

Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo Recovery team Meeting
South-east Catchment Water Management Board
Conference Room
11th/12th November 2004

Present: David Baker-Gabb, Paul Koch, Jim McGuire, Mark Bachmann, Evan Roberts, Victoria Mack, Tim Burnard, Tania Rajic, Richard Hill, Bryan Haywood (Thurs am), Andy Govanstone, Dave Ryan, Peter Copley, John Barrie (Rural Solutions)

Apologies: Dean Robertson, Martine Maron, Dan Harley, Sue Mudford, Mike Weston, Julie Kirkwood

Minutes of previous meeting accepted.

1. Business arising

1.1 Fire management

RH advised that over the last 12 months increased funding has been directed to fuel reduction burns in Victoria. DSE Portland has undertaken more fuel reduction burning in the last 12 months than they had since the mid to late 1970's. The 2003/2004 prescribed burning program achieved a total area of 5803ha, **zone 1-** High value asset protection, eg townships and rural settlements 121ha, **Zone 2-** Strategic corridors aimed at breaking up major public land blocks, and provide a barrier to the major spread of wildfire, 1689ha, **Zone 3-** Broad area fuel reduced mosaic with burning aimed to support strategic corridors in fuel reduction, consistent with broad ecological outcomes, 3993ha.

Action: Bryan Haywood to check status of similar work in S.A.

Jim McGuire indicated that 2004 was not a good year for trial minimum scorch burns due to weather conditions. The cost of such burns is an issue as burns start later in the day. Staff are on duty outside normal hours and incur overtime expenses. Peter Copley suggested that any in-kind contributions to recovery actions need to be noted in the recovery plan. An Ecological Burns report submitted to Wimmera CMA was tabled. Melbourne University (Longerenong campus) is undertaking monitoring and the Department of Sustainability and Environment, Creswick group is also interested. The next planned burns will be held in autumn.

Action: RH to invite Meredith Henderson (DEH Adelaide) and Kay Richardson (DEH Mt Gambier) to inspect cool burns and monitoring.

John Barrie highlighted the issue of weed invasion in remnant blocks of native vegetation in SA and the increased fuel loads and fire risk which result.

1.2 Commonwealth Games/ Bush Heritage

DBG, JK, RH and TR met with the Commonwealth Games Marketing Group in July. There we lobbied for a "Bush Tender" project, others which have been reasonably

successful in NE Victoria. The cost however, appears prohibitive. It is estimated that approximately \$1.5 – 2 million within the Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo range in Victoria would protect approximately 10% of the remnant vegetation on private land. Funds seem to be unavailable, at least at state level.

Australian Bush Heritage Fund is interested in buying RtBC land and could be a major donor in a Commonwealth Games type initiative. DBG, RH and TR have looked at several blocks in the Casterton area, targeting blocks adjoining public land. Negotiations for purchase of one block have commenced.

Vicki Mack proposed a broad-scale mass planting of buloke through a community-based project linked to the Commonwealth Games. Andy Govanstone indicated that this falls within the scope of a community project supported by Craig Whiteford (DSE Ballarat). DSE is putting up a proposal for a community based broad-scale project. A seminar with DSE chief scientists and the Kowree Tree Group (sponsor) will be held in February 2005. Jim McGuire highlighted the need to develop broadscale buloke germination methods. Planting with other species such as black wattle and the groundwater dependency of paddock trees and the effect of pivot irrigation were discussed.

AG: Government has written to CMA's regarding revegetation opportunities arising out of the Commonwealth Games.

Tim Burnard suggested that an opportunity for television advertising exists with the RtBC selection as official mascot for the Commonwealth Games.

Action: TR

1.3. Recovery Plan

DEH (Commonwealth) agreed to fund a re-write of the recovery plan. Birds Australia has contracted DBG to finalize the plan. DEH have requested that the plan be produced in their new format which includes two stand-alone documents; a background document with technical information, and the recovery plan. The recovery plan is to be finalized by February.

