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Vic Catchments Forum Newsletter | Issue 24 | September 2023



COMMUNIQUÉ

Message from the Chair

I am pleased to write my first message as Chair of Vic Catchments. We have an exciting year ahead of us as we look to form new partnerships and work with government and stakeholders on new issues to improve the management of our catchments.

In taking on the role, I would like to thank our past Chair, Peter Hilbig, for his service. Peter steered a steady ship as we came out the other side of the COVID-19 pandemic and has left Vic Catchments in a strong position. He has strengthened our relationships with our partners, reinvigorated the Vic Catchments team and was instrumental in advocating for a robust director development program which we are now seeing play out. We are now supporting VicWater as they take the lead on the program.

The Minister has announced new Board directors for CMAs and Water Authorities effective 1st October. That means some changes to the membership of Vic Catchments with Sarah Parker replacing Helen Reynolds as Chair of Goulburn Broken CMA and Euan Ferguson replacing Julie Miller-Markoff as Chair of North Central CMA.

Helen has stood down from GBCMA and we thank her for her contribution to Vic Catchments, particularly her work as our representative on NRM RA. We congratulate Julie on her appointment as the new Chair of the Victorian Environmental Water Holder

(VEWH), thank her for her contribution to Vic Catchments and look forward to continuing to work with her in nurturing our relationship with VEWH. CMAs and Vic Catchments are preparing induction material which will ensure new Directors hit the ground running.



Our CMAs and Melbourne Water continue to wait on word of NHT funding from the Australian Government. A quick resolution is needed to ensure critical threatened species and ecosystem threat management activities can occur over the spring period.

We welcomed Minister for Water, Harriet Shing, to our last Vic Catchments' meeting. Minister Shing has been a keen supporter of Vic Catchments and our CMAs and it was exciting to welcome her to our meeting. It was pleasing to receive positive feedback from the Minister on our collective performance.

CMAs have entered their final year of the Victorian Government's Environmental Contribution Tranche 5 funding. It will be a busy year for us all as we look to close out projects but also develop plans for Tranche 6.

Cath Jenkins

Vic Catchments Meeting

Our August meeting was held online on 25th August 2023. The next meeting is scheduled to be face to face in Melbourne on Thursday 16th of November 2023. We will finalise our 2024 meeting schedule when our new Boards are formed.

Victorian Water Minister - Harriet Shing



We were delighted to again welcome Minister Shing to the Forum.

Minister Shing spoke glowingly about the work CMAs have done over the past 25 years and that they will do over the coming decades. She stressed the importance of partnerships in progressing key strategies and said CMAs have demonstrated best practice in forging those partnerships.

The Minister acknowledged government was aware of the need to fund CMAs so they can continue to engage in projects such as climate change mitigation, Regional Waterways Strategies, Water is Life (WiL) and the path to net zero by 2045.

Finally, she asked CEOs to thank their teams for working so hard to give effect to the government's priorities, stating that the lives of future generations will be better because of the work of CMAs.

DEECA (Agriculture Victoria) Update

Dougal Purcell and Kate Linden provided an overview of the organisation structure of Agriculture Victoria (Ag Vic) within DEECA now that it has been integrated.



They explained that the Agriculture Strategy launched in 2019 promotes a strong, innovative and sustainable agriculture sector, with five key themes: recover, grow, modernise, protect and promote.

Emergency management for disease and climate action are priorities in the department. The Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak in Indonesia and the Lumpy Skin outbreak meant a boost to funding with \$43 million provided for preparedness. The Strengthening Victoria's Biosecurity System (SVBS) program has led to the development of a strategy that looks at Biosecurity more broadly, including from a marine, coastal and Traditional Owner perspective as well as on-farm. Vic Catchments has been supporting this process.

Critical Agriculture has a pathway to contribute to net zero by 2045 and actions have been taken to meet that goal with development of a climate pledge and accompanying statement. Ag Vic have invested heavily in research to reduce methane emissions and continue to build capability in the sector around climate. They are working to counteract some of the misinformation in the industry about climate by providing funding for science-based advice.

As part of the *modernise* theme of the Government's Agriculture Strategy, the AgTech Regional Innovation Network (AgRIN) has been established to examine what the future of the sector looks like in technology including what role it might play in reducing emissions. AgTech is now seen as an industry and the aim is for it to grow and be well connected to the Agriculture industry.

Following its integration into DEECA, Ag Vic is benefiting from being part of a large organisation that has a strong regional presence and many synergies with Ag Vic's priorities.

Kate briefed the forum on the Ag Services operational delivery model. She outlined challenges to the delivery model such as prioritising technical expertise; working in partnerships to address key issues across regions and providing evidenced-based advice to farmers.

The Carbon Farming Outreach program saw Ag Vic and CMAs work together in that space for the first time and Kate hoped that cooperation would continue to evolve. Similarly, Ag Vic had worked successfully with Landcare and CMAs on recruitment for the On-farm Emissions Action pilot program.

BoM Climate Services for Agriculture Portal

As a follow-up to BoM's presentation to the CMA CEOs Forum, Stephanie Dickson and Elizabeth Johnston joined the meeting to provide an overview of the Climate Services for Agriculture (CSA) tool. CSA was set up under the Future Drought Fund as a long-term business planning product for farmers and advisors using 60 years of historical data and future climate projections from the CSIRO and BoM.



