

1 APPLICATION of this POLICY

This policy applies to the process for allocating permits for grazing areas within the Winton Wetlands Reserve by:

- ❑ Stating clear criteria
- ❑ Documenting a clear and transparent process
- ❑ Establishing clear goals.

2 PURPOSE OF POLICY / RATIONALE

2.1 Strategic intent

This grazing policy is designed to deliver a strategic move from one-size-fits-all grazing leases that were designed to deliver catchment management outcomes to an individually tailored series of grazing permits designed to deliver fire management and other ecological benefits to the Winton Wetlands, side by side with economic benefits to the permit holders.

The policy recognises and respects the benefits of grazing and the historic and traditional use of the site for primary production. It also recognises the changed focus of the Winton Wetlands from primarily water storage to ecological restoration, tourism, and local amenity.

This policy supports the following Winton Wetlands Committee of Management (WWCoM) objectives:

- ❑ Delivery of improved services
- ❑ Responsible financial management
- ❑ Reduction of biomass as per the Fire Management Plan
- ❑ Control of introduced pasture species such as Phalaris to improve ecological function

2.2 Operational Intent

The intent of this policy is to provide:

- ❑ consistency in the process for allocation of Grazing Permits;
- ❑ provide clarification of the goals of grazing;
- ❑ a process which is time efficient; clear and fair;
- ❑ a reduction in the administration time of permits.

The changed policy is also designed to create more flexibility for permit holders and to reduce day-to-day involvement from Winton Wetlands staff in grazing issues. The policy will deliver more accurate and up-to-date valuations and permit fees and permit longer permit tenures with increased security for graziers.

2.3 Specific

This policy supports the following land management objectives:

- ❑ To reduce the spread of introduced pasture species, in particular *Phalaris* sp. into the reserve
- ❑ To encourage environmental outcomes in degraded areas of the reserve.
- ❑ To manage biomass for fuel reduction purposes
- ❑ Contribute to improved native biodiversity outcomes

3 OUTCOMES

The key deliverables will be:

- High quality fire management for the Wetlands through strategic, flexible and timely grazing strategies
- Economic benefits to the permit holders and the community
- Management of a buffer zone around the wetlands at a reduced cost to the Winton Wetland Committee that is offset to some extent through fees
- A buffer against weed infestations into the wetlands
- Fair and appropriate fee structures
- Resolution of some long standing issues around access and equity
- Clarification and transparency of procedures, expectations and compliance approaches

4 RELATED POLICIES, PLANS & PROCEDURES

This policy is supported by:

- WWCoM Grazing Permit Agreement, including Special Conditions in its Schedule
- WWCoM Expression of Interest Form – Grazing
- WWCoM Expression of Interest – Grazing Register

5 LEGISLATION

This policy generally applies to permits issued under:

- ❑ *Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978* - Sections 17 (2).

GRAZING POLICY

6 POLICY

#	Issue	Strategy	Procedure	Responsibility	Reference to document
1	Valuations / Stocking Rates	Professional independent valuations and assessments will be reflected in fees and grazing strategies for individual permit areas	Commencing in 2013, WWCoM will employ an independent agronomist and/or valuer to value each permit area to determine individual grazing conditions for individual permit areas, to set stocking rates and timing of grazing if not year round. WWCoM will provide 90 days' notice of revised Permit conditions.	Wetlands Ranger Agronomist / Valuer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specification – Agronomy & Valuations • Agronomist Report • Valuation Report including Individual Permit Area Grazing Strategies
2	Individual Grazing Permit offers	WWCoM will re-offer each Permit area to its current Permit holder first , incorporating the revised valuations and stocking rates, and individual grazing strategy for that area	In 2013, WWCoM will update Grazing Leases to Grazing Permits with new valuations, fees and individual permit grazing strategy for that particular land parcel, and re-offer same to the current Permit holder. Documents will comprise: 1. Letter of Offer incorporating Permit area grazing strategy; 2. GIS Map of Permit Area(s); 3. Grazing Permit Agreement; 4. this Grazing Policy; and 5. Expression of Interest – Grazing Form.	Office Manager GIS Consultant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual Grazing Permit Agreement offer documents
3	Right of Appeal	Permit Holders must be given the opportunity to discuss and appeal assessments related to their Permit Offer if necessary	Permit holders will have 60 days within which they may: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • approach WWCoM staff to discuss details of their Grazing Permit Offer; • arrange for their own independent assessment of the Permit area at their expense; • appeal the tri-annual independent assessments and individual grazing strategy, via written submission to WWCoM, providing evidence and justification for a review of same. • In the case of a wide valuation disparity (>20%), WWCoM will then request that the Victorian Valuer General to appoint an experienced rural valuer to act as an arbitrator, to look at the WWCoM assessment and the evidence provided by the Permit holder, and make a final determination. 	Permit Holder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual Grazing Permit Agreement offer documents
4	Expressions of Interest in Grazing at Winton Wetlands	A register of persons / entities interested in taking up grazing at WW will be maintained. The register will be open to anyone who expresses interest , and will be consulted when allocating new grazing opportunities, whether ongoing or temporary.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WWCoM will maintain a register of Expression of Interest for Grazing, created from completed Expressions of Interest Forms, including those submitted by ongoing Permit holders. • Expressions of Interest may be requested by WWCoM from time to time through advertisements in local newspapers, on the WWCoM website, at permit renewals and invited at Community Meetings. • Expressions of Interest will be for a time-limited period with a maximum of 3 years, and interest can be re-expressed after 3 years. 	Office Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expression of Interest – Grazing Form • Expression of Interest – Grazing Register

