

### Latest news from the NRM Ministerial Council

The NRM Ministerial Council – which includes primary industries, natural resources, environment and water ministers from around Australia – met in December 2004 for its seventh meeting. Some of the major outcomes from the meeting were:

- The National Weeds Strategy, which was originally endorsed in 1997, will be reviewed and updated. The review provides the opportunity to reflect on advances in natural resource management and will identify specific actions to reduce the devastating impact of weeds on the Australian environment.
- Council supported Australia's signing of the International Convention for the Control and Management of Ships' Ballast Water and Sediments. This sends a strong message to the international community that Australia is serious about reducing the risks posed by the introduction of exotic marine pests and diseases through ships' ballast water.
- Three guidelines which form part of the National Water Quality Management System – an important element of the water reform framework and national water policy agenda – will be released.

- These include:
- Guidelines for Sewerage Systems – Sewerage System Overflows
  - Guidelines for Sewerage Systems – Biosolids Management
  - Australian Drinking Water Guidelines and the Water Made Clear attachment.

For further information visit [www.mincos.gov.au](http://www.mincos.gov.au).

### Engaging stakeholders in natural resource management

A pilot project being undertaken by the Australian Government and Land and Water Australia will help regional bodies and policy makers better understand how to achieve long-term, sustainable, natural resource management outcomes through effective investment in projects, people and skills.

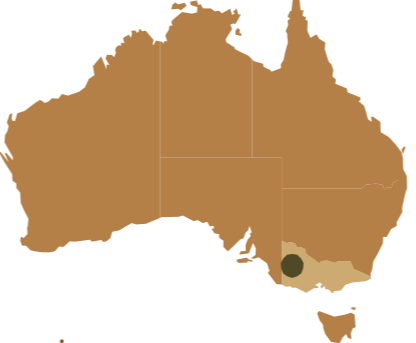
Titled "Successfully Investing in NRM Practice Change", the project will be piloted in four regions operating in diverse settings across Australia – Swan (Western Australia), North East Victoria, Southern Gulf (Queensland) and Southern Rivers (New South Wales). While each region will focus on its own priorities and interests, all are addressing three central research questions around the effectiveness of:

- stakeholder engagement and communications
- processes and tools used to achieve practice change
- the 'logic' that underpins planning to achieve long term NRM targets and goals.

- Key outcomes will include:
- an insight into what drives and impedes changes in natural resource management practices, and how all regions across Australia can apply this understanding
  - a three-year communications strategy which will provide regional bodies with nationally developed resources that have a strong regional focus
  - an improved understanding of the most effective natural resource management investments
  - an improved ability for regional bodies to monitor and evaluate practice change.

The first phase of the project is expected to be completed in June 2005.

## Region in focus



### Wimmera, Victoria

The Victorian Wimmera region encompasses the northern Grampians and stretches west to the South Australian border and north to Lake Albacutya on the edge of the Big Desert. It covers about 23,500 square kilometres – or 10.3 per cent of Victoria – and supports around 44,000 people.

The land is remarkably varied – from moist foothill forests, box ironbark forests, grasslands, mallee heath and woodlands, to semi-arid land, and dryland and irrigated agricultural areas, as well as transient streams and wetlands. It is Victoria's prime cereal growing area and contains about 40 per cent of the state's wetlands.

The Wimmera Catchment Management Authority (CMA), based in the regional centre of Horsham, is the statutory body responsible for coordinating the implementation of the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality (NAP) and the Natural Heritage Trust (Trust) in the region. The authority has a 13-member community-based board, chaired by Ms Jo Bourke, and is supported by five committees dealing with waterways, land, biodiversity, Landcare and regional development.



Gully and streambank erosion is particularly severe in the upper Wimmera catchment, where there is an average of one kilometre of gully erosion for every 100 hectares. Local landholder David Hodgetts assists with bio-engineering works, installing fencing around the worksite.

Wimmera's Regional Catchment Strategy was accredited in October 2003 following extensive community consultation. The strategy established a coordinated approach to tackling major natural resource management issues in the region, incorporating social, environmental and economic aspects. Wimmera is now developing its third regional investment plan based on the strategy, for implementation in 2005-06 to 2007-08.

