

Victorian Catchment Management Council

Annual Report 2012



Victorian
Catchment
Management
Council

Victorian Catchment Management Council Annual Report 2011-2012

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Cover photographs courtesy of Tracey Koper and Neil Meyers.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chair's Foreword	2
Introduction to the VCMC	3
Organisational Structure	6
VCMC Role	7
Executive Officer's Comment	9
Strategic Plan	10
Operations of the VCMC	11
VCMC Finance Report	14
Major State Natural Resource Management Activities and Programs	15
Operations of the Catchment Management Authorities	19
Statutory Responsibilities	33
Appendices	37
Compliance Disclosure Index	38

Chair's Foreword

This Council has now come to the end of its term after working wonderfully well as a team for three years. Council responded quickly and professionally to all tasks required of them and always sought opportunities to resolve the challenges of reporting on the statewide management and condition of land and water resources.

Following the change of State Government in 2010, we have successfully engaged with both Minister Smith and Minister Walsh in line with the machinery of government arrangements, and have worked closely with them on a range of issues, especially those around flooding and the resulting Government actions.

Council has continued to place emphasis on its responsibility to promote the Catchment Management Framework, and has again undertaken several regional visits where it was hosted by the local Catchment Management Authority. These visits are of great value in seeing what happens on the ground, and hearing from those involved, as well as building the framework, all of which are so important in Council being able to provide well-informed independent advice.

One of Council's primary statutory responsibilities is to produce the Guidelines for the Regional Catchment Strategies, as required. Following the successful establishment, these Guidelines have been used by the CMAs to develop the next iteration of their Regional Catchment Strategies which are due in October 2012.

Through all of the tasks, Council and staff have worked closely together as a team, and I take this opportunity to thank my fellow Council members and our staff, led by Patricia Geraghty, for their efforts. Council has received wonderful support from the Department of Sustainability and Environment and in particular, Secretary Greg Wilson, and from the Department of Primary Industries and its Secretary, Jeff Rosewarne. I would also like to acknowledge the contribution of our observers; Gavan Dwyer from DPI and Anthony Boxshall from EPA, as well as Anthony's predecessor Paul Ratajczyk.

As the term of this Council concludes, I would like to thank and congratulate all Council members and their families for their contribution to a productive and successful year. The legacy that this Council has created will form a strong foundation for the Council's future achievements.

In accordance with the Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994 and the Financial Management Act 1994 I am pleased to present the report of the operations of the Victorian Catchment Management Council for the year ending 30 June 2012.



Mick Murphy OAM
Chair
19 October 2012

Introduction to the VCMC

Appointed under the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994 (CaLP Act)*, the Victorian Catchment Management Council consists of up to 10 members appointed by Governor-in-Council on the basis of their skills, experience and knowledge of land protection, water resource management, primary industries, environment protection, conservation and local government.

Council Members to 19 June 2012

Mr Michael Murphy OAM - Chairperson

- Chair, Sustainability Victoria Advisory Panel
- Chair, Riparian Advisory Group
- Chair, VHSREW Stakeholder Reference Group
- Former Chair, Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authority
- Former Mayor and Councillor, Moyne Shire Council
- Former Board Member, South West Water Authority
- Civil Engineer and business development consultant
- 20 years experience as Local Government and Water Board engineer
- From Mortlake in Western Victoria

Ms Cheryl Batagol

- Chair, EPA Victoria
- Former Chair, Melbourne Water
- Board Member, Sustainability Victoria

Ms Joanne Anderson

- Chair, North East Water
- Administrator, Brimbank City Council
- Board member, VicWater
- Former Director, Melbourne Market Authority
- Former partner in beef cattle and blueberry farm in the Strathbogie Ranges for 20 years, now living in Lancefield

Mr Cullen Gunn

- Former Executive Officer, Victorian Catchment Management Council
- Partner in a small Victorian business engaged in farm forestry
- Director of Kilter Pty Ltd, managing VicSuper's Future Farming Landscapes investment

Mr Rod Gowans PSM

- 30 years work experience in natural resource management and biodiversity conservation at the state and national level
- Former member, Parks Victoria Board
- Member, Trust for Nature Board
- Former Executive Director, Biodiversity and Natural Resources, DSE

Mr Christopher Arnott

- Partner, TradeWorthy Pty Ltd
- Founder and Former Managing Director, Alluvium Consulting Pty Ltd
- Chairman, Engineers without Borders Australia
- Acting Chair, Projects Advisory Committee, Leadership Victoria
- Fellow, Peter Cullen Trust
- Fellow, Williamson Community Leadership Program
- Extensive experience in waterway management and environmental flows

Dr Sandra Brizga

- Principal of consulting firm specialising in geomorphology and waterway management
- Chair, Fraser Island World Heritage Area Scientific Advisory Committee
- Treasurer, Australian and New Zealand Geomorphology Group
- Former President, River Basin Management Society
- 25 years experience in environmental science and management

Dr Janet Mahoney (to 1 May 2012)

- Former Board member, Parks Victoria
- Former Director, Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water Corporation
- Fellow, Australian Institute of Company Directors
- Associate, Leadership Victoria
- Former Director, Grains Research and Development Corporation
- Former Program Manager, Geoffrey Gardiner Foundation
- 27 years working in agriculture in country Victoria

Mr John Young

- Former Chief Executive Officer, Wimmera Catchment Management Authority
- 35 years experience in natural resource and catchment management, including agriculture, national parks, public and coastal land management
- Community member of the Moyne Shire Environment and Conservation Committee and the Moyne Shire Coastal Risk Management Steering Committee
- Member, Western Coastal Board

Mr Adam Fennessy

- Deputy Secretary, Natural Resources and Environment Policy, DSE
- Responsible for providing support and advice to the Minister for Environment and Climate Change across the areas of Environmental Policy and Climate Change; Natural Resources and Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services.
- Former Executive Director, Infrastructure and Economics, Department of Premier and Cabinet.
- Previously a Commonwealth Government policy and legal adviser in the areas of transport, communications and the arts.

Mr Gavan Dwyer (DPI Observer)

- Executive Director, Natural Resource Management and Economics Division, Department of Primary Industries
- Extensive experience in agriculture, water and natural resource management policy in State and Commonwealth agencies
- Previously held positions at Productivity Commission and ABARE dealing among others with, environmental policy, labour market and micro-economic reform and energy economics
- Worked for several years in the dairy industry
- Holds degrees in Agricultural Economics from the University of New England and The University of Melbourne
- His family operates dairy farming interests in Gippsland and Northern Victoria

Dr Anthony Boxshall (EPA Observer)

- Head of Knowledge and Research, EPA Victoria
- Ph.D from University of Melbourne
- Marine biologist
- Former President, Australian Marine Sciences Association
- Has worked as an academic in two countries, in government and the private sector
- Passionate about the interaction between coasts and catchments

Council Staff

Patricia Geraghty
Executive Officer

Neil Meyers
Research and Policy Co-ordinator

Tracey Koper
Project and Administration Officer

Marian Pernat
Research and Policy Officer (part time, 0.4FTE)

Fiona Donohue
Catchment Condition Report Project Officer (from 8 August 2011)

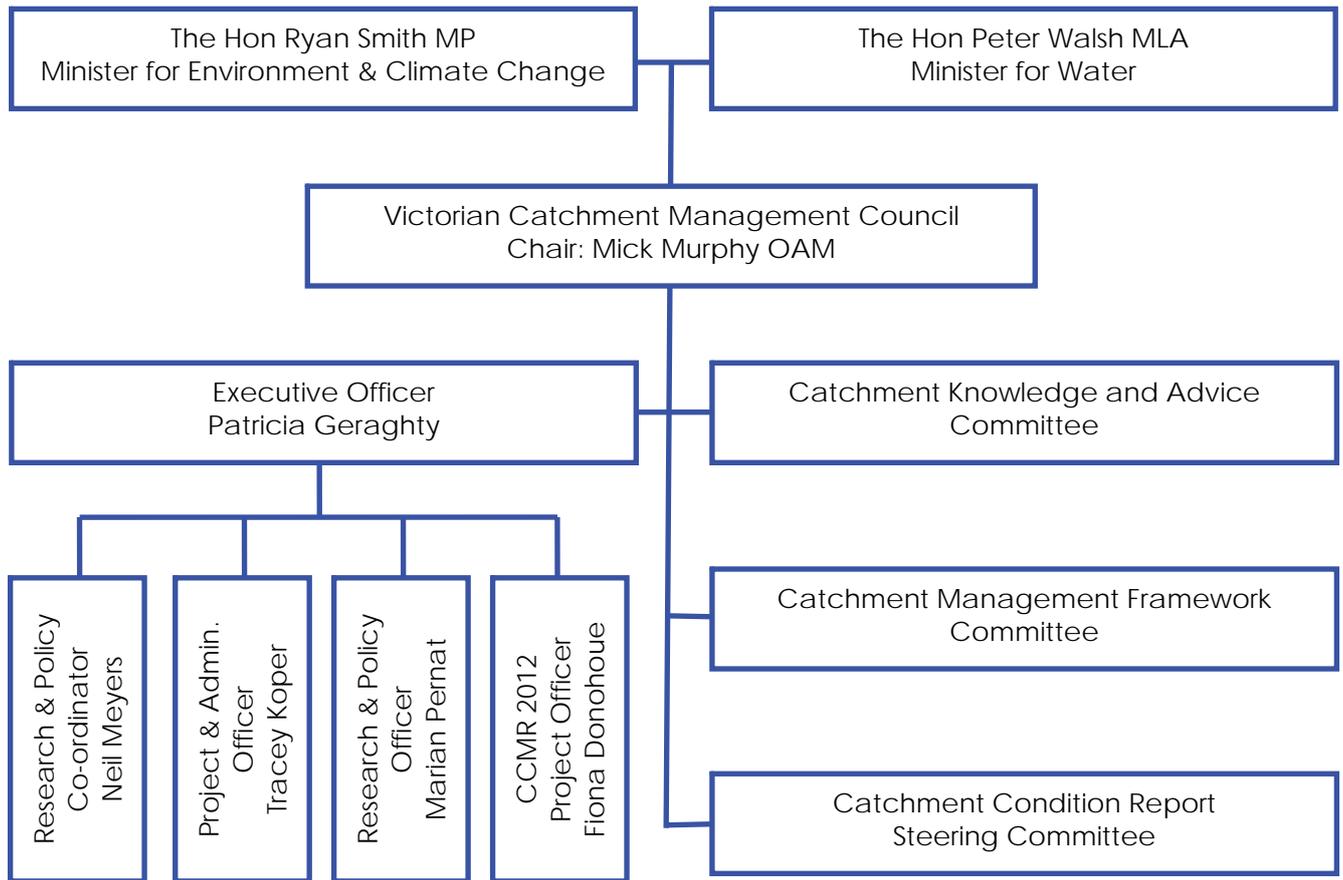
VCMC staff are employees of DSE - see DSE 2011-12 Annual Report for statement of workforce data for current and previous financial year.

The VCMC secretariat employed three people (4.4 FTE) in 2011-12

The breakdown of staff for the VCMC in 2010/11 is as follows:

	2010-11	2011-12
Executive Officers (salary greater than \$134,841)	N/A	N/A
Senior Management (salary less than \$134,841)	1	1
Administration Staff	2.4	3.4
Finance Staff	N/A	N/A
Male	1	1
Female	3	4
TOTAL	3.4	4.4

Organisational Structure



VCMC Role

Background

The Victorian Catchment Management Council (Council) is the state government's peak advisory body on catchment management. Established under the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994 (CaLP Act)* in 1997, The Hon. Gavin Jennings MLC, Minister for Environment and Climate Change was the responsible Minister from July 2010 until the Victorian state election on 28 November 2010. Following the state election, the CaLP Act became administered jointly and severally between The Hon. Ryan Smith MP, Minister for Environment and Climate Change and The Hon. Peter Walsh MLA, Minister for Water, for the remainder of the reporting period. The Council is uniquely placed, independent of government agencies, Catchment Management Authorities and non-government organisations, to take a long term view and influence change in working towards its vision for catchment management:

Victoria will have healthy rivers flowing through ecologically sustainable and productive catchments.

Council takes a statewide view on land, water and biodiversity issues and priorities related to catchment management. It facilitates integrated and coordinated catchment management through Victoria's Catchment Management Framework.

