

Fish flow proving a success

A new environmental watering regime is proving beneficial to large bodied fish in Gunbower Creek.

Environmental flows targeting breeding of large bodied fish, such as Murray cod, have been underway since September last year. The flows have been delivered in line with a new hydrograph (flow pattern) that identifies the types of flows that are compatible with the breeding cycle of large bodied fish.

Kathryn Stanislawski, said monitoring for fish larvae is so far showing positive results.

“Monitoring in November revealed young larvae less than seven days old downstream of Cohuna, confirming that fish are spawning in Gunbower Creek. When we repeated the monitoring three weeks later we found another group of larvae of the same age,” Kathryn said.

“This confirms that during October and November there has been at least two successful spawning events during the managed environmental flow event.”

Kathryn said Murray cod can produce thousands of fish from one successful spawning event, and although there is high mortality of young fish, those that survive their first summer and winter have a good chance of surviving through to maturity.

“Environmental flows will continue to be delivered through Gunbower Creek to provide the young fish with access to food resources and shelter from predation”.

“We can design the way flows are delivered through the creek to give the young fish the best chance at surviving,” she said.



Murray cod larvae found in Gunbower Creek in spring 2013. Photo: C. Sharpe, CPS Environmental Research.

Volunteers tour Gunbower Forest

Over 30 volunteers from the Cohuna Gateway Centre toured Gunbower Forest last month to improve their natural resource knowledge of the area. Volunteers learnt about cultural heritage, pest plant and animal control and environmental watering; and a visit to the Hipwell Road Channel construction site. Volunteers from Turtles Australia also provided a hands-on presentation about local turtles’ breeding behavior and the threats they face.



Cohuna Gateway Centre volunteers enjoying a tour of Gunbower Forest

Newsletter authors: Anna Chatfield, Kathryn Stanislawski and Amy Russell.
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COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

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Welcome to a new year and a new ‘Flooding for Life’ community newsletter!

This quarterly newsletter will continue to keep you up-to-date with the North Central Catchment Management Authority’s Flooding for Life Project at Gunbower Forest.

Major works on Hipwell Road all but complete

Major construction works on the Hipwell Road Channel are on the verge of completion.

Work on the southern embankment of the Hipwell Road Weir was completed by Christmas with water now flowing freely through the new structure on the creek.

Gunbower Forest project manager, Anna Chatfield said the Gannawarra Shire Council has now completed the road approaches and guard railings for the new bridge that crosses the channel. Island Road has been re-opened to traffic.

The next step is to test the new structures with water against the embankments and passing water through the gates – known as wet commissioning.

North Central CMA Gunbower Forest Manager, Anna Chatfield said “An important component of the construction process is to test the electrical and mechanical components of the new regulator gates and test the performance of the structure’s embankments.”

“Wet commissioning is planned for late

February and will result in some water being delivered into the Hipwell Road Channel, which flows into Gunbower Forest. The amount of water that will reach the forest is expected to be minimal,” said Anna.

Wet commissioning will also involve lifting the water level within Gunbower Creek by operating the Hipwell Road Weir in early March. An environmental water allocation of 400ML has been made available by The Living Murray program for the wet commissioning. No third party impacts are anticipated but creek water levels will be monitored.

Water levels within Gunbower Creek will be lifted slowly to test the performance of the structures. Delivery of water to irrigators will not be interrupted during this time. However, landholders upstream of the new Hipwell Road Weir may notice the higher water level within Gunbower Creek.

“The wet commissioning is important to ensure all the gates and electrical components are working so that any modifications or fine tuning can be done ahead of the first trial operation in winter and spring this year,” Anna said.



Island Road Bridge almost complete over the Hipwell Road Channel.

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Drying phase for Gunbower Forest

Gunbower Forest is currently in an important drying phase.

North Central CMA project officer, Kathryn Stanislawski said the natural cycle of Gunbower wetlands includes a drying phase, which is critical in maintaining the health of the forest's wetlands.

"The purpose of the 2013-14 summer drying phase is to allow black water that has remained in wetlands since the 2010 floods to recede and to reduce carp numbers," Kathryn said.

"During spring 2013 there was some overbank flooding into Gunbower Forest due to high flows in the River Murray. These flows created shallow flooding in the forest and replenished low lying wetlands. These wetlands have now remained inundated since the large floods of 2010 and are in need of a drying event."

Kathryn said the drying phase is being carried out in line with the 2013-14 seasonal watering plan for Gunbower Forest, which would only require environmental water to be delivered if there was a significant bird breeding event.

"Bird monitoring in wetlands such as Little Reedy Lagoon and Little Gunbower Lagoon did not reveal any bird breeding in response to the spring 2013 flooding," Kathryn said.

