

Victorian Waterway Management Strategy Mid-Term Progress Report

Victorian Waterway Management Strategy exceeds mid-term targets

Introduction

The health, wellbeing and prosperity of our Victorian communities depend on healthy rivers, wetlands, floodplains, estuaries and water catchments. These waterways support the wellbeing and prosperity of our communities by providing places for recreation, and for other purposes such as farming and industry. Waterways provide significant cultural, spiritual and economic value for Victorian Traditional Owners. Waterways and floodplains also play a vital role in nutrient cycling and underpin the rich agricultural soils in many areas of the state.

The health of waterways across Victoria has been affected by a history of inappropriate land use and is likely to be challenged in the future by the impacts of climate change. The Victorian Government, in partnership with Traditional Owners, catchment management authorities (CMAs) and the community, has planted trees, built fences and cleared weeds to protect and improve our waterways. Water for the environment has been delivered to re-invigorate declining rivers and creeks, and safeguard and boost internationally important wetlands.



Figure 1: Riparian revegetation on the Campaspe River at Elmore.

The Victorian Waterway Management Strategy

The 8-year *Victorian Waterway Management Strategy* (VWMS) released in 2013 provides the framework for government, in partnership with the community, to maintain or improve the condition of rivers, estuaries and wetlands so that they can continue to provide environmental, social, cultural and economic values for all Victorians. The framework is based on regional planning processes and decision-making, within the broader system of integrated catchment management in Victoria. The VWMS is delivered through the Victorian Waterway Management Program and funded by the Environmental Contribution (EC). The EC funds are collected from water supply authorities under the *Water Industry Act 1994* to promote the sustainable management of water or address adverse water-related environmental impacts. Progress against the VWMS targets is measured at the mid-term (2016) and final (2020) stages.

Mid-Term Progress

At the mid-term stage of the VWMS, all the 10 management outcome targets have been exceeded or are on track (Table 1). This significant progress demonstrates what can be achieved through large scale investment in waterway and catchment health. This is revitalising entire waterways and improving habitat for our threatened species – like the Growling Grass Frog and Variegated Pygmy Perch.

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A key achievement of the program is the improvement to riparian and wetland vegetation. Improved vegetation will benefit the health of our waterways, supporting environmental, social, cultural and economic values. Improved vegetation will help to protect waterways against the impacts of climate change by cooling water temperatures through increased canopy cover. The significant improvement to waterway vegetation is due to higher than expected delivery of fences to protect habitat from domestic stock, removal of pest plant species and planting of new native vegetation. This good progress has been supported by the acceleration of on-ground works through the *Regional Riparian Action Plan* (RRAP). The RRAP is a five-year plan launched in 2015 to accelerate on-ground riparian management works to improve the health of riparian land along Victoria's regional rivers, estuaries and wetlands.

The delivery of environmental water to priority locations has exceeded the mid-term target. The excellent progress against this target is the result of environmental water recovery and good availability of water for environmental entitlements since 2013. This outcome target was set at the end of the millennium drought, when less water was available for the environment. Since then, more water has been available for the environment.

In 2016 the Victorian Government commenced the investment of \$222 million to improve the health of waterways and catchments across Victoria through *Water for Victoria*. This funding has boosted the quantity of outputs the CMAs delivered through their programs in 2016/17.

Table 1: mid-term progress against targets in the *Victorian Waterway Management Strategy*

Management outcome	Mid-term target	Mid-term progress		Final target
Area of improved riparian vegetation (hectares)	2730	28,115	★	5450
Area of improved wetland vegetation (hectares)	5780	18,903	★	7220
Number of sites with environmental water managed	53	265	★	70
Area of land managed for pest plant and animals (hectares)	29,400	76,879	★	42,800
Number of sites with improved instream habitat	92	413	★	168
Area of land with management agreements (hectares)	16,900	20,317	★	31,400
Number of community members with increased capacity	4190	15,167	★	7990
Number of sites with improved waterway knowledge	1280	1395	★	1920
% advice and approvals completed within statutory timeframes	95	89	✓	95
% management activities undertaken on priority waterways (as defined in the regional waterway strategies)	70	67	✓	70

Statewide progress against 2016 targets: ★ Target exceeded ✓ Target on track

*Melbourne Water does not receive funding from government through the Victorian Waterway Management Program and its outcomes are not included in the progress table.

In coming decades, we know that our waterways will be under pressure from increased population and a changing climate. Protecting and improving the health of waterways and their catchments is a critical task for the decades to come. Investing in protection is more cost-effective than paying to restore health.

Exceeding the targets demonstrates what can be achieved through large scale investment in waterway health. Restoring the health of our waterways is a long-term goal and we may not see the full benefits for 30 years or more. The significant progress we have achieved in the last 4-5 years is early evidence of what we have achieved and what is required to achieve our long-term objectives.