

Discussion Starter

Developing the new Victorian Waterway Management Strategy



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Acknowledgement

The Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) proudly acknowledges Victoria's Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities and pays respect to their Elders, past and present.

For tens of thousands of years, First Nations and Traditional Owners in Victoria have practised their law and lore, customs and languages, and nurtured Country through their spiritual, cultural, material and economic connections to land, water and resources.

DEECA acknowledges all First Nations and Traditional Owners and pays respect to their Elders past and present. First Nations and Traditional Owners hold the knowledge, stories, custodial obligations and cultural expertise that have always ensured the health of waterways and Country. Each Nation and Traditional Owner group holds the cultural authority to speak for waterways and water landscapes on their Country.

 MIRRORING – COUNTRY, DEECA'S ABORIGINAL CULTURAL IDENTITY BY ARTIST TOM DAY OF THE GUNDITJMARA, YORTA YORTA AND WEMBA WEMBA TRIBES

 COVER: GLENELG RIVER, CASTERTON, GUNDITJMARA COUNTRY
CREDIT: CRAIG MOODIE

However, since colonisation, Australia's First Nations people have been treated as bystanders in the management of water landscapes. Their water landscape values and uses have not always been protected and Victoria's waterway management and planning have not always benefited from their traditional ecological knowledge.

DEECA will recognise this in the new Victorian Waterway Management Strategy and seeks to enable a shift in the way we manage waterways. This includes increasing Traditional Owner self-determination and decision-making in waterway management, and therefore delivering real benefits for Traditional Owners and the wider Victorian community. To enable this, DEECA is committed to working in close partnership with Traditional Owners for the development of the new Strategy.





GUNBOWER CREEK AT SUNSET,
YORTA YORTA COUNTRY
CREDIT: DARRYL WHITAKER

Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action

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We want to hear from you

We want to hear your vision for Victorian waterways and understand what is needed to achieve this.

A new [Victorian Waterway Management Strategy](#) (the new Strategy) is being developed. It will guide how we manage Victorian waterways into the future. We are inviting early feedback on this Discussion Starter to help shape the development of the new Strategy, which is expected to be released in 2025. Your feedback will be used to inform a draft Strategy.

We will work closely with key stakeholders throughout the project on development of the new Strategy. The next round of formal public consultation will take place when the draft Strategy is released for public comment, expected in 2024.

The purpose of this **Discussion Starter** is to:

- Detail why a new Victorian Waterway Management Strategy is needed.
- Invite input into a new vision for the future of our waterways, which will help us develop the new Strategy.
- Invite early feedback on what the new Strategy needs to achieve.

We ask that you:

- Read and consider this *Discussion Starter*, particularly the sections you/your organisation are most interested in.
- Tell us what you think by completing the survey on EngageVic, or uploading a submission.



DISCUSSIONS WITH
LANDHOLDER IN GIPPSLAND,
GUNAİKURNAI COUNTRY
CREDIT: CRAIG MOODIE



01 Introduction

Waterways are highly valued by all Victorians for their environmental, cultural, recreational, social and economic importance. Healthy waterways underpin the wellbeing of us all.



PYKES CREEK RESERVOIR OUTSIDE
BACCHUS MARSH, WURUNDJERI COUNTRY
CREDIT: DARRYL WHITAKER

Rivers, wetlands and estuaries are known collectively as [waterways](#). Some waterways also have adjacent floodplains. The many waterways across Victoria make up a connected, living and complex environment, which includes us in it. When thinking about a waterway, we need to consider it as part of a larger system — our waterways and adjacent land make up what we call **water landscapes**. More information on this is provided below in ‘Victoria’s waterways and water landscapes’.

Waterways provide habitat for many plants and animals and play a vital role in the physical and mental well-being of people and communities. Healthy waterways help create liveable and prosperous communities. Waterway health refers to the overall state of the ecosystem and its ability to function well (refer to Box 1).

For tens of thousands of years, First Nations and Traditional Owners in Victoria have practised their law and lore, customs and languages, and nurtured Country through their spiritual, cultural, material and economic connections to land, water and resources.

