

## Victorian Basin Plan Implementation Highlights for 2018-19

### Victoria's approach to the Murray-Darling Basin is about communities living with healthy, working rivers

Each year, the Victorian Government reports to the Commonwealth Government on its progress in implementing the Murray-Darling Basin Plan.

This report provides a summary of Victoria's Basin Plan annual reporting key achievements. It complements the detailed information provided in the annual reporting template which covers Victoria's obligations in relation to the Murray-Darling Basin Plan for:

- ✓Basin Plan Schedule 12 (except Matter 9 – use of environmental water);
- ✓the Basin Plan Implementation Agreement compliance requirements; and
- ✓the milestone assessments of the National Partnership Agreement on Implementing Water Reform in the Murray-Darling Basin (NPA).

This highlights document, together with the Information Collection Template, forms Victoria's Statement of Assurance against these reporting obligations. Our implementation highlights are presented against each reporting matter to ensure both documents can be read together.

Throughout 2018-19, Victoria has continued to work with the Commonwealth Government, other Basin jurisdictions and the Murray-Darling Basin Authority to support the delivery of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan's objectives in a way that balances social, economic and environmental outcomes, as agreed.

#### Matter 6: Local Knowledge and Stakeholder Engagement

Under Matter 6, Victoria must demonstrate how local knowledge and solutions inform the implementation of the Basin Plan. Victoria has delivered on this requirement and is committed to including stakeholders in decision making on the implementation of the Basin Plan. We value local knowledge and ensure it informs and influences the planning and delivery of water. Examples of stakeholder engagement include:

##### Water Resource Plans

- ✓Victoria's water resource plans were developed in partnership with water corporations, Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs) and in consultation with environmental managers, Traditional Owners, industry bodies, local government and Basin communities.
- ✓Eight weeks of engagement (23 January to 18 March 2019) with communities and stakeholders on the draft Victoria's North and Murray Comprehensive Report. An initial public consultation period was extended from six to eight weeks in response to feedback from the community and their request for more time to consider the Plan.
- ✓Eight open community consultation sessions were held in Northern Victoria over three weeks in February 2019, including in Shepparton, Yea, Mildura, Bendigo, Wangaratta and Kerang. Session attendees were contacted following the meeting with a summary of the issues discussed across all sessions. A Frequently Asked Questions document was circulated to session attendees and uploaded to the Engage Vic website.
- ✓Representatives from the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) Water Resource Plan team presented the draft Plan to Goulburn-Murray Water's Water Service Committees at meetings across northern Victoria, and targeted stakeholder meetings were held with community groups during the public consultation period.
- ✓42 Submissions to Victoria's North and Murray Water Resource Plan were received via Engage Vic, email and mail. All non-confidential submissions were uploaded to the Engage Vic website. Appendix D to Victoria's North and Murray Comprehensive Report outlines the feedback from community and how that feedback was incorporated in the final Victoria's North and Murray Water Resource Plan. <https://engage.vic.gov.au/water-resource-plan-northern-victoria>

- ✓ Victoria received 11 contributions from Traditional Owner groups to be included in Chapter 8 of the Wimmera-Mallee Comprehensive Report and Chapter 11 of Victoria's North and the Murray Comprehensive Report. The team has also produced a standalone publication: *Traditional Owner objectives and outcomes: compilation of contributions to Victoria's water resource plans*.
- ✓ Support for Traditional Owner groups to engage on Water Resource Plans and determine their objectives and outcomes for water through:
  - employment of Aboriginal water officers, whose appointments have since been extended beyond the timeframe of the development water resource plans
  - the development of water advisory groups within respective Aboriginal Corporations
  - Aboriginal waterways assessments undertaken by Traditional Owners with the support of MLDRIN
  - cultural, social, economic and environmental values identification and mapping projects
  - on-country meetings, gatherings, workshops and cultural events
  - revision of country plans to add a water focus to support continued involvement in water resource management
  - training and other capacity-building activities.

