

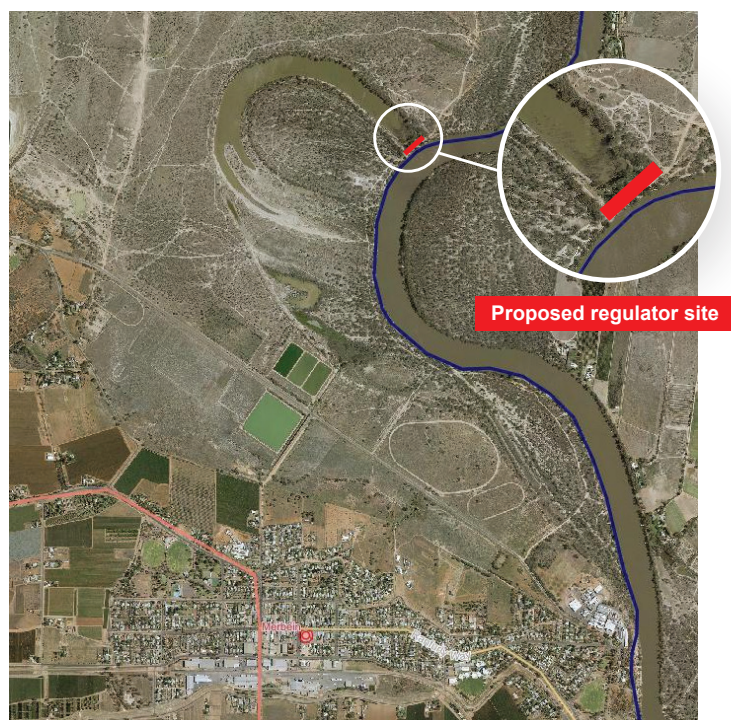
# Fact sheet

## Catfish Billabong Project



### What is Catfish Billabong?

Catfish Billabong is a 65-hectare wetland situated within the Merbein Common Flagship Waterway Site, and is identified by the Mallee Waterway Management Strategy (MWMS) as a priority for management because of the high environmental, social and cultural heritage values it supports.



### Flagship site: Merbein Common

The Catfish Billabong Project will support these values, particularly the 29 fauna and 12 flora species the wetland supports, which are listed under international agreements (i.e. CAMBA, JAMBA, ROKAMBA and the Bonn Convention); the Commonwealth EPBC Act, Victoria's FFG Act and the Advisory List of Threatened Fauna in Victoria. Species include large waders; Glossy Ibis, Royal Spoonbill, Little Egret, Intermediate Egret, Eastern Great Egret and Pied Cormorant.



### What is the project?

An environmental structure is proposed for the site to enable water to be captured and held in the Billabong for longer periods. When river flow peaks are available in winter and spring, it will be possible to retain water in the Billabong and provide reliable seasonal flooding. The structure also enables the billabong to replicate a more natural state, through wetting and drying cycles, giving local flora and fauna opportunities to benefit. Fish will also be able to enter the system when the gates are open, and fish eggs and larvae will be able to leave the wetland system during the drawdown (draining) phase.





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### Why is the project important?

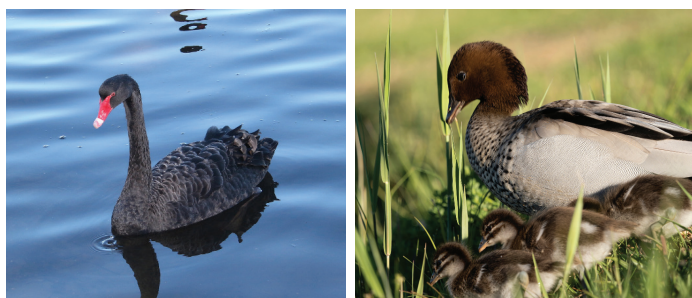
Catfish Billabong supports River Red Gum and Lignum communities, as well as many native fauna species. An existing inlet channel intermittently connects Catfish Billabong to the Murray River. Due to river regulation and weir pool levels River Red Gum sapling growth has occurred in the inlet channel, raising the level of the channel.