According to John Young, CEO Wimmera Catchment Management Authority, the key issue facing the region is pressure on its lifeblood, the Wimmera River, which supplies and sustains wetlands of international significance, provides a social and environmental focus for many in the region, and provides water for stock, domestic and irrigation uses.

"Harvesting takes away up to 90 per cent of the river's water yield. So we're also dealing with some of the serious consequent issues of a river under stress – salinity, loss of habitat, protecting biodiversity and so on.

"The challenge is to balance our water usage requirements while sustaining viable populations of native flora and fauna," said John.

A key project supported by NAP funding is Wimmera's salinity program.

"Our salinity management program is broad reaching, and at one end addresses management processes, biological management, and engineering solutions, and at the other end looks at how we can live within a saline environment, such as researching salt tolerant vegetation, and considering innovative programs like how we can use saline water for producing seaweed," John said.

Protecting remnant native vegetation is another challenge, and Wimmera CMA is investing some of its Trust funds to help the community implement strategic programs.



Wimmera wetlands comprise 25 per cent of Victoria's total wetlands, and are among the precious environmental assets that are the focus of Wimmera CMA.

"Around 80 per cent of our region is private land, and in some areas there is less than three per cent of native vegetation remaining. We're working closely with the major Landcare networks and landholders to protect and extend our remnant vegetation, particularly for priority ecological vegetation classes," John said.

While the native vegetation projects create habitat for native plants and animals, many threatened species of flora and fauna need a greater level of attention to ensure the long-term survival of their populations.



In particular, a specially-funded project helps protect the Buloke and Stringybark Woodlands in Wimmera's south-west – the habitat for the nationally significant Red-tailed Black Cockatoo, which also happens to be the mascot for the Commonwealth Games.

The Australian and Victorian Governments have approved total NAP and Trust funding of about \$28.1 million for natural resource management in the region for 2001-02 to 2006-07. In addition the Victorian Government is providing further funds to at least match the Australian Government's \$5.7 million Trust contribution.

For further information: CMA Strategic Planning and Investment Manager, Mark Edwards, Phone: 03 5382 1544  
Natural Resource Management web site: [www.nrm.gov.au/state/vic](http://www.nrm.gov.au/state/vic)  
Wimmera Catchment Management Authority web site: [www.wcma.vic.gov.au](http://www.wcma.vic.gov.au)

### ACCREDITATION OF NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLANS

Integrated natural resource management plans developed by regional bodies are the building blocks of the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality, and the Natural Heritage Trust. Once the plans are accredited by the NRM Ministerial Council, regional bodies develop investment strategies – effectively business plans for securing funding – to facilitate the implementation. Accreditation is a significant achievement for regional bodies, which all put an enormous effort and lots of passion into the process. Congratulations to the following regions on the recent accreditation of their plans.

- Port Phillip and Westernport, Victoria
- Swan, Western Australia
- SA Murray Darling Basin, South Australia
- South East, South Australia
- Fitzroy, Queensland
- Maranoa Balonne, Queensland
- Border Rivers, Queensland
- South East Western Catchments sub-region, Queensland
- South East Queensland
- Condamine, Queensland

## Regional project

### Boosting Biodiversity in Abba Plains

With only three per cent of some vegetation communities remaining in Abba Plains, this intensively used land in the southwest of Western Australia has become a high regional priority for conservation.

The Abba Plains Biodiversity Project, a three-year rescue plan initiated in 2001, has made significant inroads into enhancing the poorly conserved vegetation communities thanks to \$91,355 in funding from the Australian Government's Natural Heritage Trust. The Abba Plains has five threatened ecological communities (including the critically endangered Southern Ironstone community), and over 100 declared rare or priority plant species.

With the vast majority of remnant vegetation situated on private land, a key component of the project has been working closely with landholders to conduct assessments, recommend actions, develop management plans, and provide dollar-for-dollar (or in-kind equivalent) funding.

A consultant was employed to liaise with each landholder individually, organise training workshops,

Education and training has been a key component of the Abba Plains project, including revegetation workshops for landholders.



Ambergate Reserve, located 9km south of Busselton, is an example of typical Abba Plains vegetation and contains several rare species of plants and animals.

and co-ordinate community briefings. To support the community awareness and education initiatives, a Geographe Catchment Companion was produced, providing practical information for landholders about caring for land, water and biodiversity in the area.