## Environmental Watering events

- ✓ **Lower Broken Creek flows study review:** Community members participated in the project advisory group for the lower Broken Creek flows study update specifically to provide local environmental knowledge and help with establishing environmental objectives for the system.

- ✓ **Guttrum Forest:** In February 2019, the North Central CMA Indigenous Facilitator organised a field visit to Guttrum Forest to discuss cultural objectives for the forest with Barapa Barapa and Wamba Wamba Traditional Owners and North Central CMA staff. The Traditional Owners have expressed their aspiration to become more involved in the management of their Country through increased employment opportunities, including being paid to undertake ecological and cultural monitoring. The field visit provided an opportunity to examine how the forests responded to the extensive natural flooding of 2016 and subsequent dry years. The visit included discussion of the current condition of the forest, Traditional Owners' cultural priorities, and the importance of environmental water to living culture. Barapa Barapa and Wamba Wamba Traditional Owners recommend that culturally important plants could be used to measure success when evaluating the outcome of environmental watering actions.



Field visit to Guttrum Forest with Barapa Barapa and Wamba Wamba Traditional Owners and NCCMA staff

Credit: Nick Stewart, North Central CMA

Traditional Owners indicated that they would like to see an autumn or winter partial-fill to prime the wetlands, increase soil moisture and stimulate the growth of aquatic vegetation prior to delivering a larger watering event in spring. Traditional Owners also identified the importance of maintaining water in the soil profile to sustain large old trees around the wetland fringe.

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Wimmera CMA worked in partnership with Barengi Gadjin Land Council Aboriginal Corporation, the land manager of The Ranch Billabong, to arrange delivery of environmental flows and a community event in December 2018.



Members of Barengi Gadjin Land Council Aboriginal Corporation, Wimmera CMA, GWMWater and VEWH at The Ranch Billabong *Credit: Erin Round, VEWH*

✓ **The Ranch Billabong:** The Ranch Billabong, adjacent to the Wimmera River at Dimboola, contains important environmental values and was identified as a culturally significant site by the local Aboriginal community during an Aboriginal Waterways Assessment in 2017. Wimmera CMA worked in partnership with Barengi Gadjin Land Council Aboriginal Corporation (BGLC), the land manager of The Ranch Billabong, to arrange delivery of environmental flows and a community event in December 2018. Follow-up watering occurred in March 2019. The Ranch Billabong watering triggered responses by native wildlife and halved salinity levels, which improved the growth of aquatic plants. Wimmera CMA and BGLC are planning to build on these outcomes by delivering additional water in 2019. In addition to the planned environmental benefits, watering The Ranch Billabong will improve the site's amenity and suitability for gatherings and events (such as earth oven and bark canoe re-creations).

Highlights and outcomes from ongoing community and Traditional Owner engagement include:

- ✓ Small-bodied native fish maintained in all watered reaches of the Wimmera catchment
- ✓ Abundances and distributions of juvenile Murray Cod and Murray Darling Rainbowfish have increased in both the Broken and Campaspe Rivers
- ✓ Two successful waterbird monitoring training days with Traditional Owners from Barapa Barapa and Wemba Wemba

## Other implementation

- ✓ Community and stakeholder views drove the development of socio-economic criteria to apply to further water recovery of up to 450 gigalitres of water (efficiency measures) towards the Basin Plan. These criteria were agreed by Ministers at December 2018 Ministerial Council.
- ✓ Commonwealth funding has been provided for stage one of Victoria's nine floodplain restoration projects known as the Victorian Murray Floodplain Restoration Project. Targeted traditional owner, stakeholder and broader communication has commenced.

## Matter 10: Environmental Watering

Under Matter 10, Victoria must contribute to implementing the Basin Plan's Environmental Management Framework, which includes long term watering plans (LTWPs) and delivering environmental water in accordance with the Basin Plan.

