



Funding Update

NRM Facilitator Network extended with \$23.8 million

The Australian Government is providing \$23.8 million to extend the national Natural Resource Management (NRM) Facilitators Network for another two years. More than 100 facilitators will benefit from this funding and will continue to play a vital role in guiding regional groups through the NRM funding process. These facilitators help make NRM accessible. With their sound understanding of NRM programs they are able to connect governments, industry, regional bodies, non-government organisations and volunteers. For Facilitator Network contacts visit www.nrm.gov.au/contacts/

Regional Competitive Component receives \$20.5 million

After receiving 80 applications from across Australia for the recent Regional Competitive Component, the selection panel whittled down the applications to 28 large-scale environmental projects, which will receive almost \$20.5 million over the next three years. The Regional Competitive Component aims to support major multi-regional or cross-border projects that achieve on-ground results. This cross-jurisdictional approach supports projects that otherwise may not be identified as a high priority by individual regions. For more information visit: www.nht.gov.au/rcc/

National Competitive Component boosted with \$10 million

The latest National Competitive Component attracted close to 60 applications for a chance to share in almost \$10 million over the next three years. After a tough selection process 16 innovative environmental projects have been announced, which aim to deliver significant improvements in the sustainable management of our land, water and wildlife. The National Competitive Component funds carefully-targeted investments that will have a broad impact on the health of our environment. For more information visit: www.nht.gov.au/ncc/

Australian Government Envirofund 2006 offers \$10 million

The next round of the Australian Government Envirofund – Round 8 – will open in February 2006. For more information about the Envirofund and to register for an application form visit www.nht.gov.au/envirofund or telephone 1800 065 823.

Community Water Grants 2006

The Community Water Grants Unit is currently processing thousands of applications for Round 1 funding. That's 4,700 to be exact, ranging from schools, local governments and community groups across all states and territories. We expect to announce successful applicants early in 2006. If you missed out on applying for Round 1 keep an eye out for Round 2 at: www.communitywatergrants.gov.au/

Regional Project



Fine-tuning pest eradication methods and raising community awareness

Gambusia is a small fish from Central America that has been spread around the world since the early 1900s as a biological control for mosquito larvae. However, our native species are as good if not better at controlling mosquitos than Gambusia. Now Australia faces the problem of eradicating these pests and in Tasmania, Rodney Milner shares his experience.

Why is Gambusia considered a pest?

Gambusia is considered responsible for the decline and even local extinction of at least 35 fish species worldwide and has led to a large-scale decline in some mainland frog species. In Tasmania there is great concern that Gambusia will impact on the vulnerable Green and Gold Frog. In other states a number of frogs are considered at risk including the Yellow-spotted Bell Frog, Green and Gold Bell Frog and Wallum Froglet. A number of Australian fish species are also considered at risk including the Dwarf Galaxias, Oxleyan Pygmy Perch and Southern Purple-spotted Gudgeon

Why is it so hard to eradicate these fish?

Gambusia is tolerant to extremes in environmental conditions. They can survive in temperatures from almost 0 degrees Celsius to 44 degrees Celsius, high salinity levels, from pure fresh water to sea water; a pH range of between 3.9 to 10.2; low dissolved oxygen; high turbidity, pollution and even survive in rice fields that are sprayed with pesticides.

What parts of Australia are effected?

Gambusia is found in all states and mainland territories of Australia. In Tasmania, the main area of infestation is around the Tamar estuary where they inhabit wetlands, lagoons, farm dams, drainage channels and on occasions small creeks between Riverside and Legana in the north of the state. Two isolated populations have also been located in the Kingston and Snug areas of southern Tasmania.

How are you tackling this problem?

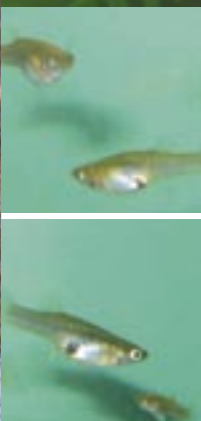
Attempts to control Gambusia have proved difficult. We have used seasonal water management of ephemeral wetlands to eradicate Gambusia from where a number of frog species breed, including the Green and Gold Frog.

