

Victorian Catchment Management Council

Annual Report 2013



Victorian
Catchment
Management
Council

Victorian Catchment Management Council Annual Report 2012-2013

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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 | 5 |
| VCMC Role | 6 |
| Executive Officer's Comment | 8 |
| Strategic Plan | 9 |
| Operations of the VCMC | 10 |
| VCMC Finance Report | 11 |
| Major State Natural Resource Management Activities and Programs | 12 |
| Statutory Responsibilities | 15 |
| Appendices | 19 |
| Compliance Disclosure Index | 20 |

Chair's Foreword

This Council was appointed on 26 September 2012 and has now been working together for nine months. Council has developed a strong esprit de corp and is working together in a positive and effective manner.

Council has also established strong working relationships with Minister Ryan Smith and Minister Peter Walsh, and is working hard to provide both Ministers with advice on various matters as requested.

In December 2012 Council's fourth report on the condition of our catchments was tabled in Parliament, the Catchment Condition and Management Report 2012. Since then, Council's focus has been on the implementation of our three key recommendations:

1. That robust processes be established to determine the condition of the State's land and water resources and the effectiveness of land protection measures;
2. That this crucial function be assigned to an independent and appropriately resourced entity, with the task of reporting annual on progress towards the implementation of these processes, and every six years on overall condition; and
3. That a State Integrated Catchment Management (ICM) plan be developed to define, explicitly, the quality of the land and water resources that will maintain and enhance long term land productivity, while also conserving the environment.

Following on from the establishment of the Regional Catchment Strategy Guidelines in 2011, nine of the 10 Regional Catchment Strategies have been gazetted by government, and are now the blueprint for catchment management across those nine regions. The tenth region is trialling a new approach to Regional Catchment Strategies and expects to have their strategy endorsed by government shortly.

I would like to thank all Council members as well as the staff in our Secretariat who have come together as a new team this year for their contribution to a productive and successful year. I would also like to say a strong thank you and bid farewell to the Council members who did not return for this term: Cheryl Batagol, Rod Gowans, Sandra Brizga and Joanne Anderson.

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 2013.



Mick Murphy OAM
Chair
13 August 2013

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 from 26 September 2012

Mr Michael Murphy OAM - Chairperson

- Chair, headspace Regional Governance Committee Southwest Victoria
- Chair, Sustainability Fund Advisory Panel
- Executive Chairman, Michael J Murphy & Co Pty Ltd
- Member, Earth Resources Ministerial Advisory Council
- Life member, Order of Australia Association

Mr Cullen Gunn

- Director of Kilter Pty Ltd

Mr Christopher Arnott

- Partner, Aither Pty Ltd
- Partner, Reputation Risk Map
- Fellow, Peter Cullen Trust Leadership Program
- Fellow, Williamson Community Leadership Program

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, Moyne Shire Environment and Conservation Committee
- Community member, Moyne Shire Coastal Risk Management Steering Committee

Mr Adam Fennessy

- Secretary, DEPI
- 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.

Ms Merna Curnow

- Member, Victorian Farmers Federation
- Member, West Marong Landcare Group
- Fellow, Australian Rural Leadership Foundation
- Member, Laanecoorie Loddon River Recreation Reserve Committee of Management
- Member, Grains Industry Training Network
- Member, Victorian Partners in Grain Reference Group

Mr Craig Madden

- Member of Salinity Program Advisory Council
- Member Goulburn Broken Catchment and Land Protection Board
- Three terms on Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority Board
- Chair, Regional Assessment Panel
- Chair, Regional Groundwater Service Committee for Goulburn Murray Water
- Member Goulburn Broken Water Service Committee for Goulburn Murray Water

Ms Peta Maddy

- President, Victorian Branch of the Australian Water Association (2010 to 2013)
- Member, International Water Association's working group for Cities of the Future
- Member, Australian Water Association
- Member, Institute of Engineers

