



# Newsletter

## Vale - Mark Wettenhall

It is with deep sadness that I record Mark Wettenhall died Friday the 22 May 2020, as a result of injuries received in a workplace accident on Sunday night the 17 May 2020. Mark, as you all know, was a representative from the mid-section of the Yanco Creek System and a member of the YACTAC Board for over 20 years.

Mark was the quintessential Australian. He was the sort of guy we men would like to have by our side in the trenches, if it comes to that. Mark was a man of action.

Curiosity, work, thought and innovation were his habits and his feelings were always buoyant with an energetic eagerness to complete the job.

One winter's evening many years ago the Board was summoned to a meeting at a nearby property with a couple of dudes, whose mission it was, to instruct the people of the YCS that the 'party' was over and the Basin Plan was going to return the system to pre 1850's flow regimes.

I remember looking around at the Board members and seeing the set of defiance written clear on their faces. Mark was up for the coming fight - there was not a hint of submission in his manner and his face beamed with a mixture of pride and confidence when he thought about what these dudes were proposing for 'his' creek. Mark knew his time had come to ensure the creek system survived!

Mark was a man who could communicate with anyone. He had a quirky infectious laugh that gave away his feelings of kindness. This led to his irresistible sociability wherein he would seek out even the most reticent person in the crowd and engage in an animated and friendly way.



Mark set about engaging, with anyone who would listen, about the virtues of the Yanco Creek System. He travelled anywhere and invited anyone who wanted to 'see' the creek and hear about its history, economic creations and environmental assets. He will be greatly missed by all. Bob Crawford

## Annual General Meeting

Conargo Hall, 27 August from 1pm - light refreshments - all welcome.

Guest Speakers: WaterNSW, DPIE Environment, DPIE Water.

- Election of board members - 3 year term.
- Constitution update and proposed adoption.



### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Vale - Mark Wettenhall .....	1
AGM notice .....	1
President's message.....	2
Murrumbidgee EWAG.....	2
Wanganella TAG.....	2
Wanganella monitoring.....	2
CEWO .....	2
DPIE - EES .....	3
Environmental Manager.....	3
NSWIC .....	3
Water Resource Plans .....	3
Water metering.....	3
YACTAC Board election.....	3
WaterNSW.....	3
YACTAC website .....	4
Executive Officer .....	4
SDLAM.....	4

### EMAIL OPTION

- Would you prefer to receive this newsletter via email to take advantage of the links to additional information?
- Please contact Tanya on **0408 833 801**

### **Murrumbidgee Environmental Water Advisory Group - EWAG**

- Water that is pumped into wetlands is from the CEWO licence. Watering will be planned with a whole of system flow, if possible.
- First Nations to increase presence in all areas of water planning. First Nations Environmental Water Guidance (FNEWG) collect information and hand to MLDRIN who prioritise and submit to MDBA. FNEWG recognises the Murrumbidgee valley as being in the top 10 of river systems.
- COVID has delayed commonwealth engagement events.

### **Wanganella Technical Advisory Group**

- Newly reformed with stakeholders from LLS, landholders, EES and YACTAC.
- Planning for 2020-21: fox baiting, weed control.
- Review structures for possible upgrade.

### **Wanganella Monitoring**

- YACTAC has engaged Dan Hutton to undertake monitoring which will form a baseline for future monitoring.

### **CEWO**

- **2019-20 watering update**  
Murrumbidgee valley 80,422ML  
Wanganella Swamp received 2,250ML of pumped water.
- **2020-21 proposed watering**  
Similar volumes to last year. Focus: maintain critical refuge habitats, threatened species populations, support important wetlands.  
**YCS Dry conditions - Spring:**  
Wanganella Swamp and Forest Creek system, high priority.  
**YCS Wetter conditions - Spring:**  
Yanco/Billabong Creek wetlands, medium priority.

## **President - Bob Crawford**

I am looking forward to the Morrison government's inquiry into national water policy. This inquiry is to be conducted by the Productivity Commission. The Terms of Reference are sufficient to generate a change of direction in the thinking of the bureaucrats and the MDBA.

I welcome this inquiry for it helps me divert an undercurrent of disenchantment in the MDBA that is prevailing in our community. Some wags have even proposed that the Hon. Keith Pitt, our new Federal Minister for water issues, resume the \$4 billion left in the MDBA's kitty and give it back to the Treasurer to combat the effects of COVID - 19.