The VCMC works particularly closely with DSE, DPI, and CMAs. Council is also working to strengthen strategic catchment management planning by increasing collaboration with local government.

The VCMC encourages cooperation of other bodies such as non-government organisations involved in the management of land and water resources.

In addition to its major statutory roles, Council has continued the excellent and highly productive working relationship with its Ministers, and has been called on to provide advice on a number of matters. Advice to both Ministers has included formal advice as requested on matters such as institutional arrangements; briefings on the Strategic Plan and Annual Work Plans and on the 'Land and Biodiversity at a time of climate change' White Paper process in 2010.

Partnerships

Council works particularly closely with the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE), Department of Primary Industries (DPI) and Environment Protection Authority Victoria (EPA). In addition, Council encourages cooperation between the major sectors of local government, community conservation and environment organisations, industry, state and federal agencies and regional Catchment Management Authorities by facilitating communication through various projects and forums.

Council has a unique relationship with Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs). It is not responsible for the operation of CMAs, nor does it oversee their work. However, Council must be receptive to issues which emerge from the regions in developing a statewide position. It also provides the opportunity for CMAs to contribute to the policy and strategic picture at State level. Effective communication is critical to this process.

Statutory Roles

Under Part 2, Section 9 of the *CaLP Act*, the functions of the Council are:

- (a) to advise the Minister and, if requested by any other Minister, that other Minister—
 - (i) on matters relating to catchment management which apply throughout the State; and
 - (ii) on the condition of the land and water resources of the State; and
 - (iii) on priorities for catchment management throughout the State; and
 - (iv) on priorities to be given on the need for research and investigation on matters related to catchment management which apply throughout the State;
- (b) to encourage the co-operation of persons and bodies involved in the management of land and water resources in furthering the objectives of this Act;
- (c) to promote community awareness and understanding of issues relating to catchment management;
- (d) to advise the Minister and provide information to the Minister on any matter referred to it by the Minister.

The Council is also required to advise the Minister under Part 8, Division 1 Section 69 (2), (3) and (4) of the *CaLP Act*, on actions before recommendation for the declaration or revocation of a declaration of any pest plant or animal:

- (2) Before recommending the declaration, or the revocation of a declaration, of an animal as an established pest animal the Minister must get advice on the proposal from the Council.
- (3) Before recommending the declaration, or the revocation of the declaration, of a plant as a noxious weed the Minister must get advice on the proposal from the Council and the Authority of the region in

which the declaration applies or will apply.

- (4) The advice of the Council or an Authority under sub-section (2) or (3) must include—
 - (a) an assessment of the extent and severity of impact of the animal or plant in Victoria; and
 - (b) suggested measures for the management of any infestation of the animal or plant; and
 - (c) an estimate of the cost of these measures and how it might be funded.
- (5) The Minister may, in a particular case or class of cases, exempt the Council or an Authority from complying with sub-section (4).

Furthermore, under Part 4, Section 19 Division 2 'Action Statements and Critical Habitats' of the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act* (1988), the Council is to provide comment on list nominations and action statements:

19. Action statements

- (1) The Secretary must prepare an action statement for any listed taxon or community of flora or fauna or potentially threatening process as soon as possible after that taxon, community or process is listed.
- (2) The action statement must set out what has been done to conserve and manage that taxon or community or process and what is intended to be done and may include information on what needs to be done.
- (3) In preparing or amending an action statement the Secretary must consider –
 - (a) any management advice given by the Committee, the Conservation Advisory Committee and the Victorian Catchment Management Council; and
 - (b) any other relevant nature conservation, social and economic matters.

VCMC Committees

Under the *CaLP Act*, the Council may, from its members, appoint any committees that it considers necessary and may abolish any such committee; and determine the procedure of each committee.

The nature and function of VCMC Committees were:

Catchment Condition Report Steering Committee
Catchment Management Framework Committee
Catchment Knowledge and Advice Committee

Members of Council were also involved individually in a range of other external committees in 2011-12. A list of these committees is provided in Appendix 1.

Executive Officer's Comment

This past year was the final one in the 2009-2012 term of this Victorian Catchment Management Council (Council) membership. There was a focus on completing the key items in the Strategic Plan, as well as reflection on the three-year term, and ideas to leave as a legacy for incoming members.

The major task of Council was the development of the next Catchment Condition and Management Report, due to be tabled in Parliament in October 2012. The Steering Committee, under the leadership of Chris Arnott, directed the work to the point of producing a near-final version which was endorsed at the final meeting of the Council in June 2012. I would like to thank Chris and the other members of the Committee, Sandra Brizga, Rod Gowans and Cullen Gunn for their diligence in working alongside the project team in producing the report. Neil Meyers led the team and special mention should be made of Sarah Ewing, a former Council member who provided expert writing skills, and of Fiona Donohoue who undertook the task of liaising with data custodians and producing the information section of the report.

Another task was the continued involvement of Council in the development and the assessment of the Regional Catchment Strategies by the ten CMAs. John Young and I were observers on the RCS Managers Forum ably chaired by Chris Norman, CEO of the Goulburn Broken CMA. John, Tracey Koper and I assessed the draft RCSs received to date against the RCS Guidelines established by the Council in 2010. This work will continue into the latter half of 2012. Further details on the activities of Council and its Committees are given later in this Annual Report.

Council enjoyed many positive connections with the Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs). The Chair, Mick Murphy and I were participants in the CMA Chairs and CEOs Groups respectively, and the Chair was an observer on the Catchment Management Forum. The Chair and I visited the Chairs and CEOs in all ten CMA regions in a series of meetings in late 2011 on strategic issues.

Council determined to visit all ten CMA regions during its three-year term and in 2011-2012 visited Glenelg Hopkins, Port Phillip and Westernport, East Gippsland and Wimmera. Each regional visit involved presentations by the Chair and CEO to Council, dinner and discussions with Board and key partners, and a field trip. The field trips provided invaluable two-way interactions among the Council, CMA Boards and staff and those community members directly involved in on-ground work.

There are very good relationships between Council and the other Catchment Management Framework partners, including the CMAs, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Department of Primary Industries, Environment Protection Authority and the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability. Council operates through inclusiveness and influence so the effective and amicable relationships we have with the CMAs and our other partners are essential. Several opportunities have arisen where Council gave advice to both The Hon. Ryan Smith MP, Minister for Environment and Climate Change, and The Hon. Peter Walsh MLA, Minister for Water, on a range of integrated catchment management issues. These opportunities for giving formal and informal advice to our Ministers are welcomed.

It has been a positive experience to work alongside the Council team of the Chair, Council members and the Secretariat staff of Neil Meyers, Tracey Koper and Marian Pernat. The Chair, Mick Murphy OAM, has been in this position for two terms and is an energetic and capable leader in the broader catchment management world, as well as an inspirational Chair of the Council.

Strategic Plan 2009-2012

VISION: 'Victoria will have healthy rivers flowing through ecologically sustainable and productive catchments'

ROLE: VCMC seeks to effectively influence the condition and management of land and water resources across Victoria's catchments through the provision of advice to government and key stakeholders.

GOALS

1. Provide advice to Ministers and Government as requested, or determined by Council
2. Undertake other statutory obligations in a timely way
 - Invasive plants and animals/Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act
 - Catchment condition report
 - Annual report
 - Financial reporting
3. Preparation for catchment condition and management report
 - Define catchment outcomes
 - Include catchment condition reporting indicators
 - Define pressures on catchment condition
 - Measure progress in catchment condition
4. Use knowledge and influence
 - Facilitate the systematic and open flow of information to influence good policy development
 - Use every opportunity to champion integrated catchment management on a landscape scale
 - Promote and disseminate natural resource knowledge and research across government
 - Develop strategic integrated knowledge management framework
5. Provide leadership in development and delivery of the Catchment Management Framework (CMF)
 - Assist in promoting government policy on integrated catchment management
 - Continue to provide guidance in the development of Regional Catchment Strategies
 - Promote effectiveness of integrated catchment knowledge management
6. Promote Catchment Management Framework; and engagement in the community
 - Promote the Catchment Management Framework (CMF)
 - Encourage the co-operation of all involved in the management of land and water resources
 - Encourage Indigenous engagement
 - Promote community awareness of catchment management
 - Continue to actively engage with CMAs
 - Ensure any changes to the CMF reinforce effective regional delivery

Operations of the VCMC

Operations of Council include the following activities, undertaken by the whole Council and by the Committees.

The structure of the Committees is determined by the Strategic Plan; each Committee is assigned sections of the plan to be its main focus.

There were no changes or factors which affected our performance during the reporting period. Furthermore, there were no events occurring after balance date which may significantly affect the Victorian Catchment Management Council's operations in subsequent reporting periods.

Catchment Management Framework Committee

The members were John Young (Chair), Cheryl Batagol, Rod Gowans and Jan Mahoney (to December 2011). Support was provided by Patricia Geraghty and Tracey Koper.

The strategic intent of the Catchment Management Framework (CMF) Committee was to provide sound and innovative advice to Council on the principles, policy and relationships which operate in and around the Catchment Management Framework in Victoria, from the statewide perspective.

CMF Committee had a specific and important role advising Council in developing and finalising the Regional Catchment Strategy guidelines, which were released by the Council in May 2011. The Convenor, John Young and Patricia Geraghty participated as observers on the Regional Catchment Strategy Managers' Forum and hence were able to keep the Committee informed regarding progress and any issues arising during RCS development across the State. The Committee commenced assessing the draft RCSs against the guidelines with the first batch of three drafts being completed in May 2012. The second and third batches will be submitted on 29 June and 3 August 2012 respectively. Advice on all ten drafts is expected to be forwarded to the two Ministers in September 2012.

CMF Committee was responsible for ongoing interaction with the CMAs and other partners, including activities such as advising on regional visits, representation on the Landcare Magazine Editorial Committee, organising cultural awareness training for Council, and overseeing several conference papers on integrated catchment management. The CMF Committee had oversight of the production of Council's Annual Report each year (with input from other Committees and staff as required).

Catchment Knowledge and Advice Committee

Membership of the Committee included Dr Sandra Brizga (Chair), Jan Mahoney (to December 2011) and Joanne Anderson, with executive support provided by Marian Pernat and Neil Meyers.

Under S. 9(1) of the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988*, VCMC may, but is not obliged, to provide advice to the Minister on any matter arising from the administration of the Act.

When the Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) has made a recommendation regarding the listing/de-listing of a taxon or community of flora or fauna or potentially threatening process, it must notify the VCMC of this advice (S.153(a)). The Minister must then consider any comments from the VCMC within 30 days of receiving the SAC's recommendation and decide whether or not to recommend to the Governor in Council that the listings be added or repealed. Furthermore, in preparing or amending an action statement, the Secretary must consider any management advice given by the VCMC S.19(3)(a).

Full SAC reports regarding items for listing and action statements received by the VCMC Secretariat were forwarded to the CKA Committee. The CKA Committee recommended to Council for each nomination, whether any specific comment is required or whether a standard "no comment" response should be sent.

Under the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994* (CaLP Act) S. 69(2-4), the Minister must obtain advice from VCMC on a recommendation to declare or revoke an animal as an established pest animal or a plant as a noxious weed. VCMC must also assess the extent and severity of its impact, propose suggested measures for its management, provide an estimate of the cost of these measures and provide advice on how it might be funded. Council has not been called upon to provide advice under these provisions in its current term.

A major review of noxious weeds involving DPI and the CMAs has been ongoing for a number of years but has not been signed off to date.

VCMC was represented on the DPI Invasive Plants and Animals Governance Group (IPAGG). IPAGG was first established to provide input into the Invasive Plants and Animals Policy and Biosecurity Frameworks and now provides more general advice around governance arrangements with respect to invasive plants and animals.

The Committee's role is to provide advice on, and contribute to the development of strategic statewide natural resource management priorities as required. The Committee was responsible for developing draft VCMC submissions/responses to policy documents and other discussion papers as appropriate on behalf of Council. Given the large volume and variety of papers that the Secretariat received, the Committee developed a set of criteria to: i) determine whether or not a response is required; and (ii) ensure a response is developed in a timely, effective and appropriate way.

The CKA Committee maintained a watching brief around statewide MER activities and held regular discussions with DSE at CKA meetings.

The Committee's role in knowledge management was to keep in touch with latest developments and encourage and enable the best possible outcomes as broadly as possible.

