



Newsletter

President - Bob Crawford

Late in December 2018, YACTAC was requested to determine an adequate Minimum Daily Flow target for each reach of the YCS. Sounds simple - yet anything that sounds simple, usually ends up difficult! However, YACTAC has achieved this mission.

YACTAC had a list of 5 identified categories that needed satisfying by a Minimum Daily Flow regime. The YCS Long Term Environmental Watering Plan has been discussed in detail with OEH and we expect this will be linked into the Water Sharing Plan. Town water along with Stock and Domestic needs are to be added to this daily flow target.

The YCS had a thriving historic indigenous community and YACTAC proposes to recognise this with a flow regime. Coupled to the historic cultural needs are the needs of the contemporary community. Everyone that now lives in the YCS and/or uses the resources of the YCS for social, spiritual and health reasons is entitled to a continuous flow regime.

In addition, YACTAC has been mindful of the economic worthiness of the YCS. Enjoying the same privileges that a WAL holder on the main stem Murrumbidgee River enjoys has been paramount in our thinking.

I would like to encourage the YCS community to keep working on the subject. In 2004 the Basin community were discussing the various elements I have outlined above. Back then these elements were lumped into the general issue of 'an environmental flow' for the YCS. Somehow the thinking process was derailed and it is only now that the community is again addressing the issue on a sub-catchment basis.

I am looking forward to more information coming forward, in a cooperative way, such that we can all own the Minimum Daily Flow targets for each reach of the YCS.



Dr Dale McNeil and Bob Crawford at Darlot



INSIDE THIS ISSUE

President Message.....	1
Executive Officer	2
CEWH	2
Murrumbidgee EWARG	2
Weir Maintenance	2
Spreading the Message.....	2
Environment Manager	3
SAP	3
Meet and Greet	3
OEH	4
Promotional Video	4
NSW Farmers	4
WaterNSW CAG	4
Creek Country Alliance.....	5
Survey	5
Objectives	5
YACTAC Membership	5
YCS Levy	5
NRAR.....	5
Creek Weed Control.....	6
NSWIC.....	6

Murrumbidgee Environmental Water Allowance Reference Group - MEWARG

- Long Term Watering Plans
See page 4
- WaterNSW Operations Report
-As at 15 March there was a
shortfall of 130 GL for the start
of next irrigation season.
-This shortfall may impact
carryover or high security.
-22GL or 11% left in accounts
-Inflows very low - 90th
percentile.
- Nimmie Ciara
- Weirs, water quality and fish kills
-26 Jan 2019 - approx. 5000 fish
died at Redbank weir.
-Adaptive management reduced
further fish kills.
-Increased eflows over Balranald
weir to improve water quality.
- OEH and CEWH are meeting
regularly to plan next season's
watering events.

Yanco Weir Maintenance

- Fishways replaced.
- Old Yanco Weir security fencing
erected.
- Yanco Weir road upgrade.

Tarabah Weir

Maintenance works 1 April—1 May
Gate and walkway replacement.
Contact Vince Kelly for details.

M: 0419 676 905

Spreading the Message

Meetings with:

CEWH - Jody Swirepik, Hilton Taylor,
Erin Lenon

NSWIC - Luke Simpkins, Jim Cush

DoI Water - David Leslie & team

OEH - Paul Doyle

NSW Farmers

Executive Officer - Tanya Thompson

Once again it has been a busy few months. Meet and Greet sessions were held in Morundah, Jerilderie, Forest Creek - Conargo, Wanganella and Moulamein. These sessions were to introduce Dr Dale McNeil to as many YACTAC members as possible, with a view to Dale then embarking on individual landholder consultations. The sessions were well attended and also enabled landholders to voice their views and concerns about current issues.

One of the areas of concern was the lack of understanding of the current political water environment. Water policy and rules are complex, challenging and changing. I am always willing to take calls from anyone on the creek system, so please call or email if you wish to discuss anything.