Environmental outcomes consistent with Victoria's LTWP objectives and Basin Plan requirements are being demonstrated by the Victorian Environmental Flows Monitoring and Assessment Program (VEFMAP) and Wetlands Monitoring and Assessment Program (WetMAP) in 2018/19 including:

- ✓ Improving the condition of riparian Ecological Vegetation Classes (EVCs): e.g. where livestock grazing is absent, water for the environment increases soil moisture and support a wider riverside vegetation zone and increased cover and recruitment of native plant species;

Abundances and distributions of juvenile Murray Cod and Murray Darling Rainbowfish have increased in both the Broken and Campaspe rivers

# Murray-Darling Basin Plan

- ✓ Improving the species richness of aquatic vegetation in wetlands: e.g. populations of significant plant species (ridged water-milfoil, spoon-leaf mud-mat, spurred arrowgrass and cane grass) are showing a positive response to environmental water deliveries at Carapugna Swamp in the Wimmera-Mallee region; and
- ✓ Improving movement of native fish: e.g. increased native fish movement detected during freshes delivered through the Loddon System.
- ✓ A review of Victoria's existing LTWPs was completed ahead of the required 5-yearly LTWP update in 2019-20. Victoria has initiated discussions with the Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) regarding the update.
- ✓ Victorian Catchment CMAs, as waterway managers, continue to implement, monitor and evaluate their 2015 LTWPs, including updating ecological objectives and associated flow recommendations contributing to monitoring and evaluation.
- ✓ Effective coordination across jurisdictions such as the alignment of weir pool manipulations in the River Murray and watering actions in the Lindsay, Mulcra and Wallpolla icon site.
- ✓ Embedding environmental watering principles in decision-making, such as the watering of Gunbower Forest from mid-June to October 2018, which included involvement of the Gunbower Island Community Reference Group (CRG) and Barapa Barapa Traditional Owners and protection and improvement of the ecological character of the Gunbower Forest Ramsar site.
- ✓ Although not required in 2018-19, the Wimmera River System EWMP (the asset-based plans underpinning Victoria's LTWPs) was reviewed and an update has been drafted by Wimmera CMA consistent with the Basin Plan, including the environmental watering plan's Principles to be applied to environmental watering. For example, this update was undertaken:
  - in collaboration with local communities and persons, including Traditional Owners, materially affected by the management of environmental water, to incorporate their local knowledge (Principle 7 Basin Plan s8.39);
  - adaptively, updating the management recommendations (Principle 8 Basin Plan s8.40) based on knowledge developed in the additional monitoring and research since the original plan in 2015; and
  - to address long-term risks (Principle 4 Basin Plan s8.36) as expected under climate change.
- ✓ Victoria formally submitted the proposed Northern Victoria Water Resource Plan package to the MDBA under the *Water Act 2007* (Cth) on 30 April 2019 for assessment and accreditation. Development of the Plan involved considerable work by DELWP, CMAs and other collaborators to embed environmental watering principles.
- ✓ Principle 8 (Basin Plan s8.40) on adaptive management has been applied in application of held environmental water as understanding is developed with VEFMAP and WetMAP monitoring and research. For example, WetMAP data informed the timing and duration of environmental water delivery to Neds Corner Wetland (Mallee), to retain 15 vulnerable, rare or threatened plant species.
- ✓ Supported environmental outcomes in the Coorong and Lower Lakes by facilitating trade arrangements that enable CEWH to use 50GL of its Southern Australian allocation in a different delivery pattern, without materially impacting other entitlement holders.



**Gunbower Forest** Credit: Kathryn Walker, VEWH

- ✓ Embedding protections for environmental water. Victoria finalised implementation of prerequisite policy measures by June 2019. In 2018-19, existing arrangements enabled environmental water holders to deliver approximately 370 gigalitres of water in Victoria that was re-used downstream for additional environmental benefit.
- ✓ In its 3 July 2019 Board communique, the MDBA formally announced that the environmental flow protections required under the Basin Plan, including those in Victoria, had been assessed as being 'in effect' (<https://www.mdba.gov.au/publications/mdba-reports/prerequisite-policy-measures>).

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## Matter 13: Critical Human Water Needs

Under matter 13, Victoria must report whether water quality triggers were reached and, where necessary, on the implementation of the emergency response process for critical human water needs.

