

Branch / Group: Waterways – River Health Group

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

Date: 26 November 2008

Location: Theatre, Western Treatment Plant, Discovery Centre

Present: John Barkla, Tom Fletcher, Maarten Hulzebosch, Richard Loyn, Peter Menkhorst, Bernie McCarrick, Brad Mclean, Justin Horne, William Steele

Apologies: Chris Lester, Marc Cassenet, Clive Minton, Aaron Organ, Cr Bob Fairclough Guests: Bob Swindley, Eddie Walker, Suelin Haynes, Peter Gall, Will Rayner (PV), Paul Dartnell (PV)

Item No.	Details / Issues	Responsibility	Due Date
1	Site tour		
	Committee members visited a number of sites at the WTP and discussed issues.		
2	Welcome		
	Carried over: WKS to arrange formal letter of invitation for TF. This should now be done together with the two-year letters of appointments for other members, due February 2009.	WKS	ASAP
3	WTP Operations update		
	<p>Brad Mclean provided an overview of Operations perspective. There was a need to find the right balance between the two objectives of improved water quality in eth Bay and retaining habitat values at the WTP. A large mixing zone study and other studies, such as the mesocosm study, were underway and would hopefully provide answers but would only be likely in 4–5 years.</p> <p>There was a process underway to find an agribusiness partner to run the agricultural side of the WTP, as forecast in the WTP Land Use Strategy (LUS). Conservation values and compatibility were highlighted throughout this process and would carry weight in deciding on a suitable partner.</p> <p>MH asked if the outsourcing of the agribusiness was now out to tender. Stage 1 (expressions of interest) was</p>		

	<p>completed and Stage 2 (submission of detailed proposals) with the selected candidates was now underway.</p> <p>JB asked if the Committee would be involved in this process. WKS replied this would be the case.</p> <p>An energy efficiency drive was seeking to reduce energy use and also increase production of renewable energy. Currently some 80% of energy demand on site was produced from renewable energy sources. Melbourne Water would like to increase this proportion. Wind farms had been discussed but might be incompatible with site's values.</p> <p>Another priority area was health and safety. WTP had a good safety record and Melbourne Water seriously considered health, safety and well-being of staff to be of importance.</p>		
4	Birdwatching access		
	<p>Peter Gall addressed the Committee and stressed that Melbourne Water in no way wanted to keep birdwatchers out of the WTP but rather sought a good, open relationship. Birdwatchers should feel free to contact WTP Operations about any issues that came up.</p> <p>At the same time, Melbourne Water had to have a safe working site and didn't want questions to be asked—should anything go wrong—as to why birdwatchers were on site without being inducted as everyone else was required to be. There had been very useful meetings between birdwatchers and Ops and this had resolved a number of outstanding issues. There had been some 'tweaking' of the maps in the 2005 access strategy, mainly around 95E ponds.</p> <p>JB asked if a WTP Ops representative could address the Committee once a year? Peter Gall: Yes, certainly.</p> <p>MH asked about access to Ryans Swamp from 160 South Road and whether this would be year-round. Peter Gall: Access from 160 South Road would be open for some time to come but would eventually close when new security gates became operational. Access to the swamp was year-round.</p> <p>MH asked about access to tracks around Lake Borrie, were there designated tracks or broad access to the area? Peter Gall: Some tracks would be maintained and it was preferred that these were used but all tracks in areas open to birdwatchers were open to use. He was confident maintenance of tracks would funnel people onto preferred tracks.</p> <p>MH asked if there was the opportunity to get special access</p>		

	<p>to other areas? Peter Gall: Yes, under the study permit system.</p> <p>MH asked if there was access to the Northern Grasslands? Brad Mclean: Yes, under the study permit system. The default position was that there were two areas open to birdwatchers under the two levels of birdwatching permit, but other areas were accessible in special cases under the study permit system.</p> <p>JB asked how different the study permit procedure was to the birdwatching permit system. Brad Mclean: the study permit application required a Job Safety Analysis and also was site specific depending on the reasons behind the study. [<i>Please note that the study permit system also requires evidence of appropriate insurance, evidence of support of an academic institution, submission of a written report, regular progress reports, etc.</i>]</p> <p>JB asked if visitor numbers to the Level 2 birdwatching area were to be limited? Peter Gall: No limit but we'll monitor numbers.</p> <p>RJS: With 560 current birdwatching permit holders can Melbourne Water cope with this number being inducted for access to the Level 2 area? Peter Gall: Yes.</p> <p>JB thanked Peter Gall and Brad Mclean for their helpfulness and sensible solutions which had resolved the issues and soothed the great angst generated among birdwatchers. With regular reviews planned the Committee could raise any issues identified every 12 months or so.</p> <p>Peter Gall told the Committee that photography and birdwatching from the tracks and verges was acceptable and that if people wanted greater access they could talk to the WTP Ops team.</p> <p>RJS asked what the costs would be to run the planned new system. Peter Gall: About the same as now but the issue was really about WTP Ops managing security of the site—which was always a necessity—and not about managing birdwatching groups.</p>		
5	Werribee River Park		
	<p>Will Rayner and Paul Dartmell of Parks Victoria gave a full briefing on the current state of planning for the Werribee River Park. The 2006 draft management plan had generated a number of submissions: many to do with protection of natural assets but also some asking for a variety of recreational opportunities to be included in the park. Staff changes has led to delays in further planning and the management plan was now awaiting further</p>	Parks Vic	TBC