The Knowledge Management Expert Panel (KMEP) (administered by VCMC) was originally set up to facilitate discussion around R&D in catchment management and its focus later shifted to natural resource knowledge management. Following the completion of the 'Strategic Framework for Integrated Natural Resource Knowledge Management', the Panel agreed to contribute to the development of the VCMC Catchment Condition and Management Report 2012. Membership comprised experts from a broad range of backgrounds including academics, government, and the private sector. The KMEP met approximately twice yearly.

Another of the Committee's roles was to keep informed about, encourage and support new, innovative and effective methods of including ecosystem services and ecomarkets in NRM practice and reporting

Catchment Condition and Management Report Steering Committee

Membership of the Committee included Chris Arnott (Chair), Sandra Brizga, Cullen Gunn and Rod Gowans, with executive support provided by Patricia Geraghty, Neil Meyers and Tracey Koper.

VCMC established the Catchment Condition and Management Report (CCMR) Steering Committee to commence planning and undertake the development of the 2012 Catchment Condition and Management Report. The Committee provided overarching direction and guidance regarding reporting on indicators, condition and management of land and water resources at a statewide level. The Committee also oversaw the structure and communication of the report as a whole.

The CCMR Steering Committee also had oversight of the CCMR Resources Expert Panel. This Panel was made up of representatives and experts from several Divisions of DSE, EPA, DPCD, DPI, the VCC and the CMAs. The role of this Panel was to provide data as available and required and analyse and interpret data for the CCMR. The Resources Expert Panel also provided a forum for knowledge exchange between data custodians and experts.

Regional Visits by Council

At the start of the three-year term, Council resolved to visit each of the 10 catchment management regions and meet with each of the CMA Boards. In 2011-12, Council travelled to Glenelg Hopkins, East Gippsland, Port Phillip and Westernport and Wimmera catchment management regions.

Each of these visits included a field inspection of catchment management issues and a meeting with the CMA Board and senior staff, including a joint session with the CMA Board during the Council meeting, held in the region during the visit.

Council has gained much from these regional visits. They provide the opportunity to be connected with the regional model and enable Council members to take a broader view of what is going on in natural resource management across the state.

Visiting the regions also gives Council an appreciation of program and project implementation, and allows members and staff to connect with the communities that are doing the work on the ground.

Council would like to thank the CMA Boards and staff members who have made us so welcome, and to the community members in the regions whom we have met, who have allowed us on to their properties and to gain an insight into their projects.

Stakeholder Communication

VCMC has continued to develop relationships across all Government departments with an interest in natural resource management and with Ministers to discuss priorities and directions for the Council.

VCMC Finance Report

The following table outlines operating revenue and expenditure for the 2007-2008, 2008-2009, 2009-2010, 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 financial years.

VCMC Financial Report 2007-2008 to 2011-2012

	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012
Operating Revenue	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$
DSE Allocation	563,579	594,498	603,071	548,061	684,789
Trust Funds	22,644	22,643	22,643	19,851	0
NAP (Catchment Knowledge Exchange ¹)	95,000	0	0	0	0
Total Revenue	681,223	617,141	652,714	567,912	684,789
Expenses					
DSE Allocation	563,036	574,234	577,277	567,474	725,303
Trust Funds	0	0	1,921	19,851 ²	0
NAP	92,678	0	0	0	0
Total Expenses	655,714	574,234	579,198	587,325	725,303

Notes:

- (1) Unspent NAP - Catchment Knowledge Exchange funding carried forward to 2006-2007 due to change in project schedule and deliverables caused by contract delays. Expenditure was completed on time.
- (2) The Council used the VCMC Trust Fund to sponsor a workshop on Indigenous Employment Opportunities in Natural Resource Management held on 29 June 2010.

VCMC, in conjunction with DSE, has transitioned its accounting policies and financial reporting from current Australian Standards to Australian equivalents of International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS).

There were no matters which changed the Council's financial position during the 2011-12 reporting period. Further, there were no subsequent events which will have a material impact on the Council's future financial position that occurred after this report was finalised.

Major State Natural Resource Management Activities and Programs

As part of the functions conferred to the Victorian Catchment Management Council through the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994*, s.9(b) and (c), the Council is:

- to encourage the co-operation of persons and bodies involved in the management of land and water resources in furthering the objectives of this Act, and
- to promote community awareness and understanding of issues relating to catchment management.

This Annual Report provides information on several key activities and operations of the Department of Sustainability and Environment, Department of Primary Industries, the Catchment Management Authorities and Melbourne Water, as the manager of water resources within the Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority. These activities, and operations of other natural resource management agencies, are of particular interest to the Council to promote awareness and co-operation, and create further awareness of integrated catchment management.

Note that the projects summarised in this section were not managed by VCMC. However, the Council is reporting on these good examples of natural resource management and integrated catchment management as its interpretation of the requirement to report on the operations of the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994*, s.9J.(1).

Responding to rain and floods

As floods swept through Victoria in March and June 2012, impacting communities and agricultural activity in 33 local government areas, DSE joined the State Emergency Service (SES) and the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) to provide emergency response and relief services.

DSE deployed aircraft and provided incident management staff and flood mapping and prediction specialists around the clock to work in planning, operations and logistics in the Incident Control Centres and the State Control Centre.

After the floods DSE continued to update and streamline response systems and processes, which were effectively put into practice when floods impacted Gippsland in June 2012. Infrastructure was badly damaged or destroyed in many communities. When the flood effort moved from the emergency phase into recovery, DSE and Parks Victoria began assessing the damage to assets on public land such as swimming pools, sporting facilities, walking trails, caravan parks and parking areas. This year's significant floods came on the back of the floods between September 2010 and March 2011, which caused widespread damage and loss in more than 104 Victorian towns and communities.

Flood recovery community infrastructure fund

DSE is administering \$22 million of the \$30 million Flood Recovery Community Infrastructure Fund to help communities rebuild after the devastating floods that occurred in 2010–11. The fund – run jointly with Regional Development Victoria – is helping flood-affected areas across the state to repair and rebuild community infrastructure ranging from tennis courts and swimming pools to public halls and caravan parks. Around 190 flood recovery projects were funded in 2011–12 in the south-west and north-west areas of the state.

Flood warning and response systems

The Review of the 2010–11 Flood Warnings and Response, led by Neil Comrie AO APM, released its Final Report in December 2011. The report made 93 recommendations that will guide comprehensive reform of Victoria's emergency management arrangements. The Minister for Water is leading the development of an implementation plan for recommendations on flood warnings and predictions.

Some of this work was already underway. After the 2010–11 floods, DSE began developing a Flood Intelligence Platform (popularly known as Floodzoom), a web-based tool that will be used to predict floods and their impacts on communities. The \$12.1 million tool will use weather forecast models, satellite observations, river gauges and hydrological modelling to improve warnings and emergency response. Emergency services will be able to use Floodzoom to more accurately predict flood behaviour and the community will be able to view Floodzoom maps to see likely flood movements and assess their own flood risk.

The 2010–11 floods highlighted a need for short-term, real time water level information to be accessible from locations without permanent flood gauging stations. Real time data collection and delivery systems known as Portable Automated Logger Systems – or PALS – have since been developed by Thiess, under contract with DSE and the Northern Regional Water Monitoring Partnership.

In the March floods, ten PALS were deployed to relay water levels in Broken Creek to the Incident Control

Centre in Shepparton. These will be available for future floods through DSE's Regional Water Monitoring Partnerships. In addition to PALS, improvements at some 30 permanent flood gauging sites commenced. These improvements will increase access to real-time river height information for flood monitoring by agencies and communities.

In the 2011–12 Victorian Budget the Government provided \$2.4 million to DSE to conduct 25 flood studies. These studies will be conducted over four years with 11 currently underway.

Managing the algal outbreak in the Gippsland Lakes

Routine monitoring of water quality in the Gippsland Lakes in December 2011 became a major incident response after high levels of blue green algae (Cyanobacteria) were detected.

As the seriousness of the threat was revealed, DSE's response became a five-month operation to manage a health threat to humans and animals – and a challenge for the fishing and tourism industries. DSE monitoring detected high levels of the algae across large areas of the Gippsland Lakes. The main algal species (*Nodularia spumigena*) eventually spread throughout the eastern end of the lakes system.

The bloom had potential for widespread environmental, social and economic impacts. Direct contact with algal-affected water can cause skin irritations, vomiting, diarrhoea and hay fever-like symptoms in humans and animals. In addition, toxins from the blue-green algae affect seafood from the lakes.

An incident management team with wide expertise was set up. DSE worked with the Department of Primary Industries, Department of Health, Parks Victoria, East Gippsland and Wellington shire councils, the Environment Protection Authority, Monash University, tourism and fishing bodies. DSE's role included submitting water and seafood samples for analysis, maintaining contact with fishing and tourism representatives, and liaising with algal scientists who provided technical expertise and interpreted data. The sampling program monitored levels of algae and its toxins, including sampling water at 25 sites and liaising with local fisherman to collect samples of fish at five locations, mussels at three locations, and prawns at five locations in the lakes and from Bass Strait.

Ongoing and comprehensive information dissemination was critical. Through direct liaison, regional media, community meetings, signage, websites and fact sheets, the large range of stakeholders were kept up-to-date with advice regarding contact with lake water and gutting and gilling fish before eating and were warned not to eat prawns, mussels or crabs caught in the lakes. Parks Victoria and local councils erected signs warning people not to come into contact with affected water.

The tourism industry was represented on the incident management team and this close contact ensured tourism operators kept visitors and locals informed and limited the negative impact on tourism. The fishing industry was required to gut and gill fish. This strict provision allowed fishermen to continue working throughout the bloom and helped maintain the viability of commercial fishing in the lakes. This became even more important as the incident went on and it became clear the outbreak would extend for weeks and months.

In April and May 2012, algae levels improved enough to lift the advisory initially on fish, and later on prawns and mussels, allowing fishing to fully resume on the lakes. A Ministerial Advisory Council was established in early 2012 to address longer term issues related to the Gippsland Lakes, including the management of algal outbreaks. The Gippsland Lakes Ministerial Advisory Council (GLMAC) will provide advice to the Minister for Environment and Climate Change on environmental issues relating to the Gippsland Lakes; including all actions in the Gippsland Lakes catchment that affect the environmental condition of the Lakes. The GLMAC will also provide advice to the Minister for Regional and Rural Development in relation to the \$10 million Gippsland Lakes Environment Fund, which has been set up from the Government's Regional Growth Fund to improve the health of the Lakes. A Gippsland Lakes Environment Strategy is to be developed, and an initial set of projects has been approved for implementation during 2012–13.

68 new Landcare facilitators

The Landcare 'family' in Victoria has welcomed vital new members who will provide important support to this iconic volunteer network.

Landcare in Victoria covers more than 1000 Landcare and other community-based environmental groups, and has over 50,000 members including farmers, urban residents, landholders, families and students. These Landcare volunteers are now supported by 68 new Landcare facilitators, recruited under the Victorian Local Landcare Facilitator Initiative.

The facilitators are funded for up to four years to provide organisational support to Landcare groups and

networks to undertake various activities such as rejuvenating and repairing wildlife habitats, restoring waterways, improving farmland, building community capacity and protecting coasts.

The facilitators will play an important role in supporting Landcare groups in on-ground delivery, building community capacity and partnerships and assisting with advice on project development. These new facilitators will help groups and networks gain additional funding to undertake their activities and become more self-supporting where possible, to make them more resilient to any future changes in funding. In managing the initiative, DSE worked with Landcare groups and networks and also involved catchment management authorities and other agencies to develop criteria for assessing funding proposals. After running the application and approval process, DSE developed a statewide training program for the facilitators and supported a statewide induction training session for the new staff.

The initiative focused on recruiting facilitators from within local communities, ensuring facilitators had a good understanding of the local area and issues and could work closely with their local groups. In May 2012, the State Government announced an additional \$1 million in funding for on-ground works by Landcare groups and networks and the start of the public comment phase of its draft plan to support Landcare in Victoria. The draft plan outlines the strategic direction the Victorian Landcare program will take to help Landcare to improve Victoria's environment in the years ahead.

The draft plan has been developed with input from the Landcare community. Public submissions on the draft plan opened in May and closed on 30 June 2012. Submissions will inform the development of the final strategic plan.

