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Vic Catchments Forum Newsletter | Issue 26 | March 2024



VIC CATCHMENTS

A Collaboration of CMAs



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COMMUNIQUÉ

Message from the Chair

This is our first Communique for the New Year, so welcome to 2024.

We've recently had devastating fires in the west of Victoria. The impact on these rural communities will be ongoing and our thoughts are with them. Our CMAs will be making assessments in the coming weeks to determine what recovery actions are needed to support the environment and natural resources so they can bounce back quickly

Our February Vic Catchments meeting was online. We welcomed Melinda Knapp to Vic Catchments. Melinda has recently been appointed to the role of Executive Director Catchments, Waterways, Cities and Towns in DEECA. This position holds a seat on the Vic Catchments Executive and we look forward to Melinda's contribution.

We were lucky enough to have the new Chair of the Victorian Environmental Water Holder, Julie Miller-Markoff, join us. Julie is the former Chair of North Central CMA so she has a very good understanding of our industry and the challenges and opportunities we face. We look forward to working with Julie, CEO Sarina Loo, and their team.



The new CMA Boards are all in place and settled and we have been actively participating in several Director Development programs that have been led by our partners, VicWater, with the support of DEECA and Vic Catchments. These have been a great way for Board members to get up to speed with the key issues facing CMAs and our focus areas for the next few years.

Cath Jenkins

Vic Catchments Meeting

Our February meeting was online. Our next meeting is on the 16th of May face to face in Melbourne.

DEECA - Water and Catchments

We welcomed Melinda Knapp (right) as the newly appointed Executive Director of Water and Catchments. Melinda advised that Kirsten Shelly had been appointed Deputy Secretary of DEECA's Water and Catchments Group. Kirsten is well known to us as she recently represented Melbourne Water on Vic Catchments.

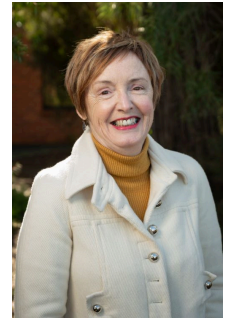


Melinda provided an update on the Yoorrook Justice Commission. This is a very involved process with a huge amount of information being provided to the Commission and a large amount of preparation for hearings.

DEECA invited public consultation from the community on the Victorian Waterway Management Strategy from July-September 2023. A report stemming from that consultation has been distributed to CMA CEOs. A final version will be available online.

Victorian Environmental Water Holder (VEWH)

We welcomed Julie Miller-Markoff and Sarina Loo to the meeting for an update on what is happening at the VEWH, including their new 10-Year Strategy. Vic Catchments and the VEWH have agreed to review their MOU earlier than the previously agreed date in August in order to incorporate any relevant focus areas from the Strategy.



Julie explained that the VEWH Commissioners (three of whom are new) bring a range of skills and backgrounds to the table and, along with the VEWH staff, are well placed to deliver the VEWH's strategic priorities in the future.

An update was provided on the VEWH's Water is Life Traditional Owner-led seasonal watering proposal trials. Early reflections included:

- Each relationship is unique and each site has its own challenges.
- Direct Traditional Owner engagement is a new role for VEWH that requires capacity building.
- Exploring transition pathways and enabling self-determination is a complex environment with lots of uncertainty. This will take time and significant resources.

The Environmental Water Matters Forum on 15 February 2024, was the first held since COVID. There was real value in bringing the broader stakeholders together, all of whom had a passion for healthy waterways, but had competing views on timing and access to those waterways. The challenge is to get everyone to agree that short term inconvenience for longer-term benefit will ultimately improve everyone's experience.

[Learn more about VEWH...](#)

Aboriginal and youth delegate positions

Each CMA has been asked by the Minister for Water to appoint an Aboriginal and youth delegate to their Board. CMAs are well advanced in progressing the appointments and are taking a number of different approaches - some were advertising the positions, some were sharing the process with Water Corporations, some were emphasising the roles as professional development opportunities.

Water Industry Advisory Group for Federation Uni

Ian Gibson (pictured right) of the West Gippsland Campus of Federation University, joined the Vic Catchments meeting to discuss possible CMA involvement in an Industry Advisory Group (IAG) being established to advise the University's regional skill network on skill needs for the water industry.



Federation University has moved to a Cooperative university model where it develops and designs courses to reflect the needs of local communities in association with local industries. The new model will begin in 2024 covering a range of engineering, IT, business, science and environment courses.

As there is so much commonality across the regions in the water industry, it was decided to establish an IAG at state-wide level rather than regionally.

It was agreed that after further input from Ian, Vic Catchments could then determine how CMAs would like to be involved. This project aligns well with the CMA discussions on industry capacity building.

