

## 'Wallaby on the Verge'

### REPORT ON Central West CMA's INFFER workshop (2 day): Dubbo 16-17 February:

I attended this workshop wearing two (possibly three) hats: Orange Field Naturalist & Conservation Society; Summer Hill Creeks; and Central West Environment Council.

The purpose of the workshop was to prioritise a list of 'assets' recognised by three groups of people in the catchment: the 'community'; government agencies (including local government); and the CMA itself. I had attended an earlier workshop held in Orange designed to draw out assets considered significant by local community members. These assets could be natural areas of land; cultural sites; animal or plant populations; or even physical characteristics such as soil types and we were then asked to map them on the catchment map. Several OFNCS, SHCC and CWEC members participated. There was very little guidance as to what could be mapped, so some people went for their favourite picnic spots, national parks or animal populations.

The workshop at Dubbo used the approach known as INFFER: Investment Framework for Environmental Resources. This was a filtering approach, whereby the first task was to go through the various assets and decide if the group thought their significance was 'exceptional; very high; high or moderate'. Herein was the second stumbling block as there was little guidance as to how these should be rated. The workshop was divided into several themes: water, wetlands, land, vegetation, cultural heritage and biodiversity. I was in the latter group and I understand the main approaches to assessing conservation significance relating to biodiversity (as I have to teach it), but some of the other participants had little idea how to do this and there was very little guidance provided, especially when our assets varied from the Macquarie Marshes, woodland birds, five frog species, national parks, all areas containing a diversity of orchids, all rivers of high conservation value, to small pockets of land containing velvet worms, koalas, quolls, one pair of beach stone curlews, and in one rather odd case: wallaby on the verge.....we were not clear as to what species of wallaby, how many there were, or what it was on the verge of, but it had been carefully mapped nonetheless and so needed assessment! It should be noted that there were no assets listed that encompassed other endangered taxa: plant species (apart from orchids and *Zieria obcordata*, mammals, reptiles and other amphibians. And we definitely were *not* allowed to add these to the list.

Anyway we muddled through and, of course, all the small favourite areas or populations identified by community members (without the special skills of people such as Col Bower), got 'filtered out' or amalgamated into larger categories because they were not of catchment/national significance, leaving only or mostly those assets nominated by government agencies. I don't know yet what happened to my chosen assets (most of Summer Hill Creek, plus local breeding habitat of brown treecreepers and diamond firetail),

as I assume they were assessed by a different group, but I suspect they got the chop for being only of local significance (or got amalgamated into larger categories).

This process begs the question of why the CMA was going to the trouble and expense of 'engaging with the community' if the outcome would have been exactly the same (or almost so) if the CMA and other agencies had sat down (perhaps with David Goldney and Anne Kerle's report on the Biodiversity of the Central West) and sorted it out between them. I suspect the latter approach would have resulted in a better ecological outcome, anyway. Well they can certainly say that there was considerable community input....and I guess they still have the list of the assets so in the unlikely event of being provided with huge wads of cash, the CMA can look beyond the obvious.

There were several other problems with the approach used (and also some very useful ones) and these were carefully detailed and provided to the organisers. I won't bore you here with them now, but if anyone is interested, please contact me.

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