Dr Peter Greig

- President, Upper Barwon Landcare Network
- Member, Murroon Landcare Group
- Fellow, Institute of Forresters of Australia
- Member, Melbourne University Blacks Football Club
- Vice President, Lake Colac Rowing Club
- Director, Gosling Creek Wines

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, to 30 August 2012)

Fiona Donohue
Catchment Condition Report Project Officer (to 8 August 2012)

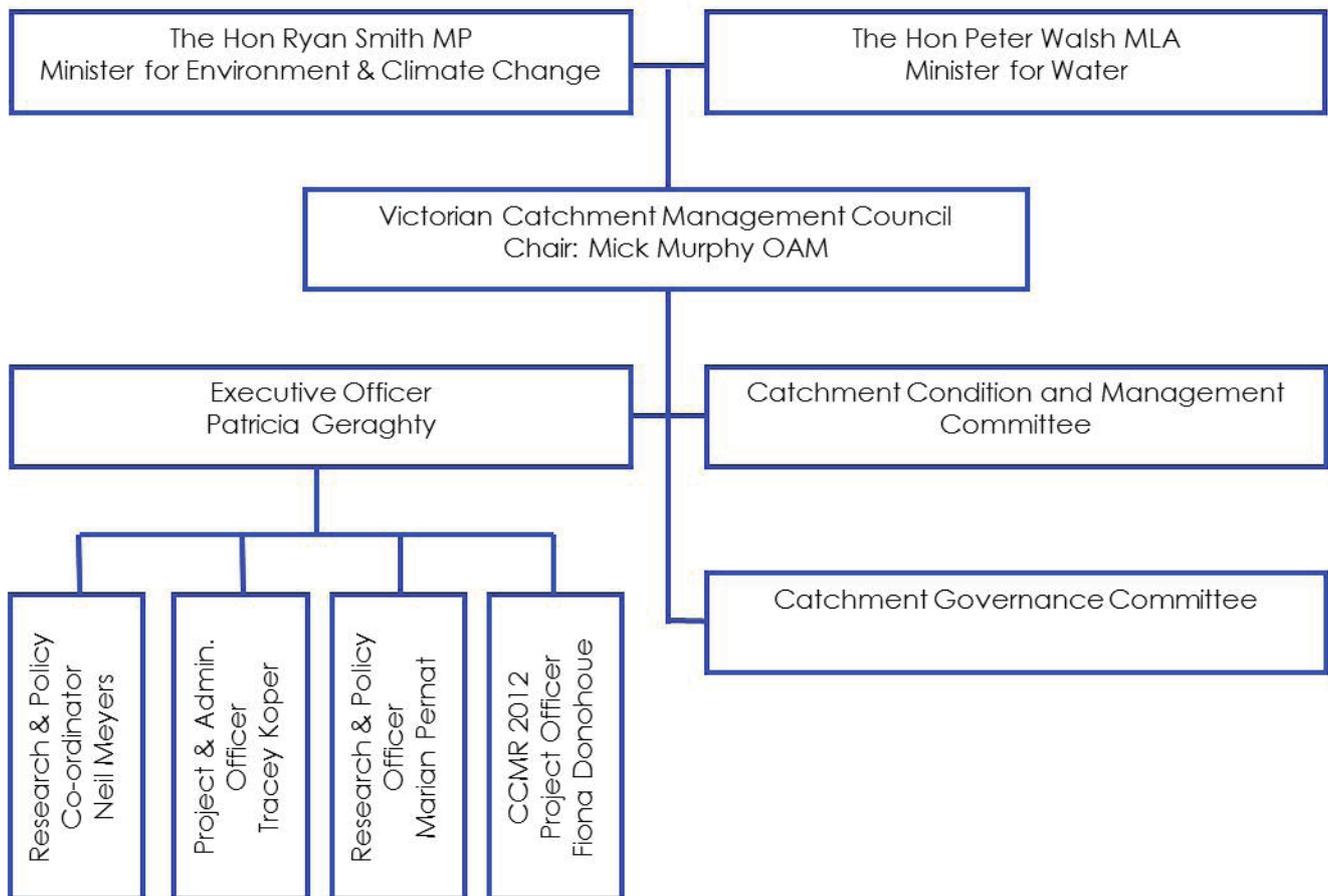
VCMC staff are employees of DEPI - see DEPI 2012-13 Annual Report for statement of workforce data for current and previous financial year.