- ✓ In 2018-19, water quality and salinity levels in Victorian tributaries to the River Murray did not exceed the trigger levels, as per s11.05, that would require a Basin Officials Committee member to advise the MDBA.
- ✓ Tier 3 water sharing arrangements were not triggered in 2018-19.

## Matter 14: Water quality and salinity

Under Matter 14, Victoria must progress the implementation of the water quality and salinity management plan. This includes considering water quality issues when making decisions about environmental watering, and applying salinity and water quality targets.

- ✓ Long-term and annual planning: To meet environmental objectives in the Loddon River, the Loddon River flows study and EWMP recommends specific flows to manage hypoxic blackwater. The VEWH's Seasonal Watering Plan 2018-19 included a recommendation for a spring high flow. One of the main functional objectives of the high flow was to flush accumulated leaf litter from the riverbank to increase productivity in the river channel and reduce the organic load that could potentially contribute to a hypoxic blackwater event if a high flow occurred in summer. The high flow was delivered in October-November 2018
- ✓ Risk management: In March 2019, the VEWH coordinated four risk management workshops relevant to the Murray-Darling Basin in northern Victoria covering the north-central, north-east, Goulburn-Broken, Mallee and Wimmera CMA regions. The workshops were attended by relevant program partners such as water holders, water corporations, waterway managers and public land managers. The workshops provided an opportunity for partner agencies to collectively identify if, when and where the water quality risks may occur during 2018-19. CMAs incorporated relevant outcomes from these workshops into their seasonal watering proposals.
- ✓ Delivery implementation: A blue-green algae outbreak occurred in the mid-Loddon River system during mid-late summer of the 2018-19 year. The storage manager informed the VEWH and the waterway manager of the status of the outbreak via the Loddon Operational Advisory Group as summer progressed. As a result of the information, a planned summer fresh to the Loddon River was not delivered to avoid dispersing blue-green algae into the Torrumbarry Irrigation Area and Murray system. The decision to withhold the fresh was a trade-off between possible benefits in the mid-Loddon system and the risk of spreading blue green algae throughout receiving systems. The operational advisory group considered up-to-date water quality monitoring data to decide if low flows provided to the Loddon system were successfully replenishing pools and limiting risks of hypoxic blackwater.
- ✓ Victoria's fulfilment of planning and management functions for the targets in Appendix 1 of Schedule B have been reported through Victoria's Basin Salinity Management 2030 Strategy (BSM2030) Annual Status Report for 2017-18 to the MDBA.
- ✓ Victoria is currently preparing a detailed BSM2030 Biennial Report for 2017-19, which is scheduled to be submitted to MDBA in October 2019 and audited by an Independent Audit Group in November 2019. Victoria has an excellent track record of compliance with Schedule B of the Murray-Darling Basin Agreement.

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## Matter 16: Water trading

Under Matter 16, Victoria must implement water trading rules, which includes removing barriers to trade, meeting service standard for processing trades, and ensuring water announcements are made publicly available. Victoria is committed to increasing transparency in the water market and demonstrated this throughout the year.

✓ In 2018-19, Victoria launched a new 'Where can I trade?' visual tool (<https://waterregister.vic.gov.au/TradingRules2019/>) on the Water Register website that helps water market participants to explore and understand the trading rules relevant to their trades, and the factors that influence available trade opportunity. This service can also be used by market participants to demonstrate how different trade rules applied their approved or refused trades.

✓ In 2018-19, Victoria developed a new, freely available mobile app – Water Market Watch – scheduled for launch in early July 2019, to provide instant access to the latest water allocation announcements, spill determinations, trade limits and market prices from the Victorian Water Register.