The wags, suggest that this will stop the largesse, covert manipulation of the debate surrounding the 2012 Basin Plan and bring the MDBA (and supporters) to the negotiation table whereby the realities of climate change and the real world will be discussed in an altruistic manner.

After all these years since the Plan was introduced MER (Monitoring, Evaluating, and Reporting) is still attached to the Plan like it was an afterthought. YACTAC is convinced that the Basin Plan has already recovered 2,750GL.

The Water Sharing Plans of each inland river require 50% of the yield dedicated to the 'run of the river'. The YCS benefited from this policy greatly during the last 'windy' drought.

However YACTAC is aware that the remaining resources for general security WAL holders may be limited, after one accounts for the PEW, HEW, high security, MI and CICAL conveyance, town water, BLR, livestock and domestic use allocations. YACTAC has been continually active endeavouring 'someone' in the NSW Government to please - do the numbers!

I am pleased though, that the state government now recognises the value of 'reuse' environmental flows. It is not ground-breaking science! All one must do is be thorough, forensic and holistic. Indeed, there is now greater recognition that flows can be used repeatedly (reused) to wet environment assets or even satisfy a timely economic order, and so the need for the 'downwater' 605 GL is lessened, using common sense practical evaluations. I am confident a revamped CARM using block chain methodology by an independent river manager could make for a better system, with shorter order lead times. This would lead to a reclassification of any operational surplus's for use downstream. Let us end the 'silo thinking' mentality.

There are glimmers DPIE - Water is up for monitoring, measuring, evaluating and reporting on the effectiveness of these enormous allocations and holdings of Planned Environmental Water and Held Environmental Water.

It has been a disjointed year for the YACTAC Board and we approach our Annual General Meeting with seemingly little to show for our efforts.

Tanya has been tireless in her contribution. I have appreciated her diligence. Dale is finding his feet and is working the funding trail to best fit out the system to discover and conserve our environmental assets.

The realisation that the 2012 Basin Plan has effected an enormous change on the farmers and people of the Murray Darling Basin and in particular the Murrumbidgee valley, has weighed heavily on the few board members and our executive who represent the YCS at all the meetings and conversations.

However, there are tantalising glimmers from the federal and state bureaucracy that our system is not for the chopping block.

## DPIE - EES Wanganella Watering

We were very thankful to receive some of the vary scarce environmental water for Wanganella Swamp, this year. The aim of the watering was to keep wetland vegetation alive through dry times, so that it can respond once bigger flows return to the system. The growth of vegetation was impressive with the water plant *Persicaria* forming an impressive pink ring around the wetland. From the ground these plants stood tall, approaching 2 meters in height in some places.

An enhanced satellite image shows the dense beds of pink flowering *Persicaria* (below) encircling the Wanganella Swamp after environmental watering earlier this year.



L: Wanganella Swamp inundation

R: Pink flowering *Persicaria* up close

## Environmental Manager - Dr Dale McNeil

### Platypus

Some of you may have met with me as I collected water samples from the creeks. The water samples are processed on site and will be analysed for platypus DNA in a Melbourne laboratory once all samples are collected.

The platypus project continues to grow and is now supported by \$27,000 of investment from the Wettenhall Environment Trust, Murray Local Land Services and TransGrid.

While our focus is now on this eDNA study, we hope to hold some community information and survey sessions once spring arrives, all going well with social distancing measures.

A subset of the samples will also be used to look for the DNA of a critically endangered fish the Murray jollytail or flatheaded Galaxias.

### Riparian revegetation

YACTAC is working with Murrumbidgee Landcare, Greening Australia and Local Land Services to develop projects that restore and enhance our riparian (riverside) vegetation communities. At present there are opportunities in the Upper Yanco Creek upstream of Morundah to secure funding for the improvement of superb parrot habitat.

If you are interested in restoring sections of your farm with native vegetation please contact me on 0428 101 318, especially if you are located between Narrandera and Morundah as funding is now available.

### NSWIC

- Interim CEO - Claire Miller
- New membership options may exclude YACTAC membership.

### Water Resource Plans

- No one is happy with the outcome of WRP or Water Sharing Plans.