The VCMC secretariat employed three people (4.4 FTE) in 2012-13

The breakdown of staff for the VCMC in 2012-13 is as follows:

| | 2011-12 | 2012-13 |
|--|---------|---------|
| Executive Officers (salary greater than \$134,841) | N/A | N/A |
| Senior Management (salary less than \$134,841) | 1 | 1 |
| Administration Staff | 3.4 | 3.4 |
| Finance Staff | N/A | N/A |
| Male | 1 | 1 |
| Female | 4 (3.4) | 4 (3.4) |
| TOTAL | 4.4 | 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 responsible Ministers were The Hon Ryan Smith MP, Minister for Environment and Climate Change and The Hon Peter Walsh MLA, Minister for Water. 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 the Department of Environment and Primary Industries (formerly the Department of Sustainability and Environment and the Department of Primary Industries) 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.

Partnerships

Council works particularly closely with the Department of Environment and Primary Industries (DEPI - formerly the Department of Sustainability and Environment and the Department of Primary Industries) 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 and Management Committee
Catchment Governance Committee

Members of Council were also involved individually in a range of other external committees in 2012-13. A list of these committees is provided in Appendix 1.

Executive Officer's Comment

There were two highlights for the 2012-2013 year from the Victorian Catchment Management Council (Council) perspective: the first was the appointment of a new Council at the end of September 2012; and the second was the tabling in Parliament of the five-yearly Catchment Condition and Management Report 2012 (CCMR).

The Secretariat comprising myself, Neil Meyers and Tracey Koper kept the business of Council administration going during the three months when there were no members. Our main activities were planning for the induction of a new Council and the final work on the text of the CCMR, followed by editing and preparation for printing. We were ably assisted through July-August 2012 by Sarah Ewing, a former Council member who was contracted as an expert writer, and Fiona Donohue who worked on the data and analysis sections of the report in a very professional manner.

One of the first tasks of the new Council was to approve the CCMR, and take ownership of a complex document, which was a significant undertaking for those members new to the Council: Merna Curnow, Peter Greig, Craig Madden and Peta Maddy. Former members who were re-appointed were the Chair Mick Murphy, Chris Arnott, Cullen Gunn and John Young. Chris had chaired the committee which developed the CCMR from its beginnings in 2010, so he led the learning and approval process.

The recommendations in the CCMR provided the foundation for the Council's Strategic Plan for its term from September 2012 through to September 2015. A Work Plan was devised around this Strategic Plan, divided into annual blocks. Two committees were set up to enable shared work commitments across the key activities, with support from the Secretariat. The two responsible Ministers gave their approval to the general intent of the Strategic Plan and the various activities in the Work Plan in April 2013. The committees' progress over the past several months is described later in this Annual Report.

The Council was and continues to be well-connected in a range of ways with its partners in the catchment management framework. The two major relationships are with the Catchment Management Authorities and with DEPI (formerly the Department of Sustainability and Environment and the Department of Primary Industries), maintained and enhanced through activities such as participation in the CMA Chairs Forum and the CMA CEOs Group, through joint representation on committees, through visits and conversations, and through the role of the DEPI nominee on Council itself. The Secretary of DEPI (formerly the Department of Sustainability and Environment and the Department of Primary Industries), Adam Fennessy served effectively in this capacity over the past year. Members of Council each had their own networks and special interests, all of which brought a richness to debate, and common-sense in Council's advice to the Ministers.

