

Report and Evaluation

World Wetlands Day 2003, Australia

“Wetlands, Water and Sustainability”

Summary of Activities:

World Wetlands Day (WWD) is celebrated each year on 2 February. It marks the anniversary of the signing of the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar Convention) in Ramsar, Iran, on 2 February 1971.

WWD was first celebrated in 1997. Since this time government agencies, non-government organisations and community groups have celebrated WWD by undertaking actions to raise public awareness of wetland values and benefits and promote the conservation and wise use of wetlands. These activities include seminars, nature walks, festivals, launches of new policies, announcement of new Ramsar sites, newspaper articles, radio interviews and wetland rehabilitation. Each year the number of organizations and community groups organising and participating in WWD activities across Australia increases.

The theme for WWD 2003 in Australia was “Wetlands, Water and Sustainability”. The total number of activities across Australia, listed on the events calendar, was 35 events spread across all States and Territories (ACT 1; NSW 8; NT 2; QLD 9; SA 4; Tas 5; Vic 4; and WA 2). Reports from some of these events are outlined below.

Narawntapu National Park, Tasmania

The National Park adopted the theme “Walking with Wildlife” to celebrate WWD 2003. A full day of guest speakers and events was organised for the visitors to the Park. The day included discovery walks and the opportunity to gain knowledge from speakers. The day provided visitors with a more in-depth look at the wetlands in the area.

Tamar Island Wetland Centre, Tasmania

The Tamar Island Wetland Centre celebrated WWD by involving children in the identification of waterbugs. This involved looking closely at waterbugs from the wetlands, identifying them and checking them in an illustrated book. The children then had fun constructing waterbugs out of a variety of materials. Several hundred visitors attended the day’s activities and were treated to a sausage sizzle.

South Australian Riverland, Wetland Care Australia

WWD 2003 marked the completion of the Gurra Gurra wetlands project. Over the last four years, 32 landholders have been involved in actions at 17

sites to restore flow paths through 3 000 hectares of floodplain. On 1-2 February 2003, a team of 22 volunteers from Origin Energy, Adelaide traveled to Berri to work on the project and to join in the WWD celebrations. The volunteers worked to stabilize exposed banks along a floodplain creek that had been deepened to allow floods to reach the wetlands more effectively. The team also prepared planting beds around the information bay site, ready for planting native trees and shrubs in late autumn.

Following all the hard work the volunteers were able to relax with the landholders and other community members/representatives, enjoying the Gurra celebration riverbank dinner.

Before dawn on WWD, Wetland Care Australia staff and the volunteers joined about 80 community members for the Riverland Conservationists celebration. The large number of community members participating illustrated that the community is taking an interest in the wetlands of the area, and beginning to understand and appreciate the wetlands values. This celebration included a sunrise boat tour down the Murray River to the Ngak Indau wetland, where the

participants were treated to breakfast and presentations. The return trip was via Little Duck Lagoon and the Gurra project.

Milang, South Australia

At Milang, Majorie Jackson-Nelson, Governor of South Australia, opened the highly successful Milang Wetlands Project – “Milang Wetland and Snipe Sanctuary”. The opening included the unveiling of a sculpture by local sculptor, John Bradford.

The local community group was also assisted by Conservation Volunteers Australia. Nine volunteers



Milang
Wetlands

assisted the community to undertake fence and track maintenance, weed removal and rubbish collection.

St Peter's Billabong Adelaide, South Australia

The Wetlands Strategy for South Australia was launched by the Hon. Terry Roberts MLC, Minister Assisting the Minister for Environment and Conservation at the site of the St Peter's Billabong Rehabilitation Project. The Friends of St Peter's Billabong conducted a popular tour highlighting the diversity of birds, insects, spiders and plants found in wetland habitats in the billabong.

The Wetlands Strategy embraces all aspects of wetland management and sets down a 'blueprint' for improving wetland management across South Australia. The goal of the Strategy is to see wetlands recognised and managed as ecological and community assets for the benefit of present and future generations. The Strategy can be found at www.environment.sa.gov.au/biodiversity/ecocons.html#Wetlands.

North Coast Wetlands, New South Wales

A number of organizations (Wetland Care Australia, Conservation Volunteers Australia - Revive our Wetlands Program, Birds Australia and NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service) joined together celebrating WWD 2003 by coordinating events which offered something for every interest. The early birds went bird-watching at four locations, with a late bush barbeque for breakfast at Yarrangully, supplied by the Bungawalbin Fire Service.

