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MURRAY FUTURE

Lower Lakes & Coorong Recovery

Community update

April 2013

This email newsletter is published by the Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources (DEWNR) to update the community about work being done to secure the future of the Coorong, Lower Lakes and Murray Mouth (CLLMM) region as a healthy, productive and resilient wetland of international importance.

Highlights

- More Native Fish returned to their natural habitat
- Funding for CLLMM fencing
- New CLLMM team members Simon and Scott
- Ruppia Translocation Project
- Lake Albert Scoping Study progressing well
- Native plants regenerate at Aleppo pine removal site

More native fish returned to their natural habitat



Approximately 200 Southern Purple Spotted Gudgeon were returned to their natural habitat in the Coorong, Lower Lakes and Murray Mouth (CLLMM) region last month, after populations of the native fish species were almost wiped out during the drought.

It was the final release of captively-bred native fish under a two-year program undertaken by the Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources' CLLMM Recovery Project.

The gudgeon were released at a site in the Lower Finniss River.

Early indications suggest the program of captively breeding threatened native fish species and returning them to the CLLMM region has been a success.

Around 900 Southern Purple Spotted Gudgeon have been released since Spring 2011 at this Lower Finniss River site, and a number of the re-introduced fish have been recaptured indicating that the species is surviving.

The released fish are treated with a harmless fluorescent dye so that they can be identified during on-going monitoring.

The 200 fish released last month will further boost the population, which came dangerously close to disappearing at the height of the recent drought across the Murray-Darling Basin.

The Southern Purple Spotted Gudgeon and other native fish species such as the Yarra Pygmy Perch and the Murray Hardyhead are key elements of the CLLMM region's ecological character.

SARDI, the SA Murray-Darling Basin NRM Board, the SA Museum, Flinders University, Aquasave Consultants, and Native Fish Australia (SA) have also been significant contributors to the effort to repopulate the native fish species in the CLLMM region.

Funding for CLLMM fencing

Grants are now available for landholders in the CLLMM region for fencing to protect revegetation work and exposed shorelines from livestock.

Since July 2011, the fencing program – previously managed by the Goolwa to Wellington LAP – has delivered more than 26 kilometres of shoreline fencing and more than 40 stock watering points.

The CLLMM Recovery Project is now managing the fencing program, and has established a set of detailed guidelines to ensure the funding delivers the best possible environmental guidelines.

To be considered for a grant, a landholder must:

- own a property within the CLLMM region (within five kilometres of the lakes) that has unprotected shorelines (either lake or tributary) that would benefit from fencing
- ensure that all fencing is constructed within, or on, the border of a property owned by the landholder
- graze stock (or have potential to graze stock in the future) at the site where the fencing is proposed
- allow Ngarrindjeri representatives to undertake a heritage inspection of the alignment of the proposed fencing, and allow DEWNR representatives to undertake site inspections or audits at the site of the proposed fencing
- agree that wherever possible, the fence line is to be constructed on cleared land and will not disturb native vegetation
- agree that to protect the Lower Lakes or their tributaries, the fencing must be constructed 15 metres (or more) from the 0.75 AHD lake level or high water mark, respectively.

Eligible landholders can apply for the following grants:

- up to \$4,000 per kilometre to fence off revegetated and/or regenerating remnant areas by erecting revegetation fencing
- up to \$6,000 per kilometre for shoreline fencing to protect shoreline areas from stock
- up to \$800 to construct watering points.

Funding is available to contribute to fencing projects relating to CLLMM Restoration Program vegetation sites. This fencing must protect remnant vegetation or proposed revegetation sites.

Further information about the CLLMM fencing programs is available from Scott Butler on (08) 8204 9336 or scott.butler@sa.gov.au

New CLLMM Team Members Scott and Simon

Simon Cheers and **Scott Butler** have recently joined the CLLMM Recovery Project, and will be working with the community to plan and deliver vital revegetation projects throughout the region.

Simon has joined the team from DEWNR's Fire Management unit, where he prepared ecological impact assessments for prescribed burns in the Mouth Lofty Ranges.

In 2009, Simon managed a key project to assist in delivering limestone to Currency Creek and the Finniss River as part of work to prevent widespread acidification across the CLLMM region.

He was also involved in the first year of the community revegetation project, working with Leah Sullivan from the Goolwa to Wellington LAP.



Simon will primarily be involved with developing site plans for commercial planting, as well as assisting with the implementation of a range of smaller, targeted revegetation projects.

Scott has joined the CLLMM Recovery Project's vegetation team as a Field Operations Officer, and will work directly with landholders, contractors, community members, and local councils to ensure the planting projects run as efficiently and effectively as possible.



Scott is also managing a Fencing Incentive Grant Program which will help to deliver fencing to protect revegetated sites and unprotected lake shorelines.

Scott grew up on a farm at Waitpinga, and studied biodiversity and conservation at Flinders University. He has previously worked with Greening Australia as a Green Corps team leader, and at Boyd's Bay Revegetation Services as a bushcare worker.

Before joining the CLLMM team, Scott was an environment officer at the Department of Planning, Transport and Infrastructure.

Both Scott and Simon are welcome additions to the CLLMM team.