In particular, the Chair, Mick Murphy OAM, worked tirelessly in meeting with individuals and organisations and discussing issues relevant to the catchment management framework in Victoria, and way beyond. He chaired and otherwise engaged in a number of committees, panels and round-table sessions as a strategic, well-informed and considerate participant. Along with many others, I was delighted that Mick decided to undertake a third term as Chair of the Council.



Patricia Geraghty
Executive Officer
21 August 2013

Strategic Plan 2012-15

Our vision

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

Who we are

- Role of the Victorian Catchment Management Council (Council) is to positively influence the condition and management of land and water resources across Victoria's catchments through the provision of advice to government and key stakeholders
- Council is a champion of integrated catchment management based on the first objective in the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994* (CaLP Act):
"...to establish a framework for the integrated and co-ordinated management of catchments which will maintain and enhance long-term land productivity while also conserving the environment; and aim to ensure that the quality of the State's land and water resources and their associated plant and animal life are maintained and enhanced."

What we must do

- Functions of Council are described in the CaLP Act, including providing advice to the Ministers on:
 - matters relating to statewide catchment management and the condition of land and water resources
 - priorities for catchment management
 - priorities for research and investigation related to catchment management
- To encourage the cooperation of persons and bodies involved in the management of land and water resources and promote community awareness and understanding of catchment management issues
- Council must report on its activities annually, and every fifth annual report is to provide an assessment of the condition and management of land and water resources in the State, most recently in October 2012
- Additional functions relate to the declaration or revocation of declaration of pest plant and animal species under the CaLP Act, in addition to:
 - Specific functions under the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988; and
 - Compliance with the Public Administration Act 2004 and other related acts.
- Council participates in and provides submissions on relevant reviews of legislation, strategies and plans

Drivers for 2012-2015

Catchment Condition and Management Report (CCMR) 2012 recommends:

1. That robust processes be established to determine the condition of the State's land and water resources and the effectiveness of land protection measures.
2. That this crucial function be assigned to an independent and appropriately resourced entity, with the task of reporting annually on progress towards the implementation of these processes, and every six years on overall condition.
3. That a State Integrated Catchment Management (ICM) plan be developed to define, explicitly, the quality of the land and water resources that will maintain and enhance long term land productivity, while also conserving the environment.

Strategic Goals

These two goals are the key areas on which Council will focus its efforts over the 2012-2015 term. This will be undertaken by Council as a vehicle for change, for improving efficiency and effectiveness for the Catchment Management Framework and through using the knowledge and wisdom of our Council members and other experts. These Goals will be reviewed annually.

1. Implementing CCMR 2012 recommendations; working towards CCMR 2017
2. Provide leadership to the Catchment Management Framework

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 one of the goals 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 Condition and Management Committee

The Catchment Condition and Management Committee comprises Chris Arnott (Chair), Cullen Gunn, Merna Curnow and Mick Murphy, supported by Neil Meyers, Patricia Geraghty and Tracey Koper.

The function of the Committee is to work towards the implementation of the recommendations from the Catchment Condition and Management Report 2012. This will be achieved by taking on the monitoring, evaluation and reporting task of developing and reporting on an initial set of indicators to be monitored annually and to fulfil our role under the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994*. The Committee will also work in partnership with stakeholders to identify and prepare a scope, vision, key aspects and major principles for guidelines to create an Integrated Catchment Management Plan

To date, a small set of pragmatic interim indicators have been selected that use readily available datasets. An initial outline of the annual advice to the Ministers on catchment condition and management has also been created based on these interim indicators.

Catchment Governance Committee

The Catchment Governance Committee comprises John Young (Chair), Peter Greig, Craig Madden and Peta Maddy, supported by Patricia Geraghty and Tracey Koper.

The function of the Committee relates to: Governance; making the Catchment Management Framework operate effectively and efficiently. In order to do this, the Council agreed that the Committee should use the vehicle of the 20 year anniversary of the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994* in 2014 to provide advice to the responsible ministers on the operation of the Act. A scan was proposed, using some key topics to assess the Act and to enable some recommendations to be derived.

