



President's Report to the 2005 Annual General Meeting

10 November 2005

The Year Past

The past year has seemingly flown, aided partly by the fact that our last AGM was less than nine months ago.

In the twelve months to 30th June, we finalised the Molonglo Catchment Strategy, which was the major objective for us for the year. The Strategy was the result of a lot of hard work by our Catchment Coordinator, Damian Wall, who put his heart into producing a well-researched and well-presented document. Unfortunately for the Group, Damian found a move to Albury was necessitated for family reasons. Damian continues to provide GIS support through an arrangement with Environment ACT.

However, the project funded by the Australian Government's National Landcare Program of \$115,000 for the implementation of the strategy got off to a false start with poor community representation at the consultation meetings in March. A re-think of the mode of delivery – through Greening Australia, has proved far more successful. Further NLP funding is being sought to extend this implementation for another two years.

At the same time that the draft Strategy was being prepared, we were able to firstly facilitate a project to address willow management on the ACT portions of the Molonglo and Queanbeyan Rivers, including Lake Burley Griffin. The tender to manage this project was won by Greening Australia, who have demonstrated once again their professional approach to NRM delivery.

The proposal to raise the profile of the catchment and environmental awareness of the broader community through an art exhibition developed in the previous year grew into two art prizes, one held in Queanbeyan on 1st July in conjunction with Queanbeyan Art Society. The second has since been at the Albert Hall on 16th September in conjunction with the Artists Society of Canberra.

A spin-off from the art exhibition concept, a proposal to develop a short film and short community announcements (advertisements), was presented to the peak community body, the ACT and Region Catchment and Landcare Association (CLA) as a possible regional project. The Group prepared an application on behalf of the CLA for an ACT Environmental Grant which was unsuccessful, but was offered encouragement to refine and resubmit the application. At the same time, the Group sponsored a successful ACT Environment Grant application by Friends of Mount Majura for a rehabilitation project around some dams on Mount Majura.

The Group also successfully applied for a Volunteer Small Equipment Grant for water quality sampling equipment to assist in implementing the Molonglo Catchment Health Indicators Program (M-CHiP). M-CHiP was the subject of a presentation by Damian Wall and Bayne Geikie at the National Waterwatch Conference in Melbourne in February.

In April, the Group hosted a short tour through the catchment for the Murrumbidgee Catchment Management Authority (MCMA) Board, with discussions reflecting a recognition of the role that the Group is able to play in this part of the Murrumbidgee catchment within NSW. The Group facilitated a successful application for an indigenous womens' workshop on behalf on the MCMA.

Group Objectives

The Group formed formally a little over two years ago, with a set of objectives. The Committee is mindful of these objectives and strives to address them.

The basic objects of the group are:

1. Provide an umbrella organisation for existing Landcare and other natural resource management (NRM) organisations in the Molonglo Catchment.

My comments last year indicated that achieving this objective has been difficult, but I understand that this may simply be a reflection of the stage of development of the Group – while preparing the strategy, there is little to attract the member groups; once the on-ground projects start the groups will more likely see the value in becoming members of the Group. There is already support for Parkcare groups through ACT Parks and Conservation; in NSW the Upper Murrumbidgee Landcare Committee provides support. Finding our niche is proving difficult.

2. Facilitate the preparation of a community catchment strategy for the Molonglo Catchment, as an agreed framework between key stakeholders for regional delivery of NRM, consistent with the Murrumbidgee Catchment Blueprint, ACT NRM Plan and total catchment principles.

The Molonglo Catchment Strategy was released at the end of June. Since then an Executive Summary has been produced and is widely circulated. A Monitoring and Evaluation component of the Strategy is now being implemented.

The Strategy was awarded the Australian Government Landcare Regional Award for the ACT. I believe that we have done very well in meeting this objective.

3. Promote a strengthened partnership between stakeholders in the Molonglo Catchment, to enhance capacity to address NRM issues in the Molonglo Catchment in a collaborative, coordinated and cost-effective manner.

As the Group establishes its relevance, we find that the Group's support is being sought. The Group is seen as a credible vehicle for NRM delivery as we further establish our credentials with effectively delivered projects. The ACT Molonglo Willows Management Plan project is one such success. The group has been represented at a regional level through the Catchment and Landcare Association and the Upper Murrumbidgee Catchment Coordinating Committee as well as meetings with the Murrumbidgee CMA board.

Several collaborative projects are in the wings, not the least of which is "Meeting the Conservation Challenge in the Eastern Murrumbidgee" Project which aims to implement the wishes of the late Dr Peter Barrer, through his bequest, for conservation of strategic corridors in the Upper Murrumbidgee, mainly the Molonglo catchment. The

project is to be delivered through the Australian Bush Heritage Fund in conjunction with Greening Australia, NPWS, MCMA and CSIRO amongst others.

4. Provide support to member groups with sub-catchment planning, strategic project development, funding bids, managing projects and to develop cross-sectoral partnerships and corporate support for projects.

Due to the delayed Implementation of the Molonglo Catchment Strategy project this objective is only now becoming a reality. The Group supported the Friends of Mount Majura Dams Rehabilitation Project and continues to hold funds for the Banksia Street Wetland Project on behalf of Sullivans Creek Catchment Group.

5. Provide a structural link between ACT and NSW groups

The relationship of the Molonglo Catchment Group to the Upper Murrumbidgee Landcare Committee continues to need refinement. The relationship with the Murrumbidgee CMA is similarly becoming clarified, exemplified by MCMA's support for the Group through hosting the Coordinator position in the MCMA Queanbeyan office.

6. Provide a central point of contact for the broad community, including information dissemination.

This continues to function well within the ACT and the duplication of effort across the border is decreasing.

7. Employ and manage a Molonglo Catchment Coordinator to facilitate meeting the above objectives.

We had been fortunate to have engaged Damian Wall in this role during the planning stage of the Group's development. Damian left for greener pastures at the end of June. After a couple months of hiatus we recruited Heather Colman to the position. Heather is admirably suited to take us through the next stage of the Group's development: consolidation and the development of a communication strategy.

The Year Ahead

The group has several irons in the fire at present and the outcome of many of these will not be known until the new year. In the meantime, the continued roll-out of the Catchment Strategy will be paralleled by the roll-out of M-CHiP. Development of a communications strategy, with the objective of raising and maintaining community awareness in Natural Resource Management issues is foremost in objectives in the short-term.

On the horizon, weeds look like becoming a major issue and will require a strategy to address them. Such a strategy is being developed by the MCMA and may be one vehicle for us to see the issue being more properly addressed.

Queanbeyan City and Palerang Councils will be developing their Local Environment Plans guided by the Sydney-Canberra Corridor Strategy and the Group will be engaging the Councils on behalf of local Landcare Groups and other stakeholders in this critical process.

In the ACT, the Group must remain sensitive to the broad community while drawing the various “care” groups together, mindful of the vast contrast in the skills and aims of individual groups. The community in the ACT presents an enormous resource that may be drawn on; formal membership of Landcare or Parkcare Groups is not necessary and support for NRM is not restricted to planting trees. For example, encouraging people to help out with developing and maintaining websites, undertaking water quality measurements, speaking on the radio, or creating short films are all ways that can be used to accomplish our objectives. All of us can speak at the right time to assist here to introduce new people to Landcare.

Thanks

In closing, I would once again like to record my gratitude for the assistance of the committee throughout the year, and in particular the tireless support of our vice president, Tom Baker and to Maryke Booth, whose business has provided venues for committee meetings as well as accounting support. The Group is grateful to Queanbeyan City Council and Environment ACT for their support through the provision of general meeting venues.

Lynton Bond