



Australian Government

Commonwealth Environmental Water Office

Lowbidgee – water delivery update

March 2021

Kakadu of the South

After several very dry years, good rainfall in the Murrumbidgee catchment has allowed environmental water managers to make the most of full water allocations and deliver water for the environment extensively across the Lowbidgee floodplain.



A bird's eye view of the Lowbidgee floodplain - it really is a spectacular place when its wet. Photo: M. Groat.

The Lowbidgee is the largest remaining area of intact wetlands in the Murrumbidgee Valley. The floodplain and the wetlands within it are nationally and internationally significant. Together they form one of the largest areas of waterbird habitat in eastern Australia.

Where and why water is being used

Water for the environment deliveries are specifically targeting wetlands and floodplains within Gayini (Nimmie-Caira), North Redbank, Yanga National Park and the Junction Wetlands.

This amazing place contains a complex network of wetlands supporting many threatened plants and animal species. The wetlands are responding incredibly well to the water deliveries and are flush with aquatic plants, and birds, fish and frogs are foraging and breeding.

Objectives

- provide habitat & breeding opportunities for waterbirds, fish, frogs, turtles & water bugs
- boost health of riverbank, wetland & floodplain native plants
- help native fish to spawn & move

Timing

Late July 2020 – late February 2021 (now complete)

Water

~342,000 ML of Commonwealth & NSW water for the environment delivered (Regulated and Supplementary)

Waterbirds are breeding!!!

Field staff recorded over 18,000 pairs of ibis breeding at Eulimbah Swamp, on Gayini Nimmie-Caira.

Scientists believe this has been one of the largest colonial waterbird breeding events wholly triggered and supported by the delivery of water for the environment.



Freshly laid waterbird eggs and nests at Eulimbah. Photo: A. Borrel.

Measuring the impact

A detailed monitoring program is in place to measure how fish, birds, vegetation and river health changes as a result of the environmental flow. This important information helps environmental water managers make decisions on where, how much and when to deliver water for the best outcomes.

Field-based surveys were completed in September, November 2020 and January 2021.

A quick summary of the results so far...

- ~15,000 pairs of straw-necked ibis and 3,000 pairs of glossy ibis bred at Eulimbah Swamp in Gayini Nimmie-Caira. Other waterbirds seen breeding on site include herons, spoonbills, cormorants, egrets and threatened Australasian bitterns.
- other waterbirds seen breeding across the Lowbidgee include little bitterns, egrets, spoonbills, herons, cormorants, darters and threatened blue-billed ducks.
- native aquatic plants have increased including water milfoil, common spike rush, water primrose and nardoo. There has also been new lignum growth, and the black box are flowering at Avalon Swamp.
- opportunities for native fish spawning and movement on the Yanga National Park floodplain – monitoring is determining the success of the flows.
- six frog species have been recorded throughout the Lowbidgee, including breeding of the threatened southern bell frog.
- Yanga Lake has partially refilled providing foraging habitat for waterbirds, frogs and turtles.



Breer Swamp, Yanga National Park showing good vegetation growth. Photo: M. Groat.



Professor Skye Wassens from CSU, conducting vegetation monitoring at Mainie Swamp, Junction Wetlands. Photo: M. Groat

Working together

We work together with local communities, landholders, Indigenous communities, NSW government agencies and scientists to manage, plan, deliver and monitor water for the environment in the Murrumbidgee River Valley.

More information:

<http://www.environment.gov.au/water/cewo/catchment/murrumbidgee>

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