European colonisation had a significant and negative impact on the health of waterways across Victoria. Important work has been done by the Victorian Government, Australian Government, other agencies, Traditional Owners, landholders, community groups and individual members of the community to begin addressing the legacy of damage since European colonisation. The previous 2002 and 2013 statewide waterway management strategies have been key vehicles for this – but there is plenty more work to do. We now need a new Strategy to guide how we manage waterways into the future.

“**Water is alive. Water is our life. Water sustains and creates, water has spirit. Water is central to our culture, identity, and cultural economies. Water is the lifeblood of Country.**”

**Traditional Owner,
Water is Life, 2022**

BOX

01

What do we mean by ‘waterway health’?

Waterway health is a general term for the overall condition of waterway ecosystems. It is made of a diverse mix of elements including:

- presence, abundance and diversity of species (plants and wildlife)
- extent and connectivity of habitat
- breeding and feeding opportunities for fish, frogs, birds and other wildlife
- carbon and nutrient cycling processes
- Water quality
- other physical features, such as water flows, the river bed, banks and the natural processes (erosion, sedimentation) that shape them.

Healthy waterways underpin a healthy environment. Healthy waterways means healthy people.



LEARNING IN GIPPSLAND,
GUNAİKURNAI COUNTRY
CREDIT: CRAIG MOODIE



KING RIVER, EDI CUTTING
CAMPING GROUND,
TAUNGURUNG COUNTRY
CREDIT: MARK JESSER

DEECA will be collaborating closely with a range of **project partners** to develop the new Strategy, including Traditional Owners, catchment management authorities, water corporations and the Victorian Environmental Water Holder. We will also engage with a range of other stakeholders throughout the project and will invite input from the broader Victorian community through formal public consultation.

Developing a new Victorian Waterway Management Strategy

The existing [Victorian Waterway Management Strategy](#) (the existing Strategy) was released in 2013, providing a strong framework for managing the health of Victoria's waterways over an eight-year period. It includes policies on regional decision-making, investment, roles and responsibilities of various management organisations, and management of key issues impacting waterways.

The existing Strategy led to a [significant program of activities for improving waterways](#) across the state. It provided the framework for the development and implementation of 10 regional waterway strategies — plans for achieving region-specific priorities and goals for waterway management, led by Victoria's nine catchment management authorities and Melbourne Water. In 2017, the delivery of the existing Strategy was supported by a [record investment of \\$222 million](#) over 4 years across regional Victoria.

The existing Strategy has now reached the end of its eight-year lifespan. To begin preparing for the new Strategy, we've completed some initial background work. This includes an [Independent Review](#) of the existing Strategy. This review found that the existing Strategy provided a successful framework for the management of Victoria's waterways. It led to

significant improvements in a number of areas and provided a solid platform for regional planning, investment and on-ground management. The Independent Review also identified areas that could be strengthened in the new Strategy, presenting an opportunity to build upon what we've learnt in the past decade and improve the way we manage waterways. More detail on this is provided in Section 5, where we are seeking your feedback on what you think the Strategy needs to achieve.

Last year we investigated the Victorian community's connection to waterways through the [2022 My Victorian Waterway Survey](#). We heard from 6,240 people sharing their aspirations and concerns for our waterways and telling us how they like to connect with their local waterways and surrounding environments. These views will inform the development of the new Strategy, including a new vision for the future of Victoria's waterways. More detail is provided in Section 4.

The new Strategy will:

- have a continued focus on the health of Victoria's waterways, including how we will adapt to climate change.
- increase Traditional Owner decision-making in waterway management.
- support communities to connect with and take care of waterways, promoting stewardship.
- guide the development of regional waterway strategies, which are required under the *Water Act 1989*.
- consider any other areas or opportunities identified from public consultation and scoping work.

These focus areas were informed by the Independent Review and the 2022 My Victorian Waterway Survey, and reflect changes in government policy and legislation since the existing Strategy.

The scope of the new Strategy will be refined in 2023 with project partners and key stakeholders — incorporating feedback from this consultation.