"The lack of bird breeding has enabled us to remain in line with our drying phase as there has been no trigger for the delivery of environmental water to maintain water levels under waterbird breeding colonies." Kathryn said the lack of bird breeding in Gunbower Forest was to be expected given other flooding across the region, providing alternative habitat for water birds.

"There are, however, still many pelicans in some of the deeper wetlands of Gunbower Forest and it is presumed, and hoped, that they are continuing to assist us in controlling our carp populations by filling their beaks and bellies," she said.



Australian Pelican, *Pelecanus conspicillatus*, Little Reedy Lagoon. Photo: Adrian Martins

New Community Reference Group

A new Gunbower Island Community Reference Group (CRG) has been established to gain community input on projects in the Gunbower Island area.

"The CRG will ensure CMA projects in the Gunbower Island area are implemented in balance with local knowledge, are communicated effectively to the community and opportunities to enhance project outcomes are realised," said Gunbower Forest project manager, Anna Chatfield.

"The CMA has decided to have just one CRG for the Gunbower Island area with a range of projects being discussed. This is a more efficient and wholistic way to receive community input on CMA projects in the Gunbower Forest area."

Some of the major projects the CRG will be providing input to include the operations phase of the Hipwell Road Channel and the new Caring for Our Country project, Protecting Key Assets of Gunbower Forest.

The Community Reference Group will meet every 2-3 months. Members are:

Di Bowles (Chairperson) – CMA Board member

Lorain Leamonth – Gannawarra Shire Council

Glen Wilson – local farmer

Glenn Hall – Cohuna Progress Association

Thomas Chick – Field and Game

Stan Archard – Field and Game

Rob Waterson – Cohuna CFA

Audrey Dickins – Gunbower Landcare

Betty Waterson – Bird Observers Club

Julie anne Smith – previous weed CRG

Wendy Duckworth – Veitch – community member, volunteer at Gateway Centre

Trevor Powis - community member, volunteer at Gateway Centre

Charlie Gillingham – NRMCA and

Torrumbarry Water Services Committee.

Watch Out! Turtles About!

Drivers are asked to take special care over the summer months as turtles in the Gunbower Forest area in their annual breeding season.

Trent Gibson from the North Central CMA said a number of turtles have already met with a tragic end on the roads in recent weeks.

"We're lucky enough to have three species of turtles living on our doorstep in the Gunbower Forest area, with one of these species, the Broad-shelled Turtle, listed as endangered in Victoria."

"The Murray River Turtle has also been identified as vulnerable in Victoria, and the Common long-neck Turtle as potentially threatened."

The CMA has joined with Turtles Australia Inc. to attempt to limit the number of turtle fatalities in and around Gunbower Forest.

Turtles Australia spokesperson, Graham Stockfeld said the best thing drivers can do is to slow down and keep their eyes peeled, especially when it's raining or in the evening after rain.

"If it's safe to do so, drivers can also stop and help turtles cross the road by gently picking them up by the shell and placing them off the road in the direction that they're headed," Mr Stockfeld said.

The CMA has an ongoing program to protect turtles within Gunbower Forest, including fox



An endangered Broad-shelled Turtle that was killed near Cohuna. Photo: Turtles Australia Inc.

baiting, nest protection and providing habitat through environmental flows. The CMA is also teaming up with the University of Western Sydney to undertake a research project aimed at better understanding fox predation on turtles and management options to reduce this threat.

To report any sick or injured turtles, please call RACV Wildlife Connect on 131 111.

Field work to begin on cultural mapping project

The steering committee for the Barapa Barapa cultural heritage mapping project has been meeting regularly over recent months to progress this exciting project.

Funded through an Indigenous Heritage grant, the project will involve Barapa Barapa traditional owners mapping plants of cultural significance and Aboriginal archaeological sites

within the lower section of Gunbower Forest. Botanist, Damien Cook (Rakali Consulting) has been appointed, along with Archaeologist, Colin Pardoe to provide the technical expertise and training for field participants.

The surveys scheduled for this month, provide opportunities for Barapa Barapa people to work on Country. The findings from the mapping project will be used by the CMA to ensure watering plans reflect the rich cultural values of the Forest.

COHUNA BRIDGE TO BRIDGE

The Annual Cohuna Bridge to Bridge is on again on **Sunday 2 March**.

The North Central CMA, through the Flooding for Life project, sponsors the 20 km Kayak race and 10 km canoe race.

The triathlon will be held on Saturday 1 March.

Look out for more information about the Cohuna Bridge to Bridge in your local media or visit www.bridgetobridge.org.au