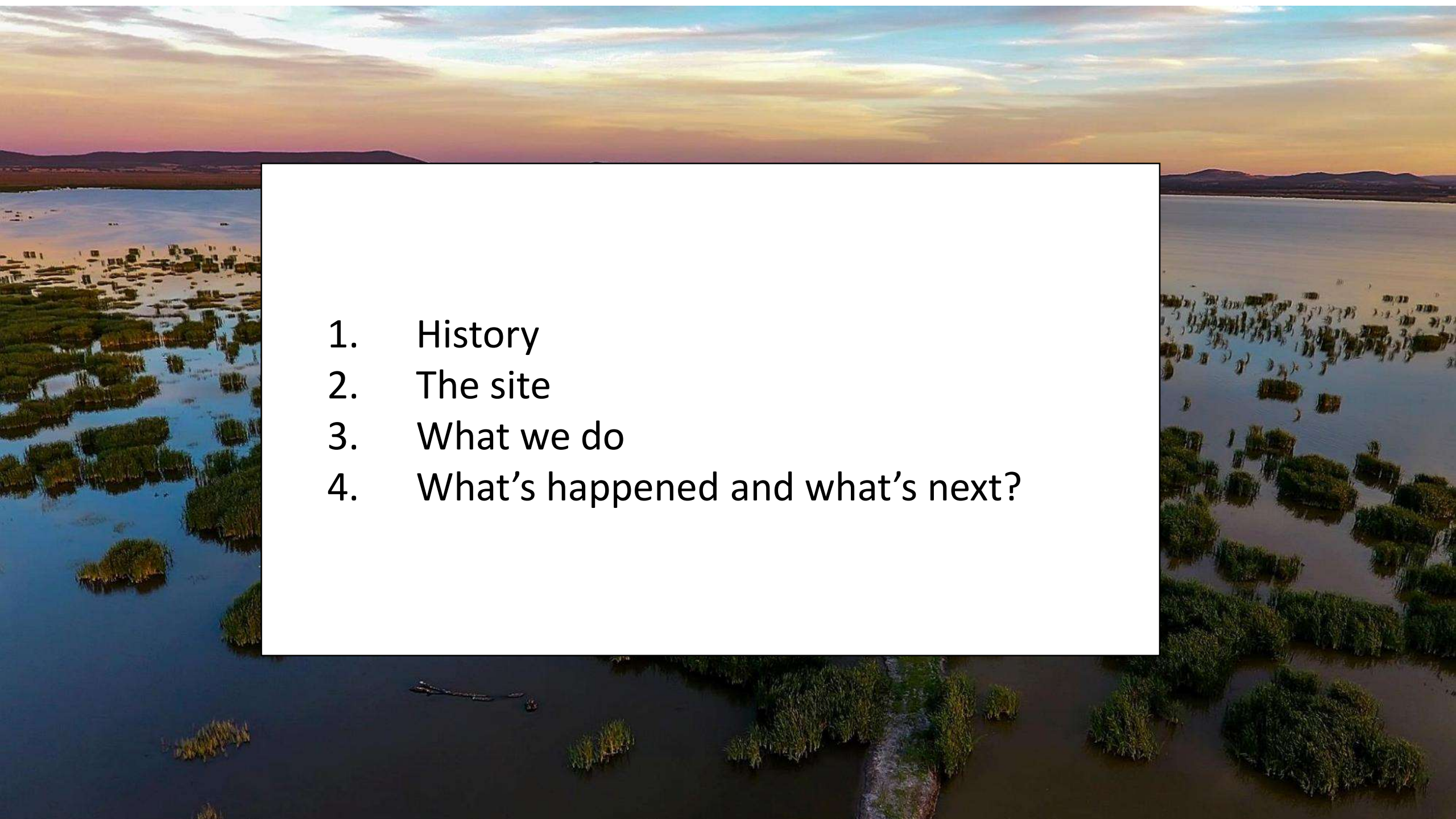


An aerial photograph of the Winton Wetlands at sunset. The foreground is filled with numerous small, rectangular plots of lush green vegetation, likely rice, interspersed with shallow, dark water. The middle ground shows a large, calm body of water reflecting the colorful sky. In the distance, a range of low mountains is visible under a sky with soft, wispy clouds in shades of orange, yellow, and blue. The overall scene is peaceful and scenic.

