

# NORTHERN exposure

Winter 2009



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Liffey River – Photo: Emma Williams

# From the CEO

We all use water, often taking it for granted until something goes wrong. This edition of Northern Exposure focuses on Rivers and Water and a range of initiatives underway to continue building our knowledge of water in the region and most importantly, that are working to improve water quality.

## Integration of regional natural resource management activities and planning

Water quality remains a critical indicator of catchment health and provides NRM North with the ability to see the impact of many on-ground works at a sub-catchment scale. The Northern Waterway Assessment team has done a magnificent job over the past five years and more to bring together professional and community monitoring of water quality in the region. This has resulted in a whole range of outcomes including an annual State of the Rivers report for the region and a huge network of Waterwatch volunteers.

We have had to scale this program back for the short term while we seek further funding. This has provided an opportunity to focus on a few catchments in more detail over the next period while we rebuild the program.

## Identify the priorities for natural resource management for the northern region

The Tamar Estuary and Esk Rivers (TEER) program continues to build capacity in a large part of the region to reach the vision of *“The Tamar Estuary and Esk River Systems - Healthy, Productive, Valued and Enjoyed, Our Rivers Of Life”*. Key activities have included a sediment modeling project looking at where in the catchments we can best invest in activities to reduce sedimentation and an environmental health monitoring program for the Tamar Estuary.

Both these activities are currently going through scientific review processes to ensure that they are robust and as accurate as possible for what they are intended to do. These two activities will provide the program, along with NRM North and the program partners, with solid information on which to prioritise and base future action.



Of course making assessments in the landscape about condition can be controversial. But to ensure that we are making an impact with the small investment we have, it must happen. One thing NRM North strives for in this area is to be open and approachable while at the same time, independent and scientifically sound.

## Implementation of the regional strategy

It has been known for a long time, through intuition, anecdote and some research, that riparian vegetation (or streamside vegetation) has a major impact on water quality. This is being well researched for Tasmania through a Landscape Logic research project of which NRM North is a partner. We have continued to invest heavily in streamside vegetation protection and establishment. More than 550 hectares of streamside vegetation has been protected over the past 12 months. Not only does this have a water quality impact, it has also led to improving the condition of critical water dependant habitat for threatened species such as the Burrowing Crayfish and Green and Gold Frog. Activities included fencing, establishing off-stream stock watering points, revegetation and river bank erosion control.

Water is one of our most valuable and precious natural resources, and we continue to work hard to help you care for it.



**James McKee**  
CEO NRM NORTH

# Trapping the ‘Fish Destroyer’



*“Over the next six months, we are going to conduct intensive trapping at the Tamar Wetlands and at Landfall on the east Tamar.”*

The introduced pest *Gambusia Holbrooki* is known as the ‘fish destroyer’. It poses a significant threat to native aquatic species in the Tamar Estuary, particularly fish and frogs. Work is underway to control or eradicate the fish through a trapping and public awareness program.

NRM North has provided funding for this program which is being implemented by Tamar NRM. The National Centre for Marine Conservation and Resource Sustainability at the Australian Maritime College is conducting the trap research and development.

The program aims to develop control methods that can be used in ecologically sensitive environments such as wetlands, where existing control measures like poisoning and draining are not appropriate.

David Maynard from the National Centre for Marine Conservation and Resource Sustainability said the focus was to put excessive fishing pressure on all local *Gambusia* populations.

“We would like to remove every juvenile before it matures and every adult female before she can release offspring. By doing this, the population should crash. In practical terms we are likely to maintain a suppressed population as long as regular trapping continues.” Mr Maynard said.

A range of trap designs and stimuli which attract and retain *Gambusia* in high numbers have been developed. These allow the safe release of native fish, invertebrates and frogs.

“Our traps continue to evolve. We use light to attract fish from the local area as the sun goes down and the latest generation traps are large volume with low service requirements.”

Grant Scurr from Tamar NRM said the new trap designs would be trialled for the first time at several sites over the next six months.

“Previously we weren’t able to trap in water shallower than 10 to 15 centimetres but these new traps are quite effective in water only seven centimetres deep.” Mr Scurr said.

“Over the next six months, we are going to conduct intensive trapping at the Tamar Wetlands and at Landfall on the east Tamar.”

The most effective time to implement an intense trapping program is early Spring. The fish do not breed in Winter and the population naturally crashes due to cold temperatures. The remaining fish are also more easily trapped as they become more active as the water temperature rises.

There were some promising results in Spring last year with clear evidence of over-fishing the population. However, trapping was not able to be conducted in the broader Tamar Wetlands region which enabled *Gambusia* in other parts of the wetlands to breed up and repopulate the area that had previously been trapped.