New online trading system for native vegetation credits

DSE launched a trial of the Native Vegetation Exchange (NVX) system – a secure online trading system for native vegetation credits in February 2012. The NVX makes transactions for buyers and sellers of offsets simpler and cheaper through an easy to use online system that matches buyers and sellers of native vegetation credits.

Removing native vegetation in Victoria generally requires a planning permit. Permitted clearing must be offset by protecting and preserving native vegetation of a similar extent or quality – a native vegetation credit.

The NVX trial area covers the south-east corner of Victoria – from the eastern suburbs of Melbourne to the Mornington Peninsula and across to Lakes Entrance. The trial is being managed by DSE in partnership with Bass Coast Landcare Network, which supports the offset market in the Gippsland Plains bioregion. The NVX system – designed by a team from the Californian Institute of Technology, led by noted economist Professor Charles Plott – is convenient, secure and fair to buyers and sellers. It automatically applies Victoria's rules for offsetting and allows buyers and sellers to quickly and easily search for potential trades. It also increases the types of trades available by allowing multiple buyers and sellers in a trade. Trades are instantaneous, buyers and sellers can view all previous trades and all current and previous bids, giving all participants equal access to information.

By the end of June 2012, six landowners and three buyers had completed training and entered the NVX system. Native vegetation credits from a range of Ecological Vegetation Classes within the Gippsland Plains Bioregion are currently available within the system. The NVX trial builds on DSE's environmental markets program, which includes ecoTender, BushTender and BushBroker. These initiatives all aim to increase the extent and quality of native vegetation across the entire landscape.

Protecting the Growling Grass Frog

Land owners are making simple changes to farm dams to help preserve an endangered species. The Growling Grass Frog (*Litoria raniformis*) is a large, green frog, once common across Victoria. It is now endangered across its range, with the loss of wetland habitats a particular threat to its persistence in the landscape.

As part of Dams to Habitat, land owners and DSE staff are working together to make simple changes to enhance the habitat in farm dams that are located close to known Growling Grass Frog populations. Growling Grass Frogs prefer wetlands with good plant growth to protect them from predators and to improve their food supply. At each farm dam selected for habitat enhancement, one third of the dam is planted with emergent, submerged and floating aquatic vegetation. The enhanced habitat is fenced to prevent stock access.

DSE biologists monitor the dams to see if the enhanced habitat is being used by the Growling Grass Frog. Survey techniques include listening and spot-lighting for adult frogs at night and trapping for tadpoles;

water quality and habitat variables are also measured.

The project is an example of how private land owners, with help from DSE, can care for endangered species on their land without impacting on their agricultural practices. Findings from this project are contributing to our knowledge of this fascinating species and how to care for it.

Old ways help create future for managing land

Incorporating indigenous knowledge, culture and practices into land management practices can help to better protect the natural environment. DSE has made two agreements with traditional owner groups for jointly managing land under the Conservation, Forests and Lands Act 1987.

The first management agreement – with the Yorta Yorta Traditional Owner group – involves establishing a board of management for Barmah National Park, an area of significant cultural value to the Yorta Yorta. The second agreement – with the Gunaikurnai Traditional Owner group – involves managing 10 areas of land in Gippsland, including the Gippsland Lakes Coastal Park and the Lakes National Park.

This agreement is part of a larger native title settlement, which delivers joint management of the land as well as the transfer of Aboriginal Title, access to natural resources and employment positions. In the past year, DSE has worked with the traditional owner groups to bring meaning and action to these agreements. One step has been to form boards of management and appoint traditional owners, community and government representatives to these boards. The appointment process to establish the Gunaikurnai Board of Management is complete and the Yorta Yorta Board of Management is being established.

DSE is also supporting board operations, including resolving policy issues, building stakeholder awareness of boards and their role and integrating the role of boards into the broader public land management framework. Joint management of public land benefits both traditional owners and the broader community. Formally embracing Indigenous land management into existing land management practices provides employment opportunities for traditional owners to ‘work on country’.

In the Gunaikurnai settlement, DSE is establishing an employment program involving Gunaikurnai people working on the jointly-managed land.

The agreements will also help to nurture an appreciation of the cultural and natural values that define the land for indigenous communities, creating a richer experience for everyone who visits that land.

Largest planned burning program achieved in two decades

DSE and Parks Victoria completed 834 planned burns treating a total of 197,149 hectares of public land in 2011–12 as part of an integrated plan to reduce bushfire risk to people, property and communities. This is 87 per cent of the annual target of 225,000 hectares and more than any other year since 1991, despite one of the wettest years on record.

The annual planned burning program will gradually build to an annual target of 390,000 hectares – or 5 per cent – of public land in response to the government’s commitment to implement all of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission recommendations.

The planned burning program aims to maximise the reduction of bushfire risk across the state, and is guided by fire behaviour models and research about the effects of fire on different vegetation types. Consultation with local industries, interest groups, the Country Fire Authority (CFA), councils and communities across Victoria is also a key part of the planned burning program, assisting to plan where to burn in each district, taking into account bushfires, planned burns and clearing works in previous years. The planned burning program made good headway in spring 2011, when favourable weather allowed crews to treat more than 34,000 hectares – more than the average for that time of year.

However, in March and April 2012 – usually peak months for planned burning – heavy rain swept across eastern Victoria, leaving many areas too wet to burn, while in the west, many areas remained too dry. DSE made the most of every burning opportunity by moving resources around the state to conduct burns where and when weather and conditions were suitable. Community engagement and communications activities also changed focus as crews moved around.

Detailed operational planning and site preparation work was also undertaken on around 180,000 hectares. These areas are ready for burning when weather and other conditions become suitable. In addition, Parks Victoria completed 800 hectares of fuel reduction in outer Melbourne’s bushland – including high risk areas such as the Dandenong Ranges National Park – using non-burning techniques such as slashing.

Operations of the Catchment Management Authorities

Corangamite Catchment Management Authority

The dedicated Corangamite CMA team continue their ongoing commitment to deliver natural resource management projects in partnership with the community, governments and industry. The authority received slightly less funding than the previous year with key investors continuing to be the Victorian Government, \$7,628,637, and the Australian Government, \$3,405,544.

The authority also welcomed the Australian Government's funding commitment of an additional \$2.9 million over the next six years for the Corangamite CMA's biodiversity program, announced in May. This funding was through the Clean Energy Future Biodiversity Fund. Corangamite CMA also received funding for waterways improvement and community education through its WaterWatch program from key partners – Barwon Water, Central Highlands Water and Wannon Water.

A significant planning project - the new Regional Catchment Strategy (RCS) - took place in the past year. The draft RCS is complete and a community consultation phase occurred during June and July.

Work also commenced on a demographic profiling project to capture an updated picture of the regional community, including land-use change and the community profile. The new research will support a new Communications and Engagement Strategy, which is scheduled for completion in 2013. Below is a list of some of the 2011-12 achievements:

Welcome to the Corangamite CMA new board - Corangamite CMA welcomed a new Board and Chair in 2011. New Chair Alice Knight took over her role in July and a new Board including two members from the previous Board commenced in November.

New Stony Rises Landcare Group - An enthusiastic bunch of Stony Rises landholders have banded together to help restore the landscape to its former glory. The Stony Rises Land Management Network was formed to help combat weed and pest problems and improve remnant bush in the area.

World Environment Day Activities - Corangamite CMA hosted two World Environment Day events involving 18 regional schools and 1029 students taking part in environment education activities conducted in partnership with regional agencies that included a fibre arts competition and exhibition.

Landcare Facilitator Program - Regional Landcare Facilitator Program has achieved an increase in farmers adopting stewardship, covenants, property management plans or other arrangements to improve both on-farm and off-farm environments, in all cases exceeding program targets.

Social Media - Incorporating the use of social media with its traditional communications to keep community and project partners up to date with projects, events and activities following the launch of its Facebook and Twitter pages, YouTube channel and online wiki/blog.

The achievements listed are the result of strong relationships with land managers, community groups and volunteers, federal and state governments, municipalities and industry groups.

East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority

In 2011/12, the Victorian Investment Framework (VIF) funded 24 projects in East Gippsland. Each project was undertaken in one of the four geographic regional Program areas adopted by the region to support project integration. The 2011/12 regional Programs were:

- Gippsland Lakes Flagship Program,
- Victorian Alps Flagship Program,
- Far East Flagship Program, and
- East Gippsland Resilience Program.

Projects contributed to one or more of the Headline Themes used by the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) as a framework for statewide resource condition and management activity reporting. Each theme represents a key area of direct investment in natural resource management by the Victorian Government. The DSE Headline Themes are:

- Biodiversity
- Inland Aquatic Ecosystems
- Marine and Coastal
- Land Health

- Community Capacity
- Environmental Stewardship

Highlights and Challenges

Climatic conditions had a significant impact on natural resource management activities during 2011/12, particularly the above average rainfall that fell across the region during the financial year. Annual rainfall totals for the reporting period were above average with Bairnsdale recording 30% above average while Lakes Entrance, Orbost and Mallacoota recorded rainfall totals 97%, 89% and 31% above average respectively. The higher than average rainfall spread throughout the year resulted in prolific flowering of some threatened species leading to improved recruitment. In addition the wet and cool conditions ensured there were no significant wildfires in the region.

Whilst the above average rainfall had some positive consequences it also created additional challenges implementing management activities; in particular access for pest plant and animal treatment activities was compromised often at the critical time for chemical control. Completing the planned amount of ecological burning was also difficult.

Other significant events having a negative impact on the natural resources of the region during the reporting period were the spread of the myrtle rust plant disease resulting from the rust fungus *Uredo ranglii*; three separate flood events in the region, and finally a significant blue green algae outbreak in the Gippsland lakes over the summer of 2011/12.

Management activities included:

The nature of the management activities in this theme mean there is some overlap with other themes in particular Environmental Stewardship and Inland Aquatic Ecosystems. The outputs for Trust for Nature, and the Conservation Management Network projects are reported under the Environmental Stewardship theme whilst the outputs for the Protect and Enhance Wetlands project are reported in the Inland Aquatic Ecosystems theme.

The DSE Restoring Threatened Species projects implemented recovery programs for selected nationally and state listed threatened species and communities across the region. The projects aimed to make each of the species or communities more secure and to increase the size of their known populations through one or more of securing habitat, on ground works to control threats, direct population supplementation or survey to find new locations of the species. Highlights for the year from these projects include:

- High rate of White-bellied Sea -eagle (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*) fledgling survival across 50 nest sites monitored.
- Vigorous regeneration in some flora due to good seasonal conditions.
- Successful propagation of a number of threatened flora species.
- Continued increase in the Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby (*Petrogale penicillata*) population.

The Parks Victoria project Protecting the Vic Alps Catchments undertook a coordinated and targeted program of weed control activities across the headwaters of the Wonnangatta, Dargo and Buchan watersheds within the East Gippsland CMA region. Due to favourable seasonal conditions some weed species such as thistles were prolific and required additional attention.

The Protecting the Best in the National Park Estate project included pest animal control in the Snowy River National Park and parts of the Alpine National Park along with a range of pest plant control activities in the Lake Tyers Forest Park and the National Parks of Far East Gippsland. A notable achievement from these projects is the successful removal of feral goats from the McKillops Bridge area of the Snowy River National Park.

The focus of the Authority's suite of Waterway management projects is on implementation of on ground works such as weed control, stock exclusion fencing, streamside revegetation and bed and/or bank stabilisation works. These projects were implemented across all basins in the region and build on previous years works and where possible include a binding agreement with the frontage landholder to ensure the sites are maintained over time. The predominant weed species controlled are the willow species and blackberries, with willow control being undertaken in the majority of river systems. In some cases willow control is in its third pass, and significant inroads have been made. Other highlights from these projects include:

- 28 landholder agreements covering 63 ha negotiated.
- Rainforest restoration of the Lower Snowy moves into the maintenance phase
- Monitoring program for completed works developed and implementation commenced.

In addition to the riparian based works the Authority also implemented two region wide projects focussing on fulfilling its obligations under the Water Act and associated planning legislation through the provision of Works on Waterway permits and planning referrals.

Water quality planning expertise contributed to the coordinated response to the 2012 Gippsland Lakes blue green algae bloom. The Waterwatch program also continued to deliver positive results with 30 active volunteers monitoring water quality across the region on a monthly basis.

