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SIGNS OF LAKE WOYTCHUGGA'S IMPORTANCE ON DISPLAY

Educational signs that provide information about Lake Woytchugga's importance and efforts being made to protect it have been erected in the Wilcannia area.

The Western Catchment Management Authority (CMA) and the Central Darling Shire have worked together to fence Lake Woytchugga, an ephemeral lake that is important for environmental and cultural heritage reasons.

Lake Woytchugga is an ephemeral overflow lake on the north-west side of the Darling River near Wilcannia. During times of flood, the floodwaters flow from the Darling River via Woytchugga Creek. The lake is 4-5 km in diameter and covers approximately 2,045 hectares when full. It normally receives water every 7-10 years.

Western CMA Biodiversity Project Officer, Erlina Compton, says 25 km of fencing has been erected.

"This will protect the Lake and its buffer zone, which includes many important burial sites and artefacts, from vehicles and illegal sand mining. Central Darling Shire will check and maintain the fence each month and undertake weed control on an annual basis," Ms Compton said.

"The project was funded through the Western CMA's High Conservation Value program because of the Lake's importance as a culturally significant site. It also has the uncommon landscape feature of white sand dunes surrounding the Lake. This is considered unusual as most dunes in the area are red sand.

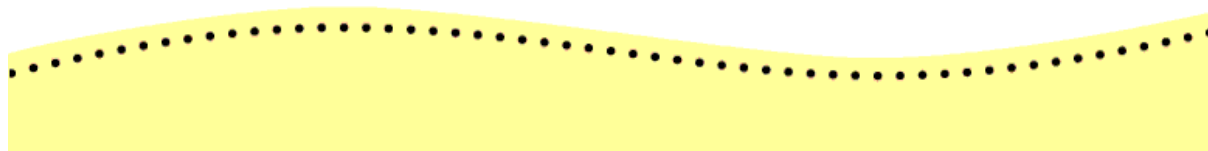
"In addition, the Lake is an important wetland and provides habitat to a wide range of native animals including many water birds. The Western CMA funded the Department of Primary Industries in assisting the Central Darling Shire to prepare a Wetland Management Plan for the Lake," Ms Compton said.

One educational sign, outlining the importance of the Lake and what is being done to protect it is located on the Barrier Highway, adjacent to the Lake. The second sign is located in Baker Park in Wilcannia to provide information for local residents and tourists visiting the town.

The Lake is very important to the Paakantji people and the educational signage features a large, colourful artwork by local Paakantji artist, Murray Butcher.

Mr Butcher says the painting depicts the natural process of the filling and drying of the lake and about the special connection that local Aboriginal people have to the lake.

"Woytchugga is the English way of saying Watjuka, or Patjuka, which means 'moon' in the Paakantyi language," Mr Butcher said.



MEDIA RELEASE



“Paakantji Wiimpatja call the Darling River ‘Paaka’, and we call ourselves Paakantji, ‘belonging to the river’. ‘Wiimpatja’ is what we call Paakantyi people.

“When the Lake is full, it attracts a variety of birds and aquatic life, bringing abundant life to a region that sees more lean times than good.

“It was in these good times that Paakantji Wiimpatja would gather and camp around the lake to take advantage of the resources at hand. There were fish to be caught and mussels, yabbies and shrimp to be collected, while ducks, swans and other waterfowl were caught using traditional hunting and gathering methods. Some of these methods are still used today on hunting and gathering trips. Various birds eggs were also gathered to be eaten.

“Today, Paakantji Wiimpatja still use the lake and surrounding country to hunt and gather various plants and animal foods, to teach the younger generations about country and show them the physical evidence of their ancestors occupation,” Mr Butcher said.

Access to the Lake can be arranged through the Central Darling Shire.

The Western CMA and Central Darling Shire have also worked together to replace a narrow pre-existing culvert which was restricting water flow with a larger and more effective structure. This \$420,000 project will enable flood waters to reach Lake Woytchugga, replenishing the wetland and providing fish passage during peak flood periods.

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Captions:

Murray Butcher, who completed the artwork, with the sign at Baker Park in Wilcannia. The signs are visible on the amenities block at Baker Park in Wilcannia

