

North Central

REGIONAL CONTEXT



AGRICULTURE: 57% of catchment area (1.7 million hectares, source: regional sustainable agriculture strategy). Irrigation, dryland cropping, mixed farming, diverse farming zones.

SIGNIFICANT NATURAL FEATURES: Box-Ironbark forests and remnants, grasslands and grassy woodlands.

MAJOR WATERWAYS: Loddon and Campaspe Rivers, Gunbower Forest wetlands and Kerang Lakes (both Ramsar listed).

INDIGENOUS HERITAGE: The North Central region includes the traditional land of the Dja Dja Wurrung, Barapa Barapa, Wemba Wemba, Yorta Yorta, Taungurung, Wadi Wadi and Wergaia (the Wergaia are represented by the Barengi Gadjin Land Council).

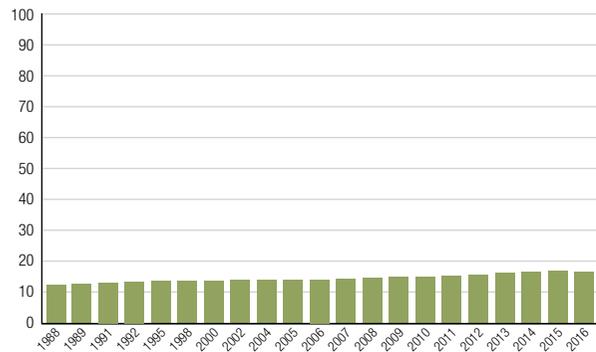
Source: NCCMA, 2013



Slender darling-pea *Swainsona murrayana* in one of Victoria's northern plains grassland. Photo: NCCMA

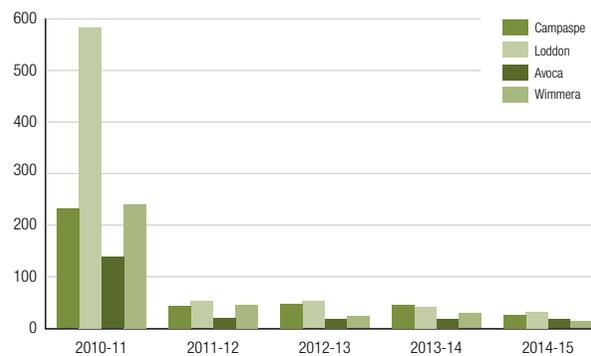
REPORT CARD

BIODIVERSITY Tree cover



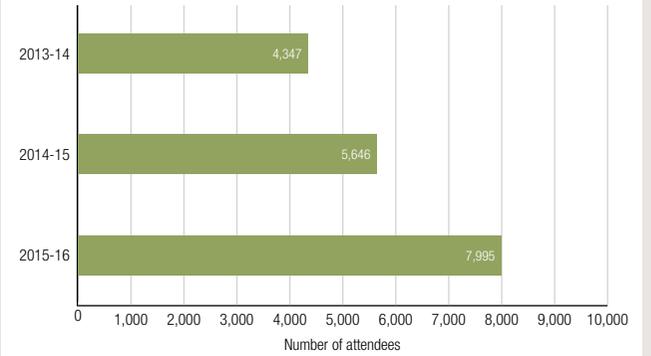
Average annual percentage (%) tree cover for the North Central region 1988-2016. Source: Van Dijk and Summers, 2016

WATER Streamflow



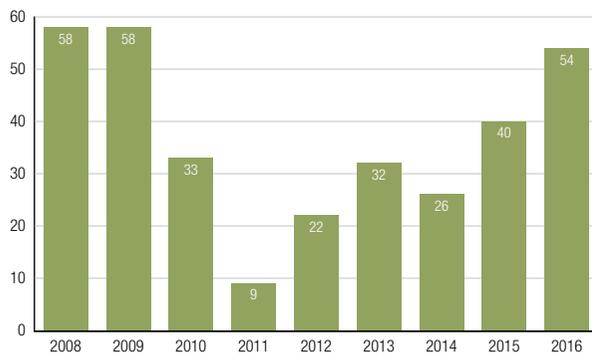
Basin streamflow (%) compared to long-term average. Source: Victorian Water Accounts

COMMUNITY Participation



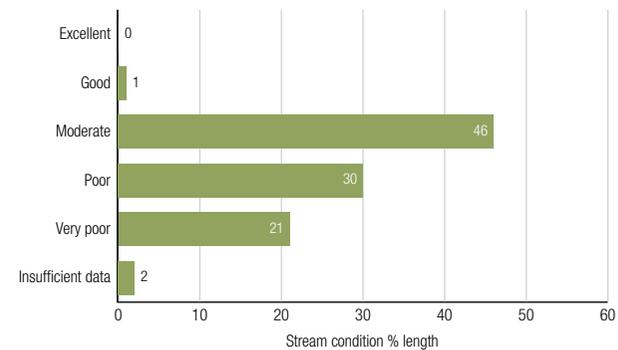
Community participation in CMA engagement events. Source: Victorian Catchment Management Authorities, 2014, 2015, 2017

