

South East Coastal Plain Project

Otway Community Conservation Network (OCCN)

Scoping Paper



April 2011



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION.....	3
1.1 South East Coastal Plain Project.....	3
1.2 The Need for an Otway Community Conservation Network (OCCN)	4
2 OTWAY COMMUNITY CONSERVATION NETWORK	6
2.1 Vision	6
2.2 Objectives	6
2.3 Focus	6
2.4 Implementation	7
2.5 Project Monitoring and Evaluation	7
2.6 Potential OCCN Stakeholders	8
3 EXISTING CONSERVATION ORGANISATIONS.....	9
4 REFERENCES	10



1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the Otway Community Conservation Network (OCCN) Scoping Paper is to:

- Provide background information on the South East Coastal Plain Project (SECP Project) and OCCN.
- Provide the context, foundation activities and project guidance for the OCCN.
- Identify current actions of existing weed control/conservation organisations and their interest in participating in OCCN.

1.1 South East Coastal Plain Project

The Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) received funding under the Caring for Our Country (CFOC) Grants Program from the Commonwealth Government to develop, implement and deliver the *Community Protection of the Iconic South East Coastal Plain Bioregion Project* (SECP Project).

The SECP Project will protect a biodiversity-rich section of the South East Coastal Plain Bioregion of Victoria that provides habitat for 20 species listed under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. Through the control of Weeds of National Significance (WONS), the SECP Project will reduce the impact of the Weeds of National Significance (WONS), boneseed *Chrysanthemoides monilifera* subsp. *monilifera* and bridal creeper *Asparagus asparagoides* to biodiversity along a National Heritage nominated coastline.

The SECP Project - a community driven initiative with agency input - will result in a concentrated, strategically coordinated and collaborative effort to increase the effectiveness of current weed control works, whilst also increasing the capability and connections within the local community.

The SECP Project aims to:

- Reduce the impact of WONS on biodiversity within the Otways-Eden area by undertaking collaborative activities to bring core infestations of boneseed and bridal creeper under strategic control, and
- Increase coastal community awareness by engaging and supporting community organisations in coastal and marine rehabilitation, restoration and conservation actions.

Project Area

The SECP Project area aligns with the Otways-Eden Project area - an existing and effective weed management project facilitated by ParksVic. Aligning the Otways-Eden Project area with the SECP Project area will extend the concentration and effectiveness of existing investment. The SECP Project is a cross tenure initiative covering both public and private land with on-ground biodiversity management works being undertaken across approximately 140,000 hectares within the Anglesea, Port Campbell and Colac triangle area (See Figure 1 below).



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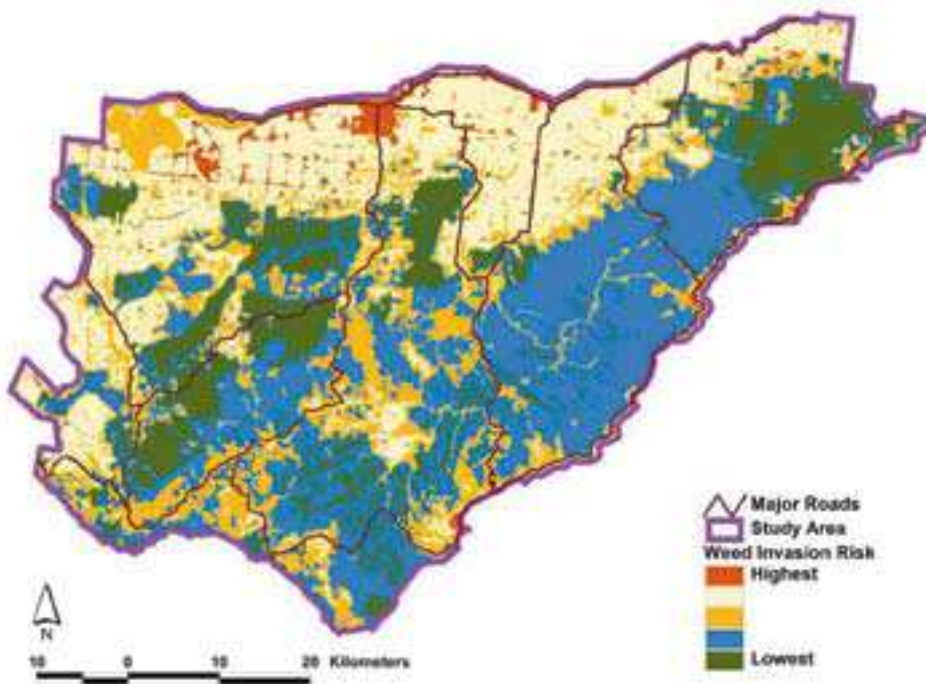