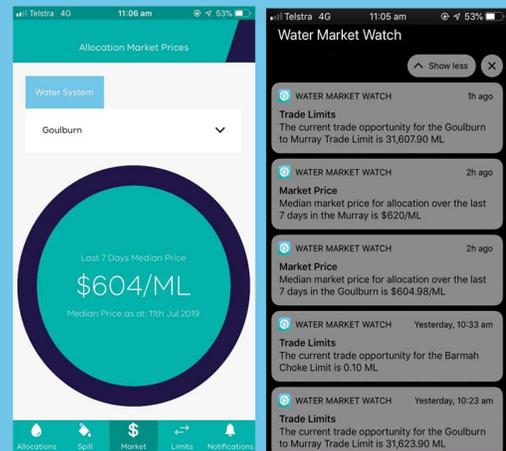
✓ Victoria has far exceeded the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) services standards for allocation trades processed; and the percentage of water share transfers processed by the water corporation and registered by the Registrar within the indicated timeframes.

✓ As a result of Victoria's investment in the development of online allocation trading and initiatives to streamline trade processing at water corporations, over 90% of all allocation trades are now processed within one business day.

✓ Analysis of trades to which the Commonwealth was a party in 2018-19 indicates that Victoria exceeded service standards for these trades.

✓ Victoria worked in partnership with other jurisdictions and the MDBA to successfully launch three trials on 1 July 2019 which aim to streamline accounting arrangements for inter-state trade in the Southern-Connected Basin and better align trade adjustments with the location and the time of delivery of inter-state trade. These improved methods are expected to keep trade from NSW to Victoria open longer, providing increased access to trade from NSW.

In 2018-19, Victoria developed a new, freely available mobile app –  
**Water Market Watch**



## Other: Sustainable Diversion Limits

Under this matter, Victoria must demonstrate that no action has been taken to impede Commonwealth measures to acquire water for environmental purposes, except where consistent with the Basin Plan water trading rules.

### Rural Water Projects

✓ In October 2018, the Victorian Government submitted Victoria's Northern Water Infrastructure Prospectus, meeting its commitment at the June 2018 Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council meeting to identify up to 9 gigalitres of water savings projects for Commonwealth investment. Investigations to inform the development of the five business cases identified in the prospectus have been directly funded by Victoria and have now commenced.

✓ During the 2019 federal election, the Commonwealth announced a \$14.5 million contribution towards the Mitiamo Domestic and Stock Pipeline Project, which is estimated to recover 1 gigalitre of water. Negotiations on the Bilateral Schedule to the National Partnership Agreement for the National Water Infrastructure Development Fund – Capital Component are continuing and will see the transfer of water at project completion.

## Goulburn-Murray Water Connections Program

- ✓ The \$2 billion Goulburn-Murray Water Connections project is a Commonwealth and state funded project that will deliver modernised rural water irrigation infrastructure that benefits irrigators, community and the environment. This project is the most significant investment in modernising irrigation infrastructure in Australia. The project will recover 429 gigalitres of water savings and provide a significant economic boost for the Goulburn-Murray Irrigation District.
- ✓ As at 30 June 2019, the project is over 80% complete, has treated 14,108 meter outlets, decommissioned 1,294 kilometres of channels, remediated or modernised 2,477 kilometres of channels and transferred 204 gigalitres of water shares to the Commonwealth.
- ✓ By 30 June 2019, the Connections project had provided 279 gigalitres of water savings towards Victoria's 1075-gigalitre target under the Murray-Darling Basin Plan. This was provided through the following milestones:
  - On 30 April 2019 the State issued the final tranche of contracted water entitlements to the Commonwealth for Stage 2 of the Connection Project. This completed Victoria's contractual obligations for the issue of 204 gigalitres for Stage 2; and
  - On 28 June 2019, the Minister for Water issued the VEWH with entitlement recovered through Stage 1 of the Connections Project.
- ✓ The project continues to meet its water savings targets in a way that improves supply to irrigators and supports productive agriculture, jobs and communities in the region and is on track for completion in October 2020.

By 30 June 2019, the Connections project had provided 279 GL of water savings

## Other: SDL Adjustment and Constraints Management

Under this matter, Victoria must describe progress towards implementing the Ministerial Council agreed package of constraints measures.