1.4. Farm Planning Project (Vicki Mack)

One field day has been held in the West Wimmera. 27 people attended including a good representation of landholders, not the usual converts. Andrew Brady (landholder) and Nathan MacDonald (DPI Edenhope) were very helpful and put a lot of effort into organization and promotion.

The Shire and landholders were in favour of native vegetation credits to be used as future offsets. Vick envisaged that eventually a working farm plan could have positive outcomes for landholders in relation to schemes such as bush tender and biodiversity trade-offs.

Two more workshops will be run – it is important that quality material is provided to farm planners. Vicki Mack requested photographs relating to RtBC and habitat. Pete

Copley suggested that Peter Canty and Peter Robinson (DEHSA) are good contacts as they maintain a slide reference collection and database.

Action: RH to forward CD's with RtBC images to TR, VM

Vick suggested that a working group be established to assist in assembling a resource kit highlighting incentives and grant information.

Action: TR, JK, ER to assist VM.

2. Extension Officer Report

TR tabled her report.

As this was her first meeting after just over 3 months in the position Tania provided a brief summary of her training and work experience. Her training is in Zoology with a Graduate Diploma in Horticulture. She has 7 years experience as a Park Planner with Parks Victoria in Mildura and a community education role with NPWS in Bourke for four months prior to moving to Mt Gambier.

Next annual count is set for 1 May 2005

Signs promoting legislative changes to the native Veg Act have been refused by Transport SA. Currently seeking letters of support from the 4 councils involved. Transport SA have indicated that they may approve the signs if they are installed in the vicinity of dead, hollow trees and if wording is minimised.

An article was written for the Summer edition of *From the Ground Up* to promote legislative changes relating to protection of dead, hollow trees in South Australia. More information about legislative changes needs to get out to landholders

Action TR to prepare media releases across the SA range.

Red-tail News drafted and ready for printing.

Funding has been confirmed through GHCMA and SENRCC. Still waiting on advice from Wimmera CMA.

Pete Copley advised that funding for DBG's position may not be guaranteed through DEH next year. Should include this in bids to CMA's.

Update of website is a priority – will discuss funding opportunities with Wynns Coonawarra and Kimberley Clark.

Action: TR to seek further quotes for website upgrade

Budget summary provided in report.

TB: Recovery Team membership – may be useful to get marketing, “attitude-change” specialists on the team.

Action: Justin Cook to approach DSE regarding Andrew Straker's availability to attend one or more recovery team meetings.

JMcG requested increased representation from council representatives.

Action: DBG to invite Colin Mibus (West Wimmera Shire) to the next meeting

Captive Red-tail Black-Cockatoo display proposed in Kaniva. Concerns were raised about the quality of interpretive material and the message it sends to the community.

Action: TR write to DSE saying that it is not a recovery team priority but recommending that the text be written by DSE with recovery team input should the proposal be approved.

3. Field Biologist Report

Richard tabled his report.

3.1 Native Vegetation Clearance

He has been dealing with two clearing issues in Victoria.

1. 33 buloke and 35 gums in the Neuappur area (T Dam Road)
2. The Adams centre pivot application; BA wrote a letter to the Federal Minister expressing its concern about the high density re-planting in offsets (300 seedlings/1.5-2ha). 30 trees/ha is the mature density target.

The permit for the Adams application required a management plan however Birds Australia were not granted permission to view the management plan.

3.2 Fire Management

Richard has been working closely with the new district forest officer in Casterton who is keen to achieve reduced-scorch zone 3 burns in stringybark. Richard has written to the Native Vegetation Council (SA) informing them of DSE trials of minimum-scorch burns in stringybark to reduce the impact of fire on stringybark seed crops.

JMcG suggested that guidelines for burning stringybark woodland be provided to landholders.

Action: RH to write to CFA offering prescriptions for burning on private land.

3.3 Biodiversity Hotspots Funding

SE South Australia and SW Victoria has been nominated as one of fifteen Biodiversity Hotspots across Australia. Funding will be available for these areas for:

1. Land stewardship (could incorporate guidelines for burning into the stewardship aspect)
2. Land acquisition

A generic bid incorporating the Wimmera and Glenelg Hopkins CMA's and SENRCC (South Australia) is proposed rather than a specific Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo bid.