Stephanie provided an overview of CSA, how it might be used and the type of information it can provide. Discussion at the CEOs Forum was about the possibility of partnering with CMAs in a train-the-trainer approach to disseminating the *My Climate View* portion of the tool to farmers. There was also interest expressed in using the Regional View of the tool for use in CMAs in a range of areas particularly if tailored to include environmental factors such as native vegetation and weeds. It was identified that there was capability to add CMA data.

Some areas of relevance for CMAs included:

- Use of the tool to predict the impact of Climate Change on crops and that could extend to impact on pest plants and native species re-vegetation
- Possible use for bigger policy decision-making for landscape-scale change. For example, it might inform the Murray Darling Basin Plan policy or decisions around wetlands and environmental watering. If it can be used interactively, there may be a real benefit to this.

Vic Catchments and BoM agreed to continue discussions on opportunities to use CSA.



Partnerships and collaboration

Director Development

We continue to support VicWater in the evolution of the Director Development program. The current focus is developing an induction program for our new Boards which will be appointed in October. The VicWater led program has three elements:



- Corporate secretaries' training for water corporation and CMA staff that will be involved in Board inductions.
- Director development forum – a two-day event in Melbourne designed for all Board directors.

- Director instruction webinar – aimed at new Directors.

WaterAble

We attended the 2023 WaterAble AGM on 3 August 2023. WaterAble is an unincorporated body supported by VicWater. It aims to improve inclusion and access for employees and customers with a disability in the Water sector. Their leadership has presented to Vic Catchments previously and it has now changed its rules to enable it to expand nationally. Organisations will be able to apply to be a partner organisation (a membership fee applies) and staff from these organisations will be able to seek membership. All current members will retain their membership.



[Learn more about WaterAble..](#)

MAV

We have met with MAV to discuss their response to the inquiry into the 2022 floods. We have agreed to continue the dialogue and look for areas of common interest and to query issues.



Landcare Victoria (LVI)

We met with Acting Chair of LVI Claire Hetzel, to introduce Vic Catchments and discuss our current priorities. We have begun a review of our MOU, which began in 2018.



A Stronger Industry

Cat Management Strategy

Vic Catchments has been contributing to discussions regarding DEECA's (Animal Welfare Victoria) development of a Cat Management Strategy for Victoria. The Strategy will establish an integrated and coordinated approach to cat management in Victoria to improve cat management practices and outcomes. The timeline for developing the Strategy is outlined below.

Strategy Development Timeline



Productivity Commission review of MDBP

Vic Catchments contributed content via NRM RA on the Productivity Commission's review of the implementation of the Murray Darling Basin Plan. We provided a summary of the complementary measures that were developed by CMAs in collaboration with DEECA several years ago.



Victorian Biosecurity Strategy

Agriculture Victoria released the draft Victorian Biosecurity Strategy for comment via [Engage Victoria](#). Comments closed on 16 August 2023. Vic Catchments believe it is a very thorough document and we will be assisting with the implementation planning this year.



Future Drought Fund Review

Vic Catchments made a submission to the Productivity Commission's review of the Future Drought Fund. We highlighted the generally positive experiences through the grants programs and how there could be benefits in having the program aligning or linked with Regional Catchment Strategies. We also pointed out areas for improvements, particularly regarding the Drought Hubs and referenced the more detailed submission by NRM RA. We were able to reiterate these comments in more detail at a meeting, arranged by NRM RA, with the Productivity Commission along with other states and territories. There is consensus across the country from the NRM industry that the Hubs need to focus on science and that other organisations should be engaged to perform engagement activities.



DAFF Sustainable Agriculture Program

We participated in a co-design workshop in May for DAFF's Sustainable Agriculture program. DAFF are also interested in working with the NRM jurisdictional representatives

across the country. DAFF prepared material that we shared with CMAs in the lead up to develop our position. Vic Catchments was able to cover everything that was put forward and have provided additional material to NRM Regions Australia to use to further advise DAFF if required.



Our People

Thank you.

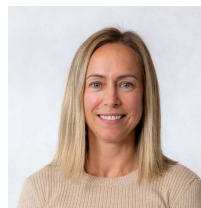
We acknowledge the departure of Helen Vaughan and Karen Lau from DEECA. Both have been great supporters of Vic Catchments. Karen served on our Executive for several years.

We farewelled John Riddiford (left) and Graeme Dear (right), CEOs of Corangamite CMA and East Gippsland CMAs, respectively. Both John and Graeme are very passionate supporters of the Integrated Catchment Management model. Graeme was a leader in the formation of Vic Catchments and John was Executive Officer of Vic Catchments for several years.



Welcome

We welcome two new CEOs. Bec Hemming (left) to East Gippsland CMA and Amber Clarke (right) to Corangamite CMA. Both are well known to us through their leadership at EGCMA and DEECA respectively. We look forward to working with them in their new roles.



Upcoming Events

New Director Introduction webinar 2 November 2023 (VicWater/Vic Catchments)

National Chairs forum 1st and 2nd of November 2023 – Online.

Director Development Forum 22nd and 23rd of Feb 2024 (VicWater)

Vic Catchments Future Meeting Schedule

Thursday, 16 November 2023 - Melbourne

February 2024 - to be confirmed

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We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the country we work on and pay our respects to their elders past, present and emerging