This issue has been resolved for Spring this year with NRM North increasing funding for the project.

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# Ringarooma Ramsar and Cape Portland

The coastline of north east Tasmania boasts an environment touched with beauty and natural assets and is an area rich in primary productivity and history. At the same time, it can also present a sense of remoteness and distance from other concerns.

Environmental diversity is showcased by the beaches and headlands, islands and wetlands scattered throughout the coastal landscape and the ecological communities that these support.

Among these values sits the Lower Ringarooma River Floodplain Ramsar site, an internationally-recognised wetland. It is a complex system spanning freshwater, riverine and wetland, estuarine and coastal zones.

NRM North's Healthy Coasts and Seas Coordinator, Emma Williams, said the site met three of the Ramsar criteria for listing and provided key habitat for a number of threatened flora and fauna species.

"The wetland area also provides potential palaeobotanical and palaeofaunal remains, geological diversity and diverse invertebrate fauna." Ms Williams said.

"Understanding the Ringarooma Ramsar site has been a cornerstone to NRM North's aim of protecting the wetland, through sustainable management and wise use."

NRM North has undertaken a number of activities in order to do this, including:

- An Ecological Character Description – a requirement for Ramsar sites to benchmark the site's condition, identify threats, impacts and management and monitoring options;
- A Management Plan;
- A Crown Land Management Strategy;
- Property Management Planning for the surrounding private property;
- A Cultural Heritage Assessment;
- Dairy management report and upgrades;
- Willow removal from within the Ramsar site;
- Gorse control within the Ramsar site and surrounding buffer zone;

- An approximate total of 30 kilometres of fencing, including 11 kilometres of riparian habitat and a total area of 4,200 hectares (approximate) native vegetation and wetland habitat protected from stock impacts; and
- Further proposed fencing of approximately 6.5 kilometres to link an additional 250 hectares of remnant vegetation with existing conservation areas and habitat protected on the adjacent Cape Portland property. Covenant agreements for wetland and other habitat areas are also proposed.

The Ringarooma Ramsar wetland has also provided a gateway to broader delivery of on-ground works in the north east.

"Building on the partnerships established through the Ringarooma Ramsar project, NRM North is also working with the Parks and Wildlife Service to deliver improvement actions at the Petal Point camp ground, adjacent to the Rushy Lagoon property on which part of the Ringarooma Ramsar site is situated.

This project, funded by the Australian Government through the Caring for Our Country – Community Coastcare program, will address issues of environmental deterioration in the camp ground reserve and will continue on-ground activities within the nearby Ramsar site." Ms Williams said.

In addition to this, NRM North is currently preparing to protect around 2,800 hectares of quality native coastal vegetation and wetland habitat on the Cape Portland property, which borders Rushy Lagoon.

Linkages between the two private properties and nearby habitat on public land are planned to maximise strategic conservation outcomes for the environment of this wider area.

This means that more than 33,000 hectares of land adjacent to over 50 kilometres of coastline in Tasmania's north east is now being managed for long-term sustainable use and significant natural resource benefits.

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# Lake Trevallyn Blue Green Algae



Lake Trevallyn is one of the most loved recreational spots in Launceston and is widely used by skiing groups and swimmers.

However, algal blooms occurring in the lake over the past several years have resulted in some recreational events being cancelled and authorities advising people not to enter the water.

Unfortunately, there is a strong likelihood that algal blooms will reoccur in Lake Trevallyn in future years.

In response to a need for timely public notification, education about the health risks and for coordinated monitoring, NRM North in collaboration with several partners has established the Lake Trevallyn Monitoring Working Group under the Tamar Estuary and Esk Rivers (TEER) program.

The TEER Program Manager, Amanda Locatelli, said algal blooms had been known to occur in Lake Trevallyn for the last two years.

“The bloom extended five kilometres upstream from the dam wall and persisted until May in both 2007 and 2008.” Ms Locatelli said.

“In 2009, the algal bloom didn’t occur until April, much later in the season than the previous years. This was attributed to a cooler summer and increased water flows.”

NRM North, Ben Lomond Water, West Tamar Council, Meander Valley Council, Launceston City Council, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Parks and Wildlife Service and Hydro Tasmania established the Lake Trevallyn Monitoring Group in 2007 with the aim of:

- Establishing a coordinated monitoring program;
- Identifying the key drivers of the bloom; and
- Raising public awareness and improving access to information.

The TEER Scientific and Technical Officer, Michael Attard, said to ensure the public was kept informed on the algal bloom situation, a daily report would be published in The Examiner newspaper during the summer months.

“The report can be found in the services section on the weather page.” Mr Attard said.

“It will give an update on the blue green algae status in Lake Trevallyn by showing either, no current algal warning or a current algal warning with a risk description.

