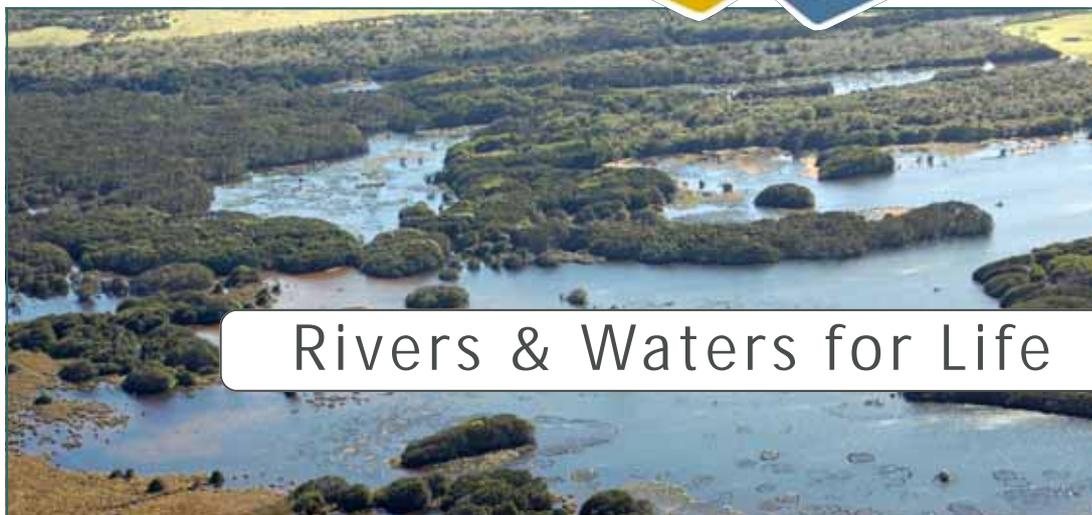




# Northern exposure

Newsletter of NRM North

winter 2008 issue



## Rivers & Waters for Life

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## CEO's Welcome

Welcome to the Winter 2008 NRM North Newsletter, the first of a new regular quarterly edition. Natural resource management in Northern Tasmania continues to be vital to the economic, social and environmental well being of the region. Our natural resources form the basis for many of the things we value and NRM North continues to work hard, in partnership with many of you, to ensure that we are managing these natural resources in a balanced and progressive way. This newsletter includes a small snapshot of some of these activities with a focus on rivers and water.

It has been a while since our last edition and NRM North has been through a number of changes since then. I have just been appointed as the new NRM North CEO effective from the 16th June 2008. I am looking forward to the opportunity of leading a vibrant team and organisation into new challenges.

Many of you will know Catherine Murdoch, the outgoing NRM North CEO and we are grateful to her for the tremendous work she has done both

for NRM North and her dedication to regional natural resource management across the State. This change in leadership along with a change in funding structures (more on that in the next edition) provide NRM North with an opportunity to build on past successes and work even more closely with you for the benefit of our region.

NRM North has also been through a revamp of our branding with a fresh new logo (page 6), and a strategic planning process which gave rise to a new vision and corporate plan for the organisation. *"In 2010 NRM North will be the leading non-government organisation that produces results in natural resource management across Northern Tasmania"*. We look forward to achieving that vision by working with you to care for the natural resources of our island home.

James McKee  
Acting CEO NRM North

**Inset:** Lower Ringarooma Floodplain Ramsar Wetland  
A Wetland of International Importance—Story on page 4

We are looking for a new **Newsletter title**. There is a prize for the best, so send your ideas to [admin@nrmnorth.org.au](mailto:admin@nrmnorth.org.au) along with any other feedback on this edition.

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## Community Benefit through Water Monitoring in Georges Bay

The Project Officer for the Georges Catchment and Estuary Project, Brendon Meulders, believes that the contribution of volunteers, each with an interest in Georges Bay and its long term health, will ultimately influence water monitoring project outcomes.

“Assessing water quality is not a straightforward task but the team is about to take over the routine sampling from the experts”, says Brendon. Our competent team has completed training with the Tasmanian Aquaculture and Fisheries Institute (TAFI). Some measures are recorded on the spot while others are sent to a laboratory for further analysis.

“Each month they will be on the water collecting samples and recording meter results. And they may even be able to dangle a line at the same time!”

The enthusiastic group of volunteers represents a cross section of the community, ranging from local business operators to retirees. Local business has supported the project by the provision of a boat and driver from Lease 65 which is greatly appreciated by the team.

