

WRP Fact Sheet 5

Priority Environmental Assets and Ecosystem Functions

Victoria's water resource plans

Victoria optimises environmental outcomes through the delivery of environmental water to support priority environmental assets and ecosystem functions.

Environmental watering priorities in the Murray-Darling Basin

As part of preparing long-term watering plans (LTWPs), Basin States are required to identify priority environmental assets (PEAs) and priority ecosystem functions (PEFs).

The PEAs for the Northern Victoria and Victorian Murray water resource plan (WRP) areas are water-dependent ecosystems (rivers, wetlands, or floodplains) that support ecological values that are significant at Commonwealth and state level, and meet criteria in Schedule 8 of Basin Plan, as outlined in LTWPs.

PEFs are the fundamental physical, chemical and biological processes that support environmental assets. These can include the transport of nutrients, organic matter and sediment in rivers, wetting and drying cycles, provision for migration and re-colonisation by plants and animals along rivers and across floodplains. PEFs can be supported by held environmental water, planned environmental water and unregulated flows and meet criteria in Schedule 9 of Basin Plan, as outlined in the LTWPs.

For more information on environmental watering see *WRP Fact Sheet 4 Environmental Water: Introduction*.

Long-Term Watering Plans (LTWPs)

LTWPs are environmental water planning documents prepared by Basin States. They describe the ecological objectives for PEFs and objectives and targets for PEAs in each WRP area and the corresponding environmental watering requirements. DELWP has developed three LTWPs, one for each surface WRP area in Victoria: Northern Victoria, Victorian Murray and Wimmera-Mallee.

To view Victoria's LTWPs visit <https://www.water.vic.gov.au/waterways-and-catchments/rivers-estuaries-and-waterways/environmental-water/long-term-watering-plans>

Identification of PEAs and PEFs in Victoria

While PEAs and PEFs are new terminology for Victoria under the Basin Plan, Victoria has historically focused on watering key or priority environmental sites and has a long history of developing long-term watering strategies.

Environmental Water Management Plans (EWMPs) and PEAs and PEFs

Site-specific Environmental Water Management Plans (EWMPs) are developed for every site in Victoria that receives environmental water.

Catchment management authorities (CMAs) are responsible for developing EWMPs, which set out environmental watering objectives for each site.



Figure 1 Steamer Plain near Budge Creek, Photo: Keith Ward

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EWMPs underpin Victoria's LTWPs and thereby form the basis for meeting Basin Plan requirements.

Victoria's approach to watering PEAs and PEFs has been to focus on sites that can be actively managed with environmental water to ensure a strong focus on the most efficient and effective use of available water.

The PEAs and PEFs identified in Victoria's WRP areas are the environmental sites managed under EWMPs.

The PEAs and PEFs identified for the purpose of Basin Plan are documented in Appendix E of both the Wimmera-Mallee and Victoria's North and Murray Comprehensive Reports:

<https://www.water.vic.gov.au/mdb/mdbp/water-resource-plans>.

Figure 2 shows PEAs in the Northern Victoria WRP area.¹ Chapter 12 of the Wimmera-Mallee and Victoria's North and Murray Comprehensive Report contain figures showing the location of PEAs across the water resource plan areas.

In the future, PEAs may change to reflect the latest technical information and prioritisation by CMAs. The PEAs will be reviewed and potentially updated further when LTWPs are reviewed.

Priority environmental assets and groundwater

Basin Plan also requires the consideration of risks to environmental watering and PEAs and PEFs as a result of groundwater use.

Victoria's state-wide policy on managing risks to surface water flows and ecosystem functions and statutory management plans provide a strong basis for meeting Basin Plan requirements.

A wide range of aquatic plants, wildlife and ecosystem processes in Victoria's water resource plan areas rely on wetlands and rivers. Commonly referred to as environmental assets, healthy water-dependent ecosystems support ecological functions and processes and support Victorian communities, for example supporting cultural connection, ecotourism and recreation activities.

Victoria's North and Murray WRP contains rules which reflect Victoria's current arrangements to demonstrate how adverse impacts on meeting environmental watering objectives will be mitigated in management of Victoria's water resources.

Part 4 of Victoria's North and Murray Index Table outlines Victoria's response, see:

<https://www.water.vic.gov.au/mdb/mdbp/water-resource-plans>

The PEAs known to have a groundwater connection in Victoria's North and Murray WRP area are listed in Appendix E to Victoria's North and Murray Comprehensive Report.

No groundwater dependent assets were identified in the Wimmera-Mallee WRP area.

¹ See Figure 12-3 of Victoria's North and Murray Comprehensive Report. Editorial updates have been made to the list of PEAs since the LTWPs were completed. These changes do not reflect a change to Victoria's policy.