BOX

02

Flooding in Victoria

We acknowledge all Victorian communities who are experiencing the ongoing impacts of record flooding due to the third consecutive La Nina event.

Relevant learnings and outcomes from the 2022 Victorian flood event will be incorporated into the new Strategy. With climate change expected to increase the frequency and severity of extreme rainfall events, consideration needs to be given to the impacts on communities as well as waterways.

To support this, the new Strategy will align with the [Victorian Floodplain Management Strategy](#). This sets out the Government's approach to managing flood risks, clarifies roles and responsibilities for floodplain management, and ensures flood planning and preparedness is underpinned by high-quality information. The Victorian Floodplain Management Strategy is the primary Victorian strategy for driving action to reduce flood risks to local communities.

The new Victorian Waterway Management Strategy will build on the work of the existing Strategy and look at improving our policies and guidance on managing the environmental values of floodplains. The new Strategy could also explore opportunities to improve the health and resilience of waterways to withstand and recover from significant flood events, with flow-on benefits for local communities. Healthy water landscapes can provide communities with some protection from flooding by slowing down the flow of water and/or allowing more space for floodwaters.

The existing Strategy outlines the importance of floodplains, however, there is minimal acknowledgment of their importance to the ecology, structure and function of water landscapes. Development of a new Strategy provides an opportunity to increase the emphasis on the multiple values of floodplains and the importance of smaller, more regular flood events in supporting healthy water landscapes.




GUNBOWER CREEK, YORTA YORTA COUNTRY
CREDIT: DARRYL WHITAKER



Victoria's waterways and water landscapes

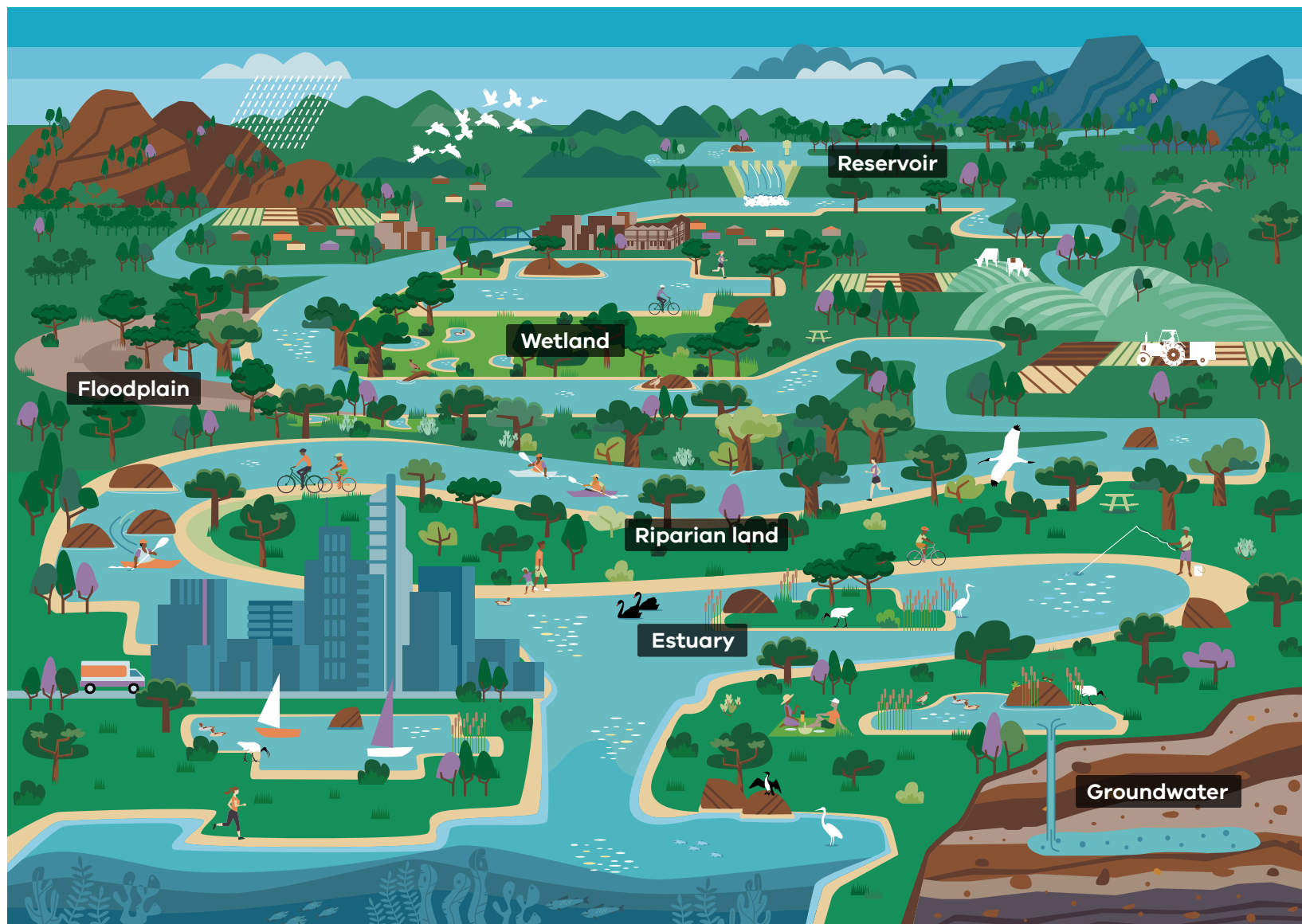
Waterways are the lifeblood of many Victorian towns and communities. From cool mountain streams in alpine areas to the creeks and rivers flowing through our cities and towns — waterways underpin the wellbeing and productivity of individuals, communities and economies.