A number of communications were sent to various government departments outlining YACTAC's policy position, frustration about lack of consultation with DoI Water (as promised by Tracey MacDonald), continuous minimum flow in the system and current creek levels.

A survey was developed in order to gain member's and the broader community's understanding and views on proposed infrastructure changes to the creek system - SDLAM. More information about this survey is presented in a separate section.

YACTAC re-engaged with Murray Landcare Collective and will be meeting with them again early in April to investigate potential environmental programs and funding opportunities.

Representations were made to various government agencies and continued dialogue was undertaken to ensure YACTAC receives current information to assist the Board to make informed decisions.

CEWH - Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder

Mark Wettenhall, Russell Ford and Tanya Thompson met with Jody Swirepik - CEWH (replaced David Papps), Hilton Taylor - Assistant Secretary and Erin Lenon - Murrumbidgee CEWH at the Yanco Offtake to discuss YACTAC and the proposed changes to the creek system. We were given ample time to discuss the history of the system, the work undertaken by YACTAC and LLS, the YCS Levy and the huge risks we see if local stakeholder knowledge and appropriate modelling is not undertaken when designing and developing the proposed SDLAM projects.

If the SDLAM projects proceed they will affect CEWH and OEH, so we feel those organisations have a similar viewpoint as YACTAC and it is these similarities that were discussed in detail.

We meet regularly with Erin Lenon at various stakeholder meetings and have a good rapport. Erin is always approachable and ready to discuss how we can work together.



Tanya, Russell, Jody, Hilton and Mark

Environment Manager - Dr Dale McNeil

It's a great pleasure to be able to write to you all after starting as YACTAC's Environment Manager in February. After decades working in government research and management, I find it really refreshing to be working FOR the community directly. This gives me a great sense of purpose, enthusiasm and accountability as I want to use your hard-earned investments to make a real difference to the water and wetlands around us in our beautiful creek environments.

The first big ticket items I have on my plate are:

1. Producing a modernised strategic plan to build on the old NRM Plan

This will set out our vision and objectives so the people and agencies we work with, and the regulators that oversee our performance, can clearly see what we are about and why we do what we do. This plan will help us to bring in partners to invest in our catchment and to be clear and transparent in the way that we deliver the investment that YOU, our members, have made to build a better creek environment for us and future generations to love.

2. Continue building programs of investment into our catchment

I have begun to work with partner organisations such as the Murray and Riverina LLS, OEH and others to attract projects and investment into our catchment. These relationships need to be long term and we will need to demonstrate that we are a great community to work with and can deliver on our end of the deal.

3. Represent the creeks system in water management

Sustainable Diversion Limit projects are the current issue for us regarding the Basin Plan and I have been working with Tanya and the Board to build relationships with the agencies responsible for building and operating potential infrastructure developments in our system. We are already in a great position and have open and productive relationships with many of the key people involved. We are also involved with the Environmental Watering Plans being developed by OEH to ensure that governments know what our water needs are and that we are at the table to argue informatively for the delivery of environmental water when the time comes.

I am embarking on a big phase of LEARNING right now – I have thoroughly enjoyed meeting many of you over the past weeks during our meetings in Morundah, Jerilderie, Conargo and Moulamein. I had some great conversations and I am continuing to find out about some of the amazing places that are important to you throughout the Billabong, Yanco and Colombo creeks.

I have been inspired by the number of you that have contacted me already to come out and see some of the wetland areas that are so important to the ecology of the region. I look forward to working with you to develop strategies for protecting, restoring and watering these important places.

I get an overwhelming sense of the interconnectedness of the people, towns, farms and environment that combine to make this such an amazing part of the Murray-Darling Basin and look forward to working with you all to keep our creeks flowing, our forests thriving and our wetland plants and animals protected, expanded and re-connected.

Please feel free to give me a call or send an email anytime. I'd love to meet each and every one of you as I get to know the creek system and get a feel for what we really value and what we want to get done over the coming years. Call me if you see anything curious or interesting in the natural world around you and let me know some of your secrets about why you love this place and how I can help keep it that way.

Cheers everyone.



