Supporting sustainable livelihoods

Guide to managing livestock grazing in Victoria's wetlands

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The sustainable use of wetlands for grazing is an important consideration in improving the management of wetlands on private land. A guide to managing livestock grazing in Victoria's wetlands is now available.

The guide, developed by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP), supports livestock grazing management decisions in wetlands by providing:

1. a livestock grazing decision framework
2. guidelines on best grazing practice
3. recommendations on monitoring and evaluation.

Livestock grazing in wetlands is common and widespread in Victoria. While it occurs most often on private land, it can also be licensed on public land. It usually degrades the condition of wetlands and threatens wetland values, but in certain cases grazing can be beneficial to wetland values if carefully managed.

Despite the prevalence of livestock grazing, and the variable responses of wetlands to it, guidance on identifying appropriate livestock grazing options has not been available in Victoria. The livestock grazing decision framework provided in the guide applies an understanding of the potential benefits and impacts of grazing in wetlands. This will assist wetland managers to identify grazing options that meet the following management objectives:

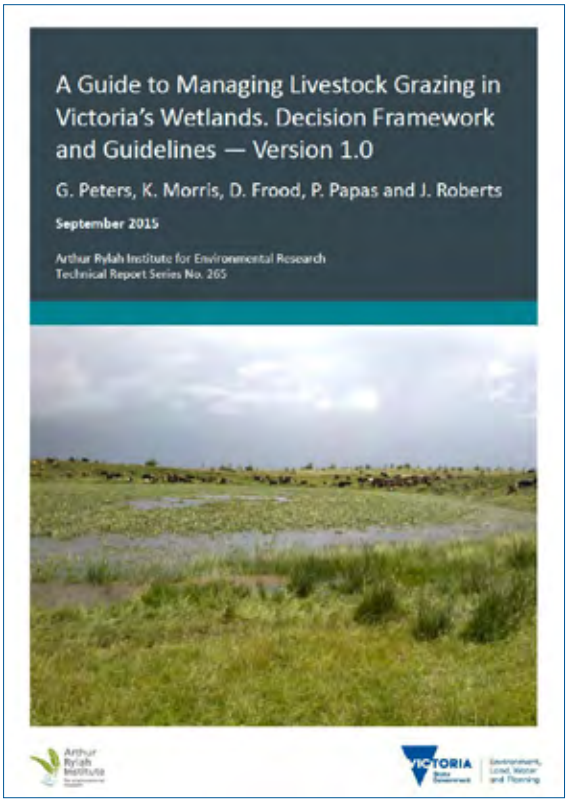
- maintain the vegetation condition of high-quality wetlands
- improve the vegetation condition of poorer quality wetlands
- manage the vegetation condition for significant fauna.

The guide is designed for use by natural resource management (NRM) practitioners, environmental consultants and researchers with expertise in NRM to inform livestock grazing management practices in wetlands on private and public land in Victoria. Agencies that may find the guide helpful include Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs), Parks Victoria, DELWP, Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources, non-government organisations, including Greening Australia and Trust for Nature, water authorities and local government.

Landowners or land managers who do not have specialist knowledge of wetlands, or lack the required botanic skills, should seek assistance from their local CMA wetland officer before using the guide.

While the guide has been designed for use in Victoria, the decision-making process may be of general use for informing livestock grazing strategies in wetlands in other parts of Australia.

For further information please contact Janet Holmes, Program Leader — Wetland Management (Janet.Holmes@delwp.vic.gov.au) or visit delwp.vic.gov.au



References

Peters, G., Morris, K., Frood, D., Papas, P. and Roberts, J. (2015). *A guide to managing livestock grazing in Victoria's wetlands. Decision framework and guidelines — Version 1.0.* Arthur Rylah Institute for Environmental Research Technical Report Series No. 265. Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, Heidelberg, Victoria.

Advocacy in a time of adversity

Jo Curkpatrick, South Australian Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources

Clem Mason's family has farmed nearly 3000 hectares on the banks of Lake Albert at Narrung, and at Jervois on the lower Murray for 30 years.

Running 200 dairy cows, 1000 head of sheep and 1600 hectares of crops, Clem Mason felt the bite of the Millennium drought. Whilst having two centre pivot irrigators was valuable, he lost considerable production during this period, as did many of his neighbours.