LAND Exposed soil



Percentage (%) Dryland area with 30-100% bare soils (higher risk of erosion) in March, 2008-16. Sources: DEDJTR, 2017a; EnSym; Guerschman et al., 2015

WATERWAYS Stream condition



Index of Stream Condition 2013 summary for the North Central region. Source: DEPI, 2013b, p. 40

ASSESSMENT OF CATCHMENT CONDITION

LAND

- ▶ The North Central region has an elevated risk of erosion from bare soils in dryland production areas, with a dramatic increase since 2011. Drought conditions have returned to the region in the last few years.

WATER

- ▶ According to the last Index of Stream Condition benchmark conducted in 2010 (DEPI, 2013b), only one stream reach was assessed as being in 'good' condition, found in the Campaspe basin. The majority of stream reaches assessed within Campaspe and Loddon basins were mostly in 'poor' or 'very poor' condition, while the Avoca basin was predominantly in 'moderate' condition. The part of the Wimmera basin in the North Central region, the Avon-Richardson system, was mainly in 'poor' condition. Basin streamflow was significantly below the long-term average from 2011-12 to 2014-15, and condition have not eased since.

BIODIVERSITY

- ▶ The North Central region has relatively low tree cover (approximately 15%) that has increased over the last 20-30 years. The low levels seen reflect past land clearing practices, as well as the presence of native grasslands that have naturally low levels of tree cover. The North Central CMA assessed the condition of biodiversity as 'poor', though it is thought to be improving (NCCMA, 2016). The condition of ecological vegetation classes across the region was assessed using 2005 and 2013 data for vegetation extent and condition, with improvement modelled for some vegetation classes, including Eucalypt Open Forests.

COMMUNITY

- ▶ Community participation has increased over three years. The North Central CMA also reports an increase in Landcare group health score, and rates community participation as positive (NCCMA, 2016).
- ▶ The top three community concerns about environmental health relate to invasive weeds (88% of respondents), poor health of rivers and wetlands (79%), and declining numbers of native fish (75%); all considered a problem by respondents (Schirmer et al., 2016).

CASE STUDY

Protecting Northern Plains Native Grasslands: Remnant Grassland Ecosystems Project



Photo: NCCMA

“The project, in partnership with Trust for Nature, has increased the number of covenants on priority sites containing grassland, permanently protecting habitat for the Plains Wanderer and other threatened plants and animals. The combination of permanent protection and on-ground works should mean improvements in grassy ecosystem condition over time.”

LOCATION: North Central

PARTICIPANTS: North Central CMA, Trust for Nature, private landholders, DELWP, Parks Victoria, Northern Plains Conservation Management Network, Bush Heritage Australia, Barapa Barapa and Wamba Wamba Traditional Owners, local municipalities. Funded by the National Landcare Programme.

OBJECTIVES: To support landowners to protect privately-owned remnant grassy ecosystems in the lower Loddon and Avoca catchments.

Privately-owned remnant grassy ecosystems in Victoria’s north central region are highly fragmented. Native grasslands were settled and developed early by Europeans due to their suitability for grazing without the need for clearing of trees and shrubs. They are among Victoria’s most heavily cleared ecosystems and are now listed as nationally threatened. The project aims to protect and restore some of these fragmented ecosystems in the Northern Plains.

Many plants and animals that rely on these ecosystems are also threatened due to the scale of past and ongoing habitat loss. The critically endangered Plains Wanderer is only found in limited remnants of grasslands in the region. The project aims to protect and enhance habitat for this species.

On-ground works to assist land managers to improve the condition of their grassland areas include fencing, pest and weed control and revegetation.

Future activities include population surveys of threatened species, plant propagation and re-introduction, and community engagement through field days. The project also aims to engage Traditional Owners in, and increase their capacity for, grassy ecosystem management (Australian Government, 2015).

The project, in partnership with Trust for Nature, has increased the number of covenants on priority sites containing grassland, permanently protecting habitat for the Plains Wanderer and other threatened plants and animals. The combination of permanent protection and on-ground works should mean improvements in grassy ecosystem condition over time.

Further to this, the success of the project to date has meant that the partnership between the CMA, conservation organisations, private landholders and Traditional Owners has led to further partnerships being established, enhancing future efforts to protect these threatened ecosystems and their plants and animals (Trust for Nature, 2015).