

# Bushfire Recovery

## Rebuilding our Waterways

May 2009

Melbourne Water manages the waterways in the Port Phillip and Westernport Region. We work with communities and agencies to look after and improve the health of our waterways.

The February bushfires impacted many of the waterways that we look after, including those within the Yarra River which flow into Port Phillip Bay and those within the Bunyip and Tarago Rivers which flow into Westernport Bay.

As caretakers of these fire affected waterways, we have established monitoring programs to understand how our rivers are responding to the fires and have begun works to help support the recovery of our rivers and creeks.

### Water Quality

#### How have the fires affected the water quality of our rivers?

Melbourne Water has set up stations to monitor water quality in fire affected rivers. Results so far show that nutrients, muddied water and sediments increased and oxygen temporarily reduced after rain.

Monitoring in the Yarra River system has found that the impacts on water quality are minimal when water travelling from the upper catchments reaches the main Yarra River.

#### Why is it important to understand how the fires have affected our waterways?

Water quality is important to the animals and plants that live in or use our waterways. For example, aquatic animals and bugs use oxygen to breathe and livestock drink the water.

#### What is Melbourne Water doing to help plants and animals in fire affected waterways?

Melbourne Water is monitoring waterways and evaluating impacts along some of the fire affected waterways. To reduce erosion and nutrients entering waterways, provide habitat for animals and protect regenerating vegetation, we are:

- controlling weeds to help native vegetation to regenerate;

- repairing and replacing Melbourne Water assets and helping landowners to repair and replace streamside fencing, off-stream stock watering facilities and streamside plantings;
- undertaking longer term studies into the impacts of fires on biodiversity; and
- conducting specific investigations for platypus, blackfish and other highly impacted aquatic animals.

#### How can I fix or help look after my waterway?

If your land fronts a waterway, you can apply to participate in Melbourne Water's Stream Frontage Management Program.

You can let us know of any significant changes in your local waterway, particularly after rain. You can encourage others proposing to work in the waterway to contact us for a permit to conduct the works. You can also become a volunteer with Melbourne Waterwatch, to help assess the health of local rivers and creeks.

#### What is the Stream Frontage Management Program?

It's a Melbourne Water program which provides support to landowners to protect, improve and manage their dams and off-stream stock watering facilities.

## Fish

### How have the fish in our rivers been affected by the bushfires?

Ash and sediment washed into rivers after rain causes them to become murky, and has the potential to smother and have other effects on fish and other aquatic life.

Fish surveys so far have found varying results. In some rivers we have found both exotic and native fish (including short finned eel and river blackfish), whilst in other rivers we did not find any fish.

### What does it mean for their future survival?

These findings tell us that fish have survived in some rivers. It will be important for us to look after their homes or refuges like deep pools over the next few years, to help ensure their survival.

## Platypus

### Have any platypus survived?

Melbourne Water has increased its platypus survey program in fire affected areas. Results so far tell us that platypus have been seen in some rivers, such as in the Tarago River up and downstream of the reservoir.

### What can we do to help platypus?

You can help by reporting any sightings of platypus in fire affected areas to Melbourne Water or the Australian Platypus Conservancy.

## Macro-invertebrates

### What are macro-invertebrates?

Macro-invertebrates are bugs that live in water.

### Why are macro-invertebrates important in our rivers?

Macro-invertebrates help keep our rivers healthy. They have many different jobs, some spend their time collecting and processing plant and leaf litter, others graze on algae growing on rocks.

### Are macro-invertebrates able to recover from the impacts of fire?

Recovery may take some time and some species may be lost in some areas. The diversity of macro-invertebrates helps ensure their successful recovery.

## Frogs

### What impact did the fires have on frogs?

Frogs may have found refuge during the fires by burrowing under rocks and hollows in the dampest areas of streams. It is important that we now look at how they've been affected.

### How will we know more about the impacts on frogs?

We need to better understand how many frog species and which ones have survived. We need your help with this.

Melbourne Water invites you to be part of our frog census program where you record frog calls and send your findings to us.

## Threats to waterway recovery

### What can threaten the natural recovery of our rivers?

The re-colonisation of fire affected rivers by exotic plant species such as blackberries, can threaten the ability for native plants to re-establish their place along waterways.

Threats to aquatic animals like platypus include foxes preying in areas with minimal vegetation and lack of cover from predators.

### What is Melbourne Water doing to lessen these threats?

Non native plants and animals can be detrimental to native plants and animals already impacted by drought and now fire. Looking after our native species by managing exotic species is an important part of our fire recovery.

Melbourne Water is working with landowners adjoining our rivers to identify weed control programs to help manage this.

## Contact details

**Rebuilding Melbourne's waterways** – call Melbourne Water's River Health team on 03 9235 2231

**Frog census** – call Melbourne Water's Customer Service Centre on 131 722 or visit [frogs.melbournewater.com.au](https://frogs.melbournewater.com.au)

**Report platypus sightings** – call the Australian Platypus Conservancy on 03 5157 5568 or visit [platypus.asn.au](https://platypus.asn.au)

**This fact sheet is also available at** [melbournewater.com.au/bushfires](https://melbournewater.com.au/bushfires)