

# On-Country Connections

## Welcome to the first edition of On-Country Connections for 2026.

On-Country Connections is a Mallee CMA newsletter designed to keep Traditional Owners in the know with work underway across the region. Here, you will hear from the Mallee CMA Aboriginal Engagement Team on topics including recent and upcoming environmental water deliveries, engagement and events. We'd love to hear your feedback, thoughts, ideas and suggestions, so please reach out at any time. We are here to listen.

The team at Mallee CMA would like to thank you for your work and partnership throughout 2025, and look forward to working together in 2026 and beyond.



*Catfish Billabong is thriving post Spring water delivery*

## Watering Mallee wetlands

Water for the environment plays a vital role in protecting the ecosystems, flora and fauna unique to the Murray wetlands. Delivering water for the environment also generates many cultural and social values that are important to Traditional

Owners and local communities. The ecological outcomes at environmental watering sites that received water deliveries during Spring 2025 have been outstanding!

## Highlights include:

### J1 Creek (Belsar)

- Boom in growth of aquatic vegetation (including sedge, lignum, old man weed and common nardoo)
- Eastern sign bearing froglet, spotted marsh frogs

### Finnigans Creek

- Lots of sacred kingfishers
- Increase in connectivity of aquatic habitat across Wallpolla Island

### Sandy Creek and Lilyponds

- Regeneration (new growth) of fringing river red gum and black box trees
- Increase in connectivity of aquatic habitat across Wallpolla Island

### Stockyards (Lindsay Island)

- Black-tailed native hens
- White necked herons
- Regeneration of lignum

### Mulcra Horseshoe (Mulcra Island)

- Frog calls including spotted marsh frog, perons tree frogs, eastern sign bearing froglet, eastern banjo frog

### Wallpolla Horseshoe (Wallpolla Island)

- Increase in connectivity of aquatic habitat across Wallpolla Island
- Frog calls including spotted marsh frog, perons tree frogs, eastern sign bearing froglet, eastern banjo frog

### Koorlong Lake

- Blue-billed ducks



*Sedge at J1 Creek is blooming*



*J1 Creek post watering*



*Blue-billed duck at Koorlong Lake*



*Black-tailed native hens making themselves at home at Stockyards Wetland*



*The Hattah Lakes system is currently undergoing a natural drawdown.*

### **Where's the water gone at Hattah?**

If you visit Hattah Lakes at the moment, you will notice water levels are being reduced to help keep this precious ecosystem healthy.

Over the past five years, the Hattah Lakes system has received water from naturally high river flows and pumped environmental water. The lakes are now entering an important natural drying (also called "drawdown") phase where some lakes will completely dry out. Wetting and drying phases are a natural and vital requirement to maintain the health of the Hattah Lakes ecosystem. Monitoring will be undertaken during the drying phase to manage unnecessary impacts on native fish.

### **Drying the lakes helps to:**

- Reduce carp numbers;
- Establish mudflat plant species, which consolidate the lakebed to improve future water quality and wetland productivity;
- Create a mosaic of waterbird and frog habitat; and
- Stimulate the release of carbon and nutrients to increase productivity of the floodplain food webs.

### **Ecological Condition Monitoring training at Hattah Lakes**

Traditional Owners recently partnered with Ecology Australia and members of our team to learn more about ecological monitoring at Hattah Lakes.

This included fish monitoring using fyke nets (a passive fishing technique designed to direct fish into the net with wings or leaders) and vegetation monitoring using quadrats (an area that has a marked square boundary).

It was a wonderful opportunity to share knowledge, learn new skills and get up close and personal with an iconic local landscape!



*Traditional Owners partnered with Ecology Australia and members of our team to learn more about ecological monitoring at Hattah Lakes.*

## Native Garden Project at Hattah-Kulkyne National Park now complete

A beautiful native garden at the Hattah-Kulkyne National Park visitor centre is now complete. Based on feedback from Traditional Owners as part of The Living Murray project, Mallee CMA has worked together with Traditional Owners and Parks Victoria to establish the

garden, which features an array of native and Bush Tucker plants and herbs, as well as tables and chairs for the public to enjoy the space. An irrigation system has also been installed to ensure the new plants are well cared for and able to thrive.



*Native plants, seating, tables and irrigation are just some of the highlights of the new native garden at Hattah-Kulkyne National Park*

## Collaborating to share knowledge

Mallee CMA, First Peoples of the Millewa-Mallee Aboriginal Corporation and the Victorian Environmental Water Holder Commission recently came together to strengthen relationships and share knowledge. The visit included discussions on strategic water issues, site tours to see environmental watering in action,

and learning about cultural and community perspectives on environmental water management. These partnerships are essential to achieving positive outcomes for the environment and the communities who care for it.





Woody fish habitat was recently installed at Narcooyia Creek.

### Narcooyia Creek Fish Habitat installation

Mallee CMA, in collaboration with OzFish and Traditional Owners, recently installed woody habitat in Narcooyia Creek (east of Robinvale). Munatunga Elders and the Pearce and Gilbie families



participated in the event and learnt about the value of fish habitat and the work OzFish are doing to reintroduce habitat within our local creek systems.



Fencing at Lake Wallawalla is now in place to help protect culturally sensitive sites.

### Aspirations Project Lake Wallawalla

Working closely with FPMMAC and Parks Victoria, over 5km of fencing was installed and around 3km replaced at Lake Wallawalla to protect culturally sensitive sites. Traditional Owners supervised the



works and received informal training in fence installation, supporting ongoing land management across the area. This was a significant achievement.

## Talk Water events and Regional Waterway Strategy consultation

Talk Water events have commenced to support and inform the 2026 seasonal water proposal. Traditional Owner groups have been consulted with to understand watering priorities and cultural values for waterways in and around Lindsay-Mulcra-Wallpolla, Mildura, Hattah and Robinvale-Wemen waterways.

In addition to the Talk Water events, initial consultation with Traditional Owner groups regarding long-term waterway management and focus areas has commenced. To date, all Traditional Owner groups have expressed desire to be involved. Please contact the Mallee CMA Aboriginal Engagement Team on 03 5001 8600 if you'd like to get involved.

### Aboriginal Engagement Team



**Steven Bowden**

Coordinator Aboriginal Partnerships and Engagement



**Katrina Garland**

Aboriginal Partnerships and Water Officer

To speak to the Mallee CMA Aboriginal Engagement Team, please call 5001 8600

We would like to wish Ken Knight and Claire O'Connor all the very best in their new roles at First Peoples of the Millewa-Mallee Aboriginal Corporation, and best of luck to Kobe Brown with his relocation and new career working with Indigenous youth.



*Outlet Creek vegetation growth during drawdown*

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners, Aboriginal communities and organisations of the Victorian Mallee. We recognize the diversity of their cultures and the deep connections they have with their lands and waters. We value partnerships with them for the health of People and Country.

We also pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging; and recognize the primacy of Traditional Owners' obligations, rights and responsibilities to use and care for their traditional lands and water.

