

NORTHERN exposure

spring 2009



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Melaleuca forest – Photo: Greg Stewart



From the CEO

Welcome to the Spring edition of Northern Exposure. Each year we use the AGM of NRM North to take stock of what has been achieved in natural resource management across the region for the past year. We put it all together in a Yearbook which you can download from our website or request a copy from us.



When it comes to biodiversity, you all do far more than we can collate and report on, but in the past year through NRM North investment and partnerships we have:

- Protected and improved more than 4500 hectares of remnant vegetation through incentives and formal management agreements.
- Protected a further 550 hectares of riparian vegetation and established and improved another 80 hectares of farm shelter belts and vegetation corridors to enhance connectivity and habitat condition for threatened species.
- Significantly reduced the impacts of invasive species on biodiversity - more than 2000 hectares of weed infested land has been treated to protect the region's biodiversity, agricultural and community assets.
- Continued supporting the control and management of the pest fish *Gambusia* in the Tamar Estuary.

And this is just a small snapshot. There have been many more activities across the region funded and supported by NRM North in partnerships with all levels of government and the broader community.

While it is true we may well struggle to maintain biodiversity as we know it, especially in the face of significant climate variation, it is important that we continue to work to do what we can to adapt and mitigate the impacts on biodiversity, it is after all one of the building blocks of life.

NRM North is excited to be part of the Islands Project, a partnership between the Tasmanian Government, Conservation Volunteers Australia, the Bookend Trust, the University of Tasmania and NRM North.

This project has a very strong biodiversity focus in harder to reach areas where threats often go unnoticed or unmanaged due to lack of volunteers. This project will also give us an opportunity to showcase the spectacular biodiversity of some of our less well known coastal and remote areas.

In a very different context, we are part of an urban partnership to undertake the Greening Inveresk Precinct Project. This is a partnership between Launceston City Council, the University of Tasmania, Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, the York Park and Inveresk Precinct Authority and NRM North. This provides an opportunity to bring together a reduced environmental footprint and active urban biodiversity.

At our recent AGM we also announced the new Friends of NRM North. This is an informal network of people and groups interested in keeping up to date with what NRM North is doing and participating more in our activities. Friends will get the quarterly newsletter, other updates and announcements but more importantly, will have the opportunity to participate in forums to address NRM related issues and opportunities.

There is lots going on and we appreciate your support and input as we seek to help you care for the natural resources and biodiversity of our island home.



James McKee
CEO NRM NORTH

Managing Chytridiomycosis



“We have recently succeeded in isolating for the first time a Tasmanian strain of the fungus...”

Chytridiomycosis is an infectious frog disease caused by a fungal pathogen known as *Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis* or “Bd” and sometimes called “chytrid”.

The fungus infects the skin of frogs, destroying its structure and function, and can ultimately cause death.

It has been devastating to frog species around the world. In mainland Australia, four species are now presumed extinct from chytrid infection. The disease was first detected in Tasmania in 2004 and poses a significant threat to the state’s frog fauna.

Tasmania has 11 frog species, two are listed as threatened under the Tasmanian Threatened Species Protection Act 1995 (Green and Golden Frog and Striped Marsh Frog) and three species are found only in Tasmania (Tasmanian Tree Frog, Moss Froglet and the Tasmanian Froglet).

NRM North is supporting a project to manage the spread of the fungus which is being run by Tasmania’s Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and the Environment.

Before the start of this project, the status of Tasmania’s frog populations and the distribution of the disease were only partly known. Although the project has only been running for nine months, it is clear the disease is relatively widespread in Tasmania.

Wildlife Health Officer, Annie Philips, from the department’s Biodiversity Conservation Branch, said the team had been working hard collecting data in the lab and in the field to establish the distribution and impacts of chytridiomycosis on Tasmania’s frog species.

“Monitoring has involved swabbing of tadpole mouthparts and adult frogs to determine presence or absence of chytrid fungus as well as monitoring calls and visual identification for presence or absence and abundance of target frog species.” Dr Philips said.

“We are targeting Tasmania’s two threatened frog species, Green and Golden Frog and Striped Marsh Frog and our three endemic species Tasmanian Tree Frog, Moss Froglet and Tasmanian Froglet.”

To facilitate robust monitoring of Tasmanian frogs into the future, the team has collected call data intensively from key sites to establish probabilities of detection of target species.

“In addition, the team is currently finishing the lab phase of a study to assess the susceptibility of key frog species to chytridiomycosis.

“We have tested our two threatened species and one of our endemics – the Tasmanian Tree Frog - in the lab study. We have recently succeeded in isolating for the first time a Tasmanian strain of the fungus - *Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis*.”