This section provides an overview of some different types of waterways and their connections to each other, as well as the role they play in the broader ecosystem.

 GLENELG RIVER, GUNDITJMARRA COUNTRY
CREDIT: CRAIG MOODIE

“**Healthy water, waterways and Country are good for all.**”
Traditional Owner partnership
(Central Gippsland Region
Sustainable Water Strategy, 2022)

Our connected waterways



Rivers

Rivers, including streams and creeks, connect the surrounding land (called a 'catchment') to downstream receiving waters such as oceans or lakes. Rivers filter sediment and nutrients and slow down floodwater. This helps protect downstream water quality and habitats. In some of our rivers, you will find habitat for threatened fish species such as Macquarie Perch and Murray Cod. Many mammals, such as platypus and rakali (water rats) also depend on these waterways.

Vegetation (plants) alongside waterways, such as the River Red Gum forests in northern Victoria, provides habitat for many animal species. Aquatic invertebrates use leaves and organic matter as a vital energy source. These vegetated areas along a waterway are sometimes referred to as 'riparian land'.

Wetlands

Wetlands are areas that are permanently or temporarily submerged with water – meaning they can be full of water or completely dry. Approximately two-thirds of Victoria's wetlands are naturally occurring and they are important for storing and filtering water. Wetlands provide habitat for many plants and animals, including brolga (waterbird) which were once spread across much of Victoria.

Floodplains

Floodplains are the low-lying land adjacent to a river or stream, with an ecosystem dependent on inundation from floods. The connection between rivers, wetlands, floodplains and the ocean is important for many processes, such as allowing some fish species to complete their life cycles. This connectivity is crucial for the movement and cycling of sediment and nutrients and helps maintain the rich agricultural soils in many areas of the state.

Estuaries

Estuaries are where rivers meet the sea and the fresh river water mixes with the salt water of the ocean or large marine bays, such as Port Phillip Bay, Western Port and Corner Inlet. Estuaries connect upstream waters such as rivers to the marine environment. These areas provide unique habitats of mangroves, coastal wetlands and marshes that are vital for the reproduction and growth of fish.

All of our waterways across the state make up a complex system of **water landscapes**. Some water landscapes are highly modified, such as those in urban areas. However, these landscapes are still highly valued by the community. They provide a place to enjoy a recreational activity, connect with nature, or connect with friends and family. These urban waterways also protect cities and towns from flood impacts by carrying water away during and after flood events. The water landscapes in a more natural condition are less impacted by human activity and may occur in more regional or rural areas of Victoria. These are important areas for threatened plants and animals, and they play a key role in providing clean air and water.