The Environmental Water Reserve project contributed to the Authority's capacity to influence management of Snowy environmental water in 2011/12. Monitoring of the physical effects of the spring 2011 environmental flow release on the Snowy estuary was undertaken with support from the Authority, DSE and NSW Office of Water. The region hosted a visit by the Victorian Environmental Water Holder Commissioners and staff to coincide with the spring release, during which discussion regarding future VEWH and Authority involvement in Snowy environmental flow management was initiated. Collaboration between the Authority, VEWH and DSE resulted in inclusion a commitment in the Gippsland Sustainable Water Strategy (released in Nov 2011) to ongoing evaluation of the effects of environmental flow releases on the Victorian reaches of the Snowy River, estuary and wetlands, and to influence future releases to benefit the lower Snowy.

During 2011/12 the main project addressing the Marine and Coastal theme was the Parks Victoria project Gippsland Lakes Shoreline and Protection project. However, both the Parks Victoria Protecting the Best in the National Park Estate and DSE's Protect and Enhance Wetlands both have components of their projects addressing coastal issues through weed control in coastal National Parks and wetland conservation in and around the Gippsland Lakes.

During 2011/12 the following organisations delivered projects with management activities within the Land Health theme.

Department of Primary Industries
Reducing Sediment Sources to the Gippsland Lakes

East Gippsland Landcare Network
Targeting High Priority Sediment Sources on Farms

These two projects were conducted in partnership with the aim of reducing the threat to the high value rivers and the Gippsland Lakes from soil erosion and sedimentation. Threat reduction occurs through maintaining the health of the soil asset in the catchment, remediating high priority erosion sites that pose a threat to high value natural assets, and building community capacity regarding soil health and erosion control issues through field days, training days and volunteer planting days

Through the Regional Landcare Coordination project the Authority provided a regional focus to the promotion and implementation of Victorian Landcare Grants. The project is also crucial in providing support to the East Gippsland Landcare community through the implementation of the Regional Landcare Support Action Plan. The other two Landcare projects listed provided Victorian Landcare grants funding to the Landcare groups and networks.

Monitoring

The EGCSMA conducts an annual survey of Landcare groups and networks as part of its annual monitoring program. In addition to identifying the nature of activities undertaken by each group, the survey seeks feedback on how well the groups perceive they are operating. Results gathered to date from the 2011/12 survey indicate that 9% of groups rated themselves as "Thriving", 46% rated themselves as "Strong" and a further 45% rated themselves as "Ok", and these results also gave an average self assessed health rating of "Good".

Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authority

The Glenelg Hopkins region lies south of the Great Dividing Range in Victoria's south west. The region is renowned for its scenic beauty, dramatic coastline and rich biodiversity.

It covers approximately 26,910 sq km, extending from Ballarat in the east to the South Australian border in the west, and from the southern coast of Victoria to the townships of Harrow and Ararat in the north. There are four basins that occur within the region: Glenelg, Hopkins, Portland Coast and Millicent Coast. The boundaries of the region include marine and coastal waters out to the state limit of three nautical miles. The region is characterised by flat volcanic plains in the south, while the Grampians, Dundas Tablelands, and

Central Highlands are dominant in the north.

The Glenelg Hopkins region has a rich resource base that supports diverse and growing industry. The main economic drivers are agriculture, fisheries, retail, manufacturing, health and community services, education and construction, while agriculture, forestry and fishing are the major employers, providing nearly 25 per cent of total employment.

The Glenelg Hopkins region contains a number of natural features that are of national and international significance, including:

- Budj Bim National Heritage Landscape (Mt Eccles / Lake Condah /Tyrrendarra Area)
- Grampians National Park (listed on National Heritage Register)
- Kanawinka Geopark (UNESCO listed), encompassing sites of geologic significance such as Wannon Falls, Tower Hill, Mt Noorat and Princess Margaret Rose Caves
- Glenelg River – the lower section of the Glenelg River is heritage-listed due to its environmental significance
- Western District Ramsar lakes – one lake in the region is recognised as internationally important under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands
- International Bird Area (IBA) between Port Fairy and Warrnambool and the Yambuk Lakes, which support a non-breeding population of the critically endangered Orange-bellied Parrot and a breeding population of the near-threatened Hooded Plover
- significant areas of two of 15 recognised Australian Government 'biodiversity hotspots' (Victorian Volcanic Plain, South Australia's South-east/Victoria's South-west)
- 13 endangered Ecological Vegetation Communities
- 94 federally listed species
- the iconic Red-tailed Black Cockatoo, Orange-bellied Parrot and endemic Glenelg Spiny Cray, and 173 of Victoria's threatened species.

The widespread rainfall of the past two years has replenished soil moisture and water storages in the region. This has been positive for its agricultural producers. Farmers this year have experienced high livestock and commodity prices, along with strong export demand and so many of the producers have been rebuilding flocks and herds. The long term sustainability of rural enterprises relies on continued profitability as well as increased knowledge and practice of sustainable land management practices. In southern parts of the region where dairying is concentrated, the soil health program has been an important source of information for landholders to improve their land management practices and reduce the impacts of soil acidity. The major floods of 2010-11 damaged townships, rural areas and many natural features of the catchment. Fortunately with the stimulus of the Victorian Government's Flood Recovery Employment Program, the CMA has been able to help many farmers repair or replace damaged fencing, clean up waterway debris and weeds, and replant riparian vegetation.

Flooding in 2011 and higher flows throughout the region have dramatically improved the health of the river systems and their estuaries. In the Glenelg River higher natural flows have been combined with increased water allocations for the river from the Wimmera and Glenelg Rivers Environmental Entitlement, gazetted last year. In managing the return of environmental water to the Glenelg River the CMA has monitored the impact of environmental flows and has documented the improvements to river health, although the flows have also enabled Carp to expand their range further downstream.

The Regional Catchment Strategy, the guiding NRM framework for the region, will be renewed in 2012-13. The new RCS has been drafted with input from major partners and members of the community, and was issued for public comment during June.

This third RCS will show how the region is tracking in achieving its vision and it will provide clear direction for the CMA and others within the region, to continue to improve the state of natural resources while contributing to increased prosperity.

25 years of Landcare in Victoria was celebrated in 2011, together with the many Landcare groups and their members. This significant milestone was acknowledged in August by the Minister for Water The Hon Peter Walsh at the CMA's display at Sheepvention in Hamilton.

Achievements and Highlights

- The major floods of 2010-11 damaged townships, rural areas and many natural features of the catchment. Fortunately with the stimulus of the Victorian Government's Flood Recovery Employment Program, the CMA has been able to help many farmers repair or replace damaged fencing, clean up waterway debris and weeds, and replant riparian vegetation.

- A number of Landcare groups and members were acknowledged for their many years of dedicated work in protecting productive landscapes at the Glenelg Hopkins Environmental Achievement Awards in August. It was heart-warming to see such an impressive collection of innovative and effective environmental champions showcased in one evening.
- Glenelg Hopkins CMA received competitive Biodiversity Funding from the Australian Government to protect and revegetate key 'biolinks' in the Zone 1 of Habitat 141. H141 is one of six key wildlife corridors identified in the Australian Government's Draft Wildlife Corridors Plan.
- Glenelg Hopkins CMA and its partners planted more than 250,000 trees and other plants across the region in 2011-12.

Stakeholder Engagement

The relationships and communication with the community are central to the Glenelg Hopkins CMA ethos. Close working partnerships with residents, landholders and investors thread through all CMA objectives.

In 2011-12, community engagement achievements included:

- Regional Catchment Strategy stakeholder and community workshops
- Landcare 25th birthday celebrations
- Glenelg Hopkins Environmental Achievement Awards
- Lake Bolac Eel Festival
- Waterway Action Plan public meetings
- environmental and flood recovery projects in partnership with Conservation Volunteers Australia
- 15 Carbon Farming Initiative presentations to over 500 people
- support VicSES to promote FloodSafe awareness and FloodSafe Week
- field days and environmental sponsorships
- Landcare monthly e-newsletter and LandLife quarterly e-newsletter.

The Glenelg Hopkins CMA Advisory groups provide advice on, and review CMA strategic direction and monitor and report achievements. Over the year, both Advisory Groups have provided extensive input and feedback on the development of the region's third Regional Catchment Strategy (2012 -2018). Key areas of focus included the provision of advice on the regional vision for the RCS, and associated objectives and actions for catchment assets. Feedback was also provided on asset prioritisation, condition and threats. The Biodiversity and Land Health Advisory Group has also provided advice on the renewal of the Regional Landcare Support Strategy; while the River and Wetland Health Advisory Group has provided advice and feedback on community engagement methods surrounding Environmental Watering and is involved in the development of the Regional Waterway Management Strategy.

In addition they provided advice and support to the CMA Land Health Program including the sustainable farm practices, soil acidification and woodland projects. The group also provided support to the DAFF Regional Landcare Facilitator role.

The Glenelg Hopkins Environmental Achievement Awards were held in August 2012. They are held biannually to recognise contributions to improving the region's environment. There were 41 entries in eight categories, with the winners selected by an independent judging panel.

The categories were Coastcare, Education, Rivercare, Primary Producer, Landcare and Community Group, Indigenous Group, Individual or Partnership Achievement and Business and Government Partnerships. The awards were attended by 120 people, and the guest speaker was Australia's first Landcare facilitator Professor Andrew Campbell.

The Gunditj Mirring Partnership Project (GMPP), is a collaboration between the Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation and Glenelg Hopkins CMA. The project is focused on enhancing Gunditj Mirring's capacity to record its indigenous ecological knowledge and to apply this knowledge, where appropriate, to natural resource management.

An extension program as part of the GMPP has been initiated through partnership and secondment with RMIT Hamilton to undertake trial site activities, landowner surveys, collate extensive data and knowledge for toolkit development and involve external consultants in research and NRM.

Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority

The past 12 months has seen a number of ongoing and new NRM opportunities and challenges face the Catchment community of the Goulburn Broken including natural disasters, water and carbon policy reform, and Regional Catchment Strategy development. The Goulburn Broken CMA continued to successfully deliver important environmental programs during 2011/12 underpinned by strong regional partnerships and a skilled and committed workforce. Both of which, when complemented by a progressive catchment

community, has challenged the Goulburn Broken CMA to continually develop new programs and management approaches within a dynamic environment.

Priorities

The Goulburn Broken CMA has driven a very community inclusive process for the renewal of the Goulburn Broken Regional Catchment Strategy (RCS), embracing a new approach that will drive investment prioritisation based on an understanding of the thresholds affecting the resilience of six social-ecological systems in the Catchment. The RCS describes the evolution over the last 20 years from a focus on a single threat (salinity) to integrated catchment management (including water quality and biodiversity) to an understanding of ecosystem services (such as clean air and water, productive soils) to now embedding resilience into thinking and planning. Resilience is an understanding of how a system can maintain its functions (i.e. deliver ecosystem services we need) whilst coping with all the changes imposed upon it.

Natural disasters have again shaped on-ground work priorities during 2011/12. A flood employment program was implemented in response to the 2010 and 2011 floods, and in response to the 2012 floods a Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements funding application for \$738,000 was submitted to repair flood affected waterways throughout the Broken-Boosey Creek system. In addition, numerous flood studies have been instigated to better understand the hydraulic characteristics of these systems and better plan for floods. The Goulburn Broken CMA also presented to the Victorian Government's Environment and Natural Resources Committee Inquiry on Waterway Management on two occasions, sharing experiences and learnings.

A continuing priority in 2011/12 was the debate around the Murray Darling Basin Authority's Basin Plan. The Goulburn Broken CMA submitted a comprehensive response based on supporting environmental flows in the Goulburn system, aligned with the Northern Region Sustainable Water Strategy, recognition of flow constraints in the systems, an emphasis on water savings generated through works and measures and the need to maintain the momentum in salinity and water quality strategies while recognising the importance of socio-economic factors in the region.

Achievements/highlights

Another significant flood was experienced across the northern part of the Catchment with the Goulburn Broken CMA playing a very important role in the Incident Control Centre providing up to date flood intelligence and scenarios to enable planning.

Strong partnerships fostered by the Goulburn Broken CMA have resulted in regional agencies, community-based organisations and individual landholders in the catchment being able to capitalise on the establishment of the Commonwealth Government's Clean Energy Future Land Sector Package by capturing nearly \$7.5 million in the first round of the Biodiversity Fund plus \$2.2 million of funding from the Victorian Communities for Nature program.

