Water weed woes are under control

Goulburn-Murray Water (GMW) and the Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) have successfully been able to manage the growth and spread of the waterweed *Egeria densa* in Lake Mulwala by periodically lowering the water level of the lake, exposing the weed to the open air.

**Egeria densa**

Over the last 15 years, the environmental and aesthetic values of Lake Mulwala, along with its recreational use, have at times been impacted by the waterweed *Egeria densa* (Egeria).

The highly invasive nature of Egeria results in it outcompeting and displacing native submerged vegetation like floating pondweed and ribbonweed.

Apart from these undesirable environmental effects, when it is abundant and widespread Egeria can also restrict the usage of the lake, making it difficult to launch a boat, troll a lure, swim, or water ski without getting tangled in the weed.

**Lake ‘Drawdowns’**

Egeria is a submersed aquatic macrophyte that is intolerant to drying out. It is entirely reliant on vegetative reproduction as it can’t produce seed.

Lowering of the lake’s water level (known as a ‘drawdown’) and exposing the weed to open air has proved to be an effective way of controlling its distribution and abundance across the whole lake.

Between 1993 and 2007, Lake Mulwala was only drawn down once for weir maintenance. This prolonged period of stable water levels, along with Lake Mulwala’s suitability for plant growth, provided ideal conditions for Egeria to flourish.

By 2008 Egeria occupied about 60 percent of the volume of Lake Mulwala. That same year the lake was drawn down in the course of day-to-day operations but this drawdown wasn’t deep enough to expose all the Egeria. In subsequent years, deliberate drawdowns were conducted during winter to the point where the weed was exposed to the open air. The table below provides a summary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>DEPTH OF DRAWDOWN BELOW FULL SUPPLY LEVEL (m)</th>
<th>EFFECT ON EGERIA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>Minimal effect. The drawdown was not deep enough to expose the lake bed where Egeria was growing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>5.43</td>
<td>Dramatic effect. All Egeria was exposed, reducing it from 60% to 1% of the lake’s volume.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Good effect. Maintained Egeria at its lowest level since monitoring began.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>Results currently unknown. A repeat of the standard survey in 2016 will determine whether the 2015 drawdown has kept Egeria under control.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Side by side comparison**

In 2008 (left), most of the Egeria below the surface of these mounds remained alive throughout the drawdown because it was protected from frost and drying out. Source: DEDJTR, Victoria.

In the 2015 drawdown (right) the mounds were thinner and most of the Egeria was dead. Source: Peter Shaw (Murray-Darling Basin Authority).

**Community Feedback**

Local stakeholders have been supportive of the drawdowns because they have been effective in managing Egeria and its associated problems, as well as providing opportunities for foreshore maintenance.

Another important benefit of the drawdowns was a boost in tourism in the area with visitors coming to see the drawn down lake at a time of year when tourist numbers are traditionally very low.
Managing Egeria

Like most weeds, Egeria can’t be eradicated entirely but can be managed. Lowering of water level to expose the weed to air and dry it out is the only feasible management option for controlling Egeria over the whole lake.

Based on the success of this in Lake Mulwala, as well as the positive community feedback, this will continue to be method for managing Egeria in the lake into the future.

Community Reference Group

The Lake Mulwala Community Reference Group was formed in 2005 through the development of the Lake Mulwala Land and On-Water Management Plan.

The group is made up of representatives from Corowa and Moira Shire Councils, as well community representatives.

Their focus is on building and establishing partnerships between the community, special interest groups, and governments. They provide advice on implementing and monitoring the Land and On-Water Management Plan and play an active role in community engagement.

The group has endorsed a set of aims for vegetation in the lake, including:

- keeping the lake relatively weed free for all aquatic sports
- preventing Egeria from growing and decomposing in front of lake-front houses and tourist amenities (for aesthetic reasons)
- encouraging a healthy mix of aquatic plants to provide a better habitat for native fish to flourish
- preventing downstream spread.

The Future

GMW and the MDBA are now working to develop a set of guidelines for the ongoing operational management of Egeria.

The guidelines will capture the lessons learned and the effects of drawdowns on in-lake ecological processes as well as stakeholder feedback.

They will be implemented as part of normal operations in an effort to achieve the Community Reference Group’s aims and will be adapted over time as knowledge and information improves.

Advice of upcoming drawdowns will be issued as early as possible, and coordinated with scheduled maintenance work on the lake whenever possible.

For more information about the active management of Egeria densa in Lake Mulwala, contact Goulburn-Murray Water’s Yarrawonga office:

Goulburn-Murray Water
Burley Road
YARRAWONGA Vic 3730
(03) 5743 9300