# **WINTON WETLANDS**

An aerial photograph of a vast wetland area. The foreground and middle ground are filled with numerous small, rectangular plots of green reeds or marsh grasses, interspersed with shallow, dark water. The water reflects the colors of the sky. In the background, a wide expanse of water stretches towards a range of low mountains under a dramatic sunset sky with soft, colorful clouds in shades of orange, yellow, and blue. The overall scene is serene and natural.

**Dr Dennis O'Brien**

- 
1. History
  2. The site
  3. What we do
  4. What's happened and what's next?

# 1. THE HISTORY

(five periods)



# 1. INDIGENOUS

- ❑ Highly significant gathering place and food source.
- ❑ Hundreds of artefacts - including a scar tree forest, burial sites as well as middens birthing trees and directional trees

**Dispossessed with the arrival of non-indigenous people in 1825**





## **2. PASTORALIST - EUROPEAN AGRICULTURE**

**1825 'Settlers' started arriving**

**1840's The site became Mokoan Squatters Run, with the forced removal of indigenous owners.**

**It was later referred to as Mokoan Swamp and Winton Swamp**





**1853** Winton Village had its first store, a railway station, two schools, a hall, three churches, a post office and farming families.

**1860** Butter factory

**1885** Discussion about a water storage or reservoir begins

**The community developed into a thriving grazing and cropping area over 125 years**



- ❑ 1967 - 1971 construction of the dam wall (longest dam wall (7.5km) in the Southern Hemisphere)
- ❑ 16 farming families called the site home prior to inundation in 1971

**Dispossessed when their properties were compulsorily acquired**



### **3. LAKE MOKOAN**

- Popular for fishing, sailing and duck hunting.**
- Irrigation and flood mitigation**
- Problems**
  - regular blue green algal blooms
  - infestation by introduced carp
  - extreme evaporation (due to shallowness),
  - poor water quality

## 4. DECOMMISSIONING

**2004** Victorian Government as part of the *Our Water Our Future* White Paper decides to decommission the lake

**June 2008** Government commits to provide \$20million

**March 2010** Dam wall is breached.

**Hunters, fishers and yachties as well as irrigators were dispossessed when their access to activities were curtailed**





## **5. The Renewal (restoration)**


- ❖ The state government committed \$17 million to the restoration ... and the possibility of selling up to \$3 million in land to implement the FLUS and Master Plan**
  
- ❖ The government appointed the first Committee of Management in 2010**
  - Various committee compositions (1+4)**
  - Five CEOs with different priorities and skills**
  - Well supported by DEECA (in its different incarnations)**



