

VicSport Update

Central Highlands Region - Water Restrictions

We recently spoke with Sue O'Brien Executive Officer of the Central Highlands Sports Assembly and discussed the effect that water restrictions have had on the town of Ballarat and surrounds. Ballarat has been living with water restrictions for a number of years and in November of 2006 moved to Stage 4 restrictions. The current level for the town's water storage sits at 14.8%. Whilst metropolitan Melbourne is just beginning to deal with the effects of water restrictions, the Ballarat region has been working to come up with solutions for some time.

In Ballarat, the council has undertaken to maintain a small number of ovals for use by sporting clubs. Also a number of private schools in the area have made their fields, watered from private bores, available for use to community clubs. This has meant rationalising ground usage so that clubs who do not have access to a ground can continue with their usual sporting activities. This has resulted in changes to playing and training schedules and adjusting to operating out of temporary locations.

Whilst clubs can continue to participate in their sport, they are severely restricted financially as the usual takings from gate receipts and canteen operations are diminished. Clubs may be able to withstand the financial implications of temporary ground use on a short term basis, however in the long term, continued ground unavailability may have a significant impact on the financial viability of clubs. The challenge is for clubs to consider their long term strategies should they be forced into permanent shared arrangements rather than believing the current situation will abate and they will return to their previous arrangements.

Outside of Ballarat, some sporting facilities have installed bores to help deal with the water shortage. This has been highlighted in the media recently as an option to deal with water restrictions. The cost of having a bore installed depends on the depth of the bore required in order to reach ground water. The figure can be upwards of \$10,000- a financial commitment beyond the reach of many sporting clubs. For sporting facilities that do have access to bore water the viability of the club is more attractive to potential new participants and additional financial benefits accrue to the club from being able to hire the facility out to neighboring clubs. Some clubs have continued to exist on the generosity of local farmers who donate a portion of their irrigation water rights to the watering of grass surfaces or will truck water to a ground from private dams in order to assist.

It is not only grassed playing fields that are affected. Lake Wendouree that has been home to a strong rowing community is completely dry. The clubs that have previously used the lake for rowing, kayaking, sailing and fishing have been without a lake on which to participate. They can travel to alternate locations however this is a time consuming and costly process. Recreational users of the lake who walk it's perimeters for exercise have also been affected as anecdotal evidence suggests that numbers of walkers around the lake have also decreased. In order to solve the problem the Lake Wendouree Water Supply Project proposal was endorsed by the Victorian Government with the announcement by Premier Steve Bracks on 20 January 2006 of a \$2.1 million contribution to the project, whereby a combination of treated reclaimed water from the Ballarat North Waste Water Treatment Plant and stormwater from Paul's Wetland in Wendouree will provide sufficient quantities of suitable quality water to sustain Lake Wendouree.