The Goulburn Broken CMA continues to lead the consortium delivering the successful Farm Water Program, generating valuable environmental water for the Catchment as well as consolidating a viable irrigation industry. Another 240 on-farm irrigation upgrades were funded through Round 2 of the Program with support from the Federal Government's On-farm Irrigation Efficiency Program (\$25 million) and Victorian Government's On-farm State Priority Project (\$43 million) saving a total of 32GL of water. The Program featured in a presentation by the Goulburn Broken CMA on Australian water management on a national, state, regional and farm scale perspective at the International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage Conference in Tehran, Iran. The success of the Program demonstrates the importance of integration in delivering irrigation modernisation in the Catchment.

A Climate Change Integration Strategy was finalised by the Goulburn Broken CMA in March 2012. The first of its kind, the Strategy consolidates a framework for implementing the Goulburn Broken CMA climate change policy by facilitating the integration of climate change into existing programs through the consideration of climate change adaptation in planning, implementation, evaluation and reporting. The Strategy will investigate initiatives to promote opportunities in the areas of sequestration and mitigation, and provide the vehicle for communicating the Goulburn Broken CMA's position on climate change.

Significant on-ground work undertaken in the Catchment in 2011/12 to further enhance the environment and protect natural features included:

- 888 hectares of remnant vegetation fenced for protection
- 755 hectares of native (indigenous) vegetation planted
- 1228 hectares managed for natural regeneration
- 19 kilometres of river or stream erosion treated
- 20 kilometres of instream habitat established

- 26 kilometres of riparian or stream/river remnant fenced
- 327 whole farm plans prepared
- 0.6 kilometres of irrigation drains built
- 1,783 hectares of irrigation systems improved
- 4,377 hectares of irrigation systems upgraded

Stakeholder engagement

2011/12 has seen the full implementation of the new community engagement model moving from two Implementation Committees to a broad range of community advisory groups with a “whole of catchment” focus based on our 3 delivery Programs, namely Sustainable Irrigation, Land & Biodiversity, and River & Wetland Health and Floodplain Management. This has been complemented by a continued focus on community NRM groups, such as the 93 Landcare Groups and 6 Networks, 5 Conservation Management Networks, and various Alliances and Friends of Groups. A number of other community engagement structures have been reviewed and the Goulburn Broken CMA has significantly increased its media coverage in 2011/12, run a number of community events and field days, and established a comprehensive social media strategy and online presence to engage with a broader range of our community.

An initial step in implementing the Goulburn Broken CMA’s new engagement strategy was to host the first ever ‘whole of catchment’ Landcare Awards in July 2011 attended by 160 people. Regular meetings have also been instigated with the Chairs of the 6 Landcare networks in the catchment to discuss strategic NRM alignment which we will look to expand further in 2012/13. The Goulburn Broken Local Government Biodiversity Reference Group celebrated its 5th anniversary in August 2011. The Group has a strong emphasis on the role of local government in NRM with collaboration from all 8 local governments in the Catchment, DSE, VicRoads, Goulburn-Murray Water and the Goulburn Broken CMA.

The Goulburn Broken CMA continued to coordinate a monthly Partnership Team meeting and instigated a RCS Partnership Management Team meeting involving DSE, DPI, Goulburn-Murray Water, the Northern Victorian Irrigation Renewal Project, local government and the Department of Planning and Community Development.

The success that the Goulburn Broken CMA achieves in improving the environmental health of the catchment is also due to the significant commitment and support of its delivery agencies and partners. The contribution of landholders, Landcare, Conservation Management Networks, Department of Primary Industries, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Goulburn-Murray Water, Goulburn Valley Water, Northern Victorian Irrigation Renewal Project, Victorian Farmers Federation, Trust for Nature, Australian Government agencies, local government, and other community groups and organisations is acknowledged by the CMA.

Mallee Catchment Management Authority

Overview

The Mallee Catchment Management Authority’s primary responsibility is to ensure that natural resources in the Victorian Mallee are managed in an integrated and ecologically sustainable way that is in line with its community’s expectations.

The work of the Mallee CMA is based on science and delivered through meaningful partnerships with government agencies, local organisations and community groups in the Victorian Mallee.

The Authority is responsible for a region covering 3.9 million hectares, which is about one fifth of Victoria. It is the largest catchment area in the state and runs along the Murray River from Nyah to the South Australian border, through areas of high-value irrigated horticulture and national parks, and south through vast dryland cropping areas and public reserves to the Wimmera.

Highlights

- Delivery of the Flood Recovery Environmental Employment Program (FREEP) ;
- Supporting the re-introduction of Local Landcare Facilitators in the Mallee;
- Commencement of \$30 million construction of The Living Murray works and measures package at Hattah and development of further large scale water management works;
- Reaching the milestone of 1 million hectares of Mallee agricultural land covered by whole farm environmental plans since commencing the Environmental Management Action Planning (EMAP) program.
- Development of the Mallee Regional Catchment Strategy 2012-18 in consultation with NRM partners and regional stakeholders;
- Mallee Invasive Plants and Animals Management Strategy received Ministerial approval.

- Victorian Mallee Land and Water Management Plan received Ministerial approval.

Challenges

- The ongoing ramifications from the severe climatic conditions experienced last season and the resulting financial stress and changing seasonal impacts on both the irrigation and dryland industry sectors.
- Responding to the increased incidence and impact of a number of key threatening processes (e.g. invasive plants and animals) resulting from above average rainfall conditions over the past two seasons.

The future

- Move towards a more streamlined, flexible and sustainable organisation;
- Continuation of The Living Murray works and measures program at Hattah Lakes.
- Increased regional emphasis on achieving integrated and targeted outcomes through delivery of the 2012-18 Regional Catchment Strategies approach to Asset Based implementation.

North Central Catchment Management Authority

The North Central Catchment Management Authority (CMA) and regional partners have implemented projects to protect and enhance the integrity of its catchments.

The North Central CMA has delivered \$24 million of environmental investment in 2011-12, resulting in significant positive environmental outcomes.

Regional Catchment Strategy

The North Central Regional Catchment Strategy is currently being finalised following the identification of over 400 natural resource assets by the community, ten community consultation meetings and the receipt of over 40 submissions from the regional community on the draft Regional Catchment Strategy. With the final 2012-18 Regional Catchment Strategy due to be submitted to Government in September 2012, the CMA is excited to be embarking on the implementation of this renewed strategy which sets a foundation for work over the coming years to strengthen the links between rivers, landscapes and people in the region.

The vision for the Regional Catchment Strategy is "A community active in protecting and enhancing the integrity of its catchments."

Flood Recovery

In 2011-12, the North Central CMA remained focused on flood recovery and the completion of several flood management plans as its core priority. Community engagement and strong relationships with Local Government and other government agencies is critical in the ongoing development of these plans.

Funding to develop these flood management plans has been provided primarily by Department of Sustainability and Environment's Office of Water, with contributions from the Australian Government under the Natural Disaster Resilience Grants Scheme. The CMA is very proud of how it has gathered local community knowledge and expertise to develop practical, positive and achievable flood mitigation options in flood-affected communities. The Creswick Flood Management Plan was completed and another 6 plans will be completed in 2012-13.

Funding provided through the Australian Government's Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements (NDRRA) enabled us to:

- repair 197 levee breaches,
- repair 59 damaged fences,
- repair 27 erosion control structures
- commence the revegetation of 305,000 plants

The North Central Flood Recovery Employment Program has provided employment opportunities for 64 individuals, which has resulted in:

- 114 kilometers of fencing
- 853 hectares of weed control
- 138 hectares of rabbit control
- 31,000 tubestock planted
- Other activities including flood debris removal and minor infrastructure construction.

Gunbower Forest

Significant work has occurred for the design of the Gunbower Forest Environmental Watering initiative. The

initiative will realise significant benefits to both the environment and the local communities through the construction of the upper forest channel. With regulators and other measures in place to allow controlled flooding of the forest, the health of River Red Gums, native fish and other threatened plants and animals will be secured.

In partnership with the Murray-Darling Basin Authority, Victorian State Government and Goulburn-Murray Water, the CMA aims to see construction commence on the large-scale flooding infrastructure works in 2012-13.

Summary of Achievements for 2011-12

In 2011-12, the North Central CMA and regional partners have achieved the following highlights:

- more than 1514 hectares of terrestrial habitat improved for biodiversity values
- 450 community groups supported to increase or maintain capacity to contribute to NRM and cultural heritage outcomes
- an additional area of 65,186 hectares is being sustainably managed by landholders
- over 198 hectares of habitat within riparian zones has been improved to protect biodiversity values
- 5388 hectares has been treated to contain invasive plants and animals
- 9398 hectares treated to reduce the impact of invasive plants and animals on biodiversity and key natural resource management assets
- over 757 hectares of revegetation to reduce the risk of salinity on land and water assets

Our priorities and the year ahead

The North Central CMA'S funding priorities for the year ahead include:

- finalising flood recovery commitments - through the flood recovery program of works and the Flood and Drainage Management Plans
- protecting and enhancing Ramsar wetlands - with a focus on the Gunbower Forest Environmental Watering Initiative and the Protecting and Enhancing Priority Wetlands program
- increasing the capacity of communities to actively participate in natural resource management - particularly through the Landcare, Waterwatch and Indigenous engagement programs
- maintaining productive agricultural land - through projects such as FarmWater, Farming for Sustainable Soils and Healthy and Productive Irrigated Landscapes
- commencing the 'Protecting, linking, and enhancing priority remnants in the Kyneton woodlands for biodiversity and carbon gains' project funded by the Biodiversity Fund
- protecting threatened species and ecological communities
- compliance with statutory obligations under the relevant Acts.

North East Catchment Management Authority

Overview

At a strategic level, the North East Catchment Management Authority (CMA) focused its efforts in three key areas during 2011/2012:

- Engagement and partnering – the CMA sought to strengthen and extend its relationships with existing and new partners and encouraged community involvement in natural resource management in the region;
- Building an innovative and collaborative culture – the CMA encouraged new approaches to natural resource management in its catchment and encouraged staff to share ideas;
- Delivering on core business – the CMA provided information, advice and education about effective integrated catchment management, continued to deliver on ground works, and managed the environmental water reserve and a number of statutory functions under the *Water Act 1989*, including floodplain management referrals and authorisation of works on waterways.

Key challenges & opportunities

The renewal of the North East Regional Catchment Strategy provided the CMA with an opportunity to interact with many partners and community groups in development of an environmental 'blueprint' for the region.

At an operational level, numerous high rainfall and flood events during the year required a continued focus on emergency flood recovery and soil conservation works. Recurrent wet conditions created challenges for project delivery and caused delays to scheduled works. Flooding and saturated soils restricted site access, and increased soil moisture contributed to high weed infestations. On a positive note, these natural events also

- created an opportunity for the CMA to work with a range of agencies and community groups in providing comprehensive community support to those affected by flooding;
- replenished wetlands and groundwater supplies

- created positive seasonal conditions, resulting in record commodity prices for many graziers.

Highlights

The North East CMA is responsible for strategic planning and coordinating actions to improve the management of natural resource assets in the North East region. The following examples illustrate how the North East CMA worked during 2011/2012 to deliver these responsibilities.

Engagement and partnering

The CMA continued to foster and support sustainable agriculture and worked with key partners to protect biodiversity and encourage environmental stewardship in the catchment.

- Leading an environmental planning process - the North East CMA led the renewal of the North East Regional Catchment Strategy on behalf of the catchment during 2012. As part of the renewal process, the CMA sought to gather local knowledge about landscapes within the region and how the community values and interacts with these. This knowledge was integrated with technical and formal knowledge to develop a more in-depth understanding of the values and dynamics of the various landscapes in North East Victoria. The CMA utilized on-line and traditional community engagement techniques to gather information, including individual interviews, convening of expert panels, launch of an interactive website (www.yoursaynecma.com.au) and facilitated workshops attended by business, research and community members. The draft Strategy will be available for public comment in August.
- Supporting sustainable agriculture - the CMA continued to foster sustainable agriculture by delivering a range of capacity building activities through the 'Sustainable Farming Practices: Soil carbon' project. Neighbouring regional bodies and groups, including the NSW Murray CMA, Victorian DPI and multiple Landcare groups also became involved. By partnering, the CMA was able to share resources and sponsor speakers and special events, making them more affordable and allowing delivery in locations inside and beyond the North East CMA region. In June, 140 farmers from north east Victoria and southern NSW attended a forum and associated field day events that explored ways of adapting technology to ensure that farmers can be productive, profitable and equipped to manage carbon.

