



# Northern Region Sustainable Water Strategy

## Fact Sheet 6

### Certainty and choice

The Northern Region of Victoria is home to 529,000 people, produces foods and wines that contribute \$3.26 billion to Victoria’s economy, and boasts iconic environmental assets including internationally acclaimed wetland sites such as Lindsay, Mulcra and Walpolla Islands, Hattah Lakes and the Barmah forest

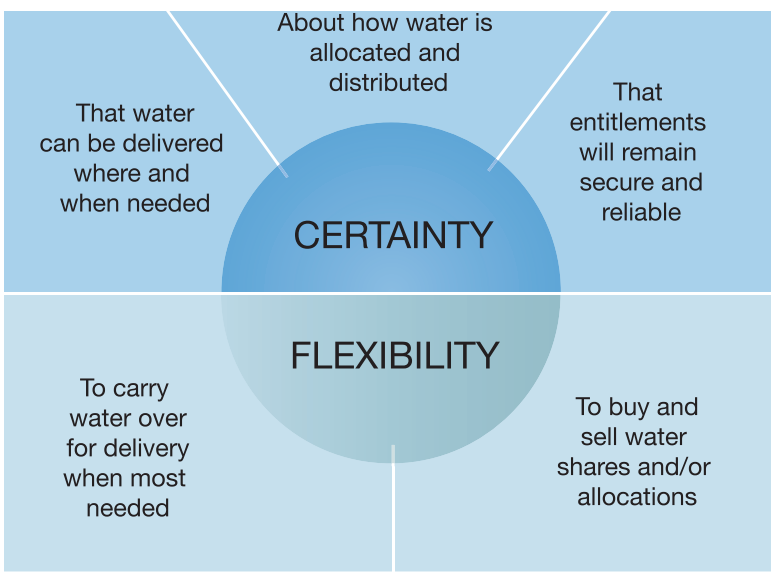
To be confident that water will be available for our towns, farms and the environment, water needs to be able to get to where it is needed, when it is needed.

#### Key actions to safeguard our future

The Strategy aims to provide more certainty, and choice, because everyone’s water needs are different. It equips our towns, irrigators and environmental managers with improved tools, to make their own decisions on when it is best to buy, sell, use or store water.

That means some changes from how we have traditionally managed water. Our water storage and distribution network is designed to accommodate several years of low rainfall or drought – but is struggling to perform at its optimum after 12 years of below average rainfall.

Figure 6.1 - How does the Strategy provide certainty and flexibility



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- ↘ increase system reserves to ensure distribution systems can be relied upon to deliver water when and where it is needed
  - water will be set aside in the Murray and Goulburn systems when allocations for high-reliability water shares are between 30 and 50 per cent. During this time, as the amount of water available increases, half will go to reserve, while the other half will be allocated.
- ↘ change the rules to allow exemptions from the four per cent limit on trade out of irrigation districts when purchases are linked to modernisation programs
  - Victoria's water market is well developed and has been a key tool for farmers and water managers to manage drought, with the volume of allocation traded in northern Victoria since 1 July 2007 in excess of 1,000 GL.
- ↘ free up trade rules for unregulated systems, where there are no adverse impacts on other entitlement holders
  - relaxing trade rules for unregulated systems will give these farmers more options to manage through dry years and drought.
- ↘ decreasing the risk of losing carryover in full allocation years – carryover water will only be lost when storages actually spill and remove the limit on how much water can be carried over
  - carryover provides access to critical water early in the season when allocations may be low. It provides certainty on the minimum amount of water available for a season, and gives people more control over their own water supplies. It also gives environmental water managers the chance to store water and use it when it is most needed.

## What happens if we do nothing - a future with less water

Northern Victoria's water storages underpin the reliability of our water entitlements. The 21 major storages built in the Northern Region total more than 12,000 GL of storage capacity and support current levels of water use.

Water is set aside in our storages so people and water managers can get it delivered when they want it. In addition water is stored as a reserve to call on in times of drought.

At the moment, water is set aside in reserve only after high-reliability water shares are fully allocated. This 'reserve policy' has worked well in the past and has been enough to support highly reliable entitlements to underpin high-value agriculture, including permanent plantings which are less able to go without water at certain times of the year.

But the last 12 years has shown that this policy will not work if there is a reduction in annual rainfall. Without change, zero allocations may occur in the Goulburn system in August in up to 11 years out of 100, and in the Murray, 16 years out of 100.