

Critical Analysis of the Wetlands Restoration Initiatives in Victoria, Australia

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Introduction

In 2013, an inventory of Victoria's wetlands listed 23,739 natural wetlands covering 604,322 hectares and 11,060 artificial wetlands covering 170,613 hectares [1]. Defined by DELWP (2016), a wetland is a waterway and is valued because as a watercourse it helps transports water vital to cities and communities to support life, essential services and for recreational purposes. This case study focused on two contrasting sites from which to review the wetland restoration initiatives of Victoria, Cheetham wetlands and Darebin parklands. Against the backdrop of the Victorian government's vision for integrated catchment management, these two areas have catchment management authorities that have site specific goals. Cheetham was chosen because of its Ramsar status and Darebin for its proximity to urban areas. Both are under siege from encroaching urbanization that has proven very challenging for the natural fauna and flora.

However, being so close to urban areas has one considerable advantage in that local groups have the potential to mobilize their resources efficiently and regularly. To begin, a summary of Victoria's wetland restoration initiatives is given. This is followed by a description of the two sites and information based on discussion with the relevant managers. Finally, results of the study were analyzed against the government initiatives. The aims of this paper were to provide an indication as to whether restoration initiatives work in the real world, and whether new, unexpected or innovative results could occur.

Discussion

While the Ramsar Convention is not legally binding, there is a moral or political force attached [2]. Caring for wetlands is much cheaper than restoring them but there is only so much regeneration that can be achieved. The two sites mentioned above illustrate the challenges managers face, especially in urban-based environments. In order to manage these sites, managing people by engendering their support is the most effective and long-lasting effect that can be achieved to help wetlands into the future (Newton M 2016, pers. comm., 8 August).

Habitat restoration potential

Water quality is vital to the survival of the wetlands as human population will engulf the wetlands further and therefore degrade this important resource. Mr. McCarrick from Parks Victoria brought up the importance of maintaining habitat and this is the key to animal survival. As long as Parks Victoria and the Darebin Parklands Association apply adaptive management and are vigilant and monitor the wetlands and what flows into it, the wetlands will continue to have a purpose. In light of the housing and infrastructure demands of the present and future, neither site will return to its original condition but managing it well will be the best outcome for all. Darebin Parklands is a much smaller area than Cheetham and potentially easier to manage.

Restoration management outcomes

It is noted that the government has not maintained a consistent effort in carrying out long term initiatives based on the following arguments. Valuable datasets gained from adaptive

management, field work and community engagements are needed for informed decisions to implement strategies. Without regular participatory community inclusion in terms of citizen science or feedback from regular visitors to update and maintain these datasets, science goes nowhere without proper implementation. There was no clear evidence that monitoring from these two sites was being relayed back to government in a meaningful way.

One of the major problems with land care is the lack of rural land care regulations that refer to unsustainable farming practices and this must be addressed by government, both state and federal, so that agriculture is held accountable. Man is not coping with the variability and uncertainty factor of land changes [3-10] and this is due to factors such as climate change. There is also a perceived lack of integrated consultation between locals, scientists and local government and this is critical to wetland restoration efforts.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to review the Victorian government's wetlands management initiatives. Views of management were summarized and there is still a lot of work involved in harmonizing the long term and immediate objectives faced by all stakeholders. Nature is vulnerable and has measurable and definite flow on effects on mankind. Human resources required to manage these objectives are limited and often difficult to implement due to limiting beliefs and lack of understanding. Public engagement is a vital key to making positive advancement of the wetland initiatives as we all have a cultural stake in the significance of our wetlands [10-15].

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