The team is also establishing a chytrid diagnostic service at the Animal Health Laboratories in Launceston.

Armed with key information such as species susceptibility and distribution in key locations, a Chytrid Management Plan and an Emergency Response Plan will be written.

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The Islands Project

In September, the Tasmanian Government announced the first stage of an exciting new conservation partnership known as the Islands Project.

The project is a partnership between the Tasmanian Government, Conservation Volunteers Australia, the University of Tasmania, the Bookend Trust and NRM North.

The partners jointly committed \$350,000 as the first stage to fund volunteer conservation works across the Tasmanian archipelago.

The Minister for Environment, Parks and Heritage, Michelle O'Byrne, said the partnership would engage international and local volunteers, students and the philanthropic and corporate sectors in long term, practical and research-based conservation activities in Tasmania and the off-shore islands.

"The first conservation activities will occur across a range of sites in northern Tasmania, including the Furneaux Islands, Bay of Fires, Cape Portland and Waterhouse Conservation Area. They will be practical on-ground works such as revegetation, fencing, track work and site monitoring."

The Chief Executive Officer of NRM North, James McKee, said this exciting partnership would bring significant people power to protecting and enhancing some of the best undeveloped areas in Tasmania.

"This program will not only raise awareness of these unique and spectacular natural assets, but will also inspire more people to become involved in crucial conservation projects." Mr McKee said.

"One of the difficult aspects of the management of our natural resources in more remote areas, is getting the volunteers and support for locals in sufficient numbers to really make a difference. This partnership will make that difference."

Sue Campbell, past Chair and current Board Member of Conservation Volunteers Australia, said CVA was delighted to be working with the government and NRM North on this project.

"On over 330 offshore islands and across Tasmania itself, we will be working in what is truly a state of islands." Mrs Campbell said.

"The Tasmanian archipelago is one of a handful of global biodiversity hotspots, the home to species that are not or are no longer found elsewhere in Australia and the world. This project gives young people from around the world and locally, a real chance to make a lasting difference."

Ms O'Byrne said the Islands Project was part of the Tasmanian Government's commitment to ensuring our volunteers are getting the same support they are giving us.

"Through it we hope to encourage the next generation of volunteers to get involved and give a little of their time for the greater good." Ms O'Byrne said.

"It is also part of promoting Tasmania as an international hub for learning and exchange, at the forefront of the emerging environmental economy."

NRM North's contribution is made possible through the Australian Government's Caring for Our Country Program.

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Sue Campbell, James McKee and Michelle O'Byrne at launch

Protection of Davies' Wax Flower

Over the past year, with funding from the Australian Government, NRM North has been implementing weed management projects that will help to protect the integrity of threatened plant communities and high priority natural assets.

One of the major projects underway will help to protect an area of Davies' Wax Flower (*Phebalium daviesii*).

Davies' Wax Flower is a riparian shrub that is endemic to Tasmania and is considered to be one of the rarest plants in the state.

The species was thought to be extinct until it was rediscovered in 1990. Less than 30 plants occupy a four kilometre site on the George River near St Helens, but in recent years, several "insurance" plantings grown from cuttings, have been established in the local area.

The majority of the plants occur on private property and the main population has now been fenced and a Conservation Covenant put in place so as to restrict activities that may be detrimental to the survival of the species.

Phebalium daviesii is listed as "endangered" under the Tasmanian Threatened Species Protection Act and is listed as "critically endangered" under the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act.

The Threatened Species Listing Statement describes Davies' Wax Flower as a shrub or small tree which grows up to five metres tall. It flowers between late September and mid January with seed developing from January to February.

It grows in the riparian strip and major regeneration events appear to be associated with fire and floods. The leaves of Davies' Wax Flower are fine, two to three centimetres long, parallel but widening at the ends and becoming distinctively bilobed.

The upper leaf surface is dark green with a row of glands along each side. The underside is silvery, having a close covering of small scales. The small flowers are cream coloured and occur in clusters of five to eight flowers. The five petals have brown glands on their backs. Stamens are about twice as long as the petals and protrude from the flower.

NRM North's Weeds Coordinator, Greg Stewart, said one of the identified impacts to the Davies' Wax Flower population was weed invasion.

"Some of the weed species that are present in the general locality are gorse, blackberry, willow and spanish heath." Mr Stewart said.

"Some hand control work in the immediate area of the *Phebalium* has already been completed using teams of workers from Conservation Volunteers Australia."