At Richmond Wetland the “North Coast Wetland Assessment Technique” was launched and tested. The Assessment Technique was developed by Southern Cross University, and supported by the Richmond Landcare Inc. and Wetland Care Australia.

Other activities included a tour of four wetland sites, an introduction to native fish in local wetlands, and a walk to identify wetland plants.

Moreton Bay Environmental Alliance, Queensland

Throughout WWD 2003 there were a number of activities organised by the Moreton Bay Environmental Alliance. During the morning participants attended “Indigiscapes”, and listened to short presentations from Wetlands International, Cabbage Tree Creek Bushcare, Queensland Parks and Wildlife, Sunfish and Wildlife Preservation Society (Qld) Inc.



Seagrass Watch
Moreton Bay

Photographer:
James Udy

The afternoon began by meeting at Wellington Point for interpretive and training activities involved with the Seagrass Watch Project. This provided participants with a chance to see some of Moreton Bays marine life. The afternoon was very successful with over 80 people attending, some of which decided to become volunteers for Seagrass Watch activities. Overall, the day increased the

awareness of the community about Moreton Bay and coastal issues (including Lyngbya, Go Slow zones in the marine park and wildlife issues).

The last activities for the day included flying over Cleveland, walking the new boardwalk and observing some of the bird inhabitants (watching the Magpie Geese and other waterbirds fly in), watching the Flying Fox fly out and learning about their fascinating lives, a slide show in the park and enjoying a sausage sizzle. Once again this was very successful, with about 80 people taking part in the activities.

North Queensland Wetland Festival, Family Fun & Tree Planting Day, Queensland

These events built on the very successful Wetlands Information day held in 2002.

31 January 2003: Wetlands Forum and Cocktail Party – 90 people attended.

1 February 2003: Tilapia Fishing Competition (postponed until 22/3/03).

2 February 2003: Tree planting at Townsville Town Common (Revive our Wetlands site). 1 000 trees were planted at the Common. This was followed by the Wetlands Festival Family Fun Day with displays and activities – 300 people enjoyed the Day.

The Wetlands Centre, New South Wales

The Wetlands Centre organized a party to commemorate the Shortland Wetlands new Ramsar listing. The site is now part of the Hunter Estuary Wetlands Ramsar site. The celebrations included free entry into the Centre, a photographic display recalling the history of volunteer work to rehabilitate the site, bird watching, dip netting, and feeding the Magpie Geese and aquarium animals. For a full report refer to www.ramsar.org/wwd2003_rpt_australia2.htm.

Mildura, New South Wales

WWD 2003 activities included a guided wetlands walk, a kids treasure hunt (wetland food chain related), the operation of the 110 year old steam-powered Psyche Pumps, a Jazz Band, wine tastings by Trentham Estate, as well as wetland information displays and giveaways for young and old.

The Mallee Catchment Management Authority and a number of other organizations in the region were involved with organising and promoting the event. They spread the word, including two press releases, radio interviews and eight public notices. A wide range of interest groups were targeted (including Jazz lovers, Steam Engine lovers, Conservationists/Naturalists, young and old), and the day was a success with over 200 people attending. Also large articles were placed in two local newspapers the following day. The main message taken away from the day was that 'WWD does exist'.

International Year of Freshwater hats and WWD magnets were made for prizes on the day – they were a hit! Hopefully the message will be reinforced at home or on other occasions throughout the year when the products are used.

Conservation Volunteers Australia and the Revive our Wetlands program

WWD 2003 gave the opportunity for volunteer teams and Land Management agencies to showcase wetlands to the community at large and achieve very positive environmental results. For CVA, this was achieved in a variety of ways including:

- One day or week long practical conservation projects;
- Wetlands Discovery Days for schools;
- Wetland walking tours and demonstration of wetland assessment techniques;
- Wetland forums, family days and tree planting days; and
- Wetland Visitor centre guided walks, bird watching tours and wetland plant displays.

A total of 14 different wetland projects and events happened around Australia under the Revive our Wetlands banner. Terrific environmental outcomes were achieved, along with informing more members of the community about the importance and value of wetlands.

For a full report refer to Appendix 1.

