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Vic Catchments Forum Newsletter | Issue 27 | May 2024



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COMMUNIQUÉ

Message from the Chair

Winter is almost upon us and while things are getting cold, we have yet to see a break that brings with it widespread rainfall. With long term forecasting somewhat undecided, there is some nervousness about what the year might bring for our farming communities and our waterways.

We were pleased to be able to hold our May 2024 meeting face to face in Melbourne. This allowed us to reconnect in a meaningful way as CMAs but also with some of our partners. Details of our meeting and other actions are outlined below.

The obvious highlight for Vic Catchments and our CMAs over this period was receiving the Nature Positive Award at the 35th National Banksia Awards. This is an amazing honour and great recognition for the more than 26 years of service our CMAs have collectively given to Victoria. We were lucky enough to have Banksia Foundation CEO, Graz van Egmond, attend our May meeting and she was full of praise for our nomination and our efforts to deliver outcomes for our regions. We look forward to working with Graz and the Banksia Foundation Alumni to build connections and partnerships with like-minded organisations.

The Victorian Catchment Management Authorities' (CMAs) Actions and Achievements Report 2022-23, has been published and once again delivers good news for Victoria's catchments and communities. It showcases the achievements and outcomes of the Victorian regional integrated catchment management approach delivered through Victoria's 10 CMAs. Highlights include:



- 95,000 people engaged via CMA engagement events.
- 399,000 hectares of pest plant and animal control works undertaken.
- 3,000 hectares of native vegetation improved.
- 9,000 hectares with improved agricultural practices.

More details are included below.

Happy reading.

Cath Jenkins



Vic Catchments Meeting

Our May meeting was face to face in Melbourne on 16th May 2024. Our next meeting is online on the 23rd of August.

DEECA - Water and Catchments

Melinda Knapp (Executive Director) and Nikki Gemmill (Director)

We were grateful for an update provided by Nikki Gemmill (DEECA) on the status of the development of the Victorian Waterway Management Strategy (VWMS). DEECA is currently collating a large amount of policy work into a Partners Draft that is being tested with CMAs and other stakeholders. Once it has been refined, it will go to the Minister for Water between October and December this year. Nikki thanked CMAs for all of their input. It has been an intensive process and the CMA Waterways Managers Forum has been heavily involved, as have the CEOs.



Melinda Knapp (DEECA) also provided the following updates:

- The Murray Darling Prospectus has been published. This is in response to a change to Commonwealth legislation regarding additional water purchases. DEECA is starting a conversation with communities and attempting to take a strategic approach to water returns. The prospectus is available on the Engage Vic and DEECA websites.
- Parliamentary Flood Inquiry: An interim flood inquiry report was tabled in Echuca on 18th April. No recommendations have been made at this stage. The final report is due for tabling on 30 June.

Banksia Foundation

As a result of winning the Nature Positive Banksia Award, Vic Catchments has become a member of the Banksia Foundation Alumni. So, we were delighted to welcome Banksia Foundation CEO, Grazyna van Egmond, to our meeting. Graz spoke glowingly of our award nomination, particularly the way it was written and the compelling story that it told.



Graz said the nomination reviewers were impressed, not only by the quality of the submission, but the fact that while demonstrating longevity, CMAs are still being innovative. The other thing Graz found pleasing was the innovation around partnerships. Some entries claim they have partnerships but after further examination, there is often no real discussion and sharing of information – that is not the case with CMAs.

Graz provided background on how the Banksia awards began 35 years ago and her own journey since joining 25 years ago. The awards have changed over time, from initially focusing on reducing pollution, to now bringing in social as well as environmental aspects and focusing on sustainability. The Foundation is looking to promote Australian efforts in sustainability around the world via DFAT. In addition, the Foundation publishes sustainability success stories on their website - information which is downloaded 500 times a month around the world. They aim to create an Australian library of excellence in sustainability - Vic Catchments efforts are included in that library.

We look forward to working with Graz, the Banksia Foundation staff and Alumni as we explore new

opportunities to collaborate with a broader range of entities looking to improve environmental sustainability across Australia.