"They were employed to "cut and paint" the weedy plants. Specifically, the plants were cut off at ground level prior to the stumps being painted with herbicide (glyphosate) registered for use in aquatic situations."

While this work was being undertaken, all participants implemented hygiene procedures for boots, tools, etc to protect against the introduction of *Phytophthora* fungus to the site.

A weed management contractor is currently working on an infestation of spanish heath adjacent to the *Phebalium* site so as to stop the spread of this weed species further into the area.

The contractor is using a combination of herbicide spraying and "cut and paint" to control the *Erica*. The Parks & Wildlife Service at St Helens has also undertaken weed control works to help reduce the impact on the Davies' Wax Flower.

All on-ground works associated with this project have been undertaken in consultation with the Threatened Species Unit of DPIPW.

NRM North will continue to work with stakeholders to monitor the weedy sites and assist with implementation of works to help protect the Davies' Wax Flower population.

The Listing Statement and Recovery Plan can be found on the DPIPW website.

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News in brief...

Landcare Grants

NRM North received strong interest from community care groups and not-for-profit organisations for the latest round of small grants.

The Community Grants program offered grants from between one hundred dollars and five thousand dollars to assist landcare and natural resource management activities.

NRM North is investing around \$115,000.

The funding has been made available through the Australian Government's Caring for our Country Program.

Successful applicants will be announced soon.

NRM North decided to run another round of grants following the success of a similar program earlier in the year.

The Landcare and Community Grants program in April attracted a lot of

interest and NRM North was able to fund 14 projects.

These included field days and natural resource management education programs for schools.

Business Awards

Thirteen businesses in northern Tasmania were recognised at the Launceston Chamber of Commerce Business Excellence Awards in September.

NRM North sponsored the new Hall of Fame award, which was won by CBM Sustainability Group.

NRM North congratulates the winners:

- Autech Software & Design
- Pivot Maritime International
- Whitelion
- Festivale
- Pickled Evenings
- Stompin
- Devil Island Project
- CBM Sustainability Group
- Lester Franks Survey and Geographic Pty Ltd
- Theatre North
- Braaap
- Gunns Mitre 10
- Newstead Hair

CBM Sustainability Group and NRM North CEO James McKee



Greening Inveresk



NRM North is supporting a new project to demonstrate innovative water and energy saving initiatives.

The Greening Inveresk Precinct Project is a partnership between Launceston City Council, University of Tasmania, Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, the York Park and Inveresk Precinct Authority and NRM North.

In September, the council received \$788,000 from the Australian Government towards the project.

The money will assist the council to retrofit a unique arts and sports precinct in Inveresk with the latest energy and water saving technologies.

The project will ensure the community is well educated about the need to reduce our carbon footprint.

On the ground elements include programming heating and cooling, lights, refrigeration and hot water at Aurora Stadium to only come on when required.

Out & About

Dorset Sub-Region



Sea Spurge Removal



Bridport Coastcare volunteers braved gale force winds to remove sea spurge from a small islet in the estuary at Bridport.

After years of work to eradicate ricegrass from the estuary, sea spurge has emerged a new threat.

Sea spurge is a toxic coastal weed that is invading large areas along Tasmania's coastline.

The islet and the saltmarsh surrounding it provide important habitat and protection for oystercatchers, terns and other shorebirds.

Tasmania's saltmarshes are unusual and diverse ecosystems that support a host of plants and animals.

They are the temperate equivalent of mangroves and are very sensitive to changes in sea level and flow regimes.

Wildlife Biologist Retires

Guests at the Dorset NRM Inc. Annual General Meeting in early November had the chance to pass on their best wishes to retiring native animal expert Nick Mooney.

Mr Mooney gave a presentation on the importance of top predators such as eagles and devils in maintaining a healthy balance within ecosystems.

Mr Mooney has retired from the Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and the Environment after a career spanning more than 30 years.

Out & About

Break O'Day Sub-Region



Water Monitoring

The Georges Bay water monitoring team celebrated two years of monthly water monitoring with a barbecue in September.

The dedicated team venture out onto Georges Bay at St Helens each month using a boat provided by Aqua Oysters.

The team tests for key physical, chemical and biological indicators including dissolved oxygen, salinity, turbidity, chlorophyll and nutrients.

The volunteers are implementing the Integrated Water Quality Monitoring Framework for Georges Bay developed in 2005.

The project is supported by NRM North and the Break O'Day Council and is part of a larger project to improve land and water management in the catchment.





Natural Resource Management
in Northern Tasmania

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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Supported by the Australian and State Governments.



Australian Government



Tasmania
Explore the possibilities

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Working with you to care for the natural resources of our island home.