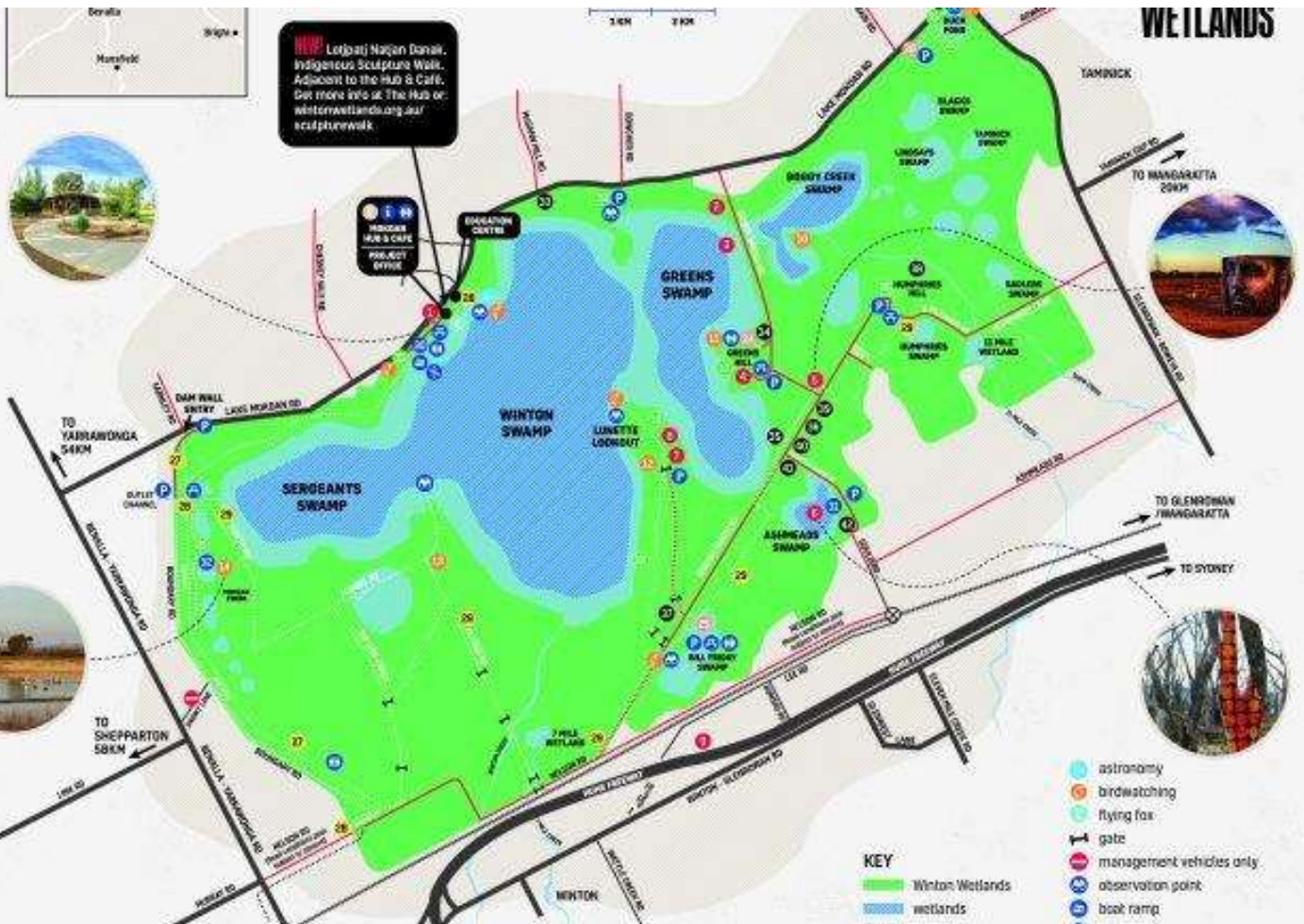
# COMPLEX HISTORY

- ❖ Connection and dispossession
- ❖ Stewardship, intervention and damage
- ❖ Example of humanity in the landscape

## 2. THE SITE

- 
- **8,750 hectares or 21,613 acres (4,325 MCGs)**
  - **One third wetlands (33 different pond areas)**
  - **Ephemeral**
  - **Most significant wetland restoration site in the Southern Hemisphere**