To date, an initial set of key topics has been identified and a preliminary scan of the Act has been undertaken. Advice is proposed to be provided to the ministers by December 2013.

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 2008-2009, 2009-2010, 2010-2011, 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 financial years.

VCMC Financial Report 2008-2009 to 2012-2013

| | 2008-2009 | 2009-2010 | 2010-2011 | 2011-2012 | 2012-2013 |
|--------------------------|----------------|----------------|---------------------|----------------|-------------------------------|
| Operating Revenue | \$ | \$ | \$ | \$ | \$ |
| DEPI Allocation | 594,498 | 603,071 | 548,061 | 684,789 | 549,646 |
| Trust Funds | 22,643 | 22,643 | 19,851 | 0 | 0 |
| Total Revenue | 617,141 | 652,714 | 567,912 | 684,789 | 549,646 |
| | | | | | |
| Expenses | | | | | |
| DEPI Allocation | 574,234 | 577,277 | 567,474 | 725,303 | 498,981.83 |
| Trust Funds | 0 | 1,921 | 19,851 ¹ | 0 | 0 |
| Total Expenses | 574,234 | 579,198 | 587,325 | 725,303 | 498,981.83² |

Notes:

- (1) The Council used the VCMC Trust Fund to sponsor a workshop on Indigenous Employment Opportunities in Natural Resource Management held on 29 June 2010.
- (2) There was an underspend in the 2012-2013 financial year due to the appointment of the Council members in September 2012, resulting in reduced expenditure for the period July to September 2012; and to savings on printing and editing in the production of the Catchment Condition and Management Report 2012.

VCMC, in conjunction with DEPI, 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 2012-13 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 Environment and Primary Industries (formerly the Department of Sustainability and Environment and the Department of Primary Industries). 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). In past annual reports, this requirement has involved reporting on various programs and projects undertaken by the Catchment Management Authorities within the integrated catchment management framework. However, these reports are available elsewhere, and can frequently be found in the annual reports of these authorities.

Council decided to undertake a different approach in the term 2012-2015. Council set up a Catchment Governance Committee to provide advice on the operation of the Act. The report of the Committee is found elsewhere in the annual report. The following items are examples taken from the Department of Environment and Primary Industries and its predecessors.

Water law review

The department is leading a review of Victoria's water laws to deliver a streamlined and effective legislative framework for water management and use in Victoria. The new Act will reflect new water policies including the Living Melbourne, Living Victoria agenda and the land use change policy developed through the Western and Gippsland regional sustainable water strategies. The review will also consider whether legislative changes are required to implement the Commonwealth's Murray-Darling Basin Plan. An expert panel with legal and industry experience has been appointed to oversee the review and make recommendations. Proposed improvements to the legislation were tested with key stakeholders at targeted forums across the state in late 2012. The department is working towards introducing a Bill to Parliament in 2014.

River frontage protection and improvement works evaluation

The department assists catchment management authorities to work with landholders to improve the condition of river frontages, or riparian land, through weed and pest animal management, revegetation and limiting stock access to the river bank through fencing and providing off-stream watering sites. An evaluation of river frontage protection and improvement work in Victoria showed landholders believed waterway health had improved since the work and they would recommend other landholders get involved; 74 per cent of landholders indicated they considered the condition of the waterway had improved as a result of the riparian works.

Landmark Dja Dja Wurrung settlement

A landmark native title settlement in March formally recognised the Dja Dja Wurrung people as the Traditional Owner group for lands in central Victoria. The settlement – between the Victorian Government and the Dja Dja Wurrung people – is the first under the Victorian Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010 to use the full suite of agreements available under the Act, including the first Natural Resource Agreement and Land Use Activity Agreement. The Natural Resource Agreement facilitates Dja Dja Wurrung involvement in natural resource management and access to and use of natural resources. The Land Use Activity Agreement replaces the Future act regime under the Commonwealth Native Title Act 1993 and provides the Dja Dja Wurrung people with different levels of procedural rights depending on the category of land use activity.