Figure 1. The Otway Community Conservation Network working area

1.2 The Need for an Otway Community Conservation Network (OCCN)

The Otways community is aware and active in the control of boneseed and bridal creeper, however a lack of over arching coordination was identified as a serious impediment to achieving strategic control outcomes. Several conservation-based groups indicated a willingness to connect at the Otways Weed Management Forum in 2009 in order to provide a more effective and coordinated approach to weed control. Furthermore, given the high level of awareness and concern regarding WONS by the Otways conservation groups, there are significant opportunities to enhance their skills and further develop interest and awareness of the impact of weeds in the greater community.

Community Management Networks (CMNs) or Community Conservation Networks (CCNs) are a demonstrated means of achieving improved biodiversity outcomes by creating cross-tenure partnerships and support networks for land managers and community members working towards common conservation goals. Community Conservation Networks are unique in that they are a mechanism for achieving biodiversity goals via community capacity building and agency collaboration.

Therefore, a multi-stakeholder CCN made up of community, government and agency representatives will deliver the over arching coordination that is lacking, to provide a concentrated and collaborative effort to combat weeds and protect biodiversity within the Anglesea, Port Campbell and Colac triangle area now and in future years.

1.3 What does OCCN mean to me as a community member or local environmental group?

In this initial year OCCN will act as an umbrella organisation to provide a coordinated approach to controlling boneseed and bridal creeper across the project area. This will be in the way of providing support to existing community environmental groups through:

- Engaging with local media to celebrate group successes and encourage new memberships;
- Providing targeted control of important boneseed and bridal creeper infestations through engaging contractors; and,
- Providing a forum where community groups and natural resource management organisations can discuss important local issues and work together to ensure integrated management of biodiversity values.

It is anticipated that the steering group will comprise more community members as the project develops and also cover more issues that may be of importance to biodiversity values within the Otways.



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2 OTWAY COMMUNITY CONSERVATION NETWORK

2.1 Vision

Ecological values in the Otway Plain and Ranges coastal regions are protected and enhanced through coordinated community action managing significant weed species.

2.2 Objectives

These objectives are adapted from Thiele *et. al.* (2002) and represent a subset of overall CCN/CMN objectives and additional objectives directly related to the Otway region.

Objectives include:

1. Reduce the threat of invasive species, boneseed and bridal creeper in particular, to protect biodiversity and natural values.
2. Promote sustainable land management that protects biodiversity, especially to private property owners adjacent to natural values.
3. Encourage consistent and environmentally sustainable management across tenure.
4. Enhance and encourage community ownership of the local environment.
5. Provide a support network for all land managers and the community, and encourage consistent management by linking to existing conservation networks
6. Share knowledge between landholders, scientists and conservation experts.
7. Build community capacity and agency collaboration.

2.3 Focus

Each CCN/CMN has a particular conservation focus that is suited to the local environment and community. Much of the biodiversity-rich Otways region, which borders on Geelong and the coastal communities along the Great Ocean Road including; Anglesea, Lorne, Apollo Bay and Port Campbell, is peri-urban making this area extremely susceptible to conservation threats such as invasive species. In addition, absentee ownership is high in these coastal communities, presenting challenges to strategic cross-tenure conservation initiatives.

Currently there is a strong community focus on invasive plants in the Otways region. Community groups and land managers are engaged and working with the wider community to implement and encourage strategic invasive plant management. Reducing the threat of invasive species on biodiversity can be most effectively achieved through development of cross-tenure partnerships, strategic management and education programs. The Otways Community Conservation Network hopes to create such partnerships.



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2.4 Implementation

Delivery

As the instigators of the SECP Project and the development of OCCN, community groups will be heavily involved in delivering outcomes with assistance from an external facilitator (Beacon Ecological). The OCCN Steering Group, made up of government agency and community representatives, will guide OCCN through the project facilitator. The OCCN Steering Group will meet as required to discuss SECP Project and OCCN progress and any issues that may arise.

