



Community wetlands – a fluid asset

By PAULA D'SANTOS

THE RESTORATION of wetlands is a tricky business. The New South Wales Murray Wetlands Working Group (MWWG) has developed an interesting way to encourage the rehabilitation and protection of these important areas.

The MWWG is an independent, community-based wetland rehabilitation group that aims to develop and implement well-researched, technically sound and community-endorsed management programs for individual wetlands throughout the Murray and Lower Murray-Darling catchments in NSW.

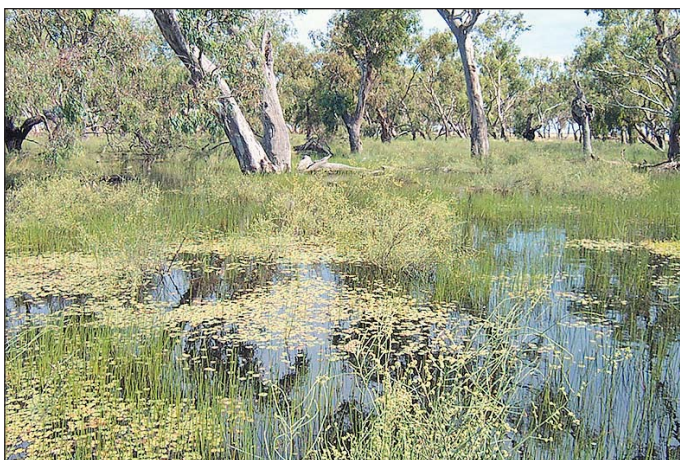
In March, 2004, they launched the Wetlands Incentive Scheme (WIS), a small grants scheme for projects costing less than \$10,000. WIS aims to encourage, and provide assistance to, landholders or community groups who are interested in managing and/or rehabilitating natural wetlands on their properties or in the community (within the Murray and Lower Murray-Darling catchments of NSW).

The scheme provides financial assistance for on-ground works such as fencing, revegetation and minor earthworks. It also funds small studies aimed at improving and rehabilitating wetlands, and wetland education activities. Applications for the WIS can be submitted at any time until the end of 2007.

The MWWG has a wealth of experience. For the past four years it has managed, on behalf of the



Wetland in the dry season. Photographs by Patricia Alexander



The same area during the wet

NSW Government, up to 30,000 megalitres of Adaptive Environmental Water (AEW) for use in wetland projects. This is freshwater that is classified for use for environmental purposes, and it is stored in the Hume Dam. Less water is available in low rainfall years. The amount is determined on a sliding scale according to the volume of water in the system.


Under the operating rules for AEW, the MWWG can trade a portion of the water when it cannot be used in wetland areas. Funds generated by

the trade support wetland rehabilitation projects and on-ground works.

The MWWG also runs the Wetland Rehabilitation and Investigations Program (WRIP). This second funding program is for larger scale projects (costing more than \$10,000) involving on-ground works, investigations or scoping studies aimed at improving management, understanding and rehabilitation of natural wetlands. Applications for this funding can be submitted by 31 March or 31 October each year, until 2007.

The WIS and WRIP are two initiatives that the Murray Wetlands Working Group believes will be an effective way of ensuring that water trade funds are directed back into the community to help improve wetland environments.

In the first six months of the programs, the MWWG approved 26 WIS applications (\$155,000) and six WRIP projects (\$225,000). Pro-

jects range in scale and focus from revegetation works, fencing to manage stock access and development of management plans, to research investigations of groundwater impacts on soils in Murray River wetlands. 

Contact: Application forms are available online at www.mwwg.org.au Further information is available from MWWG offices at Albury, phone (02) 6023 1822; Buronga, phone (03) 5021 9446 or Deniliquin, phone (03) 5881 9211.