Dale inspecting vegetation at the creeks edge.

Stakeholders

Advisory Panel – SAP

Meet on 10 & 11 April

Meet and Greet summary

- Reject DoI Water's idea to have a pilot communication program with Forest Creek/Hartwood Weir landholders.
- Landholders disillusioned with lack of consultation after December meeting.
- Landholders prefer to receive information as a large group.
- YACTAC has the confidence of it's members.
- Information about SDL projects need to be shared with stakeholders.
- Community and council must be included in any discussions.
- Uncertainty within the community is stressful.
- Too much time has been wasted.
- Need for constructive dialogue now.
- Concern about degradation of our healthy creek system.
- Concerns for town and stock/domestic water.
- Concerns over water quality if flows are reduced.

YACTAC Website

Google: landcare YACTAC

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

WaterNSW CAG

The Water Allocation Statement published on 15th March 2019 indicated that there was no increase in Available Water Determinations. The shortfall for delivery of next year's high priority needs is currently at least 130,000 ML. The current shortfall is likely to be filled before 1 July if the inflows are greater than about 75th percentile. Inflows drier than this are likely to trigger measures under the department's Extreme Events Policy.

- iWAS improvements coming soon.
- Amending water orders within lead times.
- New invoice template.
- WAMC consultation to commence in May.
- Transition to privately owned meters to commence.
- Extreme Events may be triggered if inflows remain low.
- Extreme Events may reduce access to carryover water.
- In extreme events where water is restricted the % of the restriction is across the board, so carryover will be impacted. The water will not be lost, only suspended, it just can't be used when extreme events are enacted.
- **Minimum instream flows** at the following locations are targeted for operational purposes, when possible.
 - ◆ Yanco Creek @ Downstream Tarabah Weir – 25ML/day
 - ◆ Yanco Creek @ Morundah – 65ML/day (to be revised based on maintenance work)
 - ◆ Yanco Creek @ Wiraki – Up to 70ML/day
 - ◆ Billabong Creek @ Downstream Hartwood Weir – 25ML/day
- **Maximum flows**
 - ◆ Colombo Creek @ Morundah - 600ML/day

OEH - Long Term Watering Plans

Paul Doyle and members of the executive discussed the Long Term Watering Plans for the creek system. Increases to the flow rate were achieved. The **'very low flows'** have been increased to account for losses downstream of the gauges and for the fact that weir pools would have lower flow velocities and therefore have increased risks of stratification.

The changes are:

- Yanco Offtake: was 60 – now 80 ML/day
- Colombo at Morundah: was 30 – now 40 ML/day
- Billabong at Jerilderie – new flow – 50 ML/day
- Billabong at Darlot: was 15 – now 30 ML/day

There is also a new baseflow at Jerilderie – set at 70 ML/day – in line with that at Morundah (on Colombo).

Whilst flow rates are aspirational they form the basis of OEH watering objectives.



Promotional Video

Mark Wettenhall has been eager to develop a video which shows just how healthy our creek system is and how irrigators and community work together to look after our creeks. Mark and his son spent many hours on the creek system taking footage with a drone and iphone to potentially use in the promotional video.



Initially it was to be supported by NSWIC but that opportunity has now been withdrawn as the video was to be used for International Water Day in March.

Helene Mortlock is actively involved in this project. It is proposed to have a short 2 minute video along with another extended version. The videos will be uploaded onto the YACTAC website and used for promotional purposes.

NSW Farmers

Two motions were put at the Berrigan meeting of NSW Farmers. These motions have been accepted at state level:

1. That NSW Farmers lobby the NSW Government to ensure all facts and figures on which the proposed SDLAM projects are based, are ratified by an independent body and available to stakeholders before proceeding to the final draft of each business case.
2. That NSW Farmers lobby the NSW government to ensure any rule changes in Water Sharing Plans do not reduce current licence values or current access to water in the Southern Valley.

Creek Country Alliance

Gwen McLaughlin and Helene Mortlock are very active in the community keeping the facebook site current and meeting people on election day where they surveyed the community about the proposed changes to the creek system and the department responsible for administering any change.

