Community grants up for grabs

Community groups can now apply for grants to fund projects aimed at protecting and rehabilitating frontages and floodplain areas along the Victorian side of the Murray River.

Applications are now open for the Frontage Management Grants Program (FMGP) component of the Mallee Catchment Management Authority’s Murray River Frontage Action Plan.

Almost 80 projects involving more than 550 community members have been funded through the program in the past four years.

Grants are available for works and activities aimed at improving river health, including fencing, erosion control, pest plant control, revegetation, track rationalisation, litter removal, disused pump site rehabilitation, recreation management and cultural heritage protection works.

To apply, or for more information, contact Ray de Groot at the Mallee Catchment Management Authority on 5051 4377 or by email ray.degroot@dpi.vic.gov.au

Above: Nangiloc and District Kindergarten and Kulkyne Way Landcare Group removed 780 tree guards from revegetation works carried out in November 2005 at Chalka Creek in the Hattah Kulkyne National Park. Funding for the original project was provided under the Mallee CMA’s Murray River Frontage Action Plan.
International Riverprize 2009
Potterwalkagee Creek a final in prestigious award

The Mallee Catchment Management Authority (CMA) is proud to have been selected as a finalist in the world’s most highly-respected river management award, in recognition of its work protecting the environmental values of Potterwalkagee Creek.

Our entry was selected as one of four finalists in the national section of the competition and was up against entries from Western Australia, Queensland and Victoria.

The Mallee CMA’s entry in the 2009 International Riverprize focused on more than two decades of multi-agency work invested in protecting the environmental assets of Potterwalkagee Creek, an anabranch of the Murray River that forms Mulcra Island, which is half way between Mildura and Renmark on the Murray River.

Unfortunately, the Mallee CMA’s entry wasn’t selected as the winner. The national award went to the Oxley Creek Catchment Association in Queensland, for its work on the Oxley Creek.

Despite not winning the Riverprize, the Mallee CMA is proud of the work that’s been carried out by various agencies and individuals to improve Potterwalkagee Creek.

These works have changed this landscape for the better – without these works, together with the co-operation and commitment of many agencies and individuals, all we would have today is a dead floodplain.

Instead, we have a floodplain that has a future because over the past 20 years, we have been able to work together to make a difference.

New faces at the Mallee CMA

A number of new board members and staff have recently joined the Mallee CMA. Congratulations and welcome aboard to all!

Our four new board members are:

• John Arnold - Mildura
• Brian Engelfield - Liparoo
• Paula Gordon - Mildura
• Bruce Jones - Swan Hill

They will serve a four year term until June 2013 and work with existing board members Eddie Lee, Fiona Murdoch, Geoff Anderson and Tony Martin.

Joan Burns has been reappointed as chair of the Mallee CMA board and, more recently, has also been chosen to lead the Murray Darling Basin Authority’s new 16-member Basin Community Committee.

Meanwhile, new staff members include:

• Emma Healy - Project Officer (Casual) Rivers and Wetlands;
• Kevin Forbes - Crown Frontage Officer, Rivers and Wetlands;
• Nick Sheahan - Coordinator, The Living Murray, Rivers and Wetlands;
• Carla Cox - Administration Officer.

And Deirdre Jaensch will join the Regional Sustainability unit on October 5, 2009.
Green light for multi-million dollar works

Hattah Lakes and Mulcra Island set to benefit

A multi-million dollar project to return Hattah Lakes to better health has been given the green light after a visit to the site by Federal Water Minister Penny Wong.

While the project is still in the concept design phase, it is expected to cost more than $20 million and will deliver a range of environmental works and measures to Hattah Lakes.

The Water Minister visited Hattah Lakes to make the funding announcement on September 3, 2009. She said the works would help maximise the benefits of environmental water and protect the valuable ecosystem from the effects of climate change.

Works proposed include a permanent pumping station, levees and regulators to manage flows within the lakes. All works are subject to appropriate environmental, planning and other approvals.

Hattah Lakes is managed by Parks Victoria and is one of six Icon Sites earmarked for improved water management under The Living Murray program. The Living Murray program is being implemented in the Mallee region by Mallee CMA, on behalf of the Department of Sustainability and Environment and the Murray-Darling Basin Authority and in conjunction with Parks Victoria.

Funding for the proposed works will be provided through the $275 million works program of The Living Murray initiative, which is jointly funded by the Australian and Murray-Darling Basin State Governments and coordinated by the Murray-Darling Basin Authority.

“Feasibility studies have developed a preferred suite of works for the Hattah Lakes Icon Site, but community consultation will play a key role to the future development of this proposal,” said Mallee CMA Chief Executive and Icon Site Manager Jennifer Collins.

Meanwhile, Federal Water Minister Penny Wong’s visit to Hattah Lakes also included the announcement of $6.1 million for environmental works at Mulcra Island.

Mulcra Island is part of the Chowilla - Lindsay-Walipolla Icon Site.

The planned works will help to restore water flows to Mulcra Island’s main creek system – the Potterwalkagee Creek – by installing a number of environmental regulators to mimic natural flooding regimes.