	<p>consultation with stakeholders. A consultant had been appointed to write a Strategic Directions Statement for the park, which was due by the end of February. A cultural heritage plan was also to be completed. A steering committee has been established. These all would inform the final Master Plan.</p> <p>There were issues around access routes into the park. Initially they were concentrating on access via Maltby Bypass and Mansion.</p> <p>A site visit before Christmas was proposed.</p>		
6	Matters arising		
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7	New and emerging weeds		
7.1	MH reported that he had seen evidence at mouth of Little River where contractors had sprayed native <i>Juncus</i> .	WKS to pass on to Maintenance	ASAP
7.2	MH reported Tall Wheat Grass along the verges of Beach Road. Still a small infestation and should be tackled now. BMC offered to raise concern with Geelong City Council, the responsible authority for this area.	BMc to raise issue with Geelong CC	ASAP
7.3	MH requested that Melbourne Water undertake an annual review of priority weeds to be tackled.	WKS to incorporate into annual works planning	1 Jul 09
8	Ferreting		
	<p>WKS reported there were recent sightings of Ferrets along Lollipop Creek and he had heard that a group was still visiting the WTP to run ferrets based upon an old agreement.</p> <p>MH reported one seen dead on road some years ago, and two recently entered zoo.</p> <p>EW supported some ferreting as an effective rabbit control measure.</p> <p>JB stated that ferrets had no effect on rabbit numbers and the Committee should recommend to Melbourne water that no ferreting be allowed.</p> <p>PM added that sightings should be documented</p>	<p>WKS to convey recommendation to Melbourne Water.</p> <p>All to record sightings and send in to WKS.</p>	ASAP
9	Shellfish collectors along coast		
	BMc explained some of the difficulties in policing this but offered to email DPI to request action.	BMc to email DPI.	ASAP
10	Status of EPBC Act compliance		

	<p>WKS reported no word as yet from DEWHA on the 2007 annual report (submitted April 2008).</p> <p>Future works planned include Western Lagoon works and also the Lake Borrie adaptive management, with Ponds 28 and 29 to be flooded in late summer. A possible PhD study with Andrew Hamilton (Uni Melb) will see a student assessing effects of adding seaweed wrack to some ponds as nutrient replacement for raw sewage.</p> <p>Annual report to DEWHA for 2008 due early in 2009. Data would be collected for this report and would show us the state of play.</p>		
11	Other Business		
11.1	RJS reported significant increase in waterfowl numbers, from 1300 Pink-eared Duck in July to 16,500 now; 300–400 Australasian Shoveler in July to 7000 now.		
11.2	<p>BMc reported that Parks Vic had presented arguments against Barro Quarry expansion at the recent hearing.</p> <p>WKS reported that Parks Vic planners had queried Western Lagoon works and possible impacts on saltmarsh. He had argued that this project required EPBC Act approval but had been assured by the Committee that it was not and that the works should proceed as soon as possible. PM responded that Melbourne Water should definitely refer the Western Lagoon project to DEWHA before commencing works. WKS pointed out that this was directly contradictory to the advice previously given to Melbourne Water by this Committee.</p>		
11.3	MH asked that sheep grazing trial of saltmarsh be stopped and sheep removed because of lack of feed. WKS replied that this had just been done at RHL's request.		
11.4	MH reported Brolga pair had had two young but one had been found dead and partially eaten shortly before it fledged and the other had not been seen for some time.		
11.5	MH reported increased sightings of Eastern Grey Kangaroos and Swamp Wallabies at WTP and along Werribee River. He felt the WTP was not a good place for wallabies and that Melbourne Water might need to manage these animals in the future.		

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Next Meetings: • TBC

Venue: Conference Room, Western Treatment Plant Discovery Centre