

Vic Catchments Forum Newsletter | Issue 32 | September 2025



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COMMUNIQUE

Message from the Chair

Welcome to our 32nd Vic Catchments communique.

Winter has come to an end. Last time we checked in we highlighted the impact of the drought particularly in the west of the state. While there has been some good rain many farmers in the south west still lack enough feed to replenish their stocks.

Our drought advocacy paid off as both Corangamite CMA and Glenelg Hopkins CMA received funding for drought employment programs.

The program will provide people whose wellbeing and livelihoods are impacted by the drought with meaningful employment, training and income in their local community.

This allows them to remain connected with their community so they can return to their normal way of life following recovery. These programs utilise the knowledge, skills and networks of experienced agriculture workers that would ordinarily not be available, providing a unique opportunity to deliver accelerated environmental and agricultural outcomes.

As this is my final message as Chair of Vic Catchments and Chair of Corangamite CMA, I want to take the opportunity to express my

A special thank you goes to Tony Baker, Belinda Brennan, and the Executive team for their commitment and efficiency in delivering outcomes.



The discussions around the Vic Catchments table have consistently been strategic, collaborative, and robust, and it has been a privilege to be part of them.

At the time of writing, announcements regarding the new board and chair appointments were still pending. I wish the incoming members of Vic Catchments every success for the future.

Thank you to our partners in DEECA, NRMRA, VicWater, VEW, Landcare Victoria and all of the other organisations that we have been partnering and engaging with. Vic Catchments has become a go to organisation for those seeking to engage with CMAs on the big strategic NRM issues across Victoria.

Happy reading.

gratitude to everyone who has contributed to the work of CMAs and Vic Catchments during my term. I would also like to acknowledge the outgoing Chairs for their valuable contributions and support over the past two years.

Cath Jenkins



Vic Catchments Forum

Vic Catchments Meeting - 29th August 2025

Our August meeting was online. Our next meeting will be face to face on 13th November 2025 in Melbourne.

DEECA Water and Catchments

Melinda Knapp, Executive Director Catchments and Communities



Thanks to Melinda for joining us and we were grateful as always for the update from our DEECA colleagues.

Key areas of interest included:

- Drought and dry conditions: Whilst many regions have had some rain and slight improvement in conditions, there has been very little run off into dams and waterways and DEECA is continuing to roll out support programs. \$25 mill investment to drought response, including CMA drought employment programs. \$3.5M has been allocated to renewal of Western region Sustainable Water Strategy, which is likely to begin in the next 6-8 weeks.
- Water Sector Board appointments -The process is continuing with approximately 130 directors to be appointed by 1st October.
- Victorian Waterway Management Strategy – work is progressing, with public consultation aimed later this year.
- Vic Basin Inter Departmental Committee (IDC) Responses are being developed in relation to impact of Commonwealth water buy backs, as a whole of government approach including the sustainable communities funding program

DEECA Agriculture Victoria update

Dougal Purcell and Bronwyn Green

It was a pleasure to welcome Dougal and Bronwyn from Agriculture Victoria to our meeting, a part of DEECA that we have a very strong and growing partnership with.

Dougal explained that Ag Vic's priorities remain consistent, with a strong influence on delivering on the Economic Growth Statement, launched in 2024.

Dougal outlined a range of drought programs to support farmers in drought affected areas, both for current support and investment in programs to help support landholders in preparing for future dry times. More information on the programs can be found at [Drought support](#) | [Farm management](#) | [Agriculture Victoria](#)





Bronwyn explained that the Victorian Biosecurity Strategy is a whole-of-system strategy and reflects the concerns, input and perspectives of people from across industry, community, First Nations people and government. Bringing the Strategy to life requires a clear, system-wide implementation plan, which has been co-developed with 60 plus stakeholders across three dedicated workshops in May 2025. Vic Catchments was involved in these workshops.

The Draft Implementation Plan outlines the activities stakeholders see as the most impactful steps to gain traction in biosecurity. A final draft implementation plan will be circulated soon for feedback.

Bronwyn also outlined the planning that is occurring in relation to the high likelihood of an outbreak of high pathogenicity Avian Influenza (H5N1). It has had devastating impacts across the world, affecting wild birds, marine and land mammals and domestic animals including cows in dairies.

Whilst Australia is currently free from virus, it has potential to enter Australian this Spring via migratory birds. CMAs are aware of potential impacts and are encouraged to work closely with municipal emergency planning groups in preparedness. [Avian influenza](#) | [Poultry diseases](#) | [Animal diseases](#) | [Biosecurity](#) | [Agriculture Victoria](#)

DEECA Integrated Water Management update

Claire Hollier

Claire gave us an informative presentation about the Integrated Water Management (IWM) Program and the CMA Resourcing Initiative. **Victoria's IWM Program is an Australian first, it is pioneering a state-wide approach to IWM, which is unique, both in its scale and ambition.**

The goal is to transform water resource management practices, to ensure sustainable and resilient water systems, ecosystems and communities into the future.



Claire explained that CMAs are recognised as leaders in collaboration, place-based approaches and community participation. They have significantly contributed to, and led IWM forums, planning and partnerships. This initiative builds on that leadership to make IWM standard practice in Victoria.

The State has committed \$7.3Million over four years to support CMAs, focusing on staffing and organisational capacity. The initiative has a flexible approach to implementing, with CMAs working on a collaborative model and is designed to meet the needs of the region. For more information, [Integrated Water Management](#).

Vic Catchments Statewide Projects

Vic Catchments works collaboratively across the State to support and deliver cooperative projects.