The interconnecting culvert has been netted to prevent the fish from re-entering the area, which appears to have been successful. However, this same process was attempted in another lagoon and proved unsuccessful.

Attempts have also been made to eradicate Gambusia from two farm dams in the Tamar Valley, these dams are highly productive breeding sites for Gambusia. The process involved pumping out the dams through a filter to reduce water volume, then treating the remaining water with lime to raise the pH to eradicate the remaining fish. A large number of native fish were relocated before the liming process took place. Follow-up monitoring revealed that we were successful in eradicating Gambusia from one dam, however, we were not successful in the other. This goes to show how tough these fish are and the difficulty we have in dealing with this pest fish.

So what does actually work?

The community education program is working very well with an increasing number of people attending shows and events commenting that they have heard about Gambusia on the radio, read about it in the paper, seen it on TV or have attended a presentation. We have also had a number of people reporting suspicious fish sightings that thankfully to date have all proved negative. The survey work undertaken to determine the distribution and spread of Gambusia has enabled us to identify the most likely habitat that Gambusia prefer allowing for a more focused effort when assessing new area. The success of two of the eradication sites has been encouraging with a great increase in numbers of tadpoles in one site in particular.



How did you inform the community about this pest?

Awareness-raising includes attending local agricultural shows, field events such as Agfest and Cressy Trout Expo as well as the Inland Fisheries open day at Liawenee. Talks to school groups and fishing clubs have also taken place. The project has received great media coverage from radio, print and television and articles have been published in stakeholder newsletters. The Project also works closely with the Tamar Island Wetlands Centre by maintaining ongoing information about Gambusia as well as participating in events such as World Wetlands Day, Science Week and the Centre's annual open day.

A brochure enabled the community to have take-home reference material that provided clear information of the pest fish and who to contact if they found anything. The brochure has been distributed widely to pet shops, fishing tackle shops, Waterwatch, Coastcare and NRM facilitators as well as organisations such as the Launceston Environment Centre, local council offices, Parks and Wildlife offices and visitor centres and Department of Primary industry Water and Environment.

What have you learned from this project?

The primary method of dispersal is by humans, whether accidentally or on purpose. To prevent further infestations we need to make the community aware of the impact of Gambusia. A preventive approach uses fewer resources and has a greater likelihood of success. Accurate data about the

distribution of exotic pest fish will enable quicker response to new infestations and in the long term reduce resources required to eradicate the species.

Now that you have gained valuable learning experience, what is your goal?

Ideally, the long-term goal is to eradicate Gambusia from Tasmania. However, realistically, we aim to prevent Gambusia from spreading outside their current range and focus eradication efforts on areas where vulnerable species breed, such as the Green and Gold Frog.

PROJECT LEARNINGS

Rodney Milner's three pearls of wisdom for pest management:

1. Accurate data about the distribution of exotic pest fish enables a quicker and more focused response to new infestations
2. Accurate data also, in the long-term, reduces resources required to eradicate the species. A preventive approach uses fewer resources and has a greater likelihood of success.
3. The primary method of dispersal is by humans, so raising public-awareness is essential.

PHOTO CREDITS

Front page Dune revegetation: Martin Heller, Mulching: Ryan Rix
Photography, Examining re-growth: AM Photography.
Inside pages Volunteers: Georgia Curry; Gambusia fish and eradication work: Rodney Milner
Back page Propagating native trees: Georgia Curry

NRM Tools and Information

Vegie knowledge

What: Exchange: a National Vegetation Knowledge Service is a project that aims to bridge the gap between scientific research and the needs of natural resource management practitioners. It is part of the Australian Government's response to requests from regional groups for better access to scientific data on our natural resources. Developed by Greening Australia, Exchange takes the most up-to-date research and innovation in vegetation management to rural land managers and property owners. It provides the most comprehensive information available in Australia.

