

Vic Catchments Forum Newsletter | Issue 37 | September 2026



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COMMUNIQUE

Message from the Chair



There have been many ups and downs across our regions over the past three months.

Of particular concern is the outbreak of

H5N1 avian influenza in Victoria. The impact has been particularly noticeable along the coast with many birds infected and an ever-increasing level of bird mortality. CMAs are providing valuable local knowledge and intelligence to DEECA as the lead response agency. Prior to this CMAs had been informing preparedness planning processes and will be supporting recovery efforts. Indeed, CMAs will be strongly advocating for a coordinated recovery planning process, of which CMAs could play a significant leadership role.

What is clear is that our work to support the resilience of waterways and other ecosystems that support bird life, is vital to giving our bird populations the best chance of surviving and recovering from this significant impact.

At our last meeting Vic Catchments endorsed our revised Strategic Plan. This plan outlines our purpose and the value of our collective approach. It also confirms our strategic themes, outcomes and focus areas. It reflects the work we have done but has a focus on the current operating environment and the future.

We welcomed incoming Victorian Water Minister, Hon. Michaela Settle, at a meeting with our Chairs in August. Minister Settle also holds the Ministries of Agriculture and Rural and Regional Development, so there is significant overlap between our business and her portfolios.

As mentioned in our last Communique, Jenny Collins, CEO Mallee CMA, is finishing up in early September. We enthusiastically acknowledged Jenny's significant service at her last Vic Catchments meeting. Jenny reflected on her time and experiences but also on the value of CMAs working together to strengthen the sector as a whole. Jenny has been a champion of Vic Catchments. We are grateful for her efforts and wish her very well.

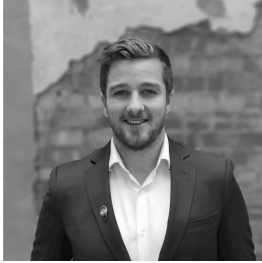
More details of our meeting and recent activities are outlined below. Happy reading.

Peter Hilbig
Chair
Vic Catchments



Vic Catchments Forum

Vic Catchments Meeting - 21st August 2026



DEECA Water and Catchments, Andrew Fennessy, Rory Shannon - Flood reform

Rory gave the meeting an update on the flood reform project, including

- Progress of CMA initiated “in-flight” planning scheme amendments (9 flood studies)
- Pathways for implementing remaining complete flood studies (46 flood studies)
- Establishing business rules/ transition pathways for funded in-train flood studies (52 flood studies)

DEECA is working with Department of Transport and Planning (DTP) on funding proposals to support implementation of both backlog of flood studies as well as funding new flood

studies.

For more information: [Better managing flood risk: planning and building reforms](#)

H5N1 avian influenza Nisarg Kalaiya

Nisarg gave an update on the current H5N1 bird flu situation.

- Latest numbers are on the Australian Government’s Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry website
- DEECA is the lead agency in Victoria and an Incident Management Team (IMT) has been established to coordinate the response to the H5N1 event.
- Reporting protocols have been updated to follow the National Framework and record events not individual birds
- CMAs will be included in all regional briefing, so they are in the loop
- Updated advice coming on cleaning up large numbers of birds at any one event



For more information: [Report sick or dead wild birds and wildlife](#) | [H5N1 avian influenza](#) | [Poultry diseases](#) | [Animal diseases](#) | [Biosecurity](#) | [Agriculture Victoria](#)



DEECA Water and Catchments, Catchments and Communities, Deb Brown

With the State election occurring in November, Deb outlined the caretaker conventions that apply to all public sector employees from 6.00pm 3rd November until the final electoral outcome.

The key issue is to avoid major policy decisions and to remain apolitical.

CMA employees, including Board Directors, are encouraged to read the caretaker conventions and additional meeting protocols.

[Guidelines on the Caretaker Conventions](#) | [vic.gov.au](#)

[Maintaining an apolitical public sector](#) | [vic.gov.au](#)

Vic Catchments Strategic Plan update

Vic Catchments endorsed its revised Strategic Plan.

The Strategic Plan reinforces our three strategic themes including:

- Building the support base
- Building our credibility
- Building resilience

The Strategic Plan guides our annual actions, and we will now look to update our rolling actions plan based on the strategic themes, the associated outcomes and focus areas.

NRM Regions Australia Update - Sarah Parker



Sarah Parker is the Chair of Goulburn Broken CMA and Victoria's Director on the NRM Regions Australia Board.

Sarah explained that the recruitment process for the NRM-RA independent Chair was underway.

NRM-RA has also been having ongoing discussion with the Australian Government about the timing and process related to the transition to the next phase of Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) funding. The current funding is due to expire in June 2028, so it is important that a seamless transition is implemented for the benefit of our community groups and the continuity of the very important projects that NHT funds.

Partnerships and Collaboration

Connections and conversations have been a key component of the last few months



A highlight has been the meeting our Chairs had with incoming Minister for Water the Hon Michaela Settle. It was a great opportunity to understand the Minister's thoughts on our sector and also for us to explain our priorities and actions. Amongst other things, we discussed the H5N1 response, the impacts of fire on our catchments, and the services that CMAs can deliver for government.

We were also invited to meet newly appointed Shadow Minister for Water Jade Benham. We were able to outline the purpose of Vic Catchments and our priorities for the next 12 months. We also spoke about the services CMAs provide for government.



We've also had very worthwhile conversations with the Victorian Farmers Federation, the Concerned Waterway Alliance, the Municipal Association of Victoria, the Trust for Nature, the Victorian Environmental Water Holder and many others on a range of topics including, Bird Flu, the Victorian Waterway Management Strategy, biosecurity and biodiversity management and the role we play in integrated catchment management.



We were also lucky enough to be invited to the Regional Cities Victoria partnership event in Parliament House in August. This was a fantastic opportunity for us to engage with several council representatives and other partners and build connections with municipal councils.

A stronger industry

We are planning on holding our annual Fire Workshop on the 6th of October. In the lead up to this event a number of experts, CMA staff and partners are being interviewed.

The information gleaned from these interviews will support the discussions around planning and delivering better catchments outcomes that might be delivered through changed fire management. Options and feasibility of reform will be explored so we can understand potential pathways for change



We are pleased to partner with Landcare Victoria to support the 2026 Victorian Landcare forum.

We are very proud to be working side by side with Landcare Victoria and the broader Landcare community to celebrate 40 years of Landcare.

Vic Catchments Statewide Projects

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

Vic Catchments coordinates several statewide projects with the support of the CMAs. At each meeting we receive updates on these projects.

For our September 2026, updates and 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/>

Communique

The Vic Catchments communique is produced quarterly following our Vic Catchments Meeting, it aims to keep you up to date with what is happening with Vic Catchments, priority projects, partnership projects and links to key updates.

If there are other people who would like to receive the communique, please direct them to the communique page on our website [Vic Catchments | Communiqués](#), for past issues and to sign up.

Or send Belinda an email: belinda.brennan@viccatchments.com.au and she will be happy to add you to the list.

Vic Catchments Website

If you are wanting to know more about Vic Catchments, our people, our projects, our partners and our achievement, please check out our website [Vic Catchments | Home](#)



Upcoming Events

Thursday 19th November 2026: Vic Catchments Forum- online

15th and 16th September 2026: Adapt NRM Climate Forum

CONTACT US

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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