Graz van Egmond and members of the Vic Catchments Forum with the Banksia Trophy at their May meeting in Melbourne

Aboriginal and youth delegates positions

CMAs provided updates that indicated each CMA is in the process of recruiting Aboriginal and youth delegates to their Board, as directed by the Minister for Water. Some have made appointments and are currently inducting recruits. This exciting initiative will help develop capacity in the regions for future recruitment to CMA Boards.

Partnerships and collaboration

Vic Biosecurity Interagency Committee (BIC)

Vic Catchments is now a member of Victoria's Biosecurity Interagency Committee (BIC) and our Executive Officer attended the latest meeting in March. The purpose of the BIC is to provide a formal consultation channel to support the management of the Victorian Government's responsibilities for biosecurity, including where there is joint responsibility or an overlap of responsibility between departments. The BIC will help strengthen Victoria's biosecurity system and support more effective management of biosecurity risks, through improved cooperation on strategy implementation, policy reform, planning and preparedness. Effectively it will oversee the implementation of the Biosecurity Strategy. The BIC membership includes:

- Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, including the following divisions:
 - Agriculture Victoria



- Biodiversity
- Water and Catchments
- Environment Protection Authority
- Parks Victoria
- Victorian Fisheries Authority
- Department of Health
- Emergency Management Victoria
- Department of Premier and Cabinet
- Department of Treasury and Finance
- Department of Government Services
- Vic Catchments

Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability

Vic Catchments has been supporting the Office of the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability (OCES) with the collection of data for the State of the Marine and Coastal Environment 2024, and State of Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks 2024, reports. We have been coordinating the provision of data that is uniquely held by CMAs.



A Stronger Industry

35th National Banksia Foundation Awards

Vic Catchments were represented at the 35th National Banksia Foundation Awards in Melbourne on the 4th of April by Cath Jenkins (Chair), Tony Baker (Executive Officer) and Sally O'Neill (West Gippsland CMA). It was an honour to receive the Nature Positive Award, particularly as we were up against some very high-profile finalists.



In accepting the award, Cath acknowledged our relatively small, yet passionate and dedicated teams, that deliver projects on behalf of the Australian and Victorian governments and other investors in natural resource management. Cath explained “that we have long term, experienced people who live within their communities and understand what makes them tick. This means we are problem solving organisations that are agile, responsive and adaptive. Our long-term certainty and consistency allow for a long-term vision where we look to the future and dedicate ourselves to caring for catchments and landscape change, side by side with the community”. Cath also thanked and acknowledged the Traditional Owners of the lands and waters where we work. Cath expressed gratitude for the support and Traditional Ecological Knowledge of First Nations peoples across Victoria and explained that together we are working to heal Country.

2022-23 Vic Catchments Actions & Achievements Report

The 2022-23 Vic Catchments Actions and Achievements (AA) report has been published and printed. A summary document has also been produced outlining the key achievements of CMAs for the period. The report has been published on the Vic Catchments website.



Natural Capital

In the last few years there has been a reinvigorated conversation about the concept of Natural Capital Accounting as a means of demonstrating the worth, or measuring improved value, of natural assets.

The natural capital approach extends the economic notion of capital (resources that enable economic production) to the natural environment. The term 'natural capital' conceptualises nature as assets: stocks of resources such as clean air, water, soil and living things which produce flows of ecosystem services that have value because they benefit humans (CSIRO 2023).

CMA's are involved in a range of activities associated with the current increased focus and activity.

Vic Catchments has been successful in acquiring funds to examine this from a statewide viewpoint and examine the key gaps, major initiatives and better ways of sharing knowledge already gained in this area by CMAs and others that have initiated their own projects. The funding will support Vic Catchments to:

- undertake a stock take exercise to identify existing activity and links to national and state efforts.
- scope existing barriers and opportunities for CMA's to progress initiatives, including data, knowledge, systems and resource barriers.

The project will involve a State Workshop involving key parties. The project will run for 12 months.

Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan

Four years ago, the Victorian government developed seven Climate Change Adaptation Action Plans including one focused on the Water Cycle. Vic Catchments has been closely involved in their development and steering groups looking at their implementation.

