





## 1.1 Role of regional sustainable water strategies

Sustainable water strategies take a long-term view of water resource planning, considering all sources of water and the needs of towns, industry, agriculture and the environment. They guide the development, integration and implementation of management plans prepared by water corporations and catchment management authorities operating within each region.

Regional sustainable water strategies were legislated through the 2005 amendments to the *Water Act 1989* and fulfil Victoria's commitment to the National Water Initiative to carry out open, statutory-based water planning.

The Northern Region Sustainable Water Strategy aims to:

- identify and understand threats to water availability and quality, including the implications of climate change and variability
- help regional communities to adjust to reduced water availability
- ensure secure water entitlements for towns, industry and the environment
- encourage economically viable and sustainable agriculture
- improve choice and flexibility for entitlement-holders to manage the risks of climate change and variability
- protect and where possible, improve the health of rivers, wetlands and aquifers from the impacts of drought, climate change and variability and other risks
- recognise and respond to Indigenous and other cultural and heritage values associated with the region's rivers and catchment areas.



Grapevines, Mclvor Estate



## 1.3 Guiding principles

The following principles guide the Strategy, providing the framework for assessing options to secure northern Victoria's water future:

### Shared responsibility and shared benefit

- > Everyone needs to act to secure water.
- > All entitlement-holders need to share the risk of reduced water availability caused by climate change. This includes rural and urban water users and the environment.
- > Overall community benefits will be maximised and no generation or group will incur unwarranted extra costs or receive additional benefits.
- > All stakeholders will be treated equitably.

### Recognising existing rights and entitlements

- > Entitlements will remain secure with legal tenure that is certain and protected.
- > The right to a share of the available resource will be protected, even if reliability is reduced due to climate change.
- > If actions have material third party impacts, these impacts will be defined and minimised, mitigated, offset or compensated by the beneficiary.
- > In defining impacts on existing rights, the assessment will be appropriate to the magnitude of the impact and accuracy of information available.

### Allowing individuals to manage their own risk and exercise their choices

- > Strategy actions will aim to maximise the ability of entitlement-holders to manage their own risk.
- > As far as possible, risk will be the responsibility of those best equipped to manage it – in most cases, this will be individual entitlement-holders.
- > Strategy actions will facilitate informed decision-making and maximise the ability of individuals to exercise choice.



Hay near Myrtleford

Photographer: Emily Hart

### Being prepared without acting prematurely

- > Strategy actions and policies will be robust under all water availability scenarios.
- > Strategy actions will aim to address the risks associated with severe climate change – avoiding unacceptable costs if this doesn't occur.
- > Ongoing monitoring and evaluation will facilitate adaptive management to ensure that we will be prepared for the future as it unfolds.

### Maximising efficiency and seeking multiple benefits

- > Water is scarce and will be delivered and used as efficiently and effectively as possible to maximise the benefits – for water users, the environment and the broader community.
- > Strategy actions will target multiple benefits – economic, social, cultural and environmental.

### Maximising environmental outcomes

- > Strategy actions, when considered together, will aim to result in no net negative impacts and where possible, environmental gain.
- > Strategy actions will aim to protect or enhance ecological values.
- > Strategy actions will seek opportunities to improve water delivery and outcomes for the environment.

### Socially responsible decision-making

- > Decisions about water resource management will be socially responsible and consider economic, social and environmental impacts.
- > Decisions about water sharing will be equitable and reflect community values (as sought through the Strategy's consultation processes, which will be open and transparent).
- > Strategy actions will be transparent in terms of the benefits gained or costs imposed (that is, trade-offs).
- > Decisions about Strategy actions will consider impacts at all scales, including on:
  - individuals
  - businesses (farm and non-farm)
  - local, regional and State communities
  - Commonwealth/national objectives.

## 1.4 The Strategy process

The Northern Region Sustainable Water Strategy is the result of an 18 month collaborative process involving Government departments, independent experts, key water industry stakeholders, including urban, rural and environmental water users and the broader regional community. Major outputs from the process are outlined in Figure 1.2.

The Minister for Water appointed a Consultative Committee of regional stakeholders to provide strategic guidance and oversight of the Strategy's development, (see Table 1.1). The committee met 15 times between January 2008 and August 2009. Its deliberations helped shape the required technical work and provided local perspective on the Strategy's consultation, option development and assessment processes.