GIPPSLAND, WATER FOR VICTORIA,
GUNAİKURNAI COUNTRY
CREDIT: CRAIG MOODIE



02 The challenge ahead

Significant efforts have been made to protect the health of Victoria's waterways over recent decades. We are now facing a range of new and emerging challenges that impact our waterways and the broader environment. It's important to understand these challenges, as they will continue to place increasing pressure on the health of waterways and the species and communities (including our own) that depend on them.

Through the new Strategy, we will develop an updated waterway management approach to meet these challenges. We will build on what we've learnt in the past decade and be guided by advances in policy and legislation, Traditional Owners, current science and ecological knowledge, and the community.

This section provides a snapshot of the known challenges ahead. In section 5, we explore ways we could begin to address these in the new Strategy.



ENVIRONMENTAL WATERING
OF NED'S CORNER ON THE
MURRAY RIVER, FAR NORTH
WEST VICTORIA, FIRST PEOPLES
OF MILLEWA-MALLEE
CORPORATION COUNTRY
CREDIT: MALLEE CMA

A changing climate

The science is clear – our climate is getting warmer and drier. Climate change is already impacting waterway health in many ways. This includes exacerbating extreme events such as floods and bushfires and decreasing water availability over the longer term. We must face the reality of changes that are already occurring and prepare for projected changes in the future.

Increasing extreme events

Extreme weather events are already significantly impacting Victorians and our environment. Despite a trend towards drier conditions overall, we are experiencing more frequent and intense rainfall events. We are also experiencing more bushfires and extreme heat days. These trends are having disastrous consequences for communities, the environment, agriculture, water resources and water quality.

Global processes such as the El Nino-Southern Oscillation, which produces El Nino and La Nina events, contribute to large natural year-to-year variations in temperature and rainfall. This natural variability now occurs on top of the warming trend, which can modify and amplify the impact of these natural drivers on the Australian climate¹.



THE REALITY OF A DRIER CLIMATE ON
THE OUTSKIRTS OF MELBOURNE,
WURUNDJERI COUNTRY
CREDIT: CRAIG MOODIE

Floods and bushfires are a natural part of Victoria's environment. Waterways have evolved with natural flood and bushfire cycles and have adapted to benefit and recover from these periodic disturbances. Worsening conditions are now making Victoria's waterways more vulnerable to reduced water flows, habitat degradation, pollution, and loss of biodiversity².

In urban areas, heavy rainfall can cause a particular problem for waterways due to stormwater runoff — rainwater that flows over the ground and enters our drains and waterways. If not well managed, stormwater can carry pollution into our waterways and the high flows can damage riverbanks and habitats.



¹ Bureau of Meteorology & CSIRO, *State of the Climate*, 2018. Available: <http://www.bom.gov.au/state-of-the-climate/State-of-the-Climate-2018.pdf>

² Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, *Protecting Victoria's Environment: Biodiversity 2037*, 2017. Available: <https://www.environment.vic.gov.au/biodiversity/biodiversity-plan>

Water availability

While rainfall and climate conditions will vary each year, climate change means we can expect an overall decline in the water we have available, due to extended dry periods and less reliable rainfall. The amount of water flowing into our waterways is already decreasing, and this decline is expected to continue³.

Victoria has an existing water entitlement and planning framework under the Water Act which sets out how water resources across the state are shared and managed⁴. This framework established by the Water Act includes Water Resource Plans, Long Term Water Resource Assessments, Sustainable Water Strategies and other related processes. Water is set aside specifically for the environment through the Environmental Water Reserve. Environmental flows studies and watering plans are used to guide when and where water is needed in certain environments to meet target ecological objectives.

The Victorian Waterway Management Strategy provides policies for managing water for the environment and getting the best outcomes possible for our waterways. This includes the role of the Victorian Environmental Water Holder in holding and managing Victoria's environmental water entitlements for the primary purpose of delivering environmental objectives as required under the Water Act.