Building an innovative and collaborative culture

- Reducing waste – the CMA continued its involvement in development of a mobile device to convert woody debris into biochar. The biochar device could potentially be used to process other on-farm sources of green waste, like thinnings from farm forestry management. During the year the CMA worked with the CSIRO and Victorian company, Earth Systems to field test a biochar prototype that can convert willow heaps into energy and a soil ameliorant. Results indicate that reductions in excess of 1000 tonnes of CO₂ per year are achievable, whilst eliminating many of the risks associated with open burning of debris heaps and significant potential benefits for agriculture and other end uses.
- Supporting community needs – in late February/early March the largest flood on record occurred on the Murray River and tributaries upstream of Walwa. As a direct result, the North East CMA received 89 new requests for assistance from farmers and landholders in the catchment, with almost 50% of these from the Upper Murray. Recognising the scale of need, the CMA devised a series of 'car bonnet' sessions in the Upper Murray to provide information to farmers and invited representatives from Goulburn Murray Hume AgCare and the Department of Primary Industries to also provide information and advice. Held at sporting ovals, community halls and shops, these 'car bonnet' sessions were well received by the community.

Delivering on core business

- Flood recovery - As the agency responsible for floodplain management and river health in the region, the North East CMA focussed a large part of its operations on flood response and recovery. The main priority was delivery of the Victorian Government Flood Recovery program in the region. During flooding, the CMA helped SES staff to interpret data and deployed field staff to hotspot areas to carry out surveillance and rapid appraisal flood damage assessments. The CMA responded to requests from landholders impacted by floods and delivered works at more than 420 locations across the catchment according to the Victorian Government's three key funding criteria:
 - restoring river erosion resulting from flood where it threatens public assets or could cause a river breakaway,
 - restoring public assets and previous CMA works damaged by flooding, and
 - removing flood debris that poses a threat of damage should flooding occur in future.
- Protecting wetlands and floodplains – in an area where adoption of covenants has historically been low, 28 landholders in the Lower Ovens signed five year management agreements, covering 518 hectares of wetland and revegetation. In its third year of operation, the Lower Ovens River and

Floodplain Wetlands (Mega Murray Flagship) project has proved to be one of the most successful targeted incentive projects of its kind. In future these covenanted sites will be monitored by Trust for Nature.

- Promoting water quality - Waterwatch continued to provide educational support to schools, students and teachers across the catchment. North East Water, NevWaste, the North East CMA, DSE, DPI and various local councils delivered the Schools Environment Education Directory (SEED) to hundreds of students across the catchment.

Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority

The Port Phillip and Westernport CMA's successes and highlights during 2011/12 included:

- Major progress developing the 2012 PPW Regional Catchment Strategy – the State's first in a website format – with a release date expected in late 2012.
- An increased stakeholder engagement program focused on forming a collaborative Alliance of regional agencies and sub-regional partners committed to implementing the Regional Catchment Strategy.
- Investment of \$ 477,000 for Grow West (from the Victorian Government's Vision for Werribee Plains) delivering pest control and landscape restoration on over 240 hectares and 25 kilometres of waterways; and coordination of a very successful Grow West Planting Day.
- Coordination of \$392,000 of Community Grants to the region – ranging from group support grants of \$500, to on-ground projects up to \$12,500.
- Ministerial launch of the 'Meeting of Minds on the Maribyrnong', initiated by PPWCMA – a \$2.475M joint Victorian Government / Australian Government / local government commitment to improve biodiversity and waterway condition along the Maribyrnong River and its tributaries.
- Effective protection of Ramsar wetland sites on Western Port and Port Phillip Bay through the multi-partner, CFOC-funded project that has so far treated over 5700 hectares for pest animals; 1024 hectares for weeds; and protected over 70 hectares of critical wetlands by fencing.
- A focused conservation effort through the PPWCMA-managed Habitat Protection and Conservation (HPAC) Project which has so far improved over 600 hectares of habitat for three rare and endangered native species – the Helmeted Honeyeater, Leadbeaters Possum and Southern Brown Bandicoot.
- Progress developing the Living Links Master Plan to guide landscape-scale connectivity in an urban environment that covers 10 councils in Melbourne's south-east.
- Consolidation of the Region's Community Outreach Program including education seminars, platypus walks and other activities coordinated by a new team of four PPWCMA Community NRM Coordinators, (co-funded by Melbourne Water). This program complements the work of the Victorian Government's newly-established team of Landcare Facilitators.
- PPWCMA met or exceeded all its 2011-12 Environmental targets, reducing waste-to-landfill, fuel consumption, paper use and offsetting any residual carbon emissions.
- All relevant directions of the Victorian Government's Financial Management Compliance Framework were complied with.
- Excellent staff satisfaction results were achieved, as measured in the annual 'People Matter' survey.

West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority

For the West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority (WGCMA) the 2011/2012 year has been one of continued significant progress and achievement in an ever changing regional environment. Underpinning the CMA's on-ground efforts is the utilization of a number of important Plans and Strategies. At the highest level the second iteration of the Regional Catchment Strategy (RCS) has been guiding efforts for some years. Utilising the guidelines issued by the VCMC, significant progress has been made on updating the RCS and the CMA is excited about the finalisation of the third version which is expected to be completed shortly.

Partnerships and collaborative works remain not only a focus, but a key priority for the organisation and are vital as the CMA knows that continued improvements in catchment health cannot be achieved without such broad collaboration. Working together with others the CMA is committed to protecting and enhancing Gippsland's wonderful natural resources and features, whether that's a local creek or patch of remnant vegetation or the internationally renowned Gippsland Lakes and Corner Inlet.

A key partnership for WGCMA is with Landcare. This longstanding alliance has yielded many achievements and it was pleasing to see a number of awards bestowed upon Landcare Networks and individuals in the 25th year of Landcare in Victoria. The CMA was also thrilled to receive the Australian Government Natural Resource Management Award at the State level.

In terms of the regional operating environment the year saw occurrences of heavy and intense rainfall events across the region. Such events will always put pressure on the river and stream network. Often this mobilises sediment and nutrients but The CMA knows if it continues to fence and revegetate waterways the impact and extent of this damage is often limited by building catchment resilience. Throughout the year the CMA continued our waterway protection and enhancement program and were successful in delivering its fencing and revegetation initiatives.

Work continues throughout the catchments of the region and during the year the CMA was pleased to be able to celebrate five years of progress with the restoration efforts at the iconic Heart Morass which is an important peripheral wetland of the Gippsland Lakes. It was extremely satisfying to see how quickly a wetland can recover if some time and energy is invested into the basics like weed and pest animal control, revegetation and strategic habitat creation. Even more satisfying is the excellent effort provided by volunteers such as Field and Game members, school children and the general public, all of whom have played a role in the rehabilitation efforts. Once again, partnerships are the foundation of the success for this project.

From a geographical perspective the CMA has made good progress on a number of key initiatives at all points of the regional compass.

In the southern reaches of the WGCMA region good progress has been made in increasing the wellbeing of Corner Inlet. Now in its third year of delivery, Corner Inlet Connections is a recognised program that acknowledges the ecological significance of the Ramsar listed Corner Inlet Nooramunga area and strives to secure funding and coordinate work to benefit this special part of the region. The coordinated efforts of many organisations is progressing well, with activities as diverse as feral animal and weed control, nutrient management, waterway rehabilitation and biodiversity protection all being coordinated by a multi-stakeholder group.

Also in the south, the CMA continued to apply its efforts in the catchment areas spanning Cape Liptrap to San Remo this year. For the WGCMA this planning area is known as the Bunurong Catchment Ecosystem which includes a number of river systems such as the Tarwin and Powlett.

In the northern part of the region, the catchments of the Gippsland Lakes remain a focus of the CMA's work. Work undertaken throughout the Latrobe, Thomson, Macalister, Avon and Perry catchments all contribute to helping protect and enhance the Gippsland Lakes environment. The CMA is looking forward to ongoing efforts in these catchments and is keen to support the Gippsland Lakes Ministerial Advisory Group in their efforts.

In the upper catchment area of the Lakes, efforts have continued to focus on nutrient reduction. This year saw the second year of the Australian Government funded CORE 4 program. This program has worked to assist farmers reduce nutrient runoff in the upper Latrobe catchment. The program is on track to see over 12 tonnes of phosphorus retained on farm every year which has clear ongoing benefits for productive farming and the environment.

Catchment connectivity is an important principle the WGCMA pursues to improve catchment health. Achieving catchment connectivity is particularly important now that the region has seen a return to wetter conditions where rehabilitation efforts are likely to be rewarded through improved river health. An important project to support connectivity is the establishment of a functional fish way in the upper reaches of the Thomson River. The work is intended to assist in providing continuous fish passage through the Horseshoe Bend section of the Thomson River. This will provide complete connectivity for migratory fish species (particularly Australian Grayling) to migrate from the Gippsland Lakes to the alpine reaches of the Thomson River, via the Aberfeldy River. This year saw major advancement in these efforts through the development of a progressive working relationship with key stakeholders with interests in the area. The intent is to balance cultural heritage with recreational and environmental values of the area. For the WGCMA reaching mutual agreement on the outcomes and approach has been very important and with the prospect of providing access to over 80 kilometers of additional habitat for migratory fish species the efforts all round will be worth it.

A further facet of connectivity linked to the health of the Gippsland Lakes is the management of environmental water flows. This is another important role of the WGCMA. This year it was satisfying to implement releases on the Thomson and Macalister systems designed to drive a net improvement in ecological health. During the year the CMA released 26 GL of water. After a couple of years of successful environmental flow delivery the environmental monitoring program has identified an increase in a number of fish species in particular the EPBC Act and FFG Act listed Australian Grayling with this year's numbers the highest since 2007.

The Latrobe River is also soon to benefit from increased environmental flows. The Gippsland Region Sustainable Water Strategy, released in late 2011, committed to establishing an environmental entitlement to 9% of the storage capacity of Blue Rock Reservoir (10 GL on average) by the end of 2012. The WGCMA will recommend how this volume is used to best environmental effect.

The year ahead promises to be busy and will see the CMA continue its efforts through specific projects, guided by the soon to be completed Regional Catchment Strategy. The CMA is looking forward to working with all levels of government and the regional community to delivery on this important strategy.

Wimmera Catchment Management Authority

Priorities

Wimmera Catchment Management Authority (Wimmera CMA) continues to work in partnership with the community to manage the region's natural assets. During 2011-12 a number of projects were implemented to meet its vision of 'a healthy Wimmera catchment where a resilient landscape supports a sustainable and profitable community'. Wimmera CMA continues to focus on the protection of wetlands, the sustainability of soils, reduction of pests and weeds and the protection and enhancement of ecosystems and threatened species across the region. The Wimmera River, its tributaries and distributaries, remain a priority for Wimmera CMA as they provide vital biolinks and refuges for wildlife, as well as economic and social benefits for the community. Wimmera CMA, working with its partners, continues to offer assistance to landholders and community groups, to protect and enhance these valuable assets.

Stakeholder engagement

Strong community participation in organisational activities continues and is rewarding. In the main, this is due to a very successful engagement program, with a strategic communication and marketing plan, that utilises a range of advertising mediums. Wimmera CMA has continued to work closely with key stakeholders such as water authorities, local government, NRM partners, Landcare groups, Departmental agencies, media and the general community. The CMA continues to offer the community high quality and relevant opportunities to learn and build capacity through events such as field days, conferences, workshops and mentoring programs such as, Chicks in the Sticks, the Kowree Yabby day, Wimmera Machinery Field days site, Swamp Talk, the Kowree Brolga day and the major plantout events of Project Platypus, Project Hindmarsh and Yarrilinks.

WCMA incentive programs continue to experience strong uptake from farmers, with funds available being the limiting factor.

Highlights

Two flood investigations were announced by The Hon. Peter Walsh, Minister for Agriculture & Food Security; Minister for Water, during September 2011: Natimuk and Upper Catchment. These investigations have been well supported by local steering committees and are planned to be completed by the end of December 2012 and February 2013 respectively.

