

Wimmera

REGIONAL CONTEXT



SIGNIFICANT NATURAL FEATURES: Grampians (Gariwerd) National Park, Little Desert National Parks, the Black Range, Mt Arapiles–Tooan State Parks and the Pyrenees Range.

MAJOR WATERWAYS: Wimmera River flows into terminal lakes, Lake Albacutya and Lake Hindmarsh, which are significant wetlands. South west of catchment contains 25% of Victoria's wetlands.

INDIGENOUS HERITAGE: Traditional Owners include the Barengi Gadjin Land Council Aboriginal Corporation.

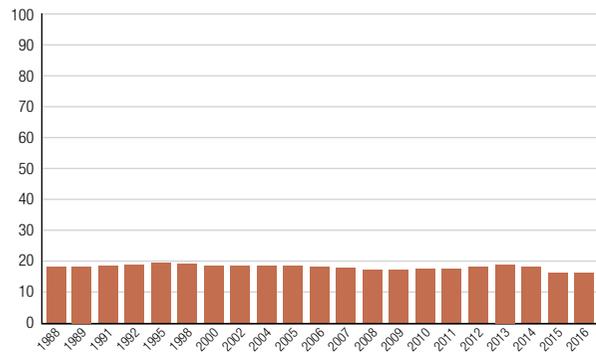
Source: WCMA, 2013



Wimmera River, Jeparit. Photo: David Fletcher

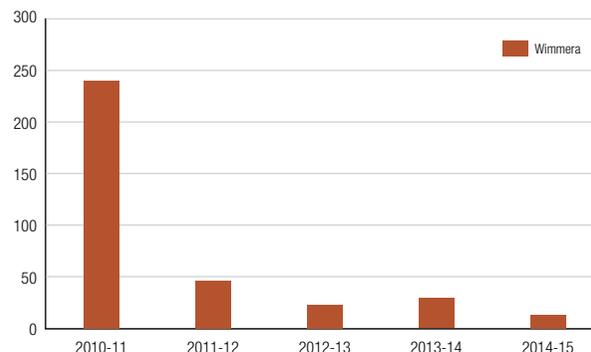
REPORT CARD

BIODIVERSITY Tree cover



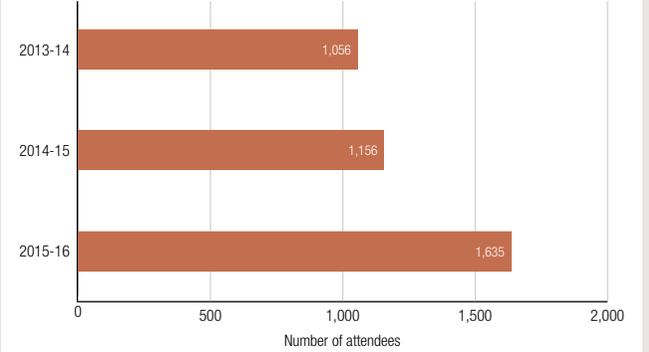
Average annual percentage (%) tree cover for the Wimmera region 1988-2016. Source: Van Dijk and Summers, 2016

WATER Streamflow



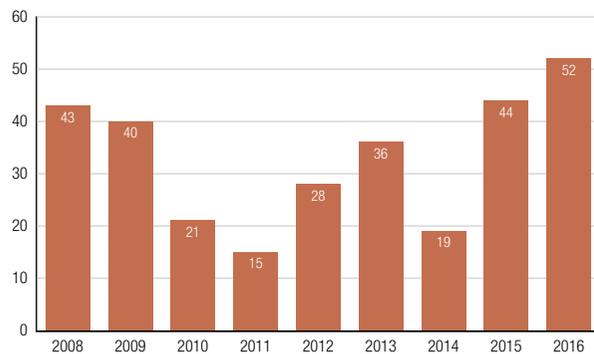
Basin streamflow (%) compared to long-term average. Source: Victorian Water Accounts

COMMUNITY Participation



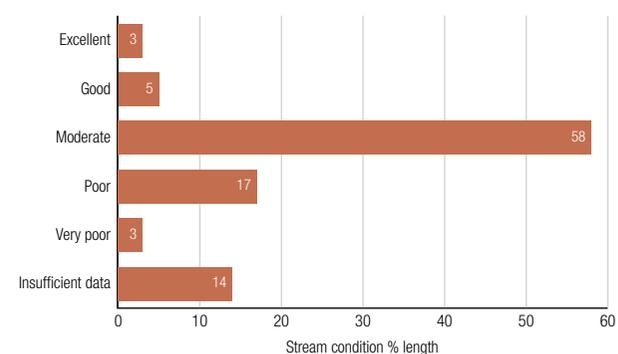
Community participation in CMA engagement events. Source: Victorian Catchment Management Authorities, 2014, 2015, 2017

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 Wimmera region. Source: DEPI, 2013b, p. 52

ASSESSMENT OF CATCHMENT CONDITION

LAND

- ▶ The Wimmera region has had an elevated risk of erosion from bare soils in dryland production areas in the last two years at levels higher than the end of the Millennium drought, though the Wimmera CMA reported no major erosion events in the last year (WCMA, 2016). 2010-11 and 2014 were years of lower risk due to favourable climatic conditions.