Declining biodiversity

Victoria is the most intensively settled and cleared state in Australia, with over 50% of the state's native vegetation cleared since European settlement. More recently, climate change has brought new and challenging threats to biodiversity, which is in decline⁵. Biodiversity encompasses all components of the living world: the number and variety of plants, animals and other living things, including fungi and micro-organisms, across our land, rivers, coast and ocean. Today, between one-quarter and one-third of all of Victoria's terrestrial plants, birds, reptiles, amphibians and mammals, along with numerous invertebrates and ecological communities, are considered threatened with extinction.

3 Potter NJ, Chiew FHS, Zheng H, Ekström M and Zhang L (CSIRO), *Hydroclimate projections for Victoria at 2040 and 2065*, 2016. Available: <https://publications.csiro.au/rpr/pub?pid=csiro:EP161427>

4 Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, *Water for Victoria*, 2016. Available: <https://www.water.vic.gov.au/water-for-victoria>

5 Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, *Protecting Victoria's Environment: Biodiversity 2037*, 2017. Available: <https://www.environment.vic.gov.au/biodiversity/biodiversity-plan>



BIRDS WADING ON REEDS
IN TAYLOR CREEK,
WURUNDJERI COUNTRY
CREDIT: DARRYL WHITAKER



Our changing population

Many of our cities and towns are becoming more densely populated and expanding in size. Victoria remains the fastest-growing state in the country, with our population expected to almost double from 6.5 million in 2018 to 11.2 million in 2056. Much of this growth will take place in Greater Melbourne which is home to more than 80% of Victoria's population. Significant population growth is also projected in regional Victoria (expected to increase from 1.5 million in 2018 to 2.2 million in 2056)⁶.

As our population grows, more and more people will be visiting waterways in both regional and urban areas for a variety of reasons — nurturing their personal health and wellbeing, undertaking recreational or economic activities and connecting with others and with nature. We need to manage waterways in a way that supports multiple community expectations, aspirations and values so they can be enjoyed by all. We also need to ensure that waterways have appropriate amenities to support increased visitation.

While the population is growing, the population is ageing overall, particularly in regional areas. This also has implications for community needs and values to consider in how we manage waterways.