Fire management to protect waterways and catchments

Ewan Waller, East Gippsland Chair, and Bec Hemming, East Gippsland CEO, presented a paper on fire management which built on previous representations to Vic Catchments. The paper proposes holding a day-long briefing on-country for CMA Board representatives, CEOs and Senior Managers on:



- The history and impact of fire on catchments and waterways
- Prevention, response, and recovery programs; and
- Initial discussions on the outcomes and changes we are seeking as a collective.

The Forum agreed to progress this important piece of work.

Partnerships and collaboration



We have continued to meet with NRM RA and other states and territories on a fortnightly basis. Recent discussions have included:

- National Heritage Trust funding delays.
- National Soils Action Plan – Vic Catchments provided case studies from our past actions and achievements report to demonstrate to government how we can contribute.
- Nature positive CRC – A bid will be going in this year from The University of



Commissioner
for Environmental
Sustainability
Victoria

Our Chair continues to engage with the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability through the Commissioners' roundtable. The CES State of the Environment report has been released and can be found on the CES website.

Adelaide. NRM RA are a general partner.

- Implications of federal funding cuts on NRM RA finances and members levies.



The Chair and Executive Officer met with the new Chair of the VEWH, Julie Miller-Markoff and CEO, Sarina Loo, in February. They discussed the review of the MOU which was due in August 2024 and it was agreed to commence the review immediately. They spoke about opportunities to collaborate, including delivering the VEWH 10-year strategy, EC6 funding outcomes and Regional Waterway Strategy development.



Vic Catchments attended Corangamite CMA's launch of the the Kitjarra-dja-bul Bullarto langi-ut Masterplan. The event was attended by several local politicians and other dignitaries. It was a great opportunity to showcase how CMAs get things done with partners and Traditional Owners.



Our Executive Officer spoke at the Landcare Victoria (LVI) webinar in November as part of the launch of the Victorian Landcare Plan. This was an opportunity to talk about the history and strength of the relationship between Landcare and CMAs and confirm our commitment to our MOU with LVI. We are in the process of reviewing our MOU.

A Stronger Industry

Victorian Biosecurity Strategy roundtable

In November Vic Catchments participated in a two-day Victorian Biosecurity Strategy roundtable. The event was designed to inform priority actions. Vic Catchments reiterated the role CMAs can play and the value in our regional planning. We explained that CMAs had previously developed invasive pest plant and animal strategies and that these could be revised if funding was available.



Actions & Achievements Report

We have completed the 2022-23 Actions and Achievements report. The report will be released following its endorsement by the Minister.

IBAC workshop

In February, Vic Catchments participated in an Independent Broad-Based Anti-Corruption Commission (IBAC) workshop. Representatives from Victoria's water sector worked together with IBAC to explore corruption risks and mitigation strategies in the sector. IBAC will take the learnings from the workshop to develop corruption prevention resources for the water sector. We are exploring the option for a representative of IBAC to present at our next Vic Catchments meeting.

Director Development Forum 2024

CMAs were very well represented at the Water Sector Director Development Forum on the 22nd and 23rd of February in Melbourne. VicWater led the forum with the support of DEECA and Vic Catchments. It was designed for new and experienced Directors within the public sector including water corporations, CMAs, VEWV and the Birrarung Council. The two-day program provided a great opportunity to network, participate in peer-to-peer learning and gain insights into current issues relevant to public entity directors.

Themes were timely and relevant and included: good to great governance; trends in tech and AI; cyber risk management; psycho-social workplace safety; emergency management; transition to net zero; and Traditional owner self-determination. Deb Brown from DEECA provided an entertaining and enlightening presentation on the Victorian water sector (available via Vic Catchments)

Our People

Rex Candy

We are very pleased that Rex Candy was awarded the Public Service Medal in the Australia Day Honours List (Meritorious Awards) for outstanding public service in waterway management.

A former employee of the East Gippsland CMA, the rivers of Gippsland wouldn't be what they are today without Rex's expertise. His achievements and successes over the past 25 years are evident in the health and ongoing rehabilitation efforts in the Cann, Snowy and Genoa Rivers.

Rex has also been a mentor to many up-and-coming waterway managers across Victoria (see the photo above of him imparting some of his expertise). In retirement, Rex remains a key technical expert in river health and floodplain management. He is still called upon to provide his skills and knowledge to complex expert panels, hearings and recovery efforts following impacts and disasters, such as major flooding and landscape-scale bushfires.



Vale Kevin Knight

It is with sadness that we acknowledge the passing of Kevin Knight. Kevin was one of the original Corangamite Board members in 1997 and served on the Catchment and Land Protection Board prior to the establishment of CMAs. Kevin received an OAM for his services to natural resource management, as well as the prestigious McKell Medal along with his sister Alice (CCMA Chair until 2021), for conservation farming and community involvement in NRM. Our thoughts are with Alice.

Vic Catchments Future Meeting Schedule

Thursday, May 16, 2024 (face-to-face)

Friday, August 23, 2024 (online)

Thursday, November 14, 2024 (face-to-face)



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Vic Catchments

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