The settlement achieves full and final resolution of native title claims to 266,532 hectares of Crown land – about 3 per cent of all Crown land in Victoria. The settlement includes the transfer of two national parks, one regional park, two state parks and one reserve to 'Aboriginal title' held by the Dja Dja Wurrung, to be jointly managed by the Dhelkunya Dja Traditional Owner Land Management Board in perpetuity with the state.

The settlement is expected to start in August 2013, once the Indigenous Land Use Agreement is registered. The settlement agreement will be implemented through a partnership arrangement between the state and the Dja Dja Wurrung people.

Point Nepean National Park

The government released the final Point Nepean National Park Master Plan in April and announced a commercial expression of interest process to seek private sector investment in developing the historic Quarantine Station precinct.

The 17-hectare precinct contains more than 50 buildings, most of which have been long closed to the public. Development of the Quarantine Station buildings will be in keeping with the Guidelines for Tourism Investment Opportunities of Significance in National Parks and with heritage, planning and environmental legislation and national park values.

Internal roads, car parks, power and sewerage have been upgraded to support investment in the precinct. A community information session at the Quarantine Station on Saturday 4 May was well attended by stakeholders and community members keen to find out more about the plans for the unique site.

Environmental Partnerships

Victorians are being encouraged to get more involved in protecting and enhancing the environment after the release of a new partnership-building approach. Environmental Partnerships – released in November 2012 – lays the foundation for government, business, industry, community groups and individuals to work together to undertake practical and effective actions to maintain a resilient, healthy environment that supports the prosperity and wellbeing of current and future generations.

Landcare

The Victorian Landcare Program Strategic Plan was launched as part of the national Landcare Week celebrations in September. The plan will guide the Government's key program of support to strengthen Landcare. This iconic grassroots movement has grown into a thriving community with more than 60,000 members across Victoria.

Ninety days of nature

More than 65 events were staged in northern Victoria as part of Spring into Biodiversity – Ninety Days of Nature. The department and the Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority and North East Catchment Management Authority joined together to present the program.

Events were hosted by the department, catchment management authorities, Parks Victoria, local government, Landcare and conservation management networks and local environmental and community groups. Program highlights included a walk and talk around the Kinnairds Wetland at Numurkah, official launch of a new North East Fish, Crayfish and Turtles Guide, Striped Legless Lizard hunt at Mount Battery, near Mansfield and a reptiles and frog discovery day at Baranduda.

BushTender helps to protect native vegetation

Avoca Plains landholders in the north-west of Victoria shared in \$1.5 million through the BushTender program to improve native vegetation on their properties by fencing, replanting and weed and pest control. BushTender has been running since 2001, protecting more than 33,000 hectares of native vegetation with the help of 460 different landholders.

New soil strategy

In July, the department released the Soil Health Strategy, which was developed in conjunction with catchment management authorities to provide a statewide, consistent approach to managing soil health in Victoria. Protecting soil health preserves future land choices and options. The strategy is intended to assist catchment planning, as well as local and state government agencies as they work with local communities to improve soil health.

Partnerships aim to boost environment and the economy

Environmental Partnerships is building a new active approach to government, communities and businesses working together to maintain a healthy environment while securing a competitive economy.

This key policy document, produced by the department, is based on three aspirations:

- value the environment and what it has to offer
- act to protect, conserve and maintain the environment
- enjoy the wide range of benefits of a healthy environment now and into the future.

While emphasising the importance of partnerships to achieve environmental outcomes, *Environmental Partnerships* clearly articulates the government's approach to maintaining a resilient, healthy environment.

The Minister for Environment and Climate Change launched the new approach in November 2012 as the Victorian Government's overarching approach to the environment.

The document establishes clear priorities and sets the direction for the department's work. The focus includes:

- maintaining healthy biodiversity and productive landscapes
- managing parks and other public land for the benefit of the community
- improving waste management
- managing risks to communities and landscape from bushfire and flood
- ensuring accountable and efficient environment agencies through stronger governance and continuous improvement.