Applications are to be submitted by April/May next year. Bids will be called for by the end of December. Don Arnold (GHCMA) will be contacting Fred Stadter to discuss regional opportunities. TR to discuss with Fred Stadter.

[Since the meeting TR has been advised that a team of 4 scientific advisors have met to set a national priority list for funding of Biodiversity Hotspots. Advice on this list will not be available until early in 2005.]

3.4 Nest searches

Nesting appears to have commenced later this year. Of 7 active nests located, 3 are new nest sites.

DBG suggested collaring all potential nest trees in a nesting area. This would ensure that trees with active nests could not be readily identified.

JMcG suggested that if information on location of nest trees was available, summer fire crews could undertake collaring work with the permission of landholders.

Action: RH to provide Jim McGuire with AMG references for known nest sites.

The need to find new nesting regions, not just new nests was identified as an action for inclusion in the recovery plan.

Action for new Recovery Plan: Explore nests in *E. baxteri* areas (southernmost and northernmost areas (Lower Glenelg NP, Little Desert NP, between Casterton and Edenhope)

3.5 Flock Counts

Richard's report summarises data on % males in flocks greater than 10 RtBC, over a 6 year period. DBG noted that the data is significant as it shows decreasing recruitment in flocks. Figures for 2004 indicate 44% adult males calculated from a total of 327 birds. Comparative data (although only a small) on other black-cockatoo species 37-38% adult males was similar to other subspecies of Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo.

PC queried the predictive ability of the test and suggested having statistical analysis undertaken. **Action:** RH to talk to Joanne Potts (ARI) about possibility of getting some analysis done.

Correlations with Paul Koch's work and population trends should also be investigated.

4.0 Justin Cook DSE Fire Management Officer

Ecological Burning Plan: Little Desert National Park

Department of Sustainability and Environment and Parks Victoria are preparing Ecological Fire Management Plans — the Little Desert National Park Plan has been completed. 71,270 ha of the total 133,000ha park area comprises stringybark, predominantly *E. baxteri*. Only 204ha is *E. arenacea*.

LMU = Land management unit, ie Little desert NP + Wail SF.

Vegetation Type	Area in LMU ha	% of LMU	area burnt in last 9 years ha	area burnt in last 9 years as a percentage of the total area
Heathland	24812	18.6	4216	17%
Mallee Broombush	30062	22.5	6594	22%
Stringybark	71271	53.4	20799	29%

The Wimmera Fire Protection Plan is out for comment. It contains a specific commitment to % unburnt stringybark for Red-tails. This raised the need to identify woodland and mallee type brown stringybark, as the latter has wider tree spacings and is

less suitable for RtBC habitat. RH reported that there are few records of sightings from the Little Desert area although there are known nest sites. The low level of reporting may reflect lack of observers, or may be real. We are unsure.

Action: TR/RH to encourage sightings from northern end of range, particularly LDNP.

5.0 Other Business

5.1 Discussion of NVR in Victoria.

JMcG discussed buloke clearing for centre pivot development. One issue is whether circles that have now been rested for up to 5 years can now be returned to, or whether there will be a new spate of applications to clear buloke, now that many circles are getting up towards 5 years and will need to be moved again. DPI feel that many circles will be not be suitable to return to due to soil permeability and salinity issues. VM's suggested massive buloke revegetation programme for West Wimmera to raise the profile and community interest in buloke would provide a disincentive for further clearing when so much is being invested in replanting.

P. Copley – a policy is required to address the issue of salinity/clearing of RtBC habitat rather than approach on a case by case basis. RH advised that a current test case to go before VCAT, which is being pursued by the VNPA and Environment Victoria, will link Red Tails and soil sustainability issues.