Rather than the situation making Clem an opponent to water going to the environment, Clem is now an advocate.

One particular night during the drought was a turning point. Whilst dragging his water pipes into the receding lake, Clem noticed a turtle, covered by a tube worm infestation, on the exposed lakebed. 'I realised I wasn't in this alone, and that it's up to us as individuals to look after the river and return it to health'.

At this crucial point of the drought, the Coorong Lower Lakes and Murray Mouth Recovery Project was instigated. On Clem's property, between 500 and 700 metres of land had been eroded and washed away. Clem was approached to fence his property to prevent cattle from grazing on the shore.

Clem Mason (© Copyright, Nerida Buckley)

His involvement in the Recovery Project has changed his thinking and delivered results for his farm. He has been a valued member of the Project's community advisory panel, providing guidance and advice to the Project on work undertaken. His farm, like many across the region, has become a focus for revegetation, fencing, returning native vegetation to the wetlands, and pest plant and animal control under the Recovery Project.

'We've gained land here and the reeds have come back as well — they provide breeding grounds for birds and fish.

'Seeing the birds here proves that we did the right thing for us and the ecology. It's a win-win.'

'We never want to be where we were before. If we don't have a sustainable river, we don't have water quality that's good enough to use,' Clem adds. 'Our job is to keep a healthy river from top to bottom, and that means allowing it to flush.'

Now entering its final year, the Recovery Project can celebrate significant achievements. Local people like Clem have helped the SA Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources manage the region through drought.

A pipeline to link into the SA Water network also helped to ensure supply.

And Clem says the internationally significant Coorong, Lakes Alexandrina and Albert Ramsar wetland is a very important place — being the end of the river system.

'It's about how we work with our upstream neighbours — it's bigger than the Coorong, and this little patch — it's about keeping the whole of the Basin healthy and productive.'

The Coorong, Lower Lakes and Murray Mouth (CLLMM) Recovery Project is funded by the South Australian Government's *Murray Futures* program and the Australian Government.

For further information, contact the South Australian Department for Environment, Water and Natural Resources on (08) 8204 1910 or see naturalresources.sa.gov.au

Floodplain graziers are boosting production by restoring their wetlands

Cassie Price, Regional Manager, WetlandCare Australia

Floodplain graziers in coastal catchments have been ecstatic with the results arising from restoring their previously drained areas of pasture to native wetland grasses.

With the right amount of water across the landscape and a clever grazing regime, farmers are seeing the benefits of returning native floodplain wetland grasses into their pasture rotation. Not only are the cattle benefiting from the nutrients and protein available in the native wetland grasses, farmers are also seeing an improvement in soil health, acid sulfate soil impact reduction and lower costs of invasive weed management.

The great feed quality of native wetland grasses might come as a surprise to some, especially those used to the traditional improved pasture species and methods. Water couch (*Paspalum distichum*) and some of the soft rush (*Eleocharis*) species for example have high digestibility, energy and protein content.

Healthy wetlands provide productive pastures (© Copyright, Eli Dutton)

Managed floodplain grazing areas are also providing significant relief in dry conditions. With the strong El Nino and drier than average conditions forecast for approaching years and the longer-term, graziers are turning to their wetland areas as a reliable feed source under drought conditions.

Aside from the benefit to the productive grazing system, the benefits to the wider catchment are immense. Restoring native wetland grasslands into grazing land is creating greater area of habitat, wildlife corridors and fish passage and is improving water quality. Downstream industry, in particular commercial fishing and tourism, is also benefiting exponentially from these updated land management practices.

WetlandCare Australia firmly believes that healthy wetlands and productive grazing can be one and the same and do not need to remain mutually exclusive.

We have been working closely with farmers, the Department of Primary Industries, coastal Local Land Services and councils to best utilise natural wetlands in the pursuit of better grazing production on floodplain farms.

While we appreciate that native floodplain grasslands won't work for every farming situation, we are encouraging farmers to look critically at their low lying areas as a greater resource and to get in touch with us if they would like to know more or discuss new property management possibilities with one of our wetland scientists.

Contact us at ballina@wetlandcare.com.au or on 02 6681 6169. For more details on WetlandCare Australia's activities, see our website at wetlandcare.com.au