The department is already successfully partnering with the community, local government and industry through a range of initiatives, including the Communities for Nature grants program, which helps community groups undertake on-ground environmental works, and the Victorian Adaptation and Sustainability Partnership, which supports local government to build local capacity to adapt to a changing environment. Environmental Partnerships forms a platform for ongoing communication and engagement with the community and the department's key stakeholders.

The department and its portfolio agencies will continue to progress the actions and approaches outlined in the policy.

Responding to fires

Victoria faced one of the most active fire seasons in four years. The department's firefighters responded to 866 fires during the 2012–13 fire season, impacting 201,630 hectares. This is significantly more than the 30-year average of 638 fires per season. Sadly, this season was a reminder of how dangerous firefighting can be, with three firefighters losing their lives in the line of duty.

For weeks large fires in and around Harrietville, Aberfeldy and the Grampians tested not only the fire services but many surrounding rural communities. Crews and incident management teams from the department, Parks Victoria, VicForests, Melbourne Water and the Country Fire Authority (CFA) worked around the clock in remote and rugged terrain to protect people, properties and communities. Firefighters from New Zealand and New South Wales provided much needed support to Victorian crews, whilst Victoria supported Tasmania and New South Wales in their firefighting efforts.

Statutory Responsibilities

VCMC Meetings

| | October 2012 | December 2012 | February 2012 | March 2012 | June 2012 |
|---------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|------------|-----------|
| Mick Murphy | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Merna Curnow | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Peter Greig | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Peta Maddy | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Chris Arnott | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Cullen Gunn | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Craig Madden | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| John Young | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Adam Fennessy | ✓ | ✓ | | | |

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 Environment and Primary Industries' Freedom of Information Manager, Ms Kim Reeves (03) 9637 9730.

During 2012-13, 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 (\$25.70) must be made in writing to:

Ms Kim Reeves
Freedom of Information Manager

Department of Environment and Primary Industries
P.O. Box 500
East Melbourne Vic 3002
Tel: (03) 9637 9730
Email: kim.reeves@depi.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 Environment and Primary Industries must respond to you as soon as possible, but not later than 45 days, outlining its decision on your request. If the Department of Environment and Primary Industries 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 Environment and Primary Industries 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 2012-13.

The VCMC commissioned no consultancies <\$10,000 in 2012-13.

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.

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 2012-13 period to which Victorian Industry Participation Policy applied.

Major Contracts

There were no major contract entered into in 2012-13.

Protected Disclosures Act (formerly Whistleblowers Protection Act 2001 (repealed))

The Whistleblowers Protection Act 2001 (Whistleblowers Act) was repealed and replaced with the *Protected Disclosures Act 2012* on 10 February 2013. As the change of legislation occurred midway through the 2012-13 financial year, this disclosure complies with the requirements of the PD Act and the Whistleblowers Act, for each of the relevant time periods.

The PD act enables people to make disclosures about improper conduct within the public sector without fear of reprisal. It aims to ensure openness and accountability by encouraging people to make disclosures and protecting them when they do.

There were no disclosures made under the *Protected Disclosures Act 2012* during the 2012-13 reporting period.

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

Department of Environment and Primary Industries (DEPI)
Jennifer Berenson, Senior Advisor, Privacy and Ombudsman
PO Box 500, East Melbourne Vic 3002.
Telephone: 03 9637 8697
Email: jennifer.berenson@depi.vic.gov.au
Website: www.depi.vic.gov.au

Independent Broad-Based Anti-Corruption Commission (IBAC) Victoria
Level 1, North Tower, 459 Collins Street Melbourne 3000
Mail: IBAC, GPO Box 24234 Melbourne 3001
Website: www.ibac.vic.gov.au
Phone: 1300 735 135
Email: see website above for the secure email disclosure process, which also provides for anonymous disclosures

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 DEPI, in accordance with Government directives.