Kirrily White, Program Manager, Geographe Catchment Council, explained that the project has focussed on conservation, rehabilitation and protection.

"In the last three years, we've protected and restored around 170ha of remnant Abba Plains vegetation, undertaken 62 hectares (ha) of weed control and 167ha of feral animal control, and installed nearly 7000 metres of fencing to exclude stock such as cattle and sheep," she said. The project also saw the establishment of the Geographe Community Landcare Nursery which promotes local biodiversity and use of local native plants.

"Volunteers collect seeds from around the area, propagate them, and the Nursery sells them to farmers," Kirrily explained.

"This ensures landholders are revegetating not only with the right species, but with the right genetic strains," she said.

The Council is taking a long-term approach to conservation. It periodically surveys the work undertaken and the improvement to the health of the vegetation, and reports using photos and standard condition assessments. In the near future, the Council also hopes to document its learnings and share its experiences among other regions.

"As land use changes through agriculture and urban settlement, conservation of native vegetation becomes a real issue. It's a common problem, and we're certainly not in a unique situation.

"We're committed to ensuring that others can benefit from the successes we've had over the last three years," Kirrily said.

## People on the ground

### Sandy Marty

Indigenous Land Management Facilitator (ILMF) Northern Territory



#### Sandy, what does your role entail?

My main role is to promote Indigenous land management within the Northern Territory's Central Land Council region. This includes lobbying, supporting, listening and helping to make a difference to small groups. I am like a link between grassroots groups and the Commonwealth.

#### So what's your background?

I completed a Bachelor of Arts at the University of Adelaide and then took on a cadetship with the Central Land Council, where I worked in a number of positions before starting this job in October 2003.

#### What are you currently working on?

I am working on a range of projects, including encouraging Indigenous people to take part in a ranger training program. I'm also participating in an Australian Government Envirofund project at Ampwerre (Black Tank), which involves fencing around cultural sites and watercourses. I'm hoping to secure funding to undertake a water re-use project at Alpururulum (Lake Nash) and for some heritage projects at a mission site at the Iwupataka Aboriginal Land Trust (Jay Creek). I'm also organising the Indigenous Land & Sea Management Conference, which runs from 19 to 21 April, 2005.

#### Are there common key issues Indigenous land managers are facing in your region?

Awareness of the funding programs available is probably the biggest issue. I work closely with Indigenous land managers to help them secure money for priority projects. There are also issues associated with the remoteness and distance of working in such a large area – the Central Land Council region covers over 778,000 square kilometres.

#### How are these being addressed?

I meet with Aboriginal groups and traditional owners of Land Trusts to encourage them to apply for funding. I try to identify where those funds are most needed, and talk to people about land management. Also, the Central Land Council is very proactive in promoting capacity building among Indigenous communities.

#### Sounds like you have your hands full. What do you like to do outside of work?

I like to unwind by reading and travelling.

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## NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

# In Focus

## In the news

### New report highlights significant progress in NRM regions

The Australian Government will soon release the 2003-04 Regional Programs Report, which summarises the remarkable achievements in the delivery of the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality, and the regional component of the Natural Heritage Trust. It covers all of Australia's 56 natural resource management regions.

The report will be available on-line by April. Visit [www.nrm.gov.au](http://www.nrm.gov.au) to find out more about the programs in your area. If you are unable to access the report electronically, free-call 1800 552 008.

## Contents

### News

2003-04 Regional Programs Report	1
2005 Community Forum	1
NRM Ministerial Council	2
Plan accreditations	2
NRM research project	2

### Region in Focus

Wimmera, Victoria	3-4
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### Region project

Boosting Biodiversity in Abba Plains	5
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### People on the ground

Sandy Marty, ILMF Facilitator	6
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## ISSUE 1, 2005

### 2005 Community Forum focuses on big picture

The 2005 Community Forum – an annual event attended by the Chairs of the 56 regional bodies and other representatives – is being held from 13 to 15 April in Darwin. Focusing on partnerships, risk management and good science for decision making, the event provides the opportunity for delegates to network, discuss issues and consider progress at a national scale.

The Forum allows the regional bodies to explore improvements in natural resource management that can be made across the board. On the final day, delegates will present key issues arising from the forum to the Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council.

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