Despite monitoring done by various groups over a number of years, there are still major gaps in our picture of the overall health of the bay, resulting in uncertainty for the community and industries which rely upon it. This project aims to complete that picture and also bring together results from different groups who monitor the bay.

The project aims to develop a baseline of condition in the Bay against which the community and stakeholders can continue monitoring health trends. Some aspects include monitoring of water turbidity, macroinvertebrates,

sea grass and habitats and nutrients levels. Together with monitoring in the catchment, it will assist to identify priority areas for on-ground actions to improve water quality. It is part of a long term land and water management plan for the Georges Catchment and Estuary.

Data is assessed annually to determine whether the health of the Bay is improving or declining as well as providing vital details on the effects of flood on the estuarine environment.



Taking water quality samples - Photo by Dragi Markovic DEWHA

The first 12 months of data are currently being analysed and results are expected by June this year.

“Our aim is to bring together local knowledge via our enthusiastic volunteers and technical experts who undertake some of the monitoring and provide support to our volunteers when required”, says Brendon.

“By including members of the community wherever possible we have the best chance of continuing the project for the long term and in a way that meets community needs and concerns.”

Experience from projects elsewhere has shown that the level of success is determined by the level of community involvement. “We are always looking to increase our team of volunteers so we urge you to get involved, gain new skills and help us to help you keep the beauty of Georges Bay for generations to come”, he says. “There are a variety of ways to assist, from monthly water monitoring to bird surveys or just reporting any unusual observations around the Bay.”

Landowners in the catchment have also been working hard to protect riverbanks and manage runoff of nutrients and other contaminants. Funding from NRM North has provided property management planning for more than a dozen large and small landowners. This has helped identify and plan activities including erection of streamside fencing, installation of troughs to discourage stock from drinking from streams and upgrading dairy effluent systems.

For further information on the water monitoring program and volunteering, and the Georges Catchment and Estuary project, contact Brendon Meulders or Kate Thorn on (03) 6376 7900





## Effective Dairy Farm Practices

Saving on farm water and fertilizer use can mean saving dollars

Solids screens, irrigators, additional storage capacity and pumps and the like are important equipment for dairy farmers to install to reduce or eliminate the potential for effluent runoff into rivers and streams. But the popular view is that the uptake of new farming management practices and the technical support are the keys to a more sustainable dairy farm in the future.



Dairy Effluent Field Day - Photo DairyTas

The other objective of the Dairy Effluent project, initiated by NRM North, Cradle Coast NRM and DairyTas in 2004, is to improve water quality and farm productivity through assisting dairy farmers to upgrade their effluent management systems and to reuse the effluent on their farms.

Although dairy farmers received matching funding of up to \$5,000 to undertake on ground work, under the Federal Government's Natural Heritage Trust, their direct investment is much greater.

Executive Officer of DairyTas, Mark Smith, says that the average investment per farm is \$18,000 but can be as much as \$70,000 for large scale systems when all the in-kind work is equated into the total investment.

This has demonstrated a real commitment to not only reviewing existing practices but to also purchasing and installing new equipment.

**“With the increased understanding of natural resource management and adoption of new practices, farmers are able to secure more long term benefits.”**

“Farmers are reaping many benefits from their participation in the project. There are substantial productivity and sustainability benefits achieved through improved management of effluent, increased water efficiencies and reduced fertiliser use and these have a direct impact on profitability,” says Mark.

“Some dairy farmers are spreading the effluent over more area to grow feed for livestock, effluent green water is used for irrigation and these assist farmers to cope better with dry spells. Our objective is for all of the effluent to remain on the farm,” adds Mark Smith.

With the increased understanding of natural resource management and the adoption of new practices, farmers are able to secure more long term benefits. Effluent management plans are prepared with consultants which includes identifying the best effluent system design, optimising water usage, fencing river banks and land management to meet both current and future needs.

“Information is provided through field days and farmers have access to technical advice and support and this will continue into the future after the project finishes,” says Mr Smith.

Considering the overall implications of changing farming practices, Mr Smith

said that there are also positive social outcomes from the project. The combined effect is less nutrient runoff into rivers and streams and this can only mean cleaner water. Farmers can

see significant changes from their actions and how these are contributing to improving the health of rivers and streams as well as wildlife habitats in their catchments.

Some farmers have noticed frogs present in on-farm dams, platypus in local streams and increased bird sightings not to mention the improved recreational amenities like children swimming in the rivers.

