



## Upper Murray Wetlands ... a New Management Focus

Much has been said about the importance of protecting large wetlands along the Murray River such as the iconic Barmah-Milewa Forest but what of the smaller, but no less important, wetlands in the upper reaches of the Murray?

These wetlands, above the Hume Dam are subject to reasonably natural flows only altered by water regulation from the Khancoban pondage and contribute to the Murray River's water quality, maintaining river health and to regional biodiversity.

While many of these wetlands are on private lands, some managed by the Hume Rural Lands Protection Board (RLPB) as they are on Travelling Stock Reserves (TSRs). In recognition of their environmental value, the MWWG has provided funding (about \$30,000 over five years) to the Hume RLPB to protect and rehabilitate two wetlands on TSRs between Jingellic and Welserang -Karara and Appleton's Reserves.

*"The wetlands are fairly degraded but still significant," says Hume RLPB senior ranger Allan Scammell. "A lot of the natural wetlands in this area are very degraded because they are encompassed in prime grazing country. Plant studies have been done and these two still have many indigenous species."*

While RLPBs are also responsible for stock health issues and give assistance/advice in pest animal control, over the last 15 years TSRs have been managed with a much more environmental focus.

*"The traditional use of these reserves, for travelling stock, is dying out," says Allan. "A lot these days are tendered out for grazing permits. But they have got significant environmental values. Even the ones that have been heavily grazed have still got the big old trees with hollows that our native fauna need for breeding. And as these reserves have never been cultivated, they still have quite a lot of the native plant species that given half a chance will recover. I see these reserves as our legacy for the future."*

Karara is the larger of the two reserves (44.5ha, compared to Appleton's which is 13.5 ha.), with the wetlands similar in size, being ~10ha. The Karara wetland has water in it, at different levels, 100% of the year whereas Appleton's tends to dry out in drier years.

The current project funded by the MWWG builds on previous projects by the Murray Catchment Management Authority and the local Landcare group. The area Karara Reserve wetland was fenced off about seven years ago and trees planted. Since then grazing has been excluded for the majority of the time. The regeneration on Karara is striking with goods stands of *Phragmites* and other wetland plants.

In comparison, Appleton's Reserve has been subject to heavy grazing pressure for many years and seems bare with minimal native plants. However since March 2007 all grazing has been excluded to allow for regeneration. Already there are signs that wetland plants have started to come back.

The MWWG funding is being used to change the management of Appleton's Reserve, in particular the grazing regime. It helps cover loss of income to the RLPB as a result of the reserves not being grazed, and is also being used for monitoring, weed and pest animal control and to repair fences etc.



*"The fact that we have been able to attract funding to help us with environmental management is a real bonus," says ranger Neale Whitsed, who is based at Holbrook, and has been looking after the reserves for the past seven years. "I can now do as much [weed control etc.] as my time permits me to do. Before this funding from the MWWG there was only limited income to spend on these reserves. I always thought Appleton's Reserve had huge potential for rehabilitation." Neale says the management of the reserves is "on the cusp of change" and has been heading that way for a few years.*

*"That's one of the real rewards of the job," he says. "I believe we have an obligation to manage the public land under our control for future generations."*

**Story and photos: Margrit Beemster October, 2007**