



Conservation

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Lily infestation at Gunbower Island (Vic). Yellow Waterlily is becoming a serious weed of waterways Photo: Bob Young

SECURING VICTORIA'S NATURAL FUTURE?

The Victorian Government has released its white paper on land and biodiversity at a time of climate change. Under the title *Securing Our Natural Future*, it states that the Government's agenda is to:

- Build ecosystem resilience across Victoria.
- Manage flagship areas to maintain ecosystem services.
- Improve connectivity in areas identified as biolinks.

BOCA made a submission to the April 2007 consultation paper and subsequently accepted an invitation to make a presentation to the Stakeholder Reference Group. Some of the issues which were of concern to BOCA have been addressed in the white paper, particularly the need for landscape-scale conservation and adaptation to climate change through identification and management of biolinks. However the paper is surprisingly weak on issues of private land conservation, particularly land tax and rating relief for conservation management and Trust for Nature's covenanting and revolving fund programs.

One proposed action of particular interest to BOCA is item 6.6.2: "Review the Land for Wildlife program to determine how it can best be supported in the future...". BOCA was heavily involved in the establishment of Victoria's Land for Wildlife program (the BOCA logo is included on LfW signs) and it is hoped that the review will result in increased financial and staffing support – but will it?

BOCA's submission also stressed the impacts of pest plants and animals on biodiversity. Section 6.1.6 of the white paper indicates three actions which could be helpful, the first of these being "Develop the Invasive Plants and Animal Policy Framework by 2010".

BOCA's submission also drew attention to the long list of items under the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988 for which no Action Statements had been prepared and the lack of funding to implement Action Statements where they do exist. The white paper proposes that the Action Statements provisions in the Act will be reviewed and covered in "the new biodiversity and conservation legislation by 2012".

Chapter 3 – "Increasing government effectiveness" is cause for concern. One strategy in this section is to "Restructure natural

resource management organisations and associated legislation". Under this provision the Victorian Environment Assessment Council and the Victorian Coastal Council would disappear into a new Natural Resource and Catchment Council; the Wildlife Act and the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act would be repealed and all public land legislation, including the National Parks Act, the Parks Victoria Act and the Heritage Rivers Act would be subject to "review, repeal and consolidate where necessary". There is a statement in the paper that "new environmental legislation must be flexible so that it remains relevant as the landscape changes...". It is hoped that this is not being seen as an opportunity to weaken existing legislation and provide more Ministerial discretion.

Education

Chapter 5 – "Supporting community action" deals with education. In BOCA's original submission we suggested that existing education programs need to be expanded and new programs developed for delivery to a range of audiences including businesses, urban landholders, public land managers and farmers. We also said that education could be provided through many existing bodies – Landcare, Land for Wildlife, environmental organisations, schools, municipal councils and friends groups.

It is good to see that the need for sustainability education of the general community is recognised, particularly in urban areas. "Urban residents often don't recognise the link between their choices and environmental impacts because these impacts often occur a long way away or over an extended period of time." The action proposed is to "prepare a targeted community education program to increase awareness and encourage actions that improve land water and biodiversity outcomes by 2010".

There is also recognition that education needs to start with children before they start school and to continue throughout their lives. It is encouraging that the policy states that "environmental sustainability will be considered core curriculum" and that "opportunities to better support and integrate biodiversity education will be investigated with particular emphasis on hands on learning".

It is to be hoped that organisations such as BOCA are included in conducting this investigation and in the development of biodiversity education programs.

Sustainability Victoria will be the coordinating agency for school-based programs. It may be the right time for BOCA to step forward and actively become involved in education development at this level.

It is disappointing that the business sector, other than agriculture and land managers, is not mentioned as a target for biodiversity education, the focus in urban areas seems to be on informing the choices individuals make and providing better coordination for schools.

In all, there are more than 120 actions promised by the Victorian Government in the white paper – many of them to be completed by 2010; but will the funding needed to implement these actions and to follow through with on-ground work be forthcoming?

NSW THREATENED SPECIES

Further to the article in *The Bird Observer*, August 2009, the NSW Threatened Species Committee has made a Final Determination under the Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995 to list Flame Robin, Scarlet Robin, Spotted Harrier, Little Eagle and Varied Sittella as Vulnerable Species and Australian Pied Oystercatcher as an Endangered Species.

ORANGE-BELLIED PARROTS IN DIRE STRAITS

Under the heading *Urgent Action to Save Parrot*, the Australian Government Minister for Environment Protection, Heritage and the Arts, Peter Garrett, issued a media release on 21 April 2010 outlining the serious situation facing the Orange-bellied Parrot (OBP) population. This follows advice from the OBP Recovery Team that only a small number of OBP females are breeding in the wild.

With a now-estimated population of only about 50 wild birds, population modelling indicates that the species could become extinct in the wild within three to five years. This means that the existing captive population becomes even more important for the conservation of the species and this is reflected in the Action Plan launched by the Minister. The captive population is based on too few founder individuals to give it the level of genetic robustness that is desirable for long-term sustainability. Therefore, it is proposed to remove a number of juvenile parrots from the wild to be incorporated into the captive-breeding program over the next few years. The number taken from the wild will be based on studies of genetic diversity in both the wild and captive populations.

The new Action Plan also recognizes the importance of the existing wild population and proposes strategies to improve breeding success and survival in the wild through habitat improvement, supplementary feeding and reducing competition for nesting boxes.

BOCA and Birds Australia issued a joint media statement supporting the new Action Plan, stressing the importance of maintaining the wild population and applauding the efforts of

the many volunteers who have been involved and will continue to be involved in monitoring the OBP population.

Our joint media release concludes with a plea to governments – “In the International year of Biodiversity, Birds Australia and BOCA are calling on all governments to recognise that we are in the midst of a Biodiversity crisis, and to invest more in research, monitoring and on-ground conservation for threatened species protection and recovery.”

WATER FOR RED GUMS AND WETLANDS

The Australian and State Governments have combined in a number of recent projects to provide water for wetlands and ailing Red Gums in the Murray Darling basin.

- In early summer and autumn, an extra 30 million litres of water will be released into nationally important Victorian wetlands along the Murray River as part of the Living Murray program. The water will be supplied to Walpolla Island, Lindsay Island, Reedy Lagoon in Gunbower Forest, Hattah Lakes and Barmah Forest.
- The Australian Government has funded the \$10m purchase of the Old Dromana property near Moree in NSW. The property contains over 600 hectares of wetlands, which is about 75% of the Ramsar-listed Gwydir Wetlands, a key breeding site for waterbirds. The property will become a nature reserve under the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Act and adds to the environmental water rights previously purchased by the NSW and Australian Governments, such as those included with the purchase of Toorale Station, for almost \$24m, at the junction of the Darling and Warrego Rivers.
- A \$6m infrastructure project has started which will enable water to be directed to more than 500 hectares of floodplain on Mulcra Island in north-western Victoria. The structures can also be operated to provide water to 250 hectares of floodplain on the NSW side of the Murray River when sufficient water is available. Mulcra Island, which adjoins the Trust for Nature owned property Ned's Corner, will become part of the extended Murray-Sunset National Park.

MACQUARIE ISLAND

Following years of planning and preparation, baiting to commence eradication of rabbits, rats and mice on Macquarie Island will begin in June 2010.

The \$24.6m Pest Eradication Program involves four helicopters dropping 305 tonnes of bait on very precise courses under winter conditions – an exercise that requires great professional skill from very experienced pilots.

The very intensive baiting program will be followed by deployment of a specially-trained team of dogs to hunt any surviving rabbits. This will commence in August for up to five years until the Island is completely free of rabbits.