The project is in its fourth round with 164 dairy farms across the state participating in the project, representing some 36% of all dairy farms in Tasmanian. Of those, 60 farms are located in northern Tasmania.

For more information contact Mr Mark Smith, DairyTas on (03) 6432 2233



Dairy Effluent Pond - Photo DairyTas





# Ringarooma Ramsar Wetland

## Managing A Wetland of International Significance

**A management plan and on-ground works to help conserve, protect and maintain a unique wetland of international importance.**

*What does it require to protect a wetland of international significance, one that supports endangered species, has Aboriginal and European cultural values and supports agriculture?*

These are the challenges that confronted Scott Schilg, Program Manager, NRM North when he was given the responsibility of developing a strategic management plan for the Flood Plain Lower Ringarooma River.

Mr Schilg says "It is 26 years since the Lower Ringarooma River Flood Plain was listed as a wetland of international significance by the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands but there has been very little done since then to conserve and maintain it." He says, "an integrated approach was needed to protect this important Ramsar site and we sought input from a wide range of stakeholders across government and the community. The plan is to set the framework to meet the challenges of the future so



Native Gypsywort - Photo by Ian Harrison

the wetland does not fall into neglect and we lose a valuable natural asset."

NRM North commissioned an Ecological Character Description (ECD) to provide a complete story of the wetland's condition including potential threats at the time of its Ramsar listing. It is a comprehensive picture of the rich diversity of the Lower Ringarooma River site and the complexity of designing programs for managing it. As one of the management tools used in the protection of Ramsar sites the ECD must support the requirements of the Ramsar Convention. Based in Switzerland, Ramsar has as its primary objective, the conservation and wise use of significant wetlands around the world.

According to Ramsar a wetland is significant if it supports vulnerable and endangered species and if it supports plant and/or animal species important for maintaining the biological diversity of the area.

The Lower Ringarooma site provides habitat for many Tasmanian threatened flora and fauna species. The native gipsywort, a perennial herb that has small white flowers and grows to about 1.5 metres was presumed extinct as it hasn't been recorded in Tasmania for 65 years, although it exists in other parts of Australia. However, during a plant life survey in January 2000, it was rediscovered in the Ringarooma area. Others on the threatened list are the purple loosestrife, ribbon weed and erect marsh flower.

The wetland also supports threatened fauna species such as the rare Dwarf

Galaxias, a tiny elongated fish with silvery white belly and clear fins. They live in shallow waters and the females grow larger than the males. The fish is endangered because it has limited distribution at unprotected sites at the Lower Ringarooma and surrounding areas in Northern Tasmania. Other



endangered species include the Growling Grass Frog, also known as the Golden Bell Frog, the Wedge-Tailed Eagle and Spotted-tailed quoll.

Not only does the Lower Ringarooma support state and national threatened species, it's an important habitat for a number of different shorebirds that migrate to Australia to escape the harsh northern hemisphere winter. They arrive in spring feed on small creatures found in mudflats and leave in autumn to breed in the northern hemisphere. These shorebirds are protected by a number of international bilateral agreements which protect and conserve their habitats.

One of these birds is the Red-necked Stint, a regular visitor to the wetland



and is Australia's smallest migratory bird weighing only 30 grams. A wader with a short straight black bill, short legs and plump in shape, it breeds in northern Siberia and makes an astonishing 15,000 kilometre one way flight to Australia via the coasts of South East Asia and Indonesia.

Another dimension of the wetland story is the significant Aboriginal and European cultural heritage values. It once was a site of a bustling port and it

future management plan including a formal survey and inventory of aboriginal cultural heritage sites and European cultural sites within the Ramsar site. These are integral to how Australia identifies and manages its Ramsar wetlands.

The Lower Ringarooma Floodplain is vast covering an area of 3,519 hectares which is predominantly privately owned. Many communities depend on the wetland in more ways than one. Much of the surrounding area is used for agriculture and dairy farming. Water for irrigation and livestock is from the wetland and the Ringarooma River provides domestic water for a number of towns in the catchment.

It is known for its recreational activities including fishing, hunting and is a haven for bird-watchers. It is also a popular place for the community to relax and picnic.

But past human activities have left a legacy of poor

water quality. There are a number of issues confronting the wetland; livestock has direct access to rivers and streams, stormwater and sewage effluent and surface runoff into the waterways all of which make the rare and threatened species more vulnerable.

Mr Schilg says "The ECD is now complete and a management plan is underway. We also have completed a number of key plans; crown land management strategy, cultural heritage assessment and three property management plans."