Regulators will be used in tandem with a variation of Lock 8 levels to provide more regular flows down Potterwalkagee Creek, filling wetlands and inundating floodplain areas during early winter, through to late spring. These areas will have reduced flows during summer and autumn, allowing them to dry out. These structures will be operated to allow maximum use of high water flows in the river, as well as special allocations of environmental water through The Living Murray or other sources.

Various flow scenarios have been planned for, allowing for differing water levels according to river height and allocation levels, which will also help improve the health of three key wetlands on the New South Wales side of the river.

Above: Federal Water Minister Penny Wong and Parliamentary Secretary for Water Mick Kelly at Lake Hattah. Photo: Mallee CMA.
Mallee Landcare groups and individuals won prestigious prizes at the 2009 State Landcare Awards ceremony, held at Government House in Melbourne on September 8, 2009.

Hopetoun’s Heather Drendel won the respected VFF Heather Mitchell Memorial Fellowship, in recognition of her long-term commitment and support for Landcare in the Southern Mallee region. This award is regarded as one of the most coveted at the Victorian Landcare Awards. In her nomination form, Mrs Drendel was described as the “glue that holds together the Southern Mallee’s strong and growing Landcare network.” Heather last year churned out an impressive 30 applications for project funding, with a success rate of close to 50 percent.

Mrs Drendel said she plans to use the $10,000 fellowship to visit a dry-climate farming region, such as Israel, to learn more about how the Southern Mallee can better prepare for changed climatic conditions. She believes Israeli farmers and communities are already managing in a climate similar to that now emerging for the Southern Mallee.

The Birchip Landcare Group won the Landcare Community Group Award for its best-practice management of stormwater for re-use, with the project leading to notable progress in biodiversity preservation close to the Birchip township.

Another local winner to be recognised at the awards was Col Beasley, who took out the DPI Sustainable Farming Award (Regional) category for his development of an aquaculture business at Thurla, near Red Cliffs. Mr Beasley was also declared runner up in the State Primary Producer Award.

Kym Kingdon from the Murrayville Landcare Group was also recognised as the runner up in the Individual Landcarer Award section. Mr Kingdon has established his own nursery and has spent countless hours working with school and community groups on seed collecting, tree identification and threatened species work.

Mrs Drendel, Mr Beasley, Mr Kingdon and the Birchip Landcare Group nominations were four of 10 State Landcare Award nominations submitted by the Mallee CMA on behalf of Landcare groups in the Victorian Mallee.

Winners in each category are now finalists in the National Landcare Awards to be held in Parliament House in Canberra in 2010.
New structure a Victorian first
Margooya Lagoon home to plastipile regulator

Margooya Lagoon is home to Victoria’s first Plastipile environmental regulator, which will help reinstate natural wet and dry periods at the wetland.

Margooya Lagoon – which is part of Beggs Bend State Forest, about 12 kilometres south-east of Robinvale – is one of many local wetlands that would have enjoyed natural wet and dry periods on a regular basis prior to the installation of locks and weirs in the river. Wetlands need both wet and dry periods to be healthy.

The regulator is made from Plastipile, a patented recycled plastic product that has been used for weir and regulator structures in South Australia. This is the first time this material has been used to build a structure in Victoria.

The structure’s environmentally friendly status was boosted by not requiring any excavation work to install it – an important factor in the culturally significant area of Margooya Lagoon.

Margooya Lagoon is now dry, for the first time in 60 years, and it’s hoped it may be re-filled by the end of the year, subject to suitable conditions.

The regulator structure includes gates that can be opened to allow water to flow into the wetland, or closed to ensure water doesn’t enter the wetland, allowing it to dry out. The structure has also been fitted with rotating carp screens that will ensure large-bodied carp can’t re-enter the wetland when the gates are opened. The new structure will allow water to flow back into the wetland more quickly than was possible with the pipe-and-lid system it replaced.

The Margooya Lagoon project was part of the Mallee CMA’s efforts to work with the Department of Sustainability and Environment and Parks Victoria to improve the environmental values of the lagoon.

Mallee CMA chair Joan Burns said the drying-out of Margooya was crucial to improving the health of the wetland.

“We hope to see an increase in the health and productivity of wetlands that are restored to a wet and dry water regime,” she said.

“This includes an increase in wetland plants, improved water quality, and a rise in the numbers and diversity of animals dependent on wetlands, like waterbirds, turtles, fish, and frogs.

“A wetland monitoring program that has been in place for nearly two years will help inform us about how the wetland is responding to the new water regime.”
Signs of life at Hattah Lakes
Benefits of environmental watering beginning to show

THE first signs of improvement in the health of Hattah Lakes are becoming visible, following the delivery of environmental water to the lakes system.

Birds are flocking back to Hattah Lakes to enjoy the recently delivered environmental water, which was pumped into the system in early Autumn to fill Lake Lockie, Lake Little Hattah, Lake Hattah and Lake Yerang.

Recent bird monitoring at the lakes revealed more than 17 species have returned to the lake system, with 14 Blue-billed Ducks, one Musk Duck, 150 Hardheads, one Common Sandpiper and a pair of Australian Wood-ducks with eight chicks sighted in one afternoon alone. Most of these birds are listed as vulnerable in Victoria.