P. Copley suggested that a map showing areas susceptible to soil salinisation be produced. DPI and West Wimmera Shire are researching the issue. DPI have contracted a soils expert. JM suggested that DSE need a policy on this issue. (as does DEH(SA))

One possible mechanism to follow up in Victoria is the need for Shires to have qualified environmental and planning specialists. These positions should be funded through state government and would make implementation of policy more successful. The South Australian INRM group fund 2 project officer positions in local councils.

AG suggested that individual trees in RtBC range must be recognized as important and protected as dead, hollow trees are currently protected. EVC's are protected but only if they are assessed as intact. Martine Maron's work supports this.

RH advised that the EPBC Unit is being advised by the recovery team that clearing of paddock trees can have a significant impact and that offsets to mitigate the impacts of clearing take so long to establish, and are so problematic in their establishment and protection, that they are not genuinely mitigating the impact of the vegetation removal. No DEH Canberra decisions on clearance of buloke habitat critical for survival have, to date, heeded this advice.

The head of the EPBC Unit (See item 5.5) has identified loss of buloke as not posing a threat to RtBC. Possums/predators were identified as a threat at a recent presentation at the West Wimmera Shire, which related to future Investment Strategy Funding for the Wimmera CMA.

An apparent lack of consistency exists between DSE and local government attitude to incremental loss of buloke was noted.

JM indicated that pivot irrigation is only the start. Cropping is also an issue – hot fires through cropping country are undertaken with the aim of clearing remnant, scattered trees. RH indicated that Martine’s work shows centre pivots are the main cause of incremental loss. Scattered tree loss needs to be documented and regular reporting of vegetation loss and gains undertaken. AG noted that incremental loss of bulokes through installation of centre pivots is unsustainable and is contrary to the Biodiversity Strategy

Action: RH draft a letter to the Ministers for Planning and Environment using the above points from the chair of the recovery team.

Action: Bryan Haywood to work towards reporting on loss by permit and illegal clearing of RtBC habitat in SA.

Action: BH to collect figures on loss of scattered trees as a result of burning as a percentage of total incremental loss (in SA).

5.2 DSE Stringybark Purchase

Andy Govanstone advised that DSE is currently purchasing a 320 acre block of native vegetation, a substantial part of which is Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo feeding habitat at Mumbannar. The vegetation also includes an endangered plant community.

5.3 West Wimmera Conservation Management Network

Trust for Nature with the support of Wimmera CMA and NHT has established a CMN in the West Wimmera.

Strong emphasis is placed on conservation covenants, which some suggested may limit uptake. Excellent incentives are offered including materials and labour costs up to \$7/metre.

5.4 Biodiversity Offsets Scheme (SA)

John Barrie (PIRSA) is administering the biodiversity Offsets Scheme. The scheme is targeting the Bangham district, north of Bordertown. Linkage potential with Little Desert National Park will be targeted. Assistance will also be provided with rabbit/weed control and may extend to assistance with Whole Farm Planning. There is opportunity for collaborative input as John will be approaching farmers whose remnant areas are classed as significant.

5.5 EPBC Report

Richard tabled Steve Mercer’s (EPBC Act Referrals Section) report on *Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo- Issues for Consideration*.

Significant errors are included in the report including:

- a claim that the population is stable
- no acknowledgement that the birds are limited by food availability

- incorrect representation of the rate of buloke decline.
- Time for buloke revegetation to be suitable for Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos is seriously understated.
- no mention of salinity issues in relation to the requirement for new pivot sites

This report was the basis of a presentation Mr. Mercer gave at a recent meeting at the West Wimmera Shire Officers. It can only be described as misinformation and requires a response from the Birds Australia CEO.

Action: RH to prepare letter to be signed by Jim Downey detailing the following:

- **misinformation presented in Steve Mercer's report.**
- **misleading to promote this information across the region**
- **express concern that no effort was made to consult with the recovery team.**

Letter to be forwarded to Native Vegetation Council (SA), Wimmera and Glenelg CMA's, SENRCC and Wimmera Biodiversity Committee.

5.6 Loss of dead, hollow trees

Jim McGuire has noticed that many dead trees are being pushed over. He feels that this has increased with the introduction of the new guidelines protecting dead, hollow trees.

Meeting closed 5:45pm