Current projects are:

Fire Management Project

Vic Catchments is exploring risks and impacts of large-scale high intensity fires to Victorian water and catchments, community and biodiversity. We are exploring CMAs role in community collaborative approaches to support DEECA in its function.

Natural Capital Approach

Vic Catchments are leading a project to explore future roles and opportunities for CMAs in natural capital, natural capital accounting, and nature markets.

Water Cycle Adaptation Project

Supporting the implementation of CMA-led on-ground, practical projects that both responds to current CMA adaptation priorities and progresses water cycle adaptation outcomes for Victoria.

National Soils Monitoring Program

Vic Catchments has partnered with CSIRO for CMAs to carry out the field component of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry's (DAFF) National Soil Monitoring Program. The purpose is to monitor agreed national soil health indicators and to use the data to help understand soil condition and trend

Carbon Farming Outreach Program

In partnership with Agriculture Victoria and Landcare Victoria Inc, Vic Catchments is delivering training programs that ensure farmers and land managers across Victoria have access to free and trusted information and resources on carbon farming.

For more details about the projects and to keep up to date with their progress, please visit the priority project page on our website:

<https://viccatchments.com.au/priority-projects/>

Partnerships and collaboration



Concerned Waterway Alliance (CWA)

Vic Catchments presented to the CWA, who were keen to understand CMA roles and priorities. The CWA is a network of community and environment groups from Gippsland to the Otways. They share a deep concern for Victoria's rivers, wetlands, and aquifers, and are committed to improving their health for the benefit of current and future generations. We have had several informal follow-up conversations including discussions about the development of Victorian Waterway Management Strategy. We have agreed to keep talking as the Strategy is developed as there are likely to be areas of joint interest.

National Parks Association



We met with the Victorian National Parks Association, in relation to their Nature Stewards Program. The program is a Community Environmental Education initiative that has traditionally been hosted by Councils with support from local organisations. Key to the program delivery success is local collaboration. The program is a multi-week course that connects curious people with their local and wider habitats. The mission of the program is to promote environmental literacy and stewardship of nature through discovery, action, and ongoing learning. The content and curriculum are developed by leading scientists, conservation experts, Traditional Owners, and environmental educators. They have run over 45 programs with local councils (and other hosts) across Victoria with over 750 participants, expert facilitators, field trips and guest presenters. They will be engaging with the CMA Biodiversity Forum to explore opportunities for collaboration on the program.



Victorian Environmental Friends Network

We have continued dialogue with the Victorian Environmental Friends Network. The Network operates as a support network for Friends of Groups similar to Landcare Victoria Inc for Landcare. One area of common interest is the need for data and demonstrating outcomes. We have shared information including our actions and achievements report and our outcomes framework.

There may be an opportunity to collaborate to work towards better data collection from groups.

Victorian Environmental Water Holder (VEWH)

We presented to the VEWB Commission and management as part of their commission meeting. We outlined the current priorities of Vic Catchments, and support for our updated MOU. An action plan will sit under the MOU. It will include agreed items for collaboration including the development of the Victorian Waterway Management Strategy.



National NRM CEOs Forum

CMAs and Vic Catchments attended the National NRM CEOs forum in Canberra (23rd – 24th July 2025). We provided an update on significant issues and highlights for Victoria and participated in a panel on NRMs' role in energy transition. Of particular note was the concern around H5N1 avian influenzas. There was also robust conversation about the opportunities and challenges surrounding environmental markets.



A Stronger Industry

Welcome new CMA Directors

We will be welcoming several new CMA Chairs and many new directors on 1st October. We have begun preparing Vic Catchments material for inductions, to support the appointments. This material will be shared with Chairs and CEOs for distribution. It will include our charter, value proposition, policies and other support material.

We are working with DEECA and VicWater on the development of a Director Development Program. This will be a joint VicWater and Vic Catchments webinar for new directors, scheduled for 19 November 2025. There will also be an in-person director's development event on the 18th of March 2026. Please lookout for more information shortly.

Statewide Water Emergency Management Exercise 2025

Vic Catchments was invited to the Statewide Water Emergency Management Exercise 2025, run by DEECA and Water Corporations. The exercise focused on how the industry would respond to a H5N1 outbreak. As land and storage managers Water Corporations have a great deal to consider in this space and some of the potential risks could impact CMA business, for example water for the environment and access to waterways. Each CMA is being encouraged to engage with their relevant Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committees.

Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee Inquiry into Community Consultation Practices

Vic Catchments provided a response to the Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee Inquiry into Community Consultation Practices. We were able to showcase the experiences of CMAs in community engagement and consultation including the diversity in engagement mechanisms, the reasons for this diversity and the benefits of having regional based organisations with over 28 years of experience embedded in regions. Two hearings are scheduled for the 22nd of August and the 5th of September at Parliament House.



Our People

At the end of September, we will say goodbye to several of our Chairs as the CMA Boards receive new directors. At the time of writing, decisions are still pending. All of our Chairs make a significant contribution to their CMAs but have also invest their time and energy in improving our sector via Vic Catchments. We would particularly like to highlight the efforts of Tony Ford who has been our NRM Regions Australia Director for the past two years and Cath Jenkins, Vic Catchment Chair for the same period. Cath has shown great leadership, warmth and vision which has strengthened our position.

We thank you all for your efforts and wish you well for the future.

Upcoming Events

19th Nov 2025: Director Development Program webinar. This will a joint VicWater and Vic Catchments webinar for new directors.

18th March 2026: Director development session hosted by DEECA and VicWater In person event

Vic Catchments Future Meeting Schedule

Wednesday 12th November 2025, Melbourne

CONTACT US

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

Vic Catchments

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