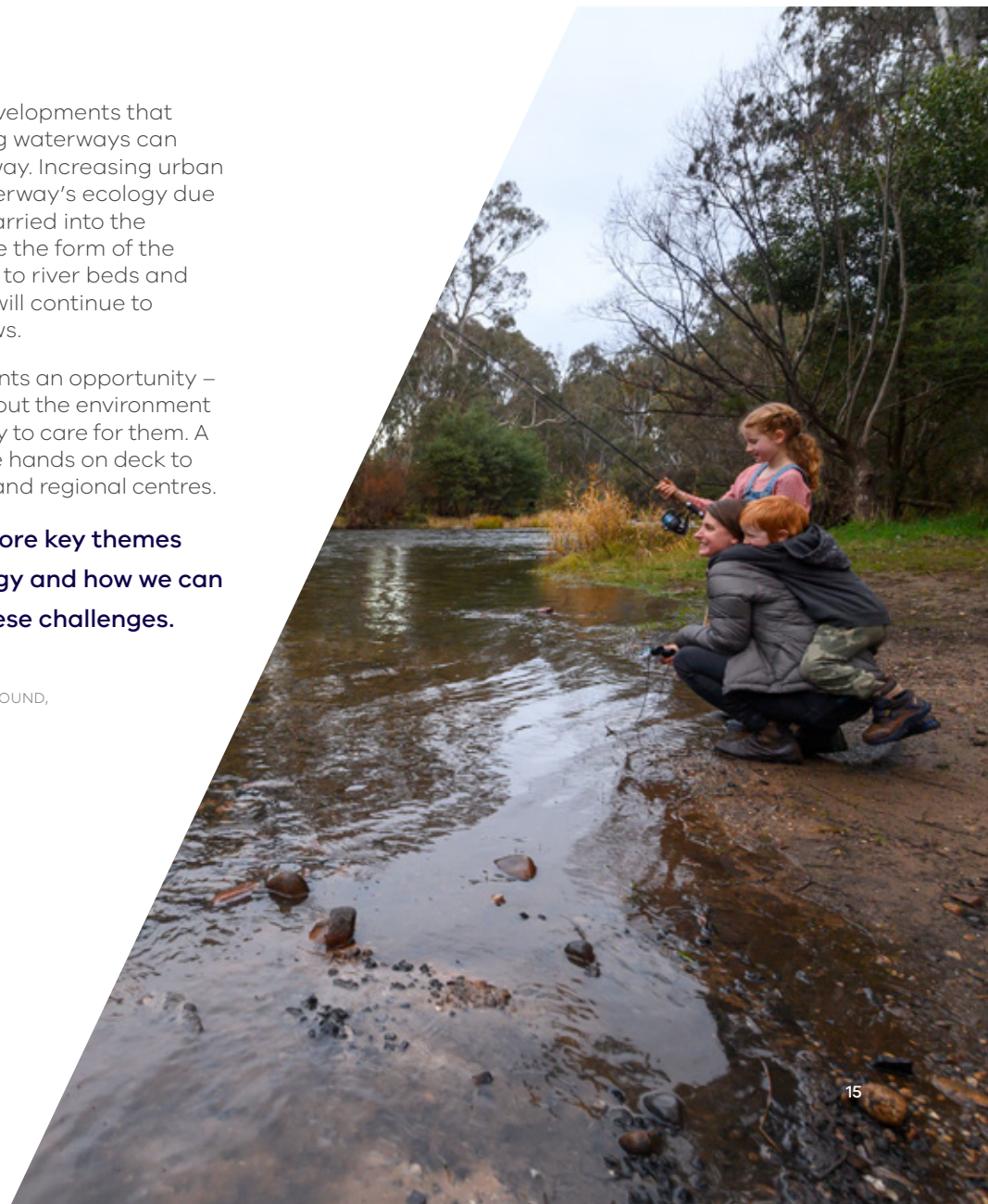
The activities, practices and developments that happen on the land surrounding waterways can impact the health of the waterway. Increasing urban development can impact a waterway's ecology due to increased pollutants being carried into the waterway, and can also damage the form of the waterway itself through erosion to river beds and banks. Urbanisation pressures will continue to increase as our population grows.

A growing population also presents an opportunity — many Victorians care deeply about the environment and feel a personal responsibility to care for them. A growing population means more hands on deck to care for waterways in our cities and regional centres.

Continue to section 5 to explore key themes proposed for the new Strategy and how we can work together to address these challenges.


 KING RIVER, EDI CUTTING CAMPING GROUND,
TAUNGURUNG COUNTRY
CREDIT: MARK JESSER

⁶ Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, *Victoria in Future*, 2019. Available: <https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/land-use-and-population-research/victoria-in-future>



03 What is your vision for Victoria's waterways?

We want to understand your vision for the future of our waterways. A new vision will be created for the new Strategy, which will be based on what we heard from the [2022 My Victorian Waterway Survey](#) and responses received via this Discussion Starter. The draft will be released for testing during the next stage of public consultation (expected in 2024).

 SPLATTA LAGOON AT
GUNBOWER CREEK,
YORTA YORTA COUNTRY
CREDIT: DARRYL WHITAKER

Through the My Victorian Waterway Survey, we asked respondents what comes to mind when they imagine a waterway that is healthy and well-managed. We also asked people about their aspirations and concerns relating to the management of waterways. Almost all of the 6,240 survey respondents described their vision for our waterways as being a **healthy environment**. The focus was not only on the benefits for waterways themselves but included a holistic idea of what healthy waterways can provide – ecosystems of abundant flora and fauna, diverse and thriving habitats, and a space for the community to connect with nature and enjoy.

Note that DEECA will work directly with Victoria's Traditional Owners. This will help us understand their objectives for waterways to guide the Strategy.