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5	Identification of new grazing areas within Winton Wetlands Reserve	Additional areas that may be grazed will be identified from time to time.	Wetlands Ranger notes an additional area in the Reserve that is not under grazing OR receives a suggestion re land parcel(s) from a member(s) of the community. The Wetlands Ranger, or if necessary, an independent expert, will assess the area and may recommend same to the CEO, who may/may not authorise progression to the Advice / Expression of Interest process for a temporary grazing permit.	Wetlands Ranger Independent expert CEO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reserve patrol notes in diary and/or photographs Independent expert report
6	Advice of new grazing opportunities at Winton Wetlands and recording Expressions of Interest	There will be a transparent, open and fair process for being advised of and included in any offer of ongoing and/or temporary grazing areas, as identified by WWCoM.	Where a Permit area becomes available <u>for any reason</u> , the following process will be used to provide opportunity for consideration of all prospective graziers interested in a particular land parcel: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Expressions of Interest Grazing Register will be consulted; Where no suitable grazier(s) can be identified, further Expressions of Interest will be requested via advertisements in local newspapers, and on the WWCoM website; Any current Permit holder who does not have a current Expression of Interest – Grazing will be asked to provide same. 	Wetlands Ranger Office Manager Permit Holders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expression of Interest – Grazing Form Expression of Interest – Grazing Ad
7	Allocation of Grazing Permits at Winton Wetlands (when two or more Expressions of Interest have been received)	Transparent, open and fair process for the offer and allocation of <u>ongoing and temporary</u> grazing permit areas.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Expressions of Interest Grazing Register will be consulted; Where two or more prospective graziers are interested in a particular land parcel, the following Allocation Criteria will apply (where relevant) and will be used to rate the relative suitability of Permit applicants according to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Grazing Performance under WWCoM or other relevant grazing experience, especially ecological management of a land parcel to specifications of WWCoM – weighting 40% Adjacency of freehold to the land parcel in question – weighting 30% Agreement to adhere to timelines and financial obligations and adequate financial capacity to manage the permit effectively – weighting 30% Permits will not necessarily be awarded to any party on the basis that they have offered a premium on the assessed fees for the grazing area. All weighted criteria above will remain relevant. Declarations of Interests, including any Conflicts of Interest, apply as usual to all members of the WWCoM Committee & staff. A recommendation will be made to WWCoM for a preferred applicant to be issued with the Grazing Permit. Where two or more graziers are rated at the same level, one will be selected by ballot with a name drawn out of a hat. WWCoM reserves the sole right to accept or reject any application, and will enter into no further correspondence with any party regarding unsuccessful applications or applicants. 	Wetlands Ranger CEO & Grazing Permit Allocation & Review Panel WWCoM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allocation Criteria Workings

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8	Breaches of Grazing Permit & Consequences	Any alleged breach of a Grazing Permit will be investigated, and substantiated breaches shall have consequences for the Permit Holder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the first instance, the Permit holder will be instructed to remedy the situation within 7 days via a documented verbal First Warning. In the second instance, the Permit holder will be instructed to remedy the situation within 7 days via a written Second & Final Warning. In the third instance, the Permit holder will be instructed to remedy the situation within 48 hours and will receive a Notice of Intent under s.4.3 of their Permit Agreement to terminate their Permit in 30 days, with a request to show cause within 7 days as to why their Permit should not be cancelled. If the Permit holder fails to respond, or does not show reasonable cause for retaining their Permit, the CEO will recommend its termination to WWCoM; WWCoM will hold a special out-of-sessions meeting to cancel a Permit in the circumstances outlined above. The Permit holder will receive a Notice of Permit Termination after 30 days from the Notice of Intent. 	<p>Wetlands Ranger Office Manager CEO Permit Holder</p> <p>WWCoM</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> First Warning Second & Final Warning Notice of Intent Notice of Permit Termination
9	Discontinuing a Grazing Permit	A Permit holder may decide to discontinue their interest in a grazing area and wish to end their Permit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Grazing Permit holder must advise WWCoM via application in writing and provide 60-days' notice of their intent to discontinue their Permit. WWCoM will follow the Expressions of Interest process outlined in sections 4-5 above. WWCoM will follow the Allocation process outlined in 6. Above WWCoM reserves the right to reject any application to discontinue a Permit that is deemed vexatious, at WWCoM sole discretion. The relinquishing Permit holder will receive a Notice of Permit Termination within 7 days of WWCoM acceding to their request 	<p>Permit holder</p> <p>Wetlands Ranger</p> <p>WWCoM</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Notice to Discontinue
10	Grazing Permit Fencing responsibilities	Winton Wetlands is responsible for the Permit boundary fences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Upon request, Winton Wetlands may supply fencing end assemblies for Permit boundary fences It is the responsibility of the Permit Holder to complete fence lines that are appropriate and adequate for the stock grazed. Internal fences within Permit areas are the responsibility of Permit holders, and may become the property of WWCoM at the end of a Permit period (see Grazing Permit Agreement). 	<p>Permit holders</p> <p>Wetlands Ranger</p>	