- 1 Fish Trees - Tim Bowtell
- 2 Wren & Finch - Davidson Lopes
- 3 The CFA Tank - Guido van Helten
- 4 Water Gallery - Troy Firebrace & Bailey Bish
- 5 Hide Barn - Cam Scale
- 6 The Long Neck Turtle - Kaiela Arts
- 7 White-bellied Sea Eagle - Andrew J Bourke
- BIRDWATCHING**
- 8 Sea Eagle Conservation Area
- 9 Raptor Nest
- 10 Eagle Nest
- 11 Peltys Corner
- 12 Mokoan Ponds
- BUSHWALKING (WALKS MAP AVAILABLE)**
- 13 Woodland Walk (540m)
- 14 Humphries Hill Walk (900m)
- 15 Greens Hill Walk (2.6km)
- 16 Spit Walk (1.3km return)
- 17 Lunette Walk (3km return)
- 18 Robertsons Hill (960m return)
- 19 Heron Loop (1.7km)
- 20 Swan Wall (1.8km return)
- 21 Mokoan Ponds (4km return)
- CAMPING**
- 22 Greens Hill - Camp Ground
- 23 Bill Friday Swamp - Camp Ground
- 24 Bush Camp @ Duck Pond
- CYCLING (CYCLING MAP AVAILABLE)**
- 25 Dam Wall Ride (7.7km one way)
- 26 Bensala-Mokoan Discovery Trail (12.8km one way)
- 27 Cycle the Wetlands (20km one way)
- KAYAKING (SEASONAL)**
- 28 Boat Ramp
- 29 Ashmeads Swamp
- 30 Mokoan Ponds
- OTHER POINTS OF INTEREST**
- 31 Chesney Vale State School
- 32 Greens Hill Homestead Site
- 33 Joan Kirra Memorial Planting
- 34 Winton North State School
- 35 Cemetery Site
- 36 Humphries Homestead Site



**Lejbat** Najan Danak, Indigenous Sculpture Walk. Adjacent to the Hub & Cafe. Get more info at The Hub or [wintonwetlands.org.au/sculpturewalk](http://wintonwetlands.org.au/sculpturewalk)



# 3. WHAT WE DO

## **In the beginning**

- ❑ State government grant of \$17m + possible land sales to \$3m**
- ❑ Recognised that it was a long-term project**
- ❑ FLUS and Master Plan developed – as guiding documents for series of three-year strategic plans with imbedded one year business plans**
- ❑ Committee of Management established - reporting to DSE/DELWP/DECCA**





COMPLEX DAMAGED SITE WITH A  
COMPLEX HISTORY AND  
INTERESTING MANAGEMENT  
STRUCTURE!



# **OUR AIM**

- 1. Renew the ecology of the estate**
- 2. Research and education in wetland and dryland ecological renewal**
- 3. Tell the stories of humanity in the landscape**
- 4. Support the growth of nature based and cultural experiences in our region**
- 5. Enhance the regional economy (including agriculture)**
- 6. Develop the financial sustainability of the project**



- 1. Renew the ecology of the estate**
- 2. Research and education in wetland and dryland ecological renewal**

- Our ecologists**
- ESAP**
- Wetland of Distinction (US Society of Wetland Scientists)**
- Collaborations**
- Grants**
- Volunteers**





**Around 200 bird species counted** – many migratory

**Most common birds:** Grey Teal, Sulphur Crested Cockatoo, Pacific Black Duck, Welcome Swallow, Superb Fairy Wren

**Bird of prey:** eagles, falcons, kites and goshawks. (Birdlife Australia has recorded 14 raptors)





**most common reptiles:** Eastern Large Striped Skink, brown snake and red bellied black snake,



**‘new’ species found regularly –** Woodland Blind Snake and Common Blue Tongued Skink (2021)

**Most common amphibians:**  
Spotted March Frog, Sudell's  
Frog

**On its way – Growling Grass  
Frog (Wettenhall Foundation)**



# Fish and turtles

**Longneck turtle** (here but threatened – especially by foxes – protecting eggs and hatchlings)

**Native fish** - Purple Spotted Gudgeon and Pygmy Perch – coming back



# Kangaroos

Abundant – consistently around 8,000 in total

About 1.4 per hectare at the moment (but big annual variations in density)

## Controversy

Local farmers

Culling – we don't but locals do

Phalaris staggers



# Feral animals

Foxes – baits and shoots

Pigs

Deer

Rabbits and hares

Dogs

Carp – electro fishing and  
carp musters



# VEGETATION

## Dryland

More than 500 hectares rehabilitated in past 10 years (River Red Gum and understory)

