



Waterwatch & EstuaryWatch
Citizen science in
Victoria's waterways

North Central

Regional Report

2019-2020



Environment,
Land, Water
and Planning



NORTH CENTRAL
Catchment Management Authority



Victoria sustains a vibrant history of community-based environmental monitoring and citizen science programs, including the Waterwatch and EstuaryWatch programs. These programs are instrumental in informing waterway management decisions while strengthening community engagement and fostering environmental stewardship and advocacy. Catchment management authorities, water authorities, local government and other delivery partners play a crucial role in facilitating the programs.

Through the EstuaryWatch and Waterwatch programs, citizen scientists are supported and encouraged to become actively involved in local waterway monitoring and on-ground activities. Citizen scientists involved in the 2019-2020 programs contributed a total of **232,580** hours to care for our waterways, equivalent to 31,011 volunteer days. This contribution provides an economic value of the 2019-2020 volunteer effort of **\$9,707,889**. For more information, see the Waterwatch & EstuaryWatch Citizen science in Victoria's waterways Annual Achievements Report 2019-2020.

Aboriginal Acknowledgement:

EstuaryWatch and Waterwatch proudly acknowledge Victoria's Aboriginal community and their rich culture and pays respect to their Elders past, present and emerging. We acknowledge Aboriginal people as Australia's first peoples and as the Traditional Owners and custodians of the land and water on which we rely. We recognise and value the ongoing contribution of Aboriginal people and communities to Victorian life and how this enriches us. We embrace the spirit of reconciliation, working towards the equality of outcomes and ensuring an equal voice.

If you are interested in participating in citizen science in your region, please contact North Central CMA on (03) 5448 7124 or visit <http://www.nccma.vic.gov.au/.area>.

Regional Stats



1,243

Event Participants



4

Active Groups



77

Active Sites



56

Active Volunteers

Reconciliation at the Heart of Waterway Health

Waterwatch and River Detectives staff have relished the opportunity to work closely with Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation and Taungurung Clans Aboriginal Corporation to share knowledge and understanding of waterway health in the North Central region.

The opportunity to learn from each other and incorporate Traditional Knowledge and Aboriginal Perspectives into the Waterwatch program has been invaluable. Furthermore, developing future engagement activities and deepening our collaboration efforts is a significant step towards reconciliation.

Aunty Marilyn Nicholls is a descendant of the Dja Dja Wurrung Clans people of the central Bendigo region and has multiclans connections to the Ngarrindjeri Nation in South Australia of the Coorong Coast and the Murray River, Swan Hill area. Aunty Marilyn is helping us create culturally appropriate and safe resources for North Central Waterwatch.



Aunty Marilyn Nicholls.

She is also guiding our future project development ideas to ensure we are working towards reconciliation by acknowledging First Nations people in all the work the North Central Catchment CMA do.

Additionally, Aunty Marilyn is playing a lead role in developing an annual Kia Dhelk Gatjin (Speaking Healthy Water – Dja Dja Wurrung language) major school event. Through her involvement, North Central CMA are partnering with Djandak, Parks Victoria and the City of Greater Bendigo to plan and

deliver this exciting full-day event. Kia Dhelk Gatjin will celebrate Dja Dja Wurrung Culture and the fantastic work of our River Detectives students.

A highlight of the day will be a ‘kids teaching kids’ activity, where students will present their results and water monitoring programs to students from other schools. The afternoon will also include round-robin style activities led by Dja Dja Wurrung Traditional Owners. Postponed from April 2020 due to COVID-19 restrictions, the upcoming Kia Dhelk Gatjin event will ultimately be held at the Wanyarram Dhelk Frog Ponds, a wonderful site developed by Djandak.

The North Central CMA are proud to partner with the region’s Traditional Owners in planning this event and other work being undertaken. “Creating further opportunities for engagement and collaboration is a key priority. By working together with our Traditional Owners and First Nations people, we’re working towards reconciliation,” said Britt Gregory, acting Regional Waterwatch Coordinator, North Central CMA.



Aunty Marilyn Nicholls during a Waterwatch tour of the Avoca River. Credit: Fern Millen Photography.

Bendigo Creek Litter Trackers: An Important Message in a Bottle

The group collected 440 kilograms of plastic, glass and aluminium drink containers - enough rubbish to fill three trailers and a ute.

“Given the type of rubbish collected, it was clear most of it had washed down the creek from Bendigo’s streets,” North Central Catchment Management Authority (NCCMA) Chair Julie Miller Markoff said.

“Bendigo Creek is a waterway that supplies water to irrigators further downstream and is an important cultural and environmental asset for the region. We have an obligation to our neighbours downstream, as well as ourselves, to keep Bendigo Creek clean and ensure the water in it remains healthy.”

North Central Waterwatch and River Detectives program is partnering with the City of Greater Bendigo (CoGB) and RMIT to raise awareness about litter, how it enters the creek and where it goes. In August 2019, Ms Miller Markoff and CoGB Mayor Margaret O’Rourke joined students at Golden Square to launch five special trackers into the creek.

“Inside the bottles are GPS trackers, and the students are able to map exactly where they end up. They will be able to see what

happens to rubbish when it enters the creek,” said Cr. O’Rourke. Cr. O’Rourke said such projects were an important part of the Reimagining Bendigo Creek project.

“The City of Greater Bendigo is working closely with the Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation, the NCCMA, Coliban Water, state government departments and community representatives to create a shared vision and plan for the creek over the coming year,” she said.

“Projects such as these create awareness about the creek and remind us how important it is to the city and to those who live downstream.”

For the first few days the trackers travelled easily along the concrete stretch of the creek to just below Lake Weeroona. Here the creek changes dramatically; dense vegetation grows in the silted-up channel. Unable to move through the thick reeds, most litter finds its resting place here, as did the trackers.

The extent of litter among the dense tangle of vegetation and silt was unexpected. Three of the five trackers were lost among the layers of litter that has accumulated in the creek over decades.

“It was like looking for a needle in a haystack and reminds us about the importance of disposing litter correctly,” said Britt Gregory, NCCMA Project Officer.

“Ordinarily, throwing plastic bottles into the creek is not recommended, but these ones will tell an important story.”

**Julie Miller Markoff,
NCCMA Chair.**

“We plan to work with River Detectives students to further help them understand why litter is an important environmental issue, how it remains trapped in our waterways, the impact it has on the aquatic environment and what can be done about it. We’ll share this knowledge with the broader community too.

We live in a beautiful city and need to manage the waste we produce to ensure that our waterways remain clean and free of litter for everyone to enjoy, and to keep ourselves and local wildlife safe,” she said.

“Quite clearly, stopping litter at the source is the best option. Everyone needs to be part of the solution by being actively responsible for their own litter,” said Ms Gregory. The Litter Trackers project is a collaborative project between NCCMA, the CoGB, RMIT University and Melbourne Water. The project is funded by the CoGB and the Victorian Government.



Students send the first of five Litter Trackers down the Bendigo Creek. Credit: NCCMA