On-ground Works

Community groups, and agency staff will undertake on-ground works (except where hazardous conditions warrant the use of contractors). Approximately 500-600 volunteers from at least 20 groups are expected to be involved and approximately 500 hectares of boneseed and 300 hectares of bridal creeper infestation will be strategically controlled to protect biodiversity assets.

Engagement

Anticipated engagement activities include, door-knocking of absentee landholders and extending networks to private landholders, workshops to prioritise work sites and increase community capacity to respond to boneseed and bridal creeper and to develop plans for the future. Community groups will also be engaged during on-ground works to share and develop skills and knowledge.

For more information and indicative timelines on the implementation and delivery of the SECP Project and OCCN see *Communication Activity Plan*.

Support

Existing local environment groups will be provided support by way of providing targeted control of boneseed and bridal creeper with contractors where required and engaging local media to celebrate successes of local community groups and to encourage new members. The network will also provide a forum where community groups and natural resource management organisations can discuss important local issues and work together to ensure integrated management of biodiversity values

2.5 Project Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation is an important and necessary component of any successful natural resource management project. The SECP Project is funded by the Australian Government Caring for Our Country Program and adheres to federal monitoring protocol. The impact, effectiveness, appropriateness and efficiency of the SECP Project will be assessed and monitored during the funding lifetime of the project.

Further, there will be regular reporting back to all partners in OCCN (agencies and community groups).

For more information on monitoring and evaluation see the *SECP Project MERI plan*.



2.6 Potential OCCN Stakeholders

- Department of Sustainability and Environment
- Department of Primary Industries
- Parks Victoria
- Corangamite Catchment Management Authority
- VicRoads
- Local Governments (Surf Coast Shire, Colac Otway Shire and Corangamite Shire)
- Great Ocean Road Coastal Committee
- Otway Coast Committee
- Landcare and Community Groups
- Local Indigenous Groups
- Local schools
- Trust for Nature, Australian Wildlife Conservancy, Bush Heritage
- Industry (Shell, Alcoa, etc) and other private businesses
- Bridal creeper and boneseed Weeds of National Significance Programs



3 EXISTING CONSERVATION ORGANISATIONS

1. Aireys Inlet District Association
2. ANGAIR
3. Anglesea Coast Action
4. Apollo Bay Landcare Group
5. Barongarook Landcare Group
6. Birregurra Community Group
7. Southern Otway Landcare Network
8. Cape Otway Centre for Conservation Ecology
9. Conservation Volunteers Australia
10. East Otway Landcare Group
11. Framlingham Aboriginal Trust
12. Friends of Bannockburn Bush
13. Friends of Bay of Islands Coastal Park
14. Friends of Coastal Reserve Aireys Inlet
15. Friends of Deans Creek
16. Friends of Painkalac Creek
17. Forrest Landcare Group
18. Gerangamete Flats Landcare Group
19. Hordenvale Glenaire Landcare Group
20. Kawarren Gelibrand Progress Association
21. Lavers Hill and District Progress Association
22. Lake Modewarre Catchment Group
23. LorneCare
24. Murroon Landcare Group
25. Newfield Valley Landcare Group
26. Friends of Moggs Creek
27. Friends of Otway National Park
28. Friends of the Great Otway National Park
29. Friends of Port Campbell National Park
30. Friends of Queen Park
31. Geelong Field Naturalists Club
32. Greening Australia
33. Heytesbury District Landcare Network
34. Otway Barham Catchment Landcare Group
35. Pirron Yallock Creek Catchment Landcare Group
36. Port Campbell Environment Group
37. Surfers Appreciating the Natural Environment
38. Timboon Bushland Co-operative
39. Timboon Field Naturalists Club
40. Upper Barwon Landcare Group
41. Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative
42. Wongarra to Wye Landcare Group
43. Anglesea YMCA Camp

Management Committees

- Otway Coast Committee
- Great Ocean Road Coast Committee



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4 REFERENCES

Theile, K.R., Prober, S.M., Higginson, E. and Bell, L. (2002) "Conservation Management Networks: a working national framework for their establishment and operation" Discussion paper prepare in conjunction with the National Workshop on Conservation Management Networks, Canberra, March 2001.



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