Hattah Lakes is a precious ecosystem that is internationally recognised for the significant role it plays in providing habitat for many plants and animals, including migratory birds from as far away as Siberia.

The environmental water delivered to Hattah Lakes was provided by the Australian Government, Victorian Government, the intergovernmental Living Murray initiative, and a generous private donor. The water was delivered as part of an emergency measure to keep river Red Gums alive and provide a strategic drought refuge for plants and animals.

Hattah Lakes is managed by Parks Victoria and is one of six Icon Sites earmarked for restoration under The Living Murray program, with 12 of the lakes listed as internationally important wetlands under the Ramsar Convention.

The Living Murray program is being implemented at Hattah Lakes by Mallee Catchment Management Authority (CMA), on behalf of the Department of Sustainability and Environment and in conjunction with Parks Victoria.

“"The Sunraysia Bird Observers Club has been contracted by Mallee CMA to carry out waterbird monitoring during 2009-10 at Hattah Lakes”

Mallee CMA Chief Executive and Icon Site Co-ordinator Jennifer Collins said Hattah Lakes was a great example of what environmental benefits could be achieved through co-operation.

“This environmental watering program delivered 2124 ML from the Commonwealth Water Holder to Hattah Lakes, representing the first use of Commonwealth environmental water in Victoria,” she said.

“In addition to that, 1000 ML was contributed by The Living Murray program, 1758 ML from the Victorian Environmental Water Reserve, and 16 ML of water was donated by a property holder in New South Wales, who could have sold the water on the open market, but instead decided to donate it to this Icon Site.”

Ms Collins said the delivery of the environmental water was being followed by rigorous monitoring of the environment’s response to the watering, which will include water quality testing, monitoring of foliage growth on Red Gums, and waterbird monitoring.

“Monitoring will be carried out to ensure we are achieving the objectives of the environmental watering program and to inform us about delivering water in the most appropriate way to places that need it the most,” Ms Collins said.

“The Sunraysia Bird Observers Club (SBOC) has been contracted by the Mallee CMA to carry out waterbird monitoring during 2009-10 at Hattah Lakes.

“Frog monitoring will be done by the Mallee CMA in conjunction with community groups, such as schools.”

Ms Collins said the bird observers club will use Atlas of Victorian Wildlife survey sheets to conduct waterbird surveys, which will begin soon.

“The Mallee CMA has developed new computer software to hold the survey data and this data will also be shared with the Atlas of Victorian Wildlife database and the Birds Australia Database,” Ms Collins explained.

New waterbird and frog field guides have also been developed by the Mallee CMA, in partnership with community members. These field guides will help with volunteer monitoring of waterbirds and frogs by making it easier to identify species. The field guides will be available free of charge from the Mallee CMA in November.
Clockwise from top left: Federal Water Minister Penny Wong inspects the environmental water pumping system at Hattah Lakes (September 3, 2009); Mallee CMA’s Melanie Komisarczyk with members of the Friends of Kings Billabong during macroinvertebrate training (August 16, 2009); Mallee CMA board member Fiona Murdoch presents NAIDOC scholarships at the 2009 NAIDOC celebration (July 29, 2009); Local Indigenous elder Aunty Rose Kirby speaks to Federal Water Minister Penny Wong at Hattah Lakes (September 3, 2009); Mildura West Primary School students at Lock 9; Mallee CMA’s Peter Kelly, Deb Bogenhuber and VonMac’s Garry von Bertouch at the opening of the Margooya Lagoon structure (August 7, 2009) and Indigenous stakeholder Ronnie Harradine and Mallee CMA chair Joan Burns officially open the Margooya structure. Photos: Mallee CMA.
Catch a Carp Day 2009
New venue for popular local event

Catch a Carp Day will be held on Sunday, October 25, 2009 and this year, the hugely popular event will be held at Apex Park, Mildura.

Catch a Carp Day is continuing to grow and we are confident the new venue will help the event be even bigger and better than in previous years!

In an effort to help people register quickly at this year’s event, registration forms can be downloaded and filled in prior to the event, ready to be handed in when fishing begins at 9am on the day.

Registration forms are available from www.malleecma.vic.gov.au

Sunraysia Marine and Mallee Waterwatch

Catch a Carp Day 09

OCTOBER 25
9am to 1pm

New Venue:
APEX PARK
MILDURA

Only corn and bread to be used as bait (limited amounts available).

PROUDLY SUPPORTED BY
Sunraysia Marine - Kulkynie

For more information, contact Mallee CMA on 5051 4377

Win a $500 CASH prize
More than $1000 in prizes to be won

REGISTER NOW!

FREE BREAKFAST AND SHOWBAG FOR FIRST 100 REGISTRATIONS

For first 100 registrations log on to www.malleecma.vic.gov.au to download your registration form.

Upcoming events

October
2 Walk to Work Day
11-17 Enviroweek
14 Ride to Work Day
15-17 Mildura Show
18-24 National Water Week
20 Mallee Environmental Schools Festival
22 Milawa Carwarp Fodder Trials - Half-day field day, Werrimull
25 Catch a Carp Day