“In the event of a bloom, signage will also be erected at the lake advising on the associated health risks.” Mr Attard said.

Algal blooms are primarily caused by increased water temperature, increased nutrient load such as Nitrogen and Phosphorus and low water flows.

Blue green algae blooms can cause problems with unsightly appearance and sometimes a pungent smell to the water.

They can make affected waters unappealing for recreational activities such as boating, swimming or fishing.

During recreational use, contact with blue green algae can cause numerous health problems such as skin/eye/ear irritation and respiratory infections.

Lake Trevallyn is also used as a drinking water supply. The water treatment plants which treat the Lake Trevallyn water are able to remove the algal cells thereby ensuring the drinking water is safe.

While some populations of the blue green algae *Anabaena circinalis* can be toxic, the Lake Trevallyn algal blooms have so far been found non toxic.

For more information contact:

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# News in brief...

## Beneath the Waves

The Beneath the Waves exhibition is a spectacular showcase of the colourful and diverse marine organisms and communities in the Tamar Estuary.

NRM North is a major sponsor of the exhibition which was launched at the University of Tasmania, Newnham Campus, in July.

The photos were taken by David Maynard from the National Centre for Marine Conservation and Resource Sustainability at the Australian Maritime College.

The exhibition aims to raise awareness of the unique underwater life in the estuary and give the community a greater understanding of the need for sound coastal zone management.

The exhibition will reopen in the new year.



## NRM Community Grants

Fourteen community groups and not-for-profit organisations in northern Tasmania have received grants from NRM North to assist in landcare and NRM activities.

The Landcare and Community Grants program provides small grant funding ranging from one hundred dollars to a maximum of five thousand dollars.

NRM North has invested just over 50 thousand dollars in total.

A second round of community grants will soon become available.

For more information contact NRM North on p: 03 6333 7777.

The complete list of successful applicants for the Landcare and Community Grants:

- Tasmania Central North Local Community Partnership - \$5000
- Deloraine Apex Club - \$4000
- Friends of Four Mile Creek - \$594
- Understorey Network, North East Branch - \$1506.21
- East Tamar Landcare Group - \$5000
- Greens Beach Landcare Inc. - \$4012
- Deloraine High Landcare Group - \$902
- Tomahawk Community Association Inc. - \$5000
- North East Bio-Regional Network - \$5000
- Brooks High School - \$5000
- Wildcare Inc. Friends of Deal Island - \$5000
- Lower Meander Landcare Group - \$5000
- West Tamar Landcare Inc. - \$2717
- Scotch Oakburn College Environmental Association - \$4950

## NRM North AGM

NRM North's Annual General Meeting will be held on Tuesday, 22nd September at the Tailrace Centre at Riverside starting at 5.30pm.

NRM North is holding a forum after the meeting as an opportunity for the community to be engaged in some of the challenges and opportunities facing the region.

The theme of the forum is 'Why the Environment is Good For Business'.

With both the environment and the impact of the global financial crisis in the headlines, this is an opportunity to hear a range of speakers discuss how these two issues interact.

The keynote presentation will be made by Dr Tony McCall from the University of Tasmania.

This will be followed by a panel discussion.

The forum starts at 6.15pm.



Successful grant applicants - Wildcare Inc. Friends of Deal Island

## Out & About

### Break O'Day Sub-Region



## The Flourish Program



Students from Fingal, St Marys and St Helens have been involved in a project to help the region recover from the devastating 2006 bushfires.

The Flourish Program was funded by the Bushfire Recovery Program with support from the Break O'Day

Council, NRM North and the Understorey Network.

As part of the project, students collected and propagated local seed.

The seedlings are now being planted in the region.

## National Tree Planting Day

Cosy Corner North, part of the Bay of Fires camping area, was a hive of activity in late July as part of Planet Ark's National Tree Planting Day.

With support from NRM North and the Parks and Wildlife Service, students from the

St Helens District High School and Break O'Day residents planted around 400 native plants.

Most of the plants had been grown by local Understorey Network members.



## Out & About

### Meander Sub-Region



## Karst Remediation Project

Tonnes of rubbish has been removed from sinkholes on both public and private land around Mole Creek to better protect the significant karst values of the area.

The week-long project was a joint initiative between NRM North, the Parks and Wildlife Service and the Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment.

An excavator and tip truck were used in the clean-up which saw

the removal of an assortment of domestic rubbish including fridges, household garbage, car bodies and asbestos.

Sinkholes are a natural depression in the surface topography and play an integral part in the sustainability of karst systems.

Rubbish dumped into sinkholes provide a risk of feeding pollutants into underground streams that feed caves and can significantly impact karst values.





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.*