"At the moment we are working with



Dwarf galaxias - Photo by Michael Hammer

land holders to achieve on the ground work such as fencing to exclude stock from the river bank and wetland, weed control, upgrading dairy effluent systems and informal training for farmers on fertilising to minimise nutrient runoff".

Mr Schilg says, "we know that we have to harmonise the wise use of resources without compromising the natural integrity of the Ramsar site. Our approach is to be inclusive and reach consensus with key stakeholders. The planning process helped us to generate ideas and develop proposals on the conservation of a Wetland of International Importance".

For more information, contact Scott Schilg, NRM North, ph: (03) 6333 7779

## Key Facts

- The Lower Ringarooma Floodplain and wetland is 3,519 hectares in size.
- The Wetland is listed internationally under the Ramsar convention .
- The Wetland supports many threatened species including, the Green and Gold frog, Dwarf galaxias and Purple loostrife.



appears that Aboriginals lived within the area through the discovery of stone tools. The Cultural Heritage Assessment Report conducted in 2007 by SFM Environmental Solutions recommended the development of a



Rednecked Stint - Photo by Dean Ingwersen





## News In Brief

### Partnering: A co-operative approach for Lake Trevallyn Dam

A partnership to comprehensively study the key factors that contribute to algal outbreaks has been formed by all key parties that have both jurisdiction and responsibility for the management of Trevallyn Dam.

The Lake Trevallyn Dam working group is represented by members from Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Environment, Parks, Heritage and Arts, West Tamar Council, Meander Valley Council, Launceston City Council, Esk Water, Hydro Consulting and NRM North.

With two summers of blue green algae

outbreaks at Trevallyn Dam, each organisation acknowledged that a co-ordinated approach to the management of the dam is needed as clean and clear drinking water is a community expectation.

Partnering is an effective way of achieving mutual goals. Some of the key benefits are; the pooling of appropriate resources to investigate the causes that contribute to algal outbreaks, sharing of information and streamlining processes to achieve outputs cost effectively. Not to mention value of forming strong working relationships that make the partnership committed to finding solutions.

Mr Andrew Baldwin, Science Co-ordinator, NRM North said that we are all keen to learn what's happening and find the answers. But the first step is to research the causes and find out the facts which will enable us to develop appropriate solutions to monitor and manage the growth of algal populations in the lake for now and into the future."

So far the working group has investigated a number of causes including water flow rates, nutrient levels and even the warmer weather.

For more information contact Andrew Baldwin on (03) 6333 7781

### Volunteers Recognised for Contribution

Debbie Searle, Northern Waterway Assessment Manager, presented the Waterwatch volunteers with a Certificate of Appreciation for their valued contribution to the State of Region report findings on water quality testing.

The report was launched by Environment Parks, Heritage and Arts Minister, Michelle O'Byrne on 30 April 2008 on the banks of the North Esk River, St Leonards.

The network of volunteers collects, on a monthly basis, water samples from 22 of the 51 sites in Northern Tasmania region. Volunteers are provided with the appropriate level of training and technical support by Department of Primary Industry and Water so that they are able to deliver high quality, consistent and accurate data.

It is the only community based water quality monitoring program in Australia

whose results are recognised and used by the State Government. Mrs Searle also thanked Dorset Council for their in-kind support and Tasmanian Alkaloids for making the Westbury data available.

Northern Waterway Assessment is a partnership between NRM North and the Launceston Environment Centre.

For a copy of the report or more information contact Debbie Searle on (03) 6352 6536

### New NRM North Logo



NRM North is pleased to announce the launch of its new logo which reflects the strategic approach to achieving natural resource management (NRM)

outcomes in Northern Tasmania.

The logo is aimed at communicating to the community the holistic approach we take to managing the environment. We also want to build upon the current recognition and goodwill of the existing logo.

We achieve our outcomes through four regional programs and we believe that these need to be recognised and incorporated into the logo. Each program is represented by a distinct colour:

**Yellow** is for Healthy Coasts and Seas - a programme which integrates the management of estuarine, coastal and marine environments.

**Blue** is for Rivers and Water for Life - a programme which monitors and improves the water quality and health of the rivers.

**Green** is for Flora and Fauna at a Landscape Level - a programme which maintains and improves high value vegetation and important species and reduces the impact of invasive plants and animals.

**Brown** is for Productive Landscapes - working with the community to implement best practice land and resource use including soils.