Why: Exchange gives farmers the best possible information and sources of expertise so they can continue to carefully manage native vegetation for their own benefit and on behalf of the broader community. Healthy vegetation is critical to addressing issues like salinity, water quality and biodiversity. It also helps us maintain sustainable agricultural, forestry and pastoral production systems.

Who: Rural land managers and property owners.

Where: For more information phone (02) 6281 8585 email exchange@greeningaustralia.org.au or visit www.greeningaustralia.org.au

From the ground up

What: The latest information on Australian soil is now just a click away for natural resource managers with a new soil information web site. The Australian Soil Resource Information System provides information to enable regional natural resource management groups to plan, monitor and evaluate their investments in soil management.

Why: Soil information has a critical role to play because it helps us understand the processes that lead to problems like acidification, erosion and fertility decline. If we are to target our investments in natural resource management, we need to translate our understanding into key areas so that decision makers can access and use.

Who: Land managers, regional planners and policy makers.

Where: The Australian Soil Resource Information System is online at: www.asris.csiro.au

Putting salinity on the map

What: Two publications and a CD-ROM offer a breakthrough in salinity mapping by comparing 26 satellites, airborne and ground mapping techniques. The free guides are an authoritative assessment of salinity mapping methods covering 26 mapping methods including satellite



and airborne remote sensing techniques, airborne geophysics and electromagnetics.

Why: Salinity costs Australia millions of dollars through lost productivity and damage to buildings, roads, water pipes and treatment systems. Our ability to effectively manage dryland salinity depends on how well we understand its causes, location and behaviour - in any landscape. Accurate mapping of the saline landscape, and the hydrogeological pathways that control the movement of water and dissolved salt, is critical to our understanding of the causes of salinity and to finding long-term solutions.

Who: Community landcare groups, regional authorities and government agencies will benefit from these guides, which help decide how to map, predict and monitor salinity in the Australian landscape.

Where: The reports are available at: www.nrm.gov.au/publications/salinity-mapping

Grazing on the web

What: Grazing management decisions will be more accurate with a new web-based tool that estimates pasture growth in relation to rainfall, soil moisture and other climatic conditions. The MLA Rainfall to Pasture Growth Outlook Tool was developed by the Bureau of Rural Sciences on behalf of Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA).

Why: The new tool can detail records for the seasonal and yearly variation in rainfall and pasture growth and an outlook for rainfall and pasture growth over the next three months. The tool shows rainfall figures and information on soil moisture and pasture growth for more than 3,300 locations across southern Australia. The web site can also access historical and current weather information recorded by the Bureau of Meteorology.

Who: Management for cattle and sheep enterprise.

Where: The MLA Rainfall to Pasture Growth Outlook Tool is available on-line at: www.w.gov.au/mlatool

Accolades

The winner of the Minister's Award for Coastal Custodians for 2005 is local marine conservationist Heidi Palmer, from Western Australia, and her band of 100 volunteers and corporate supporters for their Cape to Cape Beach Clean Up around the Margaret River. Heidi and her volunteers cleared more than 8000 individual pieces of debris in a single day from the coastline between Cape Naturaliste and Cape Leeuwin. The \$5000 Minister's Award for Coastal Custodians recognises the efforts of Australians for their practical solutions to marine or coastal environmental problems.

Top honours in the Reef Guardian School Programme have gone to Queensland's Wartburg State School near Bundaberg and Wonga Beach State School north of Port Douglas.

Wartburg State School has created mini-habitat areas around the school grounds, removing weeds and revegetating native gardens, permaculture gardens, a vegetable garden and a bush tucker garden. Wonga Beach State School adopted a wetland area behind their school that was completely degraded with overgrown weed and bad water quality that was leading out to the Reef. The \$4000 end of school year awards are designed to recognise schools that have achieved outstanding results in the programme during the year.