- Aerial seeding and direct planting

- Schools and volunteers

- Regent Honey Eater Project

- Bush tucker and indigenous plant garden

## Aquatic and semi aquatic

- Water quality

- Specific planting in appropriate locations

## Weed control

- Bathurst Burr, Noogoora Burr, Paterson's Curse, Briar Rose, St John's Wort,

- Phalaris (dry and wet)

- Water Plantain

- Willow species (*Salix* spp.) - only scattered

Aquatic weeds we don't have but need to watch out for

- Cabomba (*C. caroliniana*)

- Arrowhead (*Sagittaria*)



# Wetland Restoration Science Forum

- Annually since 2015
- Applied science



# OUR AIM

**3. Tell the stories of humanity in the landscape**

**4. Support the growth of nature based and cultural experiences in our region**



# Yorta Yorta

- ❖ Indigenous Engagement Office
- ❖ Lotjpatj Natjan Danak Art Trail
- ❖ YY Cultural Education program
  - bush kindy
  - preparatory through to year 12
  - corporate
  - Informal
- ❖ Back on country



# Education Centre (old yacht club)

Culture and ecology (primary, secondary and tertiary) + internships



# Engagement and income

## Visitors

Campers, bird watchers, astronomers, day trippers, café patrons, bus tours, hikers, cyclists, photographers, artists, fishers, corporates, Friends of WW

## Events

NAIDOC, Benalla Street Art Festival, Music festivals (us and Chi Wow Wah Town), Science Forum, Movies, etc.



# Partnerships:



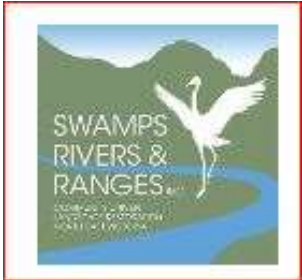
Regent Honey Eater  
Euroa Arboretum  
Benalla Garden Club  
Bird Life Australia



**UNIVERSITIES**  
Charles Sturt University  
Federation University  
University of Western Sydney  
Australian National University  
University of Melbourne  
La Trobe University  
University of Western Sydney



Catholic and State Schools



Wettenhall Foundation

Gateway Health  
Tomorrow Today Foundation  
LLEN  
Outdoor Education



Benalla Council  
BBN

State Government  
(DEECA, RDV and  
TNE)



Yorta Yorta  
Corporation

Benalla Art Gallery  
Music Festivals  
The Creatives  
Movies

# OUR AIM

5. Enhance the regional economy (including agriculture)
6. Develop the financial sustainability of the project



# FINANCIALLY SUSTAINABLE

- **DEECA recurrent funding not possible**
- **Land sale was not feasible**
- **Grazing leases, Hub and café, education programs and hiring of facilities – small contributors**
- **Solar farm**
- **Carbon sequestration**
- **Café and events**
- **Grants (RDV, Wettenhall, EPA, DEECA, etc.)**
- **Philanthropy - progress on establishing the Mokoan Foundation**



# 4. WHAT'S HAPPENED AND WHAT'S NEXT?

## TRANSITION TO A NEW MANAGEMENT MODEL

- DEECA– unable to provide recurrent funding to COMs
- Need a new management structure that is self funded
- EOI process began December 2023
- Odonata Foundation appointed as COM August 1<sup>st</sup> 2024

Continue to implement the FLUS and Master Plan but on a much BIGGER scale by generating funds through:

- commercial investment partners
- philanthropy
- development of the tourism component

ODONATA FOUNDATION DECIDES TO EXIT JULY 2025 - TRANSITION TO DEECA MANAGEMENT MODEL

## **DEECA committed to ongoing management and restoration**

- Site Management and Maintenance
  - staff on site
  - Maintenance
  - Contact point
  - DEECA Project Manager
  - Ecology (monitoring, etc.)
- Retained assets
  - The site retained and enhanced
  - The Hub and Café
  - Education and Research Centre
- Grazing leases
- Community engagement

EPA grant transferred to GBCMA

Wettenhall grant transferred to SRR



**THANKYOU**

**Any questions**