Feedback and Ideas to Consider for Future World Wetlands Day/Week Activities:

Events Calendar

- The events calendar is accessible at www.ea.gov.au/water/wetlands during the lead up to WWD.
- The events calendar was good to get ideas for initial planning for the day.
- The value of the calendar is great for those who are aware of it and how to access the calendar. Perhaps a link from other wetland websites to the calendar would be useful.
- The calendar is a great idea, however more forward planning would increase its effectiveness. Requests to groups should be sent out, providing them with plenty of time to respond.
- The events calendar provides an inspiring glimpse of the momentum that has been developed through ongoing WWD activities, though its function as a bulletin to get people along to events is limited by access limitations.
- The events calendar is great and easy to use.
- Perhaps a summary of previous years would be useful. The summary could include the number of events (per state/territory), types of events, costs and contributions involved, number of people attending and improvements for future years.
- The calendar web address and WWD information should be sent out to all current wetland groups, organizations, visitor centres, schools and tertiary institutions.
- The target audience for WWD in regional areas is landholders, community interest groups and local government. Of these groups, it seems that only the latter would readily access the web based events calendar. The remaining groups are best engaged through specific invitation, local media and local issues.

Promotional Postcards

- The promotional postcards went quickly. It is easy to take/give away for all people. It is a cost-effective way of getting the message out. It is also useful after the event.

- Perhaps the back of the postcard could include a short list of ways to care for wetlands. Thus the postcard would function as an educational tool and WWD awareness promotional tool.

- Concern was expressed about the message possibly sent through the main photo on the postcard. Care should be taken to avoid pictures of dead trees or deciduous trees in wetlands.

- The postcards and educational materials should arrive at least two months prior to the event, or even earlier. This will enable agencies and organisations to distribute the materials to community groups and visitor centres.

Postcard competition

- Should advertise the competition on WWD for subsequent years. Use Public notices for advertising the competition.
- Expand competition through increased regional advertising.
- Target Bird Observer Clubs, bushwalking clubs, Friends of Groups, Photographic clubs.
- A photo competition is a great idea. Should consider different classifications, such as professional and amateurs.
- Announce winners on the website.

Educational materials

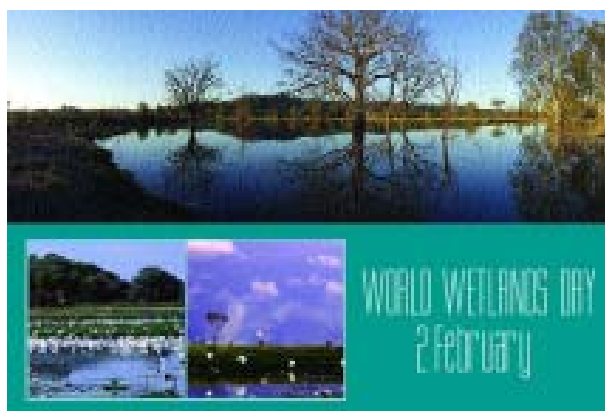
- The factsheets were informative, looked great and were easy to read – a good resource for all.
- The factsheets were useful and popular.
- The main problem with materials is that they often do not arrive in time to be useful. Earlier distribution of all products would assist in planning and organisation of WWD activities. This will also enable agencies and organisations to distribute the materials to community groups and visitor centres.
- Quantity of products is an issue. Every school and relevant regional/major community group involved in wetland protection should receive educational material kits.

- Quantities received were in excess of the requested amount. Due to unexpected numbers, all the materials were used.

- The *Wetlands Australia: national wetlands update 2003* was excellent. The range of articles across wetland education, management, research etc made it very good reading. However it should

be distributed before WWD, to help with planning and for distribution on WWD to local contacts.

Front and Back of the World Wetlands Day 2003 Promotional Postcards, with the winning photos from the WWD 2003 photo competition. Photographers: Rob Lacey, Kerry Trapnell and Julia Burnard.



Conclusion

Firstly, thank you to all who organized and coordinated activities for WWD 2003. Also, thank you to those who took the time to provide us with summaries of these activities and feedback/comments on ways to improve WWD in Australia.

We hope this report will provide people with ideas and enthusiasm to continue celebrating WWD. If you would like further information please contact Alison Beard on (02) 6274 2555 or via email (alison.beard@ea.gov.au).

Conservation Volunteers Australia and Revive Our Wetlands, World Wetlands Day 2003

Western Australia

Bull Creek Wetlands (near Perth)

Activities included woody weed removal over 3500 square metres to encourage natural regeneration and improve habitat values on an important urban wetland site adjacent to the Swan River. 11 volunteers participated in this project.

South Australia

Milang wetlands adjacent to Lake Alexandrina

Nine volunteers assisted the local community with activities including fence and track maintenance, weed removal and rubbish collection. They also assisted in setting up wetland displays for the opening of the "Milang Wetland & Snipe Sanctuary", by the Governor of South Australia, Majorie Jackson-Nelson. The opening also included the unveiling of a sculpture for the Sanctuary.