Figure 1.2 How the Northern Region Sustainable Water Strategy was developed



**Table 1.1 Consultative Committee members**

<i>Independent Chair</i>	<i>Denis Flett</i>
Department of Sustainability and Environment	John Cooke, Tony Long, Campbell Fitzpatrick and Jane Doolan
Department of Primary Industries	Neil McBeath
Murray-Darling Basin Commission/Authority	Wendy Craik / Katrina McGuire
Victorian Farmers Federation	Richard Anderson
Northern Victoria Irrigators	Barry Croke
Community representative	John Dainton
Fruit Growers Victoria	John Wilson
Australian Dried Fruits Association	Tony Martin
United Dairy Farmers of Victoria	Ian Cobbledeick
Municipal Association of Victoria	Neil Repachioli and Barbara Murdoch
Australian Conservation Foundation (until November 2008)	Paul Sinclair
Environment Victoria	Juliet Le Feuvre
North East Catchment Management Authority	John Riddiford
Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority	Bill O'Kane
North Central Catchment Management Authority	Gavin Hanlon / Damian Wells
Mallee Catchment Management Authority	Jenny Collins
North East Water	Jim Martin / Craig Heiner
Goulburn Valley Water	Laurie Gleeson / Peter Quinn
Coliban Water	Geoff Michell / Gavin Hanlon
Central Highlands Water	Neil Brennan
Goulburn-Murray Water	Garry Smith / Ian Moorhouse
Lower Murray Water	Owen Russell
First Mildura Irrigation Trust (until August 2008)	Ian Matheson

Allocation, environment, licensing and urban working groups were established to support the Committee. Membership included regional water corporations and catchment management authorities, irrigators, peak industry representatives and local environment group members. Members came from across northern Victoria including the Sunraysia, North Central, Goulburn Broken and north eastern areas. Collectively these groups met 15 times between January 2008 and September 2008 to identify and assess options to be included in the Draft Strategy. The allocation and environment groups reconvened between December 2008 and March 2009 to provide input to a review of carryover arrangements. These and the licensing group continued to meet to provide advice on actions and policies in the Strategy.

Consultation occurred with Traditional Owner groups across the Northern Region (see Table 1.2). Although each group in the Northern Region has its own unique way of operating and its own issues and aspirations several key points were consistently made in relation to future water management in the Northern Region, including:

- the importance of health of Country
- ensuring that Traditional Owners are active participants in managing water.

Further information on the issues, concerns and aspirations raised by Northern Region Traditional Owners can be found in Background Report 11.

**Table 1.2 Indigenous groups consulted in the development of the Strategy**

Bangerang People	Nyera Nyera People
Barapabarapa People	Tati Tati People
Dhudoroa People	Taungurung People
Dja Dja Wurrung People	Wadi Wadi People
Jarra Jarra People	Wamba Wamba People
Latji Latji People	Way Wuru People
Ngintait People	Yorta Yorta People

Regional stakeholders hosted more than 75 briefings and meetings with local communities and two public comment periods drew 135 and 177 submissions respectively. These submissions provided a range of perspectives from the irrigation, environment, tourism, cultural and industry sectors and were used in developing and assessing options for inclusion in this Strategy.

Other opportunities for the community to provide input included briefings for boards and customer committees of water corporations and catchment management authorities, briefings with local government (including the Municipal Association of Victoria), irrigation and environment peak industry groups (for example, grower groups, Victorian Farmers Federation, Environment Victoria) and special interest groups (for example, Upper Murray Agribusiness, Murray Campaign Committee, Waterwatch and Landcare groups).

### 1.4.1 Assessing potential responses

The consultation program helped to identify, filter and progress key proposals (from the Draft Strategy) into the actions and policies committed to in this Strategy (see Figure 1.3). In particular, deliberations by the Consultative Committee and working groups helped to assess each option against the Strategy's guiding principles and identify where further hydrological modelling and socio-economic data was needed. Background Report 12 provides more information about the results of this analysis and additional analysis completed between the Draft and this Strategy.

An Independent Panel was appointed by the Minister for Water to consider public submissions and other feedback from the consultation program. Appendix 1 provides information on the role and membership of the Panel and outlines the government's response to the Panel's key findings on the Draft Strategy submissions. Public submissions and the Panel's reports are available at [www.ourwater.vic.gov.au/programs/sws/northern/submissions](http://www.ourwater.vic.gov.au/programs/sws/northern/submissions).

**Figure 1.3 Process to develop Draft Strategy proposals into Strategy actions**