- ✓ Victoria prepared and submitted a new Goulburn Constraints Measure business case to Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment Assessment Committee in September 2017. As at 30 June 2019, the business case evaluation process has been substantially progressed with NSW, SA and MDBA. Victoria is waiting for the Commonwealth to be available to further their evaluation. Once this process is completed and the project has progressed to Phase 3, Victoria can seek funding from the Commonwealth for implementation.
- ✓ Victoria has prepared a Commonwealth Department of Agriculture funding submission to undertake pre-construction activities, including community co-design, for the Victorian Constraints Measures Program (CMP). The funding bid was prepared with assistance from The NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment in relation to cross-jurisdictional elements of the program. The Victorian CMP includes the following:
  - Goulburn Constraint Measure (Victoria) – all activities
  - Hume to Yarrowonga Constraint Measure (Joint Victoria-NSW) – all Victorian-only activities, plus Victoria's share of joint activities
  - Yarrowonga to Wakool Constraint Measure (NSW) – all Victorian-only activities, plus Victoria's share of joint activities.
- ✓ To generate efficiencies in cost and time, the Victorian components of the three projects will be managed as a single program of work, in coordination with delivery of NSW Constraints measures. This coordination will include consistent approaches to shared policy issues, aligned timelines on parallel workstreams, leveraging joint procurement opportunities, avoiding duplication, and managing program risks through Constraints Measures Working Group processes. Consultation and agreement with the Commonwealth is expected to be completed in mid-to-late 2019.
- ✓ The Victorian Government has worked collaboratively with the MDBA and other Basin states in progressing the implementation of Constraints proposals. Victoria is an active member on the multijurisdictional Constraints Measures Working Group, which has developed the Constraints Measures Program Coordinating Workplan. This group met monthly during 2018-19 to develop and implement an integrated CMP, risk management strategy and progressing resolution of significant policy implementation issues.

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✓ Victoria is ready to get on with the detailed design and approvals stages of our environmental works projects now that Commonwealth funding of \$29 million has been secured for Stage 1- pre-construction. This will include preparation of detailed designs and the development of regulatory approvals in consultation with the community and traditional owners over the next 2-3 years. A decision to fund construction of each of the nine projects will be made by the Commonwealth on completion of Phase 1. The Victorian Murray Floodplain Restoration Project will be delivered by Lower Murray Water, in partnership with Goulburn Murray Water, Mallee Catchment Management Authority (CMA), North Central CMA and Parks Victoria.



**Victorian Murray Floodplain Restoration Project:**  
Environmental water assisting to improve riparian vegetation health *Credit: Mallee CMA*

✓ Business cases were developed for each site in 2015 and are on the DELWP website. The business case involved outlining the benefits and value of the project and completed modelling and risk assessments including flooding, salinity, cultural heritage and potential significant impacts to plants and animals.

## Other: Water Resource Plans

Under this matter, Victoria has the option of providing information on the progress of water resource plans.

✓ Victoria's Water Resource Plans were successfully delivered on time to allow for the MDBA's assessment and recommendation for accreditation to the Commonwealth. The Wimmera-Mallee Water Resource Plan was submitted on 22 February 2019, prior to the 28 February 2019 deadline, and covers the Wimmera-Mallee (surface water) water resource plan area (SW4) and Wimmera-Mallee (groundwater) water resource plan area (GW3). Victoria's North and Murray Water Resource Plan was submitted on 30 April 2019 and covers the Victorian Murray water resource plan area (SW2), northern Victoria water resource plan area (SW3) and Goulburn-Murray water resource plan area (GW2).

✓ As a result of Victoria's water resource plans not being accredited by 1 July 2019, a joint agreement between the MDBA and Victoria is in place to ensure that reporting against sustainable diversion limits is undertaken in accordance with the methods outlined in Victoria's water resource plans for the reporting period 2019-20 or until Water Resource Plans are accredited.

✓ The MDBA has advised that it determined that by 30 June 2019 pre-requisite policy measures were in effect in Victoria as required under section 7.15(2) of the Basin Plan.

Victoria's Water  
Resource Plans were  
successfully  
delivered on time

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