After an internal review of the 2010 floods there was an opportunity to strengthen the use of local knowledge. This resulted in the commencement of the joint Victorian Farmers Federation and Landcare Wimmera River flood monitors. This allows specific local landholders to call in real time data and observations. The monitors were trialled during the 2011 flood in the Upper Catchment (Joel Joel) and provided invaluable observations. This approach has also attracted interest from landholders along the Yarriambiack Creek and elsewhere and may be trialled further in the future.

As an organisation driven by innovation and creativity the CMA is trialling the use of remote cameras to display live footage of flooding and river gauges on its website.

In June the CMA acquired the ground breaking orchid conservation laboratory facility – this project utilises the latest science and technology to grow threatened and endangered orchid species by the hundreds. This project will value add to existing conservations programs targeted at private land and potentially reduce the number of listed endangered orchids right across Australia.

The CMA has seen an increase in community participation across all community engagement activities and incentives. This has been very evident in the West Wimmera where interest in wetland management has exceeded historic and organisational expectations.

Preparedness for the introduction of the AS/NZS ISO 9001:2008 Quality Management Systems has been completed and the CMA is eagerly awaiting its first audit. This will be followed by participation in the

national Organisational Performance Excellence Review in October 2012.

The Wimmera CMA has undergone a revitalisation with the appointment of CEO, David Brennan, new Chair, Karen Douglas and more than half the Board being newly appointed. These changes in key positions have brought a new level of enthusiasm, knowledge of the region and a genuine passion for improving the natural resource landscape throughout the region.

Challenges

Changes in funding, new technologies and community and investor expectations or priorities have and will continue to transform the CMA's business model and how it delivers services. The CMA is focused on delivering value for money, finding business efficiencies, meeting the needs of its community and providing ground breaking and innovative services.

A challenging and exciting year lies ahead with many opportunities arising from the Clean Future Initiative, proposed Wimmera Irrigators buy-out and the launch the of Regional Catchment Strategy that will allow the CMA to focus upon delivering integrated catchment management.

Statutory Responsibilities

VCMC Meetings

	July 2011	August 2011	September 2011	October 2011	November 2011	December 2011	February 2012	April 2012	May 2012	June 2012
Mick Murphy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Rod Gowans	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Cheryl Batagol		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Jan Mahoney*		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				
Chris Arnott	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓
Cullen Gunn				✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
Sandra Brizga		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓
Joanne Anderson	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
John Young	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Adam Fennessy	✓	✓	✓				✓		✓	✓

* Jan Mahoney's resignation was accepted by GIC on 1 May 2012.

All absences were approved by the Chair prior to each meeting.

Freedom of Information

The VCMC is considered to be a "Government Agency" under the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (FOI Act) and is required to comply with the procedures that have been prescribed under which members of the public may gain access to information held by agencies. A decision to release information is made by an Authorised Officer. The VCMC has determined that its Authorised Officer is the Department of Sustainability and Environment's Freedom of Information Manager, Mr. Luke Brown (03) 9637 8575.

During 2011-12, no requests were received for access to documents under the *FOI Act 1982*.

Documents which are maintained in the possession of Council include:

Internal working papers;

- Correspondence from Ministers and Members of Parliament, Government Departments and agencies, members of the public and the private sector;
- Reports prepared by consultants commissioned by Council;
- Accounts records;
- Personnel and salary records; and
- Organisation and accommodation records.

You have a right to apply for access to documents held by VCMC and covered by the *FOI Act 1982*. This applies to both documents created by VCMC as well as those supplied to VCMC. You may apply for the original or for a copy.

FOI requests (\$23.90) must be made in writing to:

Mr. Luke Brown
Freedom of Information Manager
Department of Sustainability and Environment
P.O. Box 500
East Melbourne Vic 3002
Tel: (03) 9637 8575
Email: luke.brown@dse.vic.gov.au

Requests should be as specific as possible to enable the FOI Authorised Officer to identify relevant documents as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Once your letter requesting access has been received, the Department of Sustainability and Environment must respond to you as soon as possible, but not later than 45 days, outlining its decision on your request. If the Department of Sustainability and Environment refuses you access to the documents sought, you can appeal to the Principal Officer (Patricia Geraghty, Executive Officer) for an internal review, but you must do so within 28 days of the letter sent to you. The Department of Sustainability and Environment must then reconsider your request and respond to you within 14 days.

If you wish to appeal further to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal, you must do so within 60 days of the date you were notified of the internal review.

Consultancies

The VCMC commissioned no consultancies >\$10,000 in 2011-12.

The VCMC commissioned two consultancies <\$10,000, totalling \$18,752, in 2011-12.

Major Contracts

There were no major contracts entered into in 2011-12.

National Competition Policy

Competitive neutrality seeks to enable fair competition between government and private sector businesses. Any advantages or disadvantages that government businesses may experience, simply as a result of government ownership, should be neutralised. The VCMC continues to implement and apply this principle in its business undertakings.

Community Inclusiveness – Diversity Reporting Statement

The VCMC is committed to policies, programs and strategies aimed at delivering appropriate services to all Victorians regarding cultural diversity, women, young people and Indigenous affairs.

Council hosted a workshop with State Indigenous facilitators to consider the effectiveness of Indigenous employment opportunities.

Pecuniary Interest

Declarations of pecuniary interests have been duly completed by all relevant members and officers.

Victorian Industry Participation Policy Act

The *Victorian Industry Participation Policy Act 2003* requires public bodies to report on the implementation of the Act and applies when the Victorian Government's funding or provision of a grant exceeds \$3m in Metropolitan Melbourne and \$1m in Regional Victoria. The *Victorian Industry Participation Policy Act 2003* applies to all contracting arrangements for projects above this threshold including any sub-contracted elements which may be below this threshold.

The VCMC had no contracts that were commenced or completed in the 2011-12 period to which Victorian Industry Participation Policy applied.

Whistleblowers Protection Act

The *Whistleblowers Protection Act 2001* came into effect on 1 January 2002. The Act is designed to protect people who disclose information about serious wrongdoing within the Victorian Public Sector and to provide a framework for the investigation of these matters.

Further information is available from the Victorian Ombudsman's website at www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au

There were no disclosures made under the *Whistleblowers Protection Act 2001* during the 2011-12 reporting period.

The protected disclosure coordinator for DSE acts as an agent for the Council to receive disclosures under the Act, and applies DSE procedures in managing disclosures. Disclosures of improper conduct by the Council or its employees may be made to the following:

Mr. Luke Brown, Freedom of Information Manager
DSE, PO Box 500, East Melbourne Vic 3002.
Telephone: 03 9637 8575
Email: luke.brown@dse.vic.gov.au

The Ombudsman Victoria
Level 9, 459 Collins Street, Melbourne Vic 3000.
Telephone: 03 9613 6222 Toll free: 1800 806 314
Web: www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au

Employment and Conduct Principles

Victorian Public Service merit and equity principles are applied in the appointment and management of staff.

The VCMC follows the merit and equitable principles used by DSE, in accordance with Government directives.

Four primary goals have been assumed by DSE with regard to people management practices:

- Develop and sustain an organisational culture in which policies, practices and services are adapted to the needs of the community;
- Ensure that the diversity of the workforce reflects the diversity of the community;
- Ensure a workplace free from policies and practices that discriminate against staff or potential staff; and
- Ensure that staff have access to a fair and efficient grievance review process to resolve perceived breaches of merit and equity.

Building Act

VCMC is located within DSE premises (8 Nicholson St East Melbourne) and uses Departmental facilities. It is understood that the owner of the building is compliant with building and maintenance provisions of the *Building Act 1993*.

Environmental Reporting

Under FRD24C, CMAs are classified under the "other public sector entities", and are encouraged to adopt the requirements of this Financial Reporting Direction. The FRD24C requirements are not mandatory for public agencies; they apply only to Government Departments, the Environment Protection Agency and Sustainability Victoria.

The VCMC has been incorporated in DSE's Environmental Reporting under FRD24C.

VCMC Publications 2011-12

VCMC Annual Report 2010-11;

Copies are available on the VCMC website at www.vcmc.vic.gov.au or contact VCMC for hard copies (03 9637 9892).

Additional VCMC Information Available on Request

Information relevant to Financial Reporting Direction 22B of the *Financial Management Act 1994* is held at the VCMC office and is available on request, subject to the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*.

Appendices

1. Committees and Working Groups that included a member or staff member of VCMC in 2011-12

Group Name	VCMC Representative
Australian Landcare Council Peak Chairs	Mick Murphy
CMA CEOs Forum	Patricia Geraghty
CMA Chairs Forum	Mick Murphy
CMA Communications Officers Forum	Tracey Koper
Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability Reference Group	Mick Murphy
DPI Drought Reference Group	Mick Murphy
DPI Invasive Plants and Animals Governance Group	Sandra Brizga
DSE MER Working Group	Neil Meyers
DSE RCS Managers Forum	John Young, Patricia Geraghty
DSE Victorian Landcare and Catchment Management Magazine Editorial Committee	Jan Mahoney, Tracey Koper
NRM Ministerial Council Community Forum	Mick Murphy
Victorian Strategy for the Health of Rivers, Estuaries and Wetlands Stakeholder Reference Committee	Sandra Brizga
Victorian Coastal Strategy Co-ordination Committee	Rod Gowans, Sandra Brizga
Victorian Coastal Strategy Implementation Working Group	Sandra Brizga
Volunteering and Recruitment Initiative Project Reference Group	Tracey Koper

VCMC Activities and responsibilities under the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988*

Nominations for final FFG listings supported by the Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) and VCMC:

Communities

Granite Foothills Spring Wetland (North-East Victoria)

Wind-blown tussock grass

Potentially Threatening Processes

Degradation and loss of habitats caused by feral Horses (*Equus caballus*)

Reduction in biodiversity resulting from Noisy Miner (*Manorina melanocephala*) populations in Victoria

Soil degradation and reduction of biodiversity through browsing and competition by feral goats (*Capra hircus*)

VCMC Responses to Draft Action Statements:

Taxon

Dingo (*Canis lupus* subsp. *Dingo*)

Compliance Disclosure Index

The annual report of the Victorian Catchment Management Council is prepared in accordance with all relevant Victorian legislation. This index has been prepared to facilitate identification of the Department's compliance with statutory disclosure requirements.

Legislation	Requirement	Page Reference
Ministerial Directions: Report of Operations - FRD Guidance		
Charter and Purpose		
FRD 22C	Manner of establishment and the relevant Ministers	7
FRD 22C	Objectives, functions, powers and duties	7-8
FRD 22C	Nature and range of services provided	7, 10 - 13
Management and Structure		
FRD 22C	Organisational structure	6
Financial and other information		
FRD 10	Disclosure Index	38
FRD 12A	Disclosure of major contracts	34
FRD 22C, SD 4.2(K)	Operational and budgetary objectives and performance against objectives	10 - 13
FRD 22C	Employment and conduct principles	35
FRD 22C	Occupational health and safety policy	*
FRD 22C	Summary of the financial results for the year	14
FRD 22C	Significant changes in financial position during the year	14
FRD 22C	Major changes or factors affecting performance	11
FRD 22C	Subsequent events	*
FRD 22C	Application and operation of <i>Freedom of Information Act 1982</i>	33
FRD 22C	Compliance with building and maintenance provisions of <i>Building Act 1993</i>	35
FRD 22C	Statement on National Competition Policy	34
FRD 22C	Application and operation of the <i>Whistleblowers Protection Act 2001</i>	35
FRD 22C	Details of consultancies over \$100,000	34
FRD 22C	Details of consultancies under \$100,000	34
FRD 22C	Statement of availability of other information	36
FRD 25A	Victorian Industry Participation Policy disclosures	34
FRD 30A	Standard requirements for the design and print of annual reports	38
SD 4.5(G)	Specific information requirements	36
SD 4.5(J)	Sign-off requirements	36
Legislation		
	<i>Freedom of Information Act 1982</i>	33
	<i>Building Act 1983</i>	35
	<i>Whistleblowers Protection Act 2001</i>	35
	<i>Victorian Industry Participation Policy Act 2003</i>	34
	<i>Financial Management Act 1994</i>	2

* See DSE Annual Report 2011-12

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