

## Lower Loddon catchment ecological risk assessment (ERA)



Field trip, Loddon and Little Murray confluence May 2005

### Project summary

#### Date

June 2004 – August 2005

#### Stakeholders

- North Central Catchment Management Authority, Goulburn Murray Water
- Landowners.
- DPI, EPA Victoria, DSE, Parks Victoria, Lower Murray Water, Loddon Shire, Gannawarra Shire.

#### Resources

- **How much did it cost?** Two staff on 0.3FTE for a year and \$5000–\$7000 for accommodation and workshop costs.
- **How long did it take to do?** approximately one year.
- **What outside resources did we have?** Volunteer expert participants at workshops did not require payment

#### Engagement and tools used

- **Inform:** Phone contact, information/fact sheets, workshops, field trips, feedback newsletter.
- **Consult:** Workshops, value and threat identification, one-on-one interviews, field trips.
- **Involve:** Conceptual models, value and threat identification, model structure development and quantification, field trips.
- **Collaborate:** Workshops and meetings where stakeholders determined project scope and values to be assessed, involved in decision making throughout.

#### Key contacts

- Anne-Maree Westbury and Clare Marsh, Freshwater Sciences.

### Assessing river risk

EPA Victoria's Freshwater Sciences Unit and the Water Studies Centre, Monash University conducted an ecological risk assessment (ERA) to help provide information and tools to assist lower Loddon catchment managers.

A significant amount of work involving stakeholder consultation had already been undertaken in the region by local resource managers, including the North Central Catchment Management Authority's Regional Catchment Strategy, Regional River Health Strategy and the Loddon Murray Land and Water Management Strategy.

EPA aimed to develop the ERA taking into account previous work. The intention was to produce a model to assist in natural resource management decision making that met local managers' needs and was adaptable to other projects.

### What was EPA's role?

#### What success meant to us

- Production of a collaborative model that combined stakeholders' knowledge and EPA's expertise.
- Strong stakeholder desire to stay involved throughout the ERA development.
- The tools developed during the ERA process were useful to resource managers and the wider community in the future.

EPA's main objective in this case was to collect information to develop an ERA that had a broad range of input from the various lower Loddon stakeholders.

Local landowners and agency staff provided local knowledge and understanding about how the lower Loddon system worked, as well as their aspirations for it.

This approach ensured that the issues investigated and the outcomes of the assessment were useful and relevant to local management. This objective was approached with the following in mind:

- EPA should know about previous work in the catchment before seeking input.
- A 'consultation' rather than 'direction' method of engagement was likely to be more successful.
- The scientific nature of the project can easily alienate stakeholders and care must be taken to avoid this.

#### Tools and techniques we used

- Consultation with Goulburn Murray Water (GMW) and North Central Catchment Management Authority (CMA) to get information about possible stakeholders.
- A stakeholder mapping exercise was conducted to identify stakeholder background, influences and preferred interaction types. The stakeholder list included a running sheet of contact encounters to help personalise contact made with each stakeholder.
- Stakeholders were contacted by phone and asked if they wanted to be involved. There was a generally good response to this, helped by the information received from the GMW and CMA representatives.
- Background information on the project and an invitation to a workshop was sent out to willing stakeholders.

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- Stakeholder workshop (Nov '04):
  - Previous work in the catchment was presented as a starting point. Attendees built on this to determine project scope and values to be assessed, and to identify threats to these values.
  - Discussions about this material were conducted in small groups (4–6 people), which allowed easier contribution by all involved.
  - Discussions of values and threats were summarised into conceptual models by the stakeholders and discussed.
- One-on-one interviews were held with stakeholders unable to attend.
- Post-workshop stakeholder meeting (Jan '05):
  - Held to establish measurement and assessment endpoints for key values.
  - Discussion was based on information and suggested endpoints that were compiled before the meeting.
  - Stakeholders could not decide on measurement endpoint for one of the key values so a field trip was organised to enhance understanding. A measurement endpoint was subsequently decided upon.
- A feedback newsletter on the first two workshops was distributed to stakeholders. It encapsulated all views presented by attendees to ensure they felt their input was valued and correctly interpreted.
- The model was developed based on values and threats identified by stakeholders.
- Key stakeholders were consulted one-on-one during the development of the model for local information and to ensure it would answer the key management questions.
- Risk analysis workshop (Apr '05):
  - Stakeholders were sent fact sheets about the model prior to the workshop

*'One of the real values of this project is that it has highlighted the threats that the community are interested in and the information gaps to target monitoring. It is good that the things we have been doing (management actions such as fencing) are shown to be the right thing by the model.'*  
– Rob O'Brien, DPI Kerang.

to ensure some understanding of the technical nature of the workshop.

- Small group discussion was again used to obtain stakeholder input to the model structure and ensure all the catchment relationships were correctly represented and all information sources were included.
- A further two-day field trip was organised by stakeholders so EPA model builders could have a look at the Loddon River with locals from various river reaches and discuss catchment issues in more detail. This involved local resource managers (DPI and CMA) as well as local farmers who had extensive knowledge of the areas visited.
- Stakeholder information session (Aug '05):
  - Held to present results of the ERA.

### What were the results?

- Good relationships were formed with stakeholders, who asked to be more involved with the program.
- There was a great deal of enthusiasm for the program and there were often spontaneous phone calls from stakeholders with input as well as a spread of interest throughout the community.

- The outcomes of the ERA were improved by the involvement of all the stakeholders. They had input and checked our work every step of the way to make it a better, more useful product. There were no surprises for them at the end of the project and the results were very well accepted.
- The community engagement process used in this project has been presented at an ERA conference and can easily be used by resource managers in other cases.

### What did we learn?

- **Be prepared.** Read up on previous work in the area and find out about the stakeholders. This will help gain respect and trust from a sceptical audience.
- **Be a patient listener.** Include everyone's opinions in discussions. Condescension is counterproductive, especially where technical elements are involved.
- **Maintain a regular feedback system.** Including different forms (written, personal, phone etc) to ensure that the time the stakeholders have invested is seen to be appreciated, to keep them up to date on project progress and give them a sense of ownership of the project.
- **Facilitators need to be well informed.** This is especially so when discussions are of a scientific or technical nature.
- **Be flexible.** Have a back-up plan in case processes are not productive (e.g., discuss meeting progress during breaks).
- **Consider people's schedules when planning meetings.** Stakeholders were very appreciative of meetings held with consideration of their activities (e.g., between milking times for dairy farmers).
- **Provide quality refreshments.** When an effort is made with catering, stakeholders will feel their presence is appreciated.