the State of the Environment 2018 report, are the basis for the work CES is currently undertaking to improve the scientific baseline



for marine and coastal environment reporting through collaboration with DEWLP and a range of other partners.

Gillian explained that the Victorian Government committed to a five-year reporting timeline under the State of the Bays Report with the first report due in 2024. The report CES is currently working on covers six units – Port Phillip Bay, Port Phillip Heads, Westernport, Gippsland Lakes, Corner Inlet and Nooramunga. The report is to be released November/December 2021.

We acknowledged the ground-breaking nature of the program and its critical link to independent science. The Commissioner thanked CMAs for their input to the research and for their ongoing collaboration.

There was agreement that we can continue to work together on reporting but also that CMAs could assist the CES with the development of its online platforms.

VicWater – Jo Plummer (Chair) and Peter Morison (CEO)



Vic Catchments and VicWater have been working more closely together since 2019. This was the first time VicWater had presented at a Vic Catchments meeting.

Jo explained that one of her goals was to deepen the value VicWater provided to Water Corps and key stakeholders. With a slogan “Better Together” she said there was more work to do at this critical time in linking our water and environmental resources and that the sum of all parts is greater than one. This



aligns well with one of Vic Catchments' strategic pillars of partnership and collaboration.

Peter gave a presentation on the background of VicWater, its membership and purpose. He described the three big challenges that Vic Catchments and VicWater share as climate change; changing populations; and changing expectations.

Peter outlined some areas that might generate shared value to members of both organisations including:

- Sector development.
- Increasing industry capability.
- Leadership and innovation.

The strong partnership around the secondment portal was acknowledged and it was agreed there were many more opportunities for collaboration that will be further explored.

***Victorian Environmental Water Holder –
Sarina Loo and Paulo Lay (co-CEOs)***



Vic Catchments has an MOU with the VEWH and we have regularly caught up to progress collaborative efforts.

Sarina put forward the idea of an environmental water leadership group with the view to strengthening discussion on strategic issues. This would involve DELWP, CMAs, VEWH and from time to time guests such as VicWater. It was agreed to explore this further through the CMAs' CEOs.



Paulo shared with us the VEWH's strategic landscape approach for the management of environmental water. The emphasis in planning is moving from site-based decision making to a broader view on temporal and spatial scale. It was agreed to explore the merits and challenges of this further through the CMAs' CEOs.

Harriet Shing

We were thrilled to again be joined by Parliamentary Secretary for Water, Harriet Shing, after she joined us in February.

Harriet listened to all our speakers and reflected that it was an exceptional event with three key themes:

- Collaboration – in and across industry.
- Consideration – of a changing landscape underpinned by a science and informed by strategy.
- Continuity – follow through.



Harriet spoke of the need for the sector to work in common and for challenges to be met with good consultation and effective innovation. She explained that diverse leadership will enable different voices in the community to be part of the continuous improvement process.

Harriet also outlined the recent funding announcements from the Victorian Government from EC5. CMAs are at the forefront of delivery and some of these projects and initiatives are already underway.

Harriet offered to be an advocate and conduit for any issues the group wishes to escalate or amplify with government. She undertook to convey the substance of the meeting to the Minister.

Recent activities

Partnerships and collaborations

Vic Catchments continues to be a point of contact for industry stakeholders seeking support and input.

Sharyon attended the VicWater Connect Conference, which was an excellent event, and a great opportunity to connect with others in the Water Industry.

Tony attended a Dja Dja Wurrung-led workshop with Jenny Wilson from GBCMA regarding the Victorian Revegetation review. A range of industry stakeholders attended. The focus was how to coordinate the revegetation industry to build capacity to meet the Biodiversity 2037 targets. There was a strong theme around how to support First Nations People to be part of the industry that supports an increase in revegetation activities.

Tony has been invited to participate in discussions about the Nature Locator being explored by the People and Parks Foundation. This follows on from the work Dianne Thomas from NECMA did with the group. The concept is for an online tool that links people with nature-based recreation opportunities <https://peopleandparks.org/>

Tony attended the Landcare Victoria (LVI) AGM and strategic workshop in May. At the AGM



Terry Hubbard stood down as Chair of LVI and Jane Carney was elected. The strategic workshop involved Landcare members and partners discussing how LVI might achieve the outcomes of its strategic plan. There were many opportunities where CMAs could work with LVI including:

- Data collection and analysis.
- Marketing and storytelling.
- Governance and capacity building.

This will further inform the Vic Catchments and Landcare Victoria joint action plan aimed at driving the outcomes of our MOU.

Sharyon and Tony also met with the President of the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV), Cr David Clark and Claire Dunn MAV's Manager – Built and Natural Environment. This provided an opportunity to discuss areas of joint interest including:

- Planning and development.
- Floodplain management.
- Climate change adaptation and mitigation.
- The protection of our natural resources such as water and biodiversity.
- Community engagement.

