

FACT SHEET

CDF/SECRETARY ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE AWARDS 2008

**Max Harker
Defence Support Group**

Implementing Sustainable Environmental Practices at Simpson Barracks, Watsonia, Victoria

Max Harker, garrison and estate support officer with the Defence Support Group is one of this year's winners of a Chief of the Defence Force and the Secretary of Defence Environment and Heritage Award for his continuing work in implementing sustainable environmental practices at Simpson Barracks, Watsonia in Victoria.

On his own initiative, Max has developed his role into environmental stewardship and development for Simpson Barracks, which also includes enhancing the reputation of Defence and Simpson Barracks within the environmental community.

Simpson Barracks located on approximately 132 hectares of land in the Melbourne north-east suburb of Yallambie. It is a major Army training base where units undertake a range of field exercises. Simpson Barracks is home to listed or significant flora, significant conservation areas such as water course, wetlands area, and woodland area.

It is Max Harker who provides guidance to all course managers and participating defence members in planning and executing training activities that are held in environmentally sensitive areas at Simpson Barracks.

Max's commitment to environmental sustainability and the preservation of areas of environmental and heritage significance has been demonstrated by a number of initiatives implemented by Max.

A major achievement was the revegetation at Simpson Barracks in partnership with VicRoads. This partnership arose due to the construction of a pedestrian / bike path on the western border fence of Simpson Barracks, where the construction works led to the loss of trees and native vegetation. Max was instrumental in having the Net Gain Assessment and Offset Plan identify and recommend two areas within Simpson Barracks as the location for the revegetation for 1400 native plants. The partnership arrangements will see VicRoads monitor and maintain the revegetation sites at Simpson Barracks for a period of 10 years.

Max has also coordinated a plan to minimise weed infestation by reversing the direction of the cross country track and training activities at Simpson Barracks. The reversal meant that military personnel now travel from areas with minimal weed infestation to areas of high weed infestation, thus minimising the chance of spreading noxious weeds.

Max also implemented a grounds maintenance regime which restricts mowing activities to facilitate reseeded and growth of native grasses and vegetation to provide drought tolerant ground cover and restrict weed infestation.

Other initiatives implemented by Max include negotiating with units to restrict vehicular traffic to areas experiencing soil erosion. This strategy aims to reduce the risk of soil erosion happening to other tracks in the area.

The environmental problems that come with managing Simpson Barracks are diverse - Max has also had to deal with native ducks that became a pest as they regularly used and contaminated the outdoor heated swimming pool. Utilising local resources and the natural topography, Max coordinated construction of a duck pond to provide an alternative habitat for the duck population. This has reduced the level of duck contamination at the pool.

The Simpson Barracks is also home to trees of heritage and environmental significance. Due to low rainfall and water restrictions, these trees are showing signs of stress and are considered to be at severe risk. To minimise long term impacts, Max has implemented means by which back wash water from the Simpson Barracks pool can be transported and applied to this heritage and environmental area.

By introducing these and other environmental initiatives, Max has developed cooperative partnerships with a number of external stakeholders including the local Council, environmental groups and schools.

Some of the programs he has helped develop include the Simpson Barracks Environmental Walk which is held in conjunction with the local Council. The event gives members of the community the opportunity to visit the site and gain an appreciation of Simpson Barracks, and to showcase Defence's commitment to the environment.

Another initiative, the Simpson Barracks Water Watch Program, allows local schools and environment groups to undertake water monitoring and testing of the waterways and wetland areas within Simpson Barracks. This has resulted in an independent assessment of the environmental good health and species diversity in the area as well as maintaining important relationships with community groups.