Vic Catchments, with the support of DEECA, has received funding to progress CMA initiatives which support water cycle adaptation outcomes in Victoria. This program has been designed to improve the resilience of Victoria's water cycle system to the impacts of climate change by supporting the delivery of catchment management adaptation initiatives that support water cycle outcomes. The program will also deliver key outcome objectives of the Victorian Water Cycle Adaptation Action Plan 2022-26 (WCAAP). This collaborative program will address gaps, opportunities, and priorities. A "learning by doing" approach will be used to inform good adaptation practices for this program and future work. The initiative will result in:

- Increased capacity and capability, which will be carried forward beyond the term of this funding agreement through sector-wide learning and knowledge sharing.
- On-ground action through delivery of priority projects.

The project will run until June 2027.

Land and Agriculture

In partnership with Agriculture Victoria and Landcare Victoria, Vic Catchments has been successful in joining the Australian Government's Carbon Outreach Program. The Carbon Farming Outreach Program will support Australian farmers and land managers to reduce emissions and store carbon. This will help the agriculture and land sector play its part in Australia's transition to net zero emissions. The program aims to:



- support farmers and land managers to make decisions to reduce emissions and store carbon
- build capacity of trusted and independent advisers to deliver advice to farmers and land managers
- provide access to clear and culturally appropriate information on carbon farming.

Agriculture Victoria are leading the project with support from Vic Catchments and Landcare Victoria in rolling it out to farmers in Victoria. This includes delivering training and advice to Australian farmers and land managers, including First Nations peoples.

National Heritage Trust (NHT)

Katie Warner represented Vic Catchments, along with two NRM Group CEOs from South Australia and Western Australia, on a small delegation to Canberra recently, led by Kate Andrews of NRM Regions Australia. They met with Australian Government representatives involved in the National Heritage Trust (NHT) program. One of the aims of the meeting was to understand perspectives of, what all acknowledged, as a challenging time for the industry during the transition from National Landcare Program 2 to the new NHT program. The meeting was very positive with a range of actions agreed to, which will help drive improvements in the program roll out.

Fire and fuel management

Vic Catchments, via our CEOs, have agreed to work with DEECA to investigate opportunities to improve fire and fuel management that deliver improved outcomes for catchments. For example, more frequent and larger high intensity fires are impacting on both water quality and quantity in many regions. This is affecting the delivery of outcomes outlined in Regional Catchment Strategies and Regional Waterway Strategies. Our first step will be to engage DEECA Fire Management to explore the planning and management levers that we might be able to pull to make change.



Victorian Cat Management Strategy

Vic Catchments have recently reviewed the draft Victorian Cat Management Strategy and provided feedback. The strategy largely takes a cat welfare approach but does look at options for controlling feral cats, semi-owned and unowned cats. Vic Catchments has engaged with Trust for Nature and, amongst other things, we have both suggested that the government should consider expanding the declaration of feral cats as a pest on public land, to private land, particularly areas of high biodiversity value.

Our People

A big thank you to everyone involved in the successful nomination to the 35th National Banksia Awards.

Thanks to:

- David Brennan (CEO Wimmera CMA) and Mikaela Power (Chair West Gippsland CMA) for participating in the interview process,
- Cath Jenkins for making a great speech on the night and supporting the process.
- Martin Fuller (CEO West Gippsland CMA) for supporting the process with guidance and resources.



Sally O'Neill

A big shout out to Sally O'Neill, West Gippsland CMA, who took the initiative to develop the Vic Catchments nomination. Sally looked collectively at the achievements of our 10 CMAs and the opportunity to promote our collective strength, which is exactly what Vic Catchments is about. The Banksia Foundation said that this was one of the best applications they have ever read, which is testament to Sally's outstanding story telling abilities. Thank you, Sally, you are a Vic Catchments champion.

(Sally is pictured standing to the left of Chair, Cath Jenkins and Executive Officer, Tony Baker)



Upcoming Events

National NRM CEOs forum, Canberra 4-5 September 2024

VicWater Conference, Melbourne, 10-12 September 2024

National Chairs Forum Canberra 19-20 November 2024

NRM Knowledge Conference North Queensland May 2025 – To be confirmed

Vic Catchments Future Meeting Schedule

Friday, August 23, 2024 (online)

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

CONTACT US

Tony Baker
Executive Officer, Vic Catchments
e: executiveofficer@viccatchments.com.au
m: 0407 840 514

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