### Water Metering

- All WaterNSW meters will be transitioned to private ownership.
- It is understood the cost will not be borne by the landholder.
- To commence 2020 and be completed by 2022.

<https://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/metering/government-owned-meter-transition-scheme>

### YACTAC Board Election

- All board positions are deemed vacant.
- Three year term, 2020-2023.
- Nomination forms available upon request.
- An election follows if nominations exceed positions.
- Sections: Upper, Mid, Lower.

### WaterNSW

- No planned outage for maintenance on Yanco Weir.
- When would be a good time for maintenance to take place on Yanco Weir?

### YACTAC Website

Google: landcare YACTAC

<https://landcare.nsw.gov.au/groups/yanco-creek-and-tributaries-advisory-council>

**YANCO CREEK AND TRIBUTARIES  
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**Upper Section Committee:**

Geoff Ham 0427 942 336  
Lawrence Simpson 0448 189 001  
Glen Baxter 0428 852 623

**Mid Section Committee:**

Sam Armytage 0427 534 622  
Russell Ford 0429 425 798  
Vacancy

**Lower Section Committee:**

Bob Crawford 0427 875 955  
Sally Dye 0427 875 940  
Colin McCrabb 0428 847 558

**Executive Officer**

Tanya Thompson 0408 833 801

**Environment Officer**

Dale McNeil 0428 101 318

Please contact us to discuss any matter regarding the creek system, riparian areas or concerns you may have.

If you know of any change of ownership of property please send details to the Executive Officer, so our records can be kept up to date.



## **Executive Officer - Tanya Thompson**

Since our last newsletter so much has changed, it certainly isn't business as usual - for so many reasons.

All the board members, Dale and myself are feeling the loss of Mark Wettenhall, it is still hard to comprehend.

COVID-19 has moved all meetings with government departments to an online platform. Luckily most of the March meetings were early in the month. Meetings since have been hampered by the limitations of online platforms etc. Many presentations for YTAG have not been made due to the length of time needed for those presentations and the ability of people to stay engaged whilst online.

Governance has been reviewed and an update to the Constitution will be presented at the AGM. The policies have also been reviewed, updated and adopted. It is a very busy administrative time with end of financial year activities, auditing and preparation for the AGM.

The website has had more reports added and it is our intention to use this platform as a virtual library of the Yanco Creek System.

We are always keen to increase membership, so if you know of any changes of ownership of property please let us know the new owners contact details, so we can extend an invitation. Also BLR holders are eligible to join YACTAC, so please spread the word.

Preparations for the annual general meeting are underway with some informative guest speakers. We alternate between Conargo and Jerilderie so it will be held at Conargo this year. It is an election year with all board positions open to members. There will be at least one board position that needs to be filled, in the mid-section. Nomination forms will be available to members closer to the date. Elections are held every three years. Please contact me if you wish to discuss further.

## **SDLAM**

Five Technical Advisory Group meetings have now been held and the conversations are still on background work the department undertakes (some may say red tape) before commencing discussions about actual project proposals.

We have pushed for independent modelling of the system and supported the call for a review of all infrastructure (stock take) in the Yanco Creek System.

### **Staff changes**

David Clarke and Rod Hardwick remain onboard but progress has definitely slowed, just when we thought it couldn't get any slower. We met with Daniel Blacker (Tracey MacDonald's supervisor) in January and Daniel resigned in May, with Paul Weedon (David Leslie's boss) back filling that position. Tracey MacDonald is no longer involved in SDLAM Yanco. So currently there is no Principal Project Officer and no Director Water SDLAM program - delivery. However 2 major contractors have been engaged; 3 Rivers Joint Venture (comprising of Jacobs - previously SKM and GHD) will be the SDLAM Program Design Engineer and SMEC as the SDLAM Program Owners Engineer. 3RJV will be involved in the implementation phase and development of Infrastructure NSW Gate 1 and 2 reports, whilst SMEC will ensure the department's interests are being protected. Also Matt Barton from Fifteen/50 Consultancy is picking up some of the Principal Project Officer work. Fifteen/50 provided full-time construction contract management and site supervision for the construction of the Nimmie-Caira Water Infrastructure and Stock and Domestic Pipeline works.

YACAG meetings have been in hibernation since March, which makes this group 2 meetings behind YTAG. Remembering though that those two meetings have only been about process. However it is hoped a meeting can be held in July.