Tony will be working with Claire to explore opportunities for further collaboration.

A stronger industry

It has been a busy period and we have coordinated some Vic Catchments responses including the:

- Proposed regulated watercourse land regulations – these are the regulations that will control access to licensed crown frontage for camping.
- Right Plant, Right Way – Revegetation Review Victoria.

Vic Catchments also made a written submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Environmental Infrastructure for Growing Populations. As a result of this submission, we were asked to present to the Inquiry. Sharyon Peart and Tony presented on what CMAs do and how we can contribute. A copy of our presentation is available on request. Hansard is also available online.

Vic Catchments is also taking part in an upcoming workshop (Shaping Victoria's Biosecurity Future – 17-18 June) that is being coordinated by Agriculture Victoria. This follows an interview process that David Brennan and Tony participated in last October. Shaping Victoria's Biosecurity Future is part of Agriculture Victoria's efforts to strengthen Victoria's biosecurity system.

Our people

With some uncertainty around CMA budgets the decision has been made to extend Tony Baker's acting arrangement for the Executive Officer position until 30 September 2021.

As Sharyon Peart will be stepping down as Chair of Vic Catchments at the end of June, it is

fitting that we pay tribute to her efforts. Sharyon has led Vic Catchments over the past two years, the majority of it in the most trying of circumstances. The east of the State was severely impacted by fire, drought was a reality in some regions and then Covid-19 impacted our ability to engage. Despite this Sharyon was able to establish an MOU with VEWH, develop a new Charter and Strategic Plan and establish several governance improvements. More importantly Sharyon was able to build and strengthen relationships with the Minister's Office, senior DELWP staff and leaders of partner organisations. These relationships have been built on trust, respect and honesty. This collaborative approach is the core purpose of Vic Catchments and Sharyon went above and beyond to make it happen and show that #CMAsgetitdone. Thank you Sharyon.

Sharyon's farewell speech to Vic Catchments is included below.

I would like to say just a few words about Vic Catchments evolution as this will be my last meeting as chair.

About five years ago there was recognition in the then group of chairs and CEOs that we needed a more formal approach to our collective gatherings. Graeme Dear did some research and we took on the idea of a forum approach with an Executive Officer (EO) that could work with the CEOs' group and run the Forum.

Peter Veenker took on the chair's role and John Riddiford was appointed EO, this was certainly a great partnership. Over time the role of deputy chair was introduced in order to spread

the workload and develop some collegiate succession.

Peter's positive and encouraging influence to support and drive the collegiate spirit of working together has brought us to the where we are today as Vic Catchments.

At this time John was working on the most appropriate way to formalise arrangements with our stakeholders. Peter and John did a great deal of work to socialise this concept of Vic Catchments.

It was in late 2017 we signed our first MOU with Landcare Victoria, a great achievement, with the then Parliamentary Secretary of Environment, Anthony Carbines, with us on the day.

Our Actions and Achievements report was also born - a great bookend for the narrative of Vic Catchments.

As a group we have continued to work on our strategy, our CEOs working together to deliver positive outcomes both strategic and on the ground.

Most importantly, we have continued to develop our relationship with DELWP and continue to meet on a quarterly basis with Helen Vaughn our Deputy Secretary and Karen Lau our Executive Director Catchments, Waterways, Cities and Towns.

Peter asked me if I would step up as acting chair in early 2019.

Jarod Lyon was seconded to the EO role and together we wanted to take the next steps in

giving Vic Catchments a face whilst continuing to explore opportunities to collaborate.

The work of OCOC and defining ICM has been an integral part of the journey and telling the stories as well as working alongside our Traditional Owners.

We were proud to be sponsors of the River Basin Management Society and finally have a logo and banner that spoke to our work.

We have continued fostering our relationship with VEWH through the development of an MOU and to strengthen our relationship with the Commissioner of Environment and Sustainability and have been invited to join the Commissioners round table as endorsed by the Minister for Environment.

Tony Baker began his secondment in October 2019 and I thank him for continuing to extend his time with us as we work through these most difficult of times

Along with managing 'business as usual' extremely diligently over the period, he has maintained and strengthened Vic Catchments' established relationships and partnerships with stakeholders as well as continued to build on emerging relationships and pave the way for new opportunities. Most importantly we continue to build trust and respect across the sector and I think that is evident by the calibre of guests we have joining us today and is testament to Tony's work, evidence that we are continuing to grow and evolve.

These small steps are all part of a long journey that sees Vic Catchments now embedded in the

business as usual of NRM in Victoria and I am excited for the future.

The Chairs group will be working in the coming weeks to appoint the Chair and deputy.