The logo with the four colours depicts our approach of integrating these programs to produce results in natural resource management in northern Tasmania.





## Out & About



### Break O'Day Sub-Region

#### Dog access zones to local beaches

Balancing the needs of dog owners and shorebirds in the Break O'Day area has been one of the activities of Kate Thorn, NRM Facilitator and Alison Hugo, Community Support Officer. Kate and Alison have been working with Break O'Day Council and the Parks and Wildlife service to review zones for dog access to beaches.

"Not only did we have to look at the needs of dogs and their owners but we had to look at the safety and protection of our precious shorebirds," says Kate.

"We have been encouraged by the high level of interest and support by the community resulting in a number of constructive comments" she says.

Comments submitted in public consultation are now being considered by the Council and decision on the zoning will be released in due course.

#### Nearly 100 people attend native garden workshop

Kate and Alison have also been involved in local coastal garden and plant propagation workshops which have been a huge success. The workshops attracted almost a hundred enthusiastic gardeners.

As a result of the success of the workshops, Kate and Alison are exploring the idea of a Break O'Day 'branch' of the Understorey Network as a focus for local seed collecting and propagating.

For more information contact  
Kate Thorn on (03) 6376 7900.



### Meander Valley Sub-Region

#### Removal of crack willow project

The Birrale Valley LandCare Group is focussing on the rehabilitation of the upper reaches of the Black Sugarloaf Creek which runs through the Meander Valley. The project has been funded by Meander Valley Council.

The work is planned to commence shortly and the first task is to eradicate all crack willows in the riparian area with the assistance of a Mersey NRM work team. The revegetation work will be carried out by the LandCare Group and involves replanting of some low lying areas with a mix of appropriate native species such as Blackwoods (*Acacia melanoxylon*), and Swamp Gum (*Eucalyptus ovata*).

The group is looking forward to the positive outcomes of the project which will include a reduction in creek siltation, the reestablishment of riparian native plant biodiversity and increased habitat for native species.

#### A community water grant project - Whitmore Creek

Sediment runoff from the walls of the Whitmore Dam causing siltation of the Whitmore Creek has been an ongoing water quality issue for local farmers.

Through a community water grant project, Whitmore Valley Water Pty Ltd, comprising local farmers, has rehabilitated the dam walls using native vegetation species in combination with fast establishing pasture grasses.

The result has been the stabilisation of the dam walls, leading to reduction in sediment runoff and therefore an improvement in water quality. Supplementary plantings for windbreak protection and species habitat have also been undertaken.

For more information contact  
Peter Heading on (03) 6393 5332

### Managing the Tamar Estuary from Catchment to Coast

The Tamar Estuary & Esk Rivers (TEER) Programme is an initiative of NRM North in partnership with State and Local Government. The aim of the Programme is to protect, maintain and enhance the waterways of the Tamar Estuary and Esk Rivers, recognising a "catchment to coast" or integrated catchment management approach.

TEER Programme's partners include:

Dept. Environment, Parks, Heritage and the Arts

Dept. Primary, Industries and Water

Dept. Health and Human Services

Launceston City Council

West Tamar Council

George Town Council

Meander Valley Council

Hydro Tasmania

NRM North

The TEER Programme aims to achieve a coordinated management approach through regional partnerships which will focus on improving our scientific understanding of the issues impacting upon the health of our waterways. This will enable identification of priority areas for targeted on-ground works and strategic investment.

Activities undertaken will range from ecosystem monitoring, reporting and research to on-ground rehabilitation programs, education and awareness and building the capacity of the community to address local problems. Key activities for 2008 will include developing a coordinated monitoring program for the Tamar Estuary linked to regular reporting; and working with stakeholders to investigate and address siltation of the Tamar Estuary.

If you would like to know more about the TEER Programme, please contact: Amanda Locatelli on (03) 6333 7783





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NRM North is responsible for planning, delivery and implementation of integrated natural resource management (NRM) in northern Tasmania.

We take a holistic approach to managing the environment through identifying regional priorities and develop integrated NRM plans that are based on sound scientific data.

NRM North was established in 2003 through a community-driven process in response to the Tasmanian Government's Natural Resource Management Framework and its enabling legislation, the Tasmanian Natural Resource Management Act, 2002.

Our role is to:

- Develop programs that recognise the need to balance the environmental, economical and social needs of the community.
- Provide leadership to ensure that sound management of the region's natural resources continues.
- Promote partnerships with all stakeholders to determine appropriate investment and cost sharing strategies.



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