

## **Watson Creek Integrated Catchment Management Project Annual Report 2007-2008**

The Watson Creek Agreement was launched in June 2007, with the underlying intent to emphasise a no blame and equal responsibility approach to this project. The Agreement was signed by Mornington Peninsula Shire Council, City of Casey and Frankston City Council, local schools, community groups, Landcare, the Vegetable Growers Association, Inghams Chickens, Melbourne Water and Parks Victoria, and has begun to build a solid foundation of trust and strong partnerships with market gardeners and landholders within the catchment.



The Watson Creek ICM Project has received funding support from Mornington Peninsula Shire Council, Parks Victoria, Melbourne Water and the City of Casey, to help fund its part-time Project Officer.

In December 2007, the Biosphere Foundation farewelled Virginia Richardson as she and her family went off to travel Australia and welcomed a new project officer for Watson Creek, Janet Borley.

In December 2007 also, the Watson Creek Project was awarded \$28,834 from Envirofund Round 10 to "Engage with the rural landholders in order to improve the water quality of Watson Creek". This included funding for facilitated meetings and workshops, field days, a boat trip to Yaringa Marine National Park, water testing along Watson Creek and underwater photography of Yaringa Marine National Park.

These events and activities encourage rural landholders to:

- Recognise the values of the Watson Creek catchment and the receiving waters of Yaringa Marine National Park
- Understand the contribution of rural landholders to water quality within Watson Creek
- Identify practices that can be undertaken by rural landholders that will result in improved water quality in Watson Creek

### **Water Monitoring**

In the 1990s, a nine year study conducted by Melbourne Water along the entire creek line, identified areas where nutrient levels were very high. Since then, Watson Creek had not been tested and new, accurate, data is critical to drawing landholders into acknowledging the impact of their activities on water quality. To expand on this work, each season throughout 2008, a series of water tests were conducted at 11 sites along the length of Watson Creek to measure nutrient levels.

Water monitoring has proven to be an excellent tool to engage landholders and after viewing test results, many have recognised that their activities contribute to the problem, leading them to ask "What can we do to improve Watson Creek?"

When faced with these issues, one major market gardener has undertaken on ground works by installing settling ponds at his property to reduce farm run off into Watson Creek, and is also researching the use of fertilizers that are more environmentally friendly.

### **Underwater Photography**

A photographer was engaged and the 10 underwater photography images, taken of Yaringa Marine National Park, are being used to convince landholders that Yaringa is too precious to lose. When shown these images, the majority of landholders admitted that they were unaware of the amazing creatures that have made this marine park their home.

These photographs will also be displayed at the Landholder Public Meetings and used in the media.

## **Future Activities**

In the October/November 2008, rural landholders will be invited on an educational boat tour around Yaringa Marine National Park to receive a “whole catchment” perspective from Parks Victoria.

The boat tour will be followed up with a field day on which landholders will be invited to visit rural properties that have undertaken sustainable land management practices, to view demonstrations of best practices for water quality improvement and protection.

Landholders will be invited to attend formal public meetings to consider project and funding opportunities for water quality improvement within the Watson Creek catchment, and to discuss their own issues in relation to the creek.

The Mornington Peninsula Shire will provide a presentation of Sustainable Land management schemes.

## **Media**

The Watson Creek media and community marketing campaign will continue with an ongoing presence in local newspapers and schools utilising the underwater photographs.

## **Replication in Other Areas**

The Watson Creek ICM Project has shown itself to be an excellent model for successfully integrating and addressing the spectrum of issues associated with repairing polluted waterways, and also seeks to influence catchment management in other regions. The Biosphere Foundation is currently talking with other community groups and local government with a view to implementing this model elsewhere.

## **Future Goals**

The Watson Creek ICM Project will broaden to include a new and strong focus with urban sectors utilising:

- Community Groups - by building rapport, raising awareness, changing perceptions through ICM Project meetings and presentations
- The Dolphin Research Institute's “*i Sea i Care*” Ambassador Community Engagement Programme
- Local Media - to create community awareness and change perceptions of Watson Creek and its catchment region

Community stewardship will also be built through the ongoing engagement of the rural sector, leading towards applications for on ground works.

The Watson Creek Project will also seek to develop and achieve on ground solutions with major market gardeners (including the Vegetable Growers Association) and the poultry industry to improve sustainable farm practices that will improve the water quality of Watson Creek.

*Janet Borley, Project Officer  
Watson Creek ICM Project  
July 2008*