New South Wales

Sydney - Dee Why Wetlands, Northern Beaches

Local and international volunteers worked for the week following WWD to remove invasive weeds and plant, and mulch 360 endemic plants. This project was very successful, with the local community's awareness of this endangered ecological community increasing as a result.

Bathurst - Katoomba Sedge Swamps in the Blue Mountains

This site was a wonderful wetland environment for volunteers to work in. The volunteers worked to close off a 4WD track, which was contributing to sedimentation of the sedge swamps, and brush mat that area along with weed removal. This is a popular walk in the Blue Mountains and regularly used by many visitors from Sydney.

Newcastle - Cockle Bay Nature Reserve (part of Brisbane Waters)

For a week volunteers participated in a specialist weed removal project, to protect the sensitive habitat of complex salt marshes and swamp forests.

Byron Bay- Bungawalbin Wetlands (Ballina and Lower Clarence)

In conjunction with the Bungawalbin Catchment Management Group, 90 people participated in a number of events including early morning bird watching and wetland information tours. Breakfast was provided at Lagoon Road in West Coraki, a privately owned ephemeral wetland. Following this, a launch and demonstration of the "North Coast Wetland Assessment Technique - Guide Manual" was facilitated by Dr Keith Bolton, Tracey Chambers and Nick Davies. This provided an excellent opportunity for many people to learn about wetlands and the Revive our Wetlands program.



Left: Track repair and maintenance at Katoomba Sedge Swamp; Right: Melbourne Wildlife Sanctuary, Latrobe University
Photographer: Libby McIntyre

Victoria

Melbourne - Melbourne Wildlife Sanctuary, La Trobe University

Eight local volunteers planted 220 wetland plants and weeded around a constructed wetland to increase the habitat range for the rare Dwarfed Galaxiella (*Galaxiella prusilla*). The fish inhabits a very small wetland within the sanctuary, however when flooding occurs it requires additional area for breeding and to seek shelter from other exotic fish including Mosquito fish.

Geelong – “The Swan Bay Adventure”

37 local community members started celebrations by participating in a “walk & talk” about the flora and fauna of Swan Bay. This was intended to raise awareness of the environmental issues in the region. Following the information session participants spent the week removing thousands of invasive weed seedlings in the sensitive Coastal Moonah Wetland. The Land Manager stated that these “WWD activities was the largest participation in an activity since he had been with the Swan Bay/Swan Island project – 5 years!”

Bendigo - Gisborne Racecourse Marshlands

Gisborne Marshlands are a site of “Plains Sedgy Wetland”, one of only two remaining wetlands of its type in Victoria. The marshlands are also habitat for a population of vulnerable Growling Grass Frogs. The site is the 100th Revive our Wetlands site and thus holds special significance.

The WWD activities included the removal of up to 1 500 square metres of gorse, which is currently invading the fragile fringes of the wetland. The Friends of Gisborne Marshlands have recently formed and have been delighted with the results achieved by the volunteer teams.

Tasmania

Launceston - Tamar Island Reserve display and wetland information day

The day was open for all members of the community to learn about wetlands and their habitat and it included a wetland plant display, interpretive walks and some hands on weed removal. The National Parks & Wildlife Summer Rangers acted as guides for the day with a large

number of volunteers attending, supporting the centre and enjoying a free lunch!

Queensland

Brisbane - Pimpama Wetlands, Sunshine Coast

This project involved habitat restoration for the nationally vulnerable False Water Rat. It included weed removal and planting. Local volunteers enjoyed the informative and productive day.

Kauri Creek – Great Sandy Conservation Park, Maryborough

For the week following WWD volunteers assisted with habitat restoration for the migratory birds (approximately 45 000 birds) that visit the wetlands of the Great Sandy Strait each year. They also achieved weed removal over 500 square metres and planted 100 stems.

Cairns – Cattana Wetlands

Volunteers from Conservation Volunteers Australia and Cairns Urban Landcare worked together in planting to create wildlife corridors. Cattana Wetlands is the largest lowland wetland system in the Cairns region and is a unique environment consisting of a feather palm forest, mesophyll remnant rainforest and a Melaleuca forest wetland. A very successful day and terrific way to involve the Cairns community

Northern Territory

Darwin - McMinns Lagoon, near Humpty Doo

McMinns Lagoon is a significant wetland and is home to numerous protected migratory species including: Australian Pratincole, Common Sandpiper, Curlew Sandpiper, Common Greenshank, Little Curlew, Marsh Sandpiper, and Sharp-tailed Sandpiper. 30 volunteers from the McMinns Landcare Group and CVA planted 500 plants and shrubs – “a very positive and effective day”.