

SOME WETLANDS OF THE SHIRE OF SOUTHERN GRAMPIANS

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Introduction

I will highlight some of our important wetlands – swamps, lakes & impoundments.

I will also comment on some of the vegetation – in particular, River Red Gums waterbirds of the area – and the need for large-scale restoration of wetlands.

GHCMA Regional Wetlands Status Report 2006:

"Drainage of this region has produced an environment unrecognisable from that which first greeted the settlers....most of western and southern Victoria....was once a mosaic of seasonal and permanent wetlands. Only remnants of those remain. The process of progressively draining and thereby destroying these wetlands under the guise of 'reclamation' has been unremitting from the commencement of occupation right up to and including the present. As this activity has been carried out on private properties it is not obvious to the public, nor a matter of recorded public concern, and accordingly it has been scarcely commented upon".

- 73,000 ha - 2.8% of region of 2.6 million ha in GHCMA
- Only 3 wetlands (incl. Rocklands) are >1000 ha and only 9 between 500-1000 ha
- 96% of the wetlands are <50 ha in area
- 61% of the wetlands are privately owned
- 60% of the original wetlands have been drained for agriculture since 1788
- Freshwater meadows comprise 28% of the wetlands
- Freshwater marsh comprise 31% of wetlands
- Open freshwater 22% of wetlands
- Saline waters comprise 10% of wetlands

Scenario – a further loss of wetlands and loss of biodiversity:

- Continued drainage on private land
- Cropping and forestry reducing runoff to wetlands
- Climate change – reduced rainfall and runoff to streams and wetlands

Solution – the restoration of some very large wetlands and owned by the State

- Large wetlands provide water from odd wet years to last many dry years
- Large wetlands offer greater diversity of habitat, incl. mudflats for migratory waders
- Large wetlands give Brolga, Ibis, Magpie Geese and other waterbirds a breeding chance
- Public ownership provides better long-term security

Economics

- Large wetlands offer economic opportunities from nature-based tourism
- Restoration will be expensive

Targets

- Buckley Swamp – 2,500 ha, controlled by a single outlet drain (80% privately owned)
- Brady Swamp (240 ha, drains from Grampians NP) – part privately owned
- Mt William Swamp (1900 ha) – part privately owned
- Lake Condah (250 ha) – restoration in progress (weir construction summer 2010)

Naturalists should look critically at the wetland situation in their region and to take action with their CMAs, DSE and Shires to restore large wetlands that have been drained or mis-managed.