

Partners/Sponsors Natural Heritage Trust, National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality, Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authority, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Department of Primary Industries, Wannon Water, Southern Grampians Shire, Portland Aluminium, Warnambool District Fishcare, Central Highlands Water, Environment Protection Authority, Greening Australia, Coastcare, Waste Reduction Group.

Monitoring Information 36 Groups, 47 participants, 68 sites. **Education Participation** 10 600 participants.

Coordinators David Nichols, Jennie Sparke, John Miles, Richard Hodgens.



Glenelg Hopkins

Lake Bolac was the traditional home of the Bulokurra clan. During the eel season the lake become a meeting and trading place for the wider Tjapwurrung tribal area. However, in recent years the Lake has become quite different to the ecologically rich place it once was. Unsustainable land uses, reduced flows and low rainfall have caused severe degradation to the Lake and, in turn, salinity levels have increased dramatically. Salt Creek (the Lake's outflow) has not flowed for several years, inhibiting eel migration - a loss which is both ecological and cultural.

Singer/songwriter Neil Murray and the Framlingham Aboriginal Community decided to raise environmental and cultural awareness about Lake Bolac by embarking on a ten-day, 160km trek following the upstream migration route of the short finned eel (*Anguilla australis*), from the mouth of the Hopkins River to Lake Bolac. The trek was named the "hEELing Walk".



In the 'footsteps' of eels

With Forty Waterwatchers from Terang, Lake Bolac and Mortlake Colleges joined the walkers along a Salt Creek gully that featured rare remnant riparian vegetation. The students gained an insight into both Indigenous and European heritage values and perspectives, while a local commercial eel fisher's demonstration highlighted the economic role the eels and Lake still have within the region.

The "hEELing Walk" culminated in the Eel Festival which was attended by over 800 people and featured a concert by Neil Murray, Shane Howard and local musicians, cultural workshops and information stalls. Waterwatch's own information stall featured macro invertebrates and water quality testing. Waterwatch aims to work in partnership with the community to raise awareness and understanding of water issues and their relationship to catchment health. The Festival and Walk was a fantastic example of a community driven event which raised awareness and understanding of water issues.

One attendee summed up the event with: *"The messages got through - if you hear it in song, spoken word, poem, prose; see it in print, banners, lights; touch and feel it, smell it and taste it; and be moved by it enough times, then you have truly been involved and learned from the experience."*

For more information, visit the 2006 event website www.eelfestival.org.au



Top Neil Murray talks about the hEELing Walk to students and teachers at Salt Lake, Woorndoo. Freshly caught eels were cooked for students, alongside snags for the less adventurous. **Centre** Students join part of the hEELing Walk. **Right** Lake Bolac Eel Festival participants check out the Waterwatch display and live macroinvertebrates.