

The Loddon

Planning our Basin future together

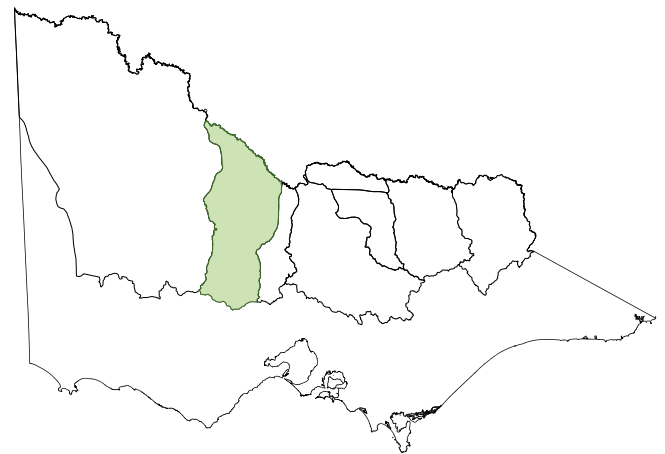
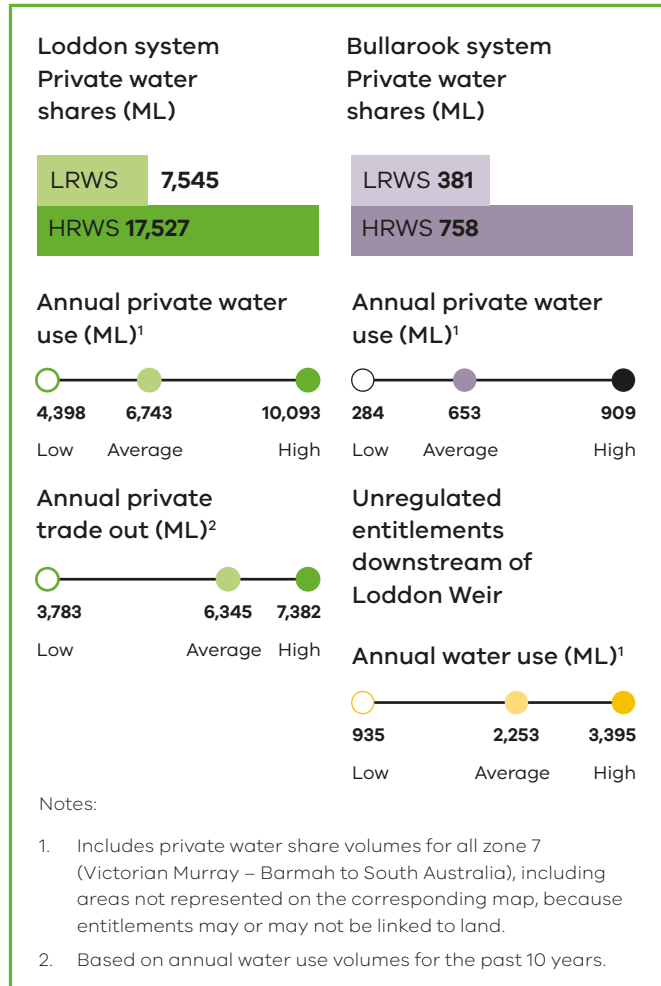
The Victorian Government recognises that a healthy Murray-Darling river system benefits everyone. We remain committed to delivering positive outcomes for agriculture, the environment, Traditional Owners and regional communities through best practice water and waterway management.

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

The Loddon includes the Loddon Valley area within the Goulburn-Murray Irrigation District. Water entitlements, water use and trade information for the Loddon system is summarised in the box below. Irrigated agriculture in the Loddon contributes to approximately \$925 million of annual agricultural production value. The main irrigated land uses include cropping and livestock grazing (non-dairy).

Significant irrigation modernisation in this area has been achieved through the successful delivery of the Goulburn Murray Water (GMW) Connections Project (completed 2020) which recovered 429 GL of water for irrigators, urban water users and the environment. An additional 15.9 GL of water recovery will be delivered through the GMW Water Efficiency Project.



Environmental values

The Loddon River flows from the Great Dividing Range to the Murray River. Middle to lower reaches of the river are characterised by many tributary creeks and anabranches that carry water away from the river onto the floodplain, including the Kerang Wetlands, a wetland of international importance under the Ramsar Convention of Wetlands.

The lower Loddon River supports large fish, including Murray cod, golden perch and silver perch. New infrastructure provides passage for fish movement between the Loddon and Murray systems. Over 20 waterbird species have been recorded in the Loddon River, which also supports platypus and rakali. The banks of parts of the river have relatively intact river red gum or black box canopy. Many of the native vegetation communities located along the Loddon River are endangered or vulnerable.

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 in this region through the GMW Connections Project and the GMW Water Efficiency Project.

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

Taking an integrated approach to water recovery in the Loddon could include:

- Rationalisation of irrigation infrastructure where rationalisation aligns with strategic plans and enables local transition
- Water purchases that consider where people live, how they are supplied, the impact on other users and opportunities to get additional system savings
- Reducing system losses by making changes to operations (e.g. changes to operations at Laanecoorie Reservoir)

These opportunities also have the potential to deliver better environmental outcomes:

- The change in irrigation supply to some reaches may support a more natural local flow
- Delivery of low flows and freshes when needed to support fish and platypus populations and river vegetation
- The change in system operations may support a more natural flow and the delivery of complementary measures

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 Central Catchment Management Authority
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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.