The environmental structure installed in the inlet channel will manage flow between the Billabong and the Murray River, ensuring native species can receive a more natural cycle of wetting and drying phases.

The Billabong's ability to support this vegetation is threatened by an inappropriate water regime, due to Murray River regulation reducing the natural flooding regime of the wetland. As a result, wetland function and ecological condition is poor.

The Billabong provides an important refuge for bird and fish species and supports important cultural values, creating opportunities for Traditional Owners to share their cultural knowledge with the Aboriginal community.



The Black Swan and Wood Duck are just two species that can be found at Catfish Lagoon.

### When will the project occur?

The consultation with the community will occur during 2021 and continue into 2022. The construction of the environmental structure is expected to commence in mid 2022, with preliminary site works commencing in early 2022. During the construction phase some track access surrounding the site will be restricted. However, it is expected as part of the complimentary works, some tracks will be upgraded and additional car parking areas created.

For more information about track access visit the Parks Victoria website [www.parks victoria.gov.au](http://www.parks victoria.gov.au).

### How is Mallee CMA working with the community on this project?

The initial project concept was developed in 2016, and as part of this process extensive community engagement occurred to inform the design and management of the site.

A Stakeholder Advisory Group has been established to provide advice and collaborate on the project, through input into the ecological operations plan. Engagement with the local community and recreational users will also be a focus in informing the future management of the site. This will contribute to achievement of the long-term outcome; to increase community understanding of, and participation in the management of priority waterways.

### Traditional Owner continued involvement.

Traditional Owners have been involved in providing information on the important cultural values of the site and builds on eight years of activities delivered in partnership with Traditional Owners at the Flagship site, Merbein Common.

Over this period Traditional Owners have been involved in identifying priority waterway health actions for the Flagship site through on-Country field work and site visits, meetings, discussions and development of two approved Cultural Heritage Management Plans (CHMP's), including participation in many field assessments and providing input into recommendations on the management of Cultural Heritage. This has successfully delivered large scale riparian restoration, recorded and protected cultural heritage, enhanced recreational opportunities and delivered environmental water at the Merbein Flagship site.

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### What benefits we can expect once the project is delivered?

Once the environmental structure is installed, the billabong will cycle between phases of inundation and drying to provide the best possible outcomes for the environment. Additional benefits will include the ability for Traditional Owners to inform ecological watering cycles to support cultural knowledge and values for the site.

The site also offers the wider community opportunities to utilise the site through recreational activities including fishing, canoeing, camping, bird watching and hiking. Additional works are also expected to be completed at the site to compliment the project through additional track works, carpark areas, visitor signage and seating as part of the Flagship Site, Merbein Common project.

### How was the alignment of the structure decided?

The environmental structure alignment was established to minimise impacts on native vegetation at the site and maximise the inundation extent of water within the billabong. The design of the alignment has been developed to reduce impacts on existing native vegetation within the billabong while still meeting structural requirements and without impacting the integrity of the structure.

### Will access to the site be restricted to the public during construction?

As part of the pre-construction phase, the wetland will enter a drying phase. This will ensure all invasive species of fish can be removed prior to refilling after construction is completed. It is expected that the drying phase will commence early in 2022.

### Who will be operating and maintaining the environmental structure post construction?

An Asset Management Plan will be developed to document the responsibilities, systems and requirements of managing the Catfish Billabong Regulator asset. Project Partner and land manager, Parks Victoria have been part of planning for the project development and will take on responsibilities for maintaining the structure, while Mallee CMA will operate the structure to deliver water to the billabong.

### How can the community contribute to the future use and management for the site (ie ecological plan)?

Mallee CMA is committed to engaging with the community about land and water management to ensure future planning meets community expectations and aspirations. Further information about the project can be found on our website or by contacting our office. We welcome community feedback and contributions on the project and the land and water management for the site.

**A survey can be found on the Mallee CMA website to provide feedback about future aspirations for the site and to gather information about what the community values about the site.**



## Catfish Billabong - area of inundation once regulator is installed

