

Merbein Common

Thank you to everyone who has helped deliver improvements and upgrades to Merbein Common over the past four years. During this time, we faced some major challenges, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the Murray River floods of 2022-23, both of which significantly impacted access to Merbein Common. But – by working

together – we have managed to deliver some fabulous outcomes.

Special thanks to local groups and organisations including the First People of the Millewa-Mallee Aboriginal Corporation (FPMMAC), the Friends of Merbein Common, Yelta Landcare, and Parks Victoria.



From 2021-2024, two key projects were delivered:

There’s nothing common about Merbein Common The Catfish Billabong Regulator

1. “There’s nothing common about Merbein Common”

- 2.2 km of road capping to deliver all-weather access
- 14 km of track rationalization to protect native vegetation and areas of cultural significance
- 0.5 ha of seed bombing and mulching
- 5 new signs
- 600 m of bollards
- 6 km of fencing
- 45 assessments (e.g. invasive species, fauna), which help target control measures
- 36 events including a “practical experience day” for Year 12 students from Mildura Senior College; water bug workshops with Traditional Owners; post-flood vegetation surveys with Friends of Merbein Common; an outdoor painting workshop, and an environmental education morning with participants from Lively Mildura.



The Catfish Billabong Regulator.

2. The Catfish Billabong Regulator

Constructed at Catfish Billabong, the regulator is now complete and the wetland is currently in a drying phase (see more on that in the following section).

Prior to the construction of the regulator, an existing inlet channel had intermittently connected the billabong to the Murray River. However, river regulation and weir pool levels led to trees growing in the channel and raising its height, meaning Catfish Billabong connected less often to the river. The wetland was struggling with carp infestation, poor water quality, salinisation, limited riparian vegetation, damage to cultural values and reduced social and recreational value.

With the regulator now in place, connection to the river will be managed so the billabong can once again cycle between wetting and drying phases, allowing the area to thrive. Traditional Owners and the local community will also be able to inform ecological watering cycles to support cultural values and social outcomes.

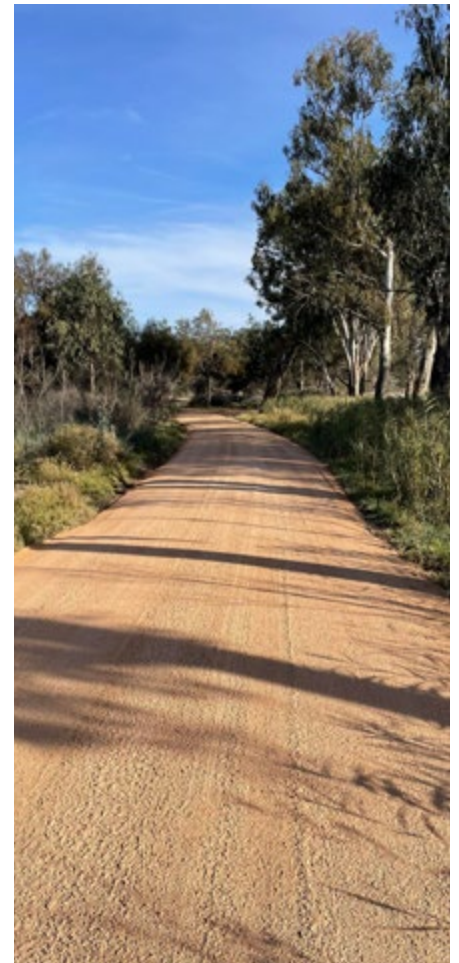
Both projects were delivered through funding from the Victorian Government.

What's next?

There's more work to do!

Mallee CMA is currently working on bids for the next four years of Victorian Government funding, which is directly informed by the priorities of Traditional Owners, community members and Parks Victoria. What we have heard from our conversations is that priorities include localised upgrades to the Red Gum Track, upgrading interpretive signage on the walking track inside Catfish Billabong to promote the values of the site, and more track rationalisation works (such as fencing, bollards, signage, and mulching) to limit vehicle disturbance and improve riparian condition.

We have also heard community members would like to hold more activities so they can get involved in monitoring native fish populations, birds, bats and frogs, so we've included that in our submissions to the Victorian Government as well.



Road upgrades at Merbein Common, delivered under the "There's nothing common about Merbein Common" project.



What's happening at the Billabongs?

Brickworks Billabong

Brickworks Billabong (pictured above) is currently going through a drying phase to eradicate carp and target weeds, ahead of the wetland refilling in late spring 2024.

Mallee CMA is working with the First People of the Millewa-Mallee Aboriginal Corporation to rehabilitate the billabong, which involves removing pest plants and revegetating the site in preparation

for the return of water. Once restored, the billabong will become home to endangered Murray Hardyhead (*Craterocephalus fluviatilis*) native fish.

These small bodied native fish have previously been found at Brickworks Billabong, but when the billabong reconnected to the Murray River during the 2022-23 floods, it's possible the small native fish moved into the river system and/or fell prey to predators such as carp and birds.

Water will be returned to Brickworks Billabong from the adjacent Cowanna Billabong in late spring 2024.

Damage occurred to the culvert connecting Brickworks Billabong to Cowanna Billabong during the 2022-23 Murray River flood. While the wetland levels are low, inspections have been completed to inform the design for a replacement structure. The structure enables the habitat in Brickworks Billabong to be managed independently to that of Cowanna Billabong, which is critical to the success of the Murray Hardyhead who thrive in more brackish water where their predators are fewer.



Cowanna Billabong

Cowanna Billabong (pictured left) will have its water level topped up in late spring 2024, as part of efforts to ensure the wetland is as healthy as possible.

The regulator managing the billabong's connection to the Murray River will be closed during winter and early spring to allow for a natural lowering of the wetland's water level. The regulator will be opened in spring to allow the wetland to refill and maintain a water level similar to the weir pool. Water in Cowanna Billabong will also be used to refill the adjacent Brickworks Billabong.

Main image (top): Brickworks Billabong, which is going through a drying phase. Left: Cowanna Billabong.

What's not common about Merbein Common?

Merbein Common is home to more than 196 fauna and 88 flora species, many of which are protected by international agreements and legislation.



Above: Catfish Billabong.

Catfish Billabong

Catfish Billabong is a freshwater wetland that needs seasonal variations in water levels to be healthy. This means the billabong needs raised water levels every second year in late winter/early spring to

give the fringing vegetation a drink, then the water levels gently recede through summer/autumn.

The billabong last received water in 2023 when the new wall (which is part of the regulator structure) was commissioned.

Since then, the billabong has been slowly drawing down to its current level, which is equal to the Murray River height.

Water for the environment is planned to be delivered to Catfish Billabong in spring 2025.

How can I find out more?

For more information on partnering with Traditional Owners and community members to enhance Merbein Common, contact:

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