WATER

- ▶ According to the last Index of Stream Condition benchmark conducted in 2010 (DEPI, 2013b), stream reaches assessed are mostly in moderate to poor condition, with some river reaches in the Wimmera basin in excellent or good condition in the northern Grampians National Park. There is insufficient data for most stream reaches in the Millicent Coast basin. Basin streamflow for the Wimmera system has declined significantly from 2010-11 to 2014-15. High stream flows in 2010-11 were the result of floods in September 2010 and January 2011 and there have been dry rainfall years since.

BIODIVERSITY

- ▶ Tree cover is mostly contained in Little Desert National Park, Grampians National Park, and other parks and has slightly declined in the last two years. West Wimmera is comprised of over 30% grasslands. According to the Wimmera CMA, the region experienced little change in biodiversity condition over the last year, and weed invasion was reduced as a result of the persistent dry conditions (WCMA, 2016). However, the dry conditions also meant that revegetation has varied rates of plant survival and have also caused a decline in native grassland condition.

COMMUNITY

- ▶ Community participation has increased over three years. The Wimmera CMA boosted its participation numbers as a result of increased funding in 2015-16, though population decline continues to put pressure on Landcare groups in the region (WCMA, 2016).
- ▶ The top three community concerns about environmental health relate to poor health of rivers and wetlands (83% of respondents), invasive weeds (83%), and declining numbers of native fish (82%); all considered a problem by respondents (Schirmer et al., 2016). Recent research by Curtis and Mendham (2017) supports community concerns mentioned around the Impact of reduced water flows on the long-term health of waterways as this was the top issue along with reduced opportunities for recreation as lakes dry out. Decline in soil health was also of high concern.

CASE STUDY

Bringing together scientific and Indigenous perspectives on biodiversity



Photo: Kathryn Walker

“The project helped build trust and understanding between non-Indigenous partners and Traditional Owners by demonstrating how we will actively seek to involve Aboriginal people in programs according to their specific community aspirations and interests.”

LOCATION: Wimmera

PARTICIPANTS: DELWP Grampians, the Barengi Gadjin Land Council (representing Traditional Owners in the Wimmera region from Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia and Jupagulk family groups), Wimmera CMA, Horsham Primary School, Department of Education and Training (DET) and the Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group.

OBJECTIVES: To enable primary school students to learn about local plants and animals from both a scientific and Aboriginal perspective, and engage Aboriginal communities and build partnerships.

The Nyupun pilot project was set up in 2016 as part of a broader effort to increase Aboriginal participation and engagement in integrated catchment management in the Wimmera (Victorian Catchment Management Authorities, 2017). The word “Nyupun” means ‘Spiritual Being’ in the local Wotjobaluk culture. The pilot project aims to support local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students by bringing local Indigenous culture into the classroom.

The eight-week pilot class involved 13 students from Horsham Primary School, and an expanded version of this project is due to be developed in 2017. Students received a Nyupun flora or fauna species local to the region and learnt about the Nyupun’s significance in the Wotjobaluk culture.

The project demonstrates the importance of increased participation by and engagement of Aboriginal community members in Wimmera integrated catchment management activities. It also highlights the benefits of strong ongoing partnerships and working relationships between Aboriginal groups and public and private land and water managers.

The students subsequently became involved in other activities including tree planting activities and community engagement events. The relationship between the Barengi Gadjin Land Council and Horsham Primary School families improved as a result of the project. The project helped build trust and understanding between non-Indigenous partners and Traditional Owners by demonstrating how we will actively seek to involve Aboriginal people in programs according to their specific community aspirations and interests. It has helped build momentum for a significant increase in participation and engagement of the wider Aboriginal community in projects over the last 12 months, including an increase in Aboriginal staff in the CMA.

The program also provides a good example of how Aboriginal knowledge of plants and animals can complement Western, scientific perspectives on ‘biodiversity’, and thus benefit catchment management activities.