

MEDIA RELEASE

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Wetlands ‘helping to heal the land’

Friday 2 February is World Wetlands Day, this year bearing the international theme of “wetlands and wellness”.

It’s a particularly apt theme for Australia and for Victoria’s Winton Wetlands in particular, where wetland restoration science and renewed cultural understandings are together working to rejuvenate the local landscape.

World Wetlands Day this year highlights the importance of wetlands everywhere to human wellbeing, through their supply of clean water (filtering out impurities in water flowing into river systems), being a source of food, offering protection from flooding, providing a healthier environment, and acting as a haven for wildlife able to be appreciated by all.

In these ways “healthy wetlands equate to our wellbeing”, according to international spokespeople for the Day.

For Winton Wetlands, the event’s 2024 global theme has particular resonance. Staff and volunteers are working closely with traditional custodians of the land, the Yorta Yorta people, to “reconnect with country”.

In the words of Restoration Manager Dr Lisa Farnsworth: “Through our on-ground restoration works we are healing country and offering a place in which people can come to heal through the powerful connection offered to nature and country.”

At an ecological level, benefits of these local restoration works include:

- Water quality improvements – wetlands act as the ‘kidneys of the landscape’ filtering out impurities in the water as it passes through
- Flood mitigation- water flowing into wetlands slows the release of floodwaters into river systems

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- Carbon storage - healthy vigorous wetland vegetation acts as a significant carbon store, contributing to a reduction in carbon emissions
- A healthy 'wild' place for people to immerse themselves – wetlands are as ecologically productive as reefs and rainforests yet don't receive the same level of attention or appreciation
- Opportunities to connect to country and like-minded people through volunteer programs which include tree plantings and animal surveys, education programs, cultural tours, photography, astronomy and pioneering growling grass frog restoration work

"We're proud to be actively working alongside our earliest ecologists, the Yorta Yorta people, to help heal country," Dr Farnsworth said.

The synergy between culture and ecology will be celebrated by the launch of an indigenous plants guide in March this year, as well as ongoing work through this year to help reconnect Yorta Yorta people to the site through artworks, landscaping and gatherings.

"Last but not least the Winton Wetlands Committee of Management is working to achieve international listing for our significant local wetlands within the global 'Ramsar' recognition system.

"We expect this listing will help in ongoing efforts to ensure this part of the world gets due recognition as one of the world's most significant wetland restoration projects – and a big contributor to wellness in this region.

"For these reasons and more, we're delighted to recognise World Wetlands Day in 2024 and its timely theme of 'wetlands and wellness'.

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