Ruppia Translocation Project

The Ruppia Translocation project- part of the CLLMM Recovery project- is aimed at re-establishing a native seagrass species critical to the ecology of the Coorong has begun.

Beds of *Ruppia tuberosa* were once wide-spread in the Coorong's South Lagoon, providing an important food source for migratory waterbirds, and habitat and food for invertebrates and fish. However, inadequate flows of fresh water to the region, especially during the recent drought, have wiped out much of the *Ruppia* in the South Lagoon.

The project builds on the *Ruppia* monitoring and research work undertaken by the University of Adelaide's Associate Professor David Paton.

Improved water conditions suitable for the seagrass have returned, however the natural seed bank became severely depleted during the drought, and populations have not naturally re-colonised on a large scale.

The first stage of translocation project involves taking dry sediment containing *Ruppia tuberosa* seeds from Lake Cantara, in the Coorong National Park, and sowing that sediment into mudflats on the eastern side of the Coorong's South Lagoon. This should help to increase *Ruppia* populations in the northern part of the South Lagoon during winter, and in turn increase habitat and food sources for the region's bird, fish, and invertebrate species.

The translocation has taken place during February to early April, to take advantage of the drier seasons.

The *Ruppia* Restoration Project is working closely with Associate Professor Paton, DEWNR Rangers, and the region's Traditional Owners, the Ngarrindjeri, to ensure the *Ruppia* Translocation Project helps to improve the ecology of the Coorong.



Collection at Lake Cantara



Bagging and delivery



Treatment site - Woods Well

Lake Albert Scoping Study progressing well

The feasibility of engineering solutions to manage water quality in Lake Albert and the Narrung Narrows into the future are now being assessed as part of the Lake Albert Scoping Study.

The 12-month study, is part of the CLLMM Recovery Project, is examining options for the long-term management of the water quality and ecological health of the lake and narrows.

A Community Requirements Survey is also underway. This important phase of the Scoping Study includes focus group sessions and in-depth interviews with community members, as well as an on-line survey that's open to any interested members of the community.

The Scoping Study's Community Reference Group is guiding these surveys, and a broad cross-section of the community will be represented in the focus groups and interviews. Further details about the on-line survey will be available soon.

Professional marketing company Square Holes is undertaking this work for the Scoping Study, and they will prepare a comprehensive report about the community's views and requirements for the future management of water in the lake and narrows.

A review of previous hydrological modelling of Lake Albert and the Narrung Narrows has also been undertaken as part of the Scoping Study, and modelling is being prepared for a range of potential management actions being examined by the Study.

For further information about the Lake Albert Scoping Study, contact Andrew Dawes at the Meningie Lakes Hub on (08) 8575 1830.

Native plants regenerate at Aleppo pine removal site

Native plant species have started to naturally regenerate at an Aleppo pine removal site at Meningie.

The pest trees were removed last year as part of an Aleppo pine control program around Meningie, which is being undertaken collaboratively by the Coorong District Council and the CLLMM Recovery Project.

The removal was the first stage of a project aimed at transforming the Meningie site from one dominated by the invasive pines to a natural setting with a variety of local native plants.

Project Managers Ben Shepherd and Sacha Jellinek, from the CLLMM Recovery Project, say the natural regeneration of native plants is an excellent result, as it's notoriously difficult to restore native vegetation in weed infested areas. "This is especially true at sites where introduced plants (such as mature pines) have existed there for decades," say Ben and Sacha.

"However, soon after the Aleppo pines were removed from the site at the southern corner of Meningie, many native plants began to regenerate.



Photo courtesy of Hafiz Stewart

The re-emergence of the native plants is important because they play a critical role in the landscape by providing food and shelter for native animals, stabilising the soil, and acting as a natural air and water filter.

Some of the native plants regenerating include Bitter Bush (*Adriana quadripartite*), Prickly Wattle (*Acacia paradoxa*),

and Golden Wattle (*Acacia pycnantha*) – which is Australia's national floral emblem.

The Restoration Program is growing plants for the site, however some of the plants that are regenerating naturally are difficult to grow and are unable to be propagated, including two species of Guinea Flower (*Hibbertia sp.*) and Mat-rush (*Lomandra sp.*). Aleppo pines are aggressive invaders of roadsides, pastures, and native bushland, and drop needles which can form a thick carpet over the ground through which nothing else can germinate and grow.

The regeneration shows just how resilient native plants can be.

Michael Vivian from the Coorong District Council reports that "in the last 12 months alone over 3000 small to medium sized Aleppo pines have been removed from the bush land surrounding

Meningie". The removal of the large trees on the edge of the bush land will significantly reduce the seed source that drives the invasion of Aleppo pines into this bushland.

More information

Funding

Implementation of the Long-Term Plan is part of the South Australian Government's *Murray Futures* program, which is funded by the Australian Government's *Water for the Future* initiative.

The Lakes Hubs have been funded through a grant made to the Milang and Districts Community Association as part of the CLLMM Recovery Project.

Find out more

To find out about the Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources' work in the Coorong and Lower Lakes region, visit www.environment.sa.gov.au/cllmm or contact us at:
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