

MEDIA RELEASE

9 July 2024

‘Caring for country’ at the heart of groundbreaking new native plants guide

A groundbreaking new native plants guide has been launched this week as part of NAIDOC Week celebrations in Benalla and at Winton Wetlands.

The guide is the result of research and cooperation between indigenous plant experts and land and water ecologists at Winton Wetlands, with funding from a legal prosecution involving Victoria’s Environment Protection Authority.

The publication, ‘A guide to significant indigenous plants of Mokoan’, focuses on plants traditionally found in and around Winton Wetlands, or Mokoan as it is known to the Yorta Yorta people, traditional custodians of the land.

It provides information on more than 25 different native plant species, both land-based and water-based, including trees, shrubs and ground vegetation. Information includes traditional uses for each of these plants, including food and medicine, alongside information on the ecological significance of each species.

“This is an exciting initiative that will share valuable information more widely,” Restoration Manager Dr Lisa Farnsworth said today. “It reflects our intentions to actively include both cultural and ecological priorities into future management of the site.

“We’re proud to have the opportunity to help combine the knowledge of Yorta Yorta people and the ecology team to produce a guide like this. For us, it represents a clear demonstration of our desire to walk together to care for country.”

Cultural officer Nikki James said she looked forward to people using the guide to understand more about the cultural dimensions of Mokoan, as well as the many practical uses to which wetlands plants have long been applied.

“Many of these plants have been important both as food and for medicine, amongst other things. The more people can learn about this, the more we can all walk together with a better shared understanding.”

Dr Farnsworth said the planting guide was being funded by a ‘restorative project order’ proposed by EPA Victoria as part of a prosecution against a local polluter in the Benalla Magistrates Court.

Under a restorative project order, the Environment Protection Act 2017 allows the court to require the polluter to pay for a local environmental project instead of imposing a conventional fine.

In this case, some of those funds have been used to pay for important revegetation activities at Winton Wetlands over the past year, as well as participation by schools and a youth support group, Boys to the Bush, in planting activities at the wetlands.

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“This guide completes the current series of projects by documenting important cultural and ecological information of Mokoan and making it possible to share that information more widely across the community,” Dr Farnsworth said.

In addition to Winton Wetlands and Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation, other organisations giving support for the guide and other parts of the EPA-linked project funding include Park Lane Nursery, Merriwa Industries, the Regent Honeyeater Project, and Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority.

The guide was released publicly on Tuesday 9 July as part of Benalla Rural City’s NAIDOC Week celebrations in Benalla, with attendees at Winton Wetlands then given the “inside story” of the guide as part of the wetlands’ own annual NAIDOC Week morning tea on Friday 12 July, hosted by cultural officer Nikki James.

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