

The rivers of northeast Victoria

Planning our Basin future together

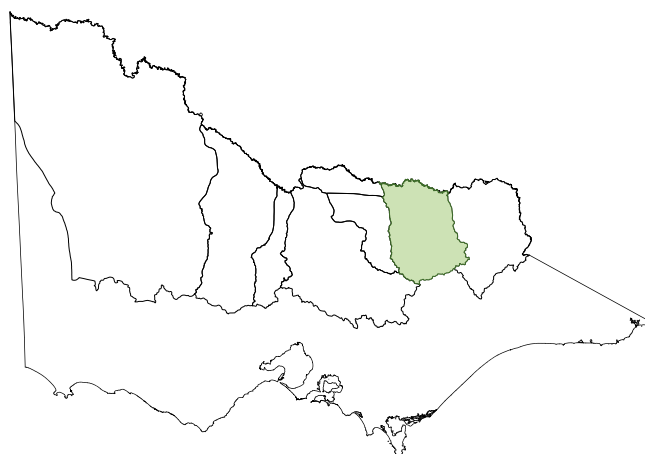
The Victorian Government recognises that a healthy Murray-Darling river system benefits everyone. We remain committed to delivering positive outcomes for agriculture, the environment, Traditional Owners and regional communities through best practice water and waterway management.

Victoria is working with communities to find better ways to deliver further water recovery. We are seeking your feedback on how and when regional water recovery projects are developed.

Irrigated agriculture

Irrigators in the Ovens-King and Kiewa systems source water from regulated and unregulated rivers and streams, groundwater bores and private dams. Water entitlements and water use information for the Ovens-King and Kiewa systems is summarised in the box below.

Irrigated agriculture in the Ovens-King and Kiewa contributes to approximately \$374 million of annual agricultural production value. The main irrigated land uses in the Ovens-King are livestock grazing (non-dairy) and perennial horticulture, which is mostly wine grapes along the King River. Dairy (agistment and fodder) and cropping are the main irrigated land uses in the Kiewa.



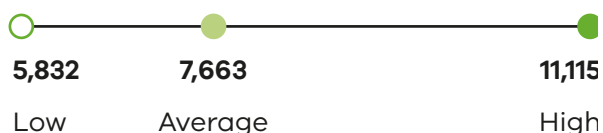
Ovens-King system

Private water shares (ML)

LRWS 12,495

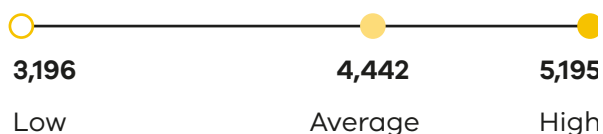
HRWS 25,978

Annual private water use (ML)¹



Kiewa system

Annual private water use (ML)¹



Notes:

1. Based on annual water use volumes for the past 10 years.

Environmental values

The Ovens-King system supports a wide range of native fish species, including Murray cod, golden perch and trout cod. Frogs, such as the giant banjo frog and growling grass frog, are abundant in the Ovens River's lower reaches and associated wetlands. The nationally significant wetland complex contains over 1,800 wetlands that support a variety of aquatic and semi-aquatic vegetation, and provide habitat for waterbirds including egrets, herons, cormorants and bitterns. Streambanks in the area support some of Victoria's healthiest river red gum forests and woodlands.

The upper reaches of the Kiewa River on the Bogong High Plains feature alpine wetlands of national significance that contain many rare species of alpine wetland flora. Lower reaches divert into floodplain wetlands before flowing into the River Murray. The upper and lower Kiewa River and its tributaries are listed as high-value environmental assets for supporting Murray cod and mountain galaxias.

Responding to change

Changes made to the Basin Plan in December 2023 mean the Commonwealth Government has greater ability to purchase water entitlements. Up to one and a half Sydney Harbours (750 GL) could be recovered across the Basin. An open tender water purchase program will have negative impacts for communities that depend on irrigation.

The Victorian Government's focus is delivering its legislative requirements under the Basin Plan. We will continue to look at works and measures which achieve these outcomes and work with the Commonwealth to get them recognised.

We will also look to minimise the impact of Commonwealth purchases in Victoria by working with communities to find ways to recover water while improving environmental outcomes and the long-term sustainability of communities in these regions. You can read about this in the 'Planning our Basin future together' prospectus and fact sheet, available at www.water.vic.gov.au/our-programs/murray-darling-basin/planning-our-basin-future-together.

A system approach to water recovery

Victoria's long-term commitment to water recovery means that large-scale projects to increase water efficiency and modernise infrastructure have already been done.

This means we need to take a system approach when considering options for further water recovery. This will allow us to minimise the impacts of water purchase, plan for the long-term sustainability of our irrigation communities and achieve better environmental outcomes.

Potential water recovery opportunities

The Ovens-King and Kiewa systems in north-east Victoria have limited regulation. Almost all basin inflows reach the Murray River from the Kiewa River due to low water use. This means that there are fewer potential water recovery opportunities in the Ovens-King and Kiewa than other Basin systems in Victoria.

Taking an integrated approach to water recovery in the Ovens-King and Kiewa region could include water purchases done in a way that considers where people live, how they are supplied, the impact on other users and opportunities to get additional system savings.

This has the potential to deliver better environmental outcomes such as:

- Maintenance of baseflows and delivery of freshes in the Ovens River during dry periods
- Contribution to meeting downstream environmental objectives in the Murray River

These ideas are a conversation starter with regional communities.

We will also be partnering with Traditional Owners to find opportunities to progress self-determination in water access and management.

Working together

In light of the Commonwealth Government's position on open tender water purchases, the Victorian Government will work with communities on how and when we will deliver water recovery, and the process to develop and deliver projects to support this.

This work will require extensive community engagement and planning and the Victorian Government will seek funding from the Commonwealth Government to support this.



Credit (above): North East Catchment Management Authority
Credit (in title): North East Catchment Management Authority

Having a say

The Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) alongside water corporations and catchment management authorities, will be talking to communities about Victoria's approach.

You are also welcome to make comments on the prospectus and approach. Submissions can be made via Engage Victoria: engage.vic.gov.au.

Contact us at rural.water@delwp.vic.gov.au.