

Branch / Group: Waterways – River Health Group

Issue / Topic: **Western Treatment Plant Biodiversity Conservation Advisory Committee**

Meeting Date: 7 May 2008

Location: Western Treatment Plant, Discovery Centre

Meeting Room: Conference Room

Present: John Barkla, Marc Cassenet, Cr Bob Fairclough, Tom Fletcher, Chris Lester, Richard Loyn, Peter Menkhorst, Colleen Miller (CM), Clive Minton (CDTM), William Steele

Apologies: Maarten Hulzebosch, Bernie McCarrick, Brad Mclean

Guests: Bob Swindley (RJS), Eddie Walker, Tom Fletcher

Absent: Aaron Organ

Item No.	Details / Issues	Responsibility	Due Date
<b>1</b>	<b>Welcome</b>		
1.1	JB welcomed Tom Fletcher as new nominee for Committee from Geelong Field Nats. WKS to arrange formal letter of invitation for TF.	WKS	ASAP
<b>2</b>	<b>Previous minutes</b>		
2.1	JB corrected minutes by asking for words "No objections and" to be deleted from para. 3	WKS	Done
<b>3</b>	<b>Matters arising</b>		
3.1	WKS and MH met on site to discuss veg management in conservation ponds. Report back when MH in attendance.	MH	8 Aug 08
3.2	WKS still to learn volume of MCPA used at WTP per annum. ---Ben James reports WAG use at less than 200 L/yr ---Kevin Gillett advises WTP Operations use no MCPA. ---Darren Coughlan advises that Flora Vic used c. 140 L of herbicide in key conservation areas (Ryans Swamp, Paul & Belfrages, Lake Borrie Spit and T-	WKS	8 Aug 08

	<p>Section grassland).</p> <p>Thiess have undertaken a considerable amount of Galenia (Coastal) and Tiger Pear (Little River) control and estimate they have used 250 L of herbicide over the past 12 months.</p>		
3.3	<p>BF asked if concern over potential heavy metal contamination at WTP would affect outsourcing proposal. Given treatment processes and EPA licence conditions already in place WKS did not believe so.</p> <p>BF: Given new technologies has recovery of heavy metals and remediation of soils been considered?</p> <p>WKS: some phytoremediation trials underway but no plans to recover heavy metals so far as he was aware.</p>		
3.4	<p>BF: Should consider external review that interviews Committee members as part of Committee annual assessment. This was done a few years ago and was valuable so should be repeated.</p>	WKS	2009
3.5	<p>RJS: Asked about access arrangements. WKS: 1 Dec 2008 tentatively suggested as date for key and lock change. Birdwatchers would be advised beforehand. All would need to re-apply for new permit and key. Those wishing to visit areas east of Little River would be given time to be inducted and apply for special permits.</p>		
3.6	<p>CM: Recommended stake and guards at Kirk Point rather than rocks to keep traffic to existing tracks.</p>		
<b>4</b>	<b>Conservation pond management</b>		
4.1	<p>CDTM reported that conservation ponds were in less than ideal condition over summer and that he had received several complaints from birdwatchers about this situation. He asked that, if water shortages were going to become the norm over summer, the Committee should make strong statement in support of priority being given to water supply and improved management for these important ponds which Melbourne Water has committed to manage as compensatory habitat.</p>	WKS	ASAP
	<p>Several members supported this argument and dismissed existing Conservation Pond Management Protocols as irrelevant (e.g. arguing WKS needed to accept need to reset ponds although this is clearly written into the protocols, was acted on last year and is planned again for this spring). Preliminary earthworks, costing \$10,000, were criticised as far too little.</p>		

	Decided that WKS needs to improve communication of his intentions to Committee. Written plan to be prepared and circulated monthly.		
	RHL highlighted need for irregular, undulating pond bottom not flat surface.		
	Given support for CDTM's assessment of poor management WKS suggested independent management plan was required to supersede the inadequate Conservation Pond Management Protocols although funding this next year might be difficult.		
	WKS will arrange pumping to 270S Borrow Pit. JB asked if off-take pipe from 115E Pond 9 to 270S Borrow Pit could be lowered to allow water into Borrow Pit.		
<b>5</b>	<b>EPBC Act Compliance</b>		
5.1	WKS reported that annual report to Canberra was now finalised and was awaiting sign-off by managers. Filter-feeding ducks numbers again reached trigger point with >25% decline in three-year average. Diving ducks were close to trigger point. Discussion around validity of trigger-points, natural variation in waterfowl population numbers, and desirability of future management actions followed.		
<b>6</b>	<b>Other Business</b>		
6.1	EW reported on nest-box study. Early rains saw good breeding, with 1700 eggs and 1490 nestlings: the fourth best season to date. CDTM asked how many nestlings fledged and where did they go. Roughly 5 out of 15 nestlings would leave nest and these were very quickly taken away from Lake Borrie to Old Lagoons and other areas.		
6.2	RJS asked about trial of sonic devices to disrupt blue-green algae. WKS replied no evidence of effect on waterbirds and little evidence of effect on algae.		
6.3	RJS reported on Waterbird Monitoring Project. Very few Pink-eared Ducks present: only 1000 with 1700 shovelers. Musk Duck presently outnumber Blue-billed Ducks.		

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Next Meetings:

- Tuesday, 5 Aug 2008
- Wednesday, 5 Nov 2008

Venue: Conference Room, Western Treatment Plant Discovery Centre

