



President's Report to the 2007 Annual General Meeting

10 December 2007

The Year Past: July 2006 – June 2007

Two main themes continued to be developed during the year – the development of the Weed Education Pack and NLP-funded devolved grants for on-ground projects for riparian rehabilitation, structural erosion control works and perennial pastures.

The progress with developing the Weed Education Pack has been a real highlight in that within a very short time, the Catchment Coordinator, Zoe Wood, had been able to find almost \$20,000 funding for the pack's development and distribution (plus a little for chemicals for use at field days), while at the same time establishing solid relationships with local government.

The NLP project funded by the Australian Government's National Landcare Program and delivered through Greening Australia, has proved reasonably successful; on paper we continue to have good uptake of the project but the level of on-ground work actually undertaken has slipped behind and the ability to meet the deadlines is proving worrisome. On ground works were subject to the vagaries of serious drought and the value of on-ground work was called into question. The focus of the project was shifted to training and subsidies for a Prograze course were well received by ACT Rural land managers. The startlingly severe storms in January and February emphasised the need to maintain ground cover and several landholders took the opportunity to establish perennial pastures.

The *Along the Molonglo* Art Exhibitions continued to be successful and aid in raising the general awareness of issues within the community. Thanks to the relationship established with the Artists Society of Canberra, the opportunity arose last year that allowed us to extend our message wider by addressing Canberra Sunrise Rotary in September and a fund-raising function held by GHD. This year that same relationship with ASoC enabled our sharing the ActewAGL Look'n'Learn marquee at Floriade for four days and offering quite popular presentations on each of the days.

Last October, our presence at the National Landcare Awards was two-fold: our Vice President, Tom Baker, was in the running for Landcarer of the Year, while the Group itself was up for the Regional Landcare Award – a reflection of the efforts of the catchment community, and the MCG Committee in particular, in establishing and implementing the Molonglo Catchment Strategy.

The Molonglo Catchment Health indicators Program (M-CHiP) has suffered somewhat from a declining enthusiasm; we need to consider how best to raise the profile of this very important program within the catchment.

Publication of the Lake Burley Griffin Willow Management Plan was released in May, more than a little late, but very well received. The ACT Government is already implementing the Plan.

Finally, the long gestation period for the Landcare Display Trailer has resulted in a healthy and productive off-spring, which we believe will become very much in demand as its presence becomes more visible around the catchment.

Group Objectives

The Group formed formally a little over four 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.

Although there is already support for Parkcare groups through ACT Parks and Conservation, our support for NSW groups has grown. The Weed Education Initiative will be one vehicle that can demonstrate the Group's function in supporting local groups on the ground. The website is frequently mentioned for its usefulness, and the subscription list continues to grow. The long-term sustainability of website maintenance is being addressed.

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 in June 2005. The Strategy was awarded the Australian Government Landcare Regional Award for the ACT. We will need to maintain its relevance by reviewing the short-term targets and actions as the timeframes expressed in the Strategy are nearing an end. The updated ACT NRM Plan will be released soon; it would be timely to commence a review of our Strategy shortly after.

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.

The group has been represented at a regional level through the Catchment and Landcare Association, the Upper Murrumbidgee Catchment Coordinating Committee and the Kosciuszko to Coast Partnership. The Group is seen as a credible vehicle for NRM delivery as we continue to establish our credentials with effectively delivered projects. The solid relationship with local government in the region as a result of the Weed Education Initiative is a further example of this evolution. However this reputation is at risk if we fail to deliver on time.

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.

Issues resulting from the delay in the ACT National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality Funding impacted the Group through delays in commencing projects such as the Banksia Street Wetland and the Canberra Urban Stormwater Education Initiative. This in turn has adversely affected the group whose momentum was reliant on these projects proceeding – Sullivans Creek Catchment Group. The frustration of having to revise the project budgets and timeframes was felt by other groups as it absorbed valuable time

that would otherwise have been available to assist groups. This was, however, a mixed blessing in that we have been able to establish stronger links with the other Catchment Groups. Nonetheless we have sponsored a successful ACT Environment Grant application for revegetation by Friends of Googong. Negotiations continue with the other NRM groups in the region to share resources in a process that should result in strong cross-sectoral partnerships and corporate support region-wide.

5. Provide a structural link between ACT and NSW groups

Our representation on the CLA and UMCCC helps this process on a regional scale, but at our catchment scale we need to encourage greater participation in catchment activities.

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. The challenge is to raise the profile of the group and hence the issues of natural resource management.

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

The role of Coordinator for a community-based catchment group is a difficult one, with often conflicting demands on time and resources. Heather Colman's resignation in September slowed our progress. The enthusiasm of our current Catchment Coordinator, Zoe Wood, for her role is very evident and appreciated by all. It can only be of benefit to the Group.

The Year Ahead

We are aware that delivering projects on time is proving difficult and the way that we work must be questioned. It is very likely that synergies exist, with the other catchment groups, with other landcare and NRM networks, and with local government and RLPB in order to use our meagre resources more effectively. We are not alone in this.

Queanbeyan City and Palerang Councils continue to develop 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.

At the same time, urban growth within our catchment looks to become a major issue for the next few years with Molonglo Valley development and East Lake Urban Renewal in the ACT and Googong and Tralee in NSW. The model presented by the Forde development of engaging the community at an early stage is a shining example that we should encourage and be willingly involved in.

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.

The Group suffers because of inadequate community participation in the committee to share the load; I believe that we could all become a little more evangelical in attracting increased membership, with an eye on the future.

Thanks

In closing, I would once again like to record my gratitude for the assistance of the committee throughout the year, in preparing, commenting on and refining our submissions, communications, and processes. In particular, I acknowledge: the frank and fearless advice that our Coordinator, Zoe Wood, provides with wisdom beyond her years; the enthusiasm with which our Molonglo Waterwatch Coordinator, Bayne Geikie, displays when working with the community; the tireless support from our Vice President, Tom Baker, whose work with *Along the Molonglo* continues to bear fruit; and the work of our Treasurer, Maryke Booth, whose business has provided accounting support. We are indebted to the Murrumbidgee CMA for the provision of office services and HR support for the coordinator position. The Group is grateful to Queanbeyan City Council for their support through the provision of general meeting venues.

Lynton Bond
6 December 2007