Survey - YACTAC and community

A survey was emailed to all YACTAC members and responses are still being received. The same survey gained the community's views on the proposed SDL projects and consultation by DoI Water. Over 300 surveys were completed.

Survey questions:

1. What level understanding do you have of Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment Mechanisms (SDLAM) proposed for the Yanco Creek System (YCS) – includes the Billabong and Forest Creeks?
2. Do you know which department is responsible for SDLAMs? **DoI - Water**
3. Are SDLAMs a Federal or State government responsibility? **Federal funded, State run.**
4. What level would you score consultation by the department?
5. What is your level of confidence in the department responsible for the SDLAMs?
6. What level of concern do you have around changes (SDLAMs) to the YCS?
7. Which of the below points are you concerned about?
 - Access to water for consumptive use – irrigation.
 - Flow on costs to WAL owners for maintenance and depreciation of new infrastructure.
 - Health of the environment –aquatic and riparian areas.
 - Third party impacts – community viability.
 - Access to recreational fishing and use of the creek system.
 - Town water supply. Daily access to Stock and Domestic supply.
 - All of the above

Summary of responses:

- 85% of respondents have poor understanding of the projects.
- 90% of respondents consider consultation to be appalling or disappointing.
- 86% of respondents have no confidence in the department responsible for the projects.
- 88% of respondents have moderate or high concern about the projects.

This sends a very clear message to DoI - Water.

The results of this survey have also been sent to Sussan Ley.

Objectives

These were some of the objectives set for the Natural Resource Management Plan.

Currently we are also heavily engaged in the advocacy for a continual minimum flow within all reaches of the Yanco Creek System.



YACTAC Membership

- Annually from 1 July.
- Only \$550 per farming enterprise, irrespective of the number of WALs owned.
- Representation at: SAP (Water Resource Plan meetings), WaterNSW CAG (Customer Advisory Group), EWAG (Environmental Water Advisory Group), NSW Irrigators Council, Murray Collective Landcare Group.
- Advocate for water access to the environment, for commercial and community interests.
- Key spokesperson for all discussions surrounding the Yanco Creek System.
- Point of contact for landholders and government organisations.

YCS Levy

- Administrator of the Yanco Creek System environmental levy.
- Crown land manager for the creek system.
- 2005/6 Levy generated \$161,266.
- 2018/19 Levy generated \$103,680 - reduction due to water being taken out of the system.

NRAR - Natural Resources Access Regulator

- DoI Water makes the rules about water management in NSW.
- WaterNSW implements the rules and operates water delivery.
- NRAR enforces the rules and investigates compliance etc.

Local contact:

michael.bevan@nrar.nsw.gov.au

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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.



Creek Weed Control

Matt Wooden and his team spent 39 days (December - February) inspecting and spraying willows, Cape Water Lily and aquatic weeds on the creek system. New infestations and hot zones were sprayed and the system was mapped. There are still a few willows along the system and it is hoped agreements can be made with the landholders to spray the remaining willows.

Opportunistic follow up spraying has also been undertaken to take advantage of the low creek flows and season.



It only takes one willow to spread and infest downstream sections.

There are alternatives to willows, such as River Cooba (native willow). If you would like to discuss removing willows and replacing them, contact Dale - 0428 101 318.



NSWIC

Luke Simpkins (CEO), Jim Cush (Chair) and the NSWIC team met with Mark Wettenhall, Glen Baxter and Tanya Thompson at the Yanco Offtake to highlight the collaboration between environmentalists and consumptive users of the creek system. NSWIC representatives were informed about YACTAC and the issues being faced along the creek.

The March meeting of NSWIC was attended and most of the time was taken up with meeting NSW politicians and candidates leading up to the state elections.



Christine Freak, Jim Cush and Mark Wettenhall

There were also discussions on NSWIC policy with a focus on:

- SDLAM projects
- Water Resource Plans
- Water Reform
- State agencies review
- Floodplain Harvesting