Four primary goals have been assumed by DEPI 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 DEPI 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 DEPI's Environmental Reporting under FRD24C.

VCMC Publications 2011-12

VCMC Annual Report 2011-12;

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

Catchment Condition and Management Report 2012;

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 22C/D 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 2012-13

| Group Name | VCMC Representative |
|---|-------------------------------|
| CMA CEOs Forum | Patricia Geraghty |
| CMA Chairs Forum | Mick Murphy |
| CMA Communications Officers Forum | Tracey Koper |
| DEPI MER Working Group | Neil Meyers |
| DEPI Victorian Landcare and Catchment Management Magazine Editorial Committee | Tracey Koper |
| RCS Managers Forum | John Young, Patricia Geraghty |
| Riparian Advisory Group | Mick Murphy |
| Victorian Catchment Management Forum | Mick Murphy |
| Victorian Waterway Management Strategy Reference Committee | Mick Murphy |

2. 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:
Taxa

Swamp Sun-orchid (*Thelymitra incurve*)

Feather Bush-pea (*Pultenaea penna*)

Bell-flower Hyacinth-orchid (*Dipodium campanulatum*)

Broad-toothed Rat (*Mastacomys fuscus*)

Large-flower Crane's-bill (*Geranium sp. 1*)

Burrnan Dolphin (*Tursiops australis*)

Angahook Pink-fingers (*Caladenia maritima*)

Communities

Cool Temperate Mixed Forest Community

Potentially Threatening Processes

There were no potentially threatening processes identified and supported for listing under the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* by the SAC and VCMC

VCMC Responses to Draft Action Statements:

There were no Draft Action Statements provided to the VCMC from the SAC.

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 22D | Manner of establishment and the relevant Ministers | 6 |
| FRD 22D | Objectives, functions, powers and duties | 6 |
| FRD 22D | Nature and range of services provided | 6 |
| Management and Structure | | |
| FRD 22D | Organisational structure | 5 |
| Financial and other information | | |
| FRD 10 | Disclosure Index | 20 |
| FRD 12A | Disclosure of Major Contracts | 16 |
| FRD 22D, SD 4.2(K) | Operational and budgetary objectives and performance against objectives | 11 |
| FRD 22D | Employment and conduct principles | 17 |
| FRD 22D | Occupational health and safety policy | * |
| FRD 22D | Summary of the financial results for the year | 11 |
| FRD 22D | Significant changes in financial position during the year | 11 |
| FRD 22D | Major changes or factors affecting performance | 10 |
| FRD 22D | Subsequent events | 11 |
| FRD 22D | Application and operation of <i>Freedom of Information Act 1982</i> | 15 |
| FRD 22D | Compliance with building and maintenance provisions of <i>Building Act 1993</i> | 17 |
| FRD 22D | Statement on National Competition Policy | 16 |
| FRD 22D | Application and operation of the <i>Protected Disclosures Act 2012</i> | 17 |
| FRD 22D | Details of consultancies over \$10,000 | 16 |
| FRD 22D | Details of consultancies under \$10,000 | 16 |
| FRD 22D | Statement of availability of other information | 18 |
| FRD 25A | Victorian Industry Participation Policy disclosures | 16 |
| FRD 30A | Standard requirements for the design and print of annual reports | 20 |
| SD 4.5(G) | Specific information requirements | 18 |
| SD 4.5(J) | Sign-off requirements | 18 |
| Legislation | | |
| <i>Freedom of Information Act 1982</i> | | 15 |
| <i>Building Act 1983</i> | | 17 |
| <i>Protected Disclosures Act 2012</i> | | 17 |
| <i>Victorian Industry Participation Policy Act 2003</i> | | 16 |
| <i>Financial Management Act 1994</i> | | 2 |

* See DEPI Annual Report 2012-13

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Victorian Catchment Management Council
8 Nicholson Street
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002
Ph 03 9637 9892 Fax 03 9637 8024

www.vcmc.vic.gov.au