Congratulations go to Newcastle City Council for its Special Award for Outstanding and Sustained Achievement at the National Awards for Local Government ceremony in November. The Council won the award for more than 10 years of action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Its innovations have led to an annual saving of \$600,000 for rate payers, and is contributing to a reduction of 55,000 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions from households and businesses – the equivalent of taking 11,000 cars off the road.

The 4th National NRM Facilitator Forum was held in Melbourne in October. The NRM Capacity Building Team reports that the Forum was a success thanks to the preparation by the Network Development Group, which consisted of Australian Government, Regional, ILMF and Local Government facilitators as well as the Capacity Building Team.

Contact Details:

The Info Expo presentations and proceedings will be sent out to all participants on CD by Christmas. A summary of the whole event will be posted on the NRM website www.nrm.gov.au and the Capacity Building Team will track any developments from the action planning sessions over the next few months.

In a landmark event, two Indigenous elders involved in the Traditional Knowledge Recording Project – funded by the Natural Heritage Trust – have been awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Letters by James Cook University in Queensland. The award in this field is the first of its kind in Australia. It was presented to Dr Tommy George and Dr George Musgrave in recognition of their traditional knowledge, contributions to research, maintaining a significant Indigenous cultural system and ensuring its survival for generations to come. The project helped record Indigenous knowledge on location at Low Lake in the Lakefield National Park (Kuku-Taypan country), Queensland. There is now a comprehensive database documenting Indigenous knowledge with images, audio, video footage and transcribed conversations of traditional Indigenous knowledge transferal.

We welcome your contributions to *In Focus* – so please keep us informed of your projects, your events, and of the people in your region who are making a difference. simply drop us an email at nrm@deh.gov.au

If you would like to be added to the mailing list to receive regular copies of *In Focus*, contact us at:
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How do I find out more?
For further information on natural resource management visit www.nrm.gov.au or freecall 1800 552 008.



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NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

In Focus



Welcome from the Ministers

ISSUE 3, 2006

As we start the new year it is a good time to take stock of our progress in natural resource management (NRM).

The ambitious NRM framework is taking shape. Some 52 of the 56 NRM regions now have accredited Plans in place. This has taken an enormous amount of consultation and feedback involving regional bodies, industry and the community, as well as the support of three tiers of government. Through this approach, powerful new partnerships are being forged. Thanks to all for your commitment.

The largest environmental rescue package in Australia's history - the \$3 billion Natural Heritage Trust and the \$1.4 billion National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality - is reaping and sustaining farming benefits. Regional delivery has advanced well into the investment phase and the dollars are hitting the dirt. As of 30 June 2004, 25 investment strategies have been approved and governments have approved some \$517 million of regional-focused investment.

Since the National Action Plan commenced in 2000-01, governments have jointly approved \$352 million. Since the Trust's extension in 2002-03, the Australian Government has approved \$165 million, with State/Territory

Governments matching this amount, largely in kind, through aligned regional programs.

The rewards are many. More than 46,000 hectares of native vegetation has been rehabilitated, about 6,200 hectares of land protected for endangered or threatened flora and fauna, and almost 4.5 million hectares managed for pest plants and animals.

More than 9,000 hectares of agricultural land has been improved by combating dryland salinity and acid soils. More sustainable irrigation systems have been established on more than 5,500 hectares of land.

With the final three-year investment period coming to a close for the current National Action Plan and the Trust, we now have a Reference Group to advise on the future of these programmes. The advice will be predicated on a continuation of the regional approach that is the cornerstone of the Australian Government's approach.

We want to ensure a smooth adoption of refinements after the current programmes conclude in June 2008. The reference group is consulting across Australia with key community and industry stakeholders.

We have seen some remarkable developments this year in the delivery of these programmes through 54 regional NRM bodies covering the entire continent. We look forward to the same success in 2006.

Senator the Hon Ian Campbell
Australian Minister for the Environment and Heritage

The Hon Peter M'Gauran MP
Australian Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

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