Based on the responses received, we have identified several recurring topics which are listed below. We want to know whether there are any other aspirations or values that you think should be considered in the development of a new vision.

“ **A stream with clear water and fishes and other animals living in it. There are trees and other greeneries at the sides with birds making their home on these trees.** ”

2022 My Victorian Waterway Survey respondent



CAMERON CREEK NEAR TORRUMBARRY
IN NORTHERN VICTORIA, YORTA YORTA COUNTRY
CREDIT: DARRYL WHITAKER

RECURRING TOPICS FROM THE MY VICTORIAN WATERWAY SURVEY

- ✓ A healthy environment
- ✓ Clean, clear, fresh water
- ✓ Thriving aquatic life
- ✓ Diverse flora and fauna
- ✓ Free of rubbish and pollution
- ✓ Naturally free-flowing water
- ✓ Well managed and protected
- ✓ Access for recreational activities
- ✓ A place to relax and connected with nature
- ✓ Providing for the needs of future generations

For reference: Vision from the existing Strategy

‘Victoria’s rivers, estuaries and wetlands are healthy and well-managed; supporting environmental, social, cultural and economic values that are able to be enjoyed by all communities.’



When you think about Victoria’s waterways in the future and your connection with them, what do you imagine?

Other than the recurring topics from the My Victorian Waterway Survey, are there any other aspirations or values you would like us to consider in the new vision?




GREEN LAKE, OUTSIDE HORSHAM ON THE LANDS OF THE WJJWJ PEOPLES OF THE WOTJOBALUK NATIONS
CREDIT: AMBER PERRY



04 What does the new Victorian Waterway Management Strategy need to achieve?

We are seeking your feedback on what you think the new Strategy needs to achieve. For the purpose of promoting discussion, we have identified three themes (listed below) which contain some of the known requirements that will need to be addressed in the new Strategy. We'd like to know what other opportunities you think the new Strategy should explore.

 MOYNE RIVER, DHAUWURD
WHURRONG COUNTRY
CREDIT: IMY ARTON-POWELL

SUMMARY OF THEMES FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION IN THE NEW STRATEGY

- 1 Healthy waterways in a changing climate
- 2 Caring for Country: living, connected water landscapes
- 3 Community connection to water landscapes

The development of these themes and requirements have been informed by:

- Existing government and legislative commitments relating to waterway management that have been introduced since the existing Strategy was released (2013).
- An Independent Review of the existing Strategy, which was completed in 2021.
- Findings from the 2022 My Victorian Waterway Survey.
- Early discussions and background work in collaboration with project partners.

It should be noted that there are strong connections and overlap between these three themes. For example, if our waterways are healthy and resilient to climate change, this has flow-on benefits for the communities that wish to access and use them. As such, they should not be viewed as stand-alone topics, but rather as a set of inter-connected themes that will be considered in more depth during the development of the Strategy.

Public comment is only being sought on themes one and three at this time. Theme two will be progressed directly with Traditional Owners, prior to release of the draft Strategy for public consultation in 2024.



“**Healthy water, waterways and Country are good for all.**”

**Traditional Owner partnership
(Central Gippsland Region
Sustainable Water Strategy, 2022)**



THE BANKS OF GUNBOWER CREEK,
YORTA YORTA COUNTRY

CREDIT: DARRYL WHITAKER

Healthy waterways in a changing climate

As outlined in Section 3, there are a range of challenges faced by our waterways both now and into the future, particularly associated with climate change and urban development. This is front-of-mind for many Victorians, particularly communities that have been impacted by floods and bushfires in recent years. The new Strategy presents an opportunity to improve how we manage the health of our waterways in the face of these challenges so that they can continue to be enjoyed by future generations.

We will need to help our waterways and wildlife transition to a drying climate, combined with more frequent and intense bushfires, droughts and floods. Strengthened policies may be needed to update the way we manage waterways before, during and after extreme events.

This section details some requirements that will need to be delivered. **We are seeking your input on what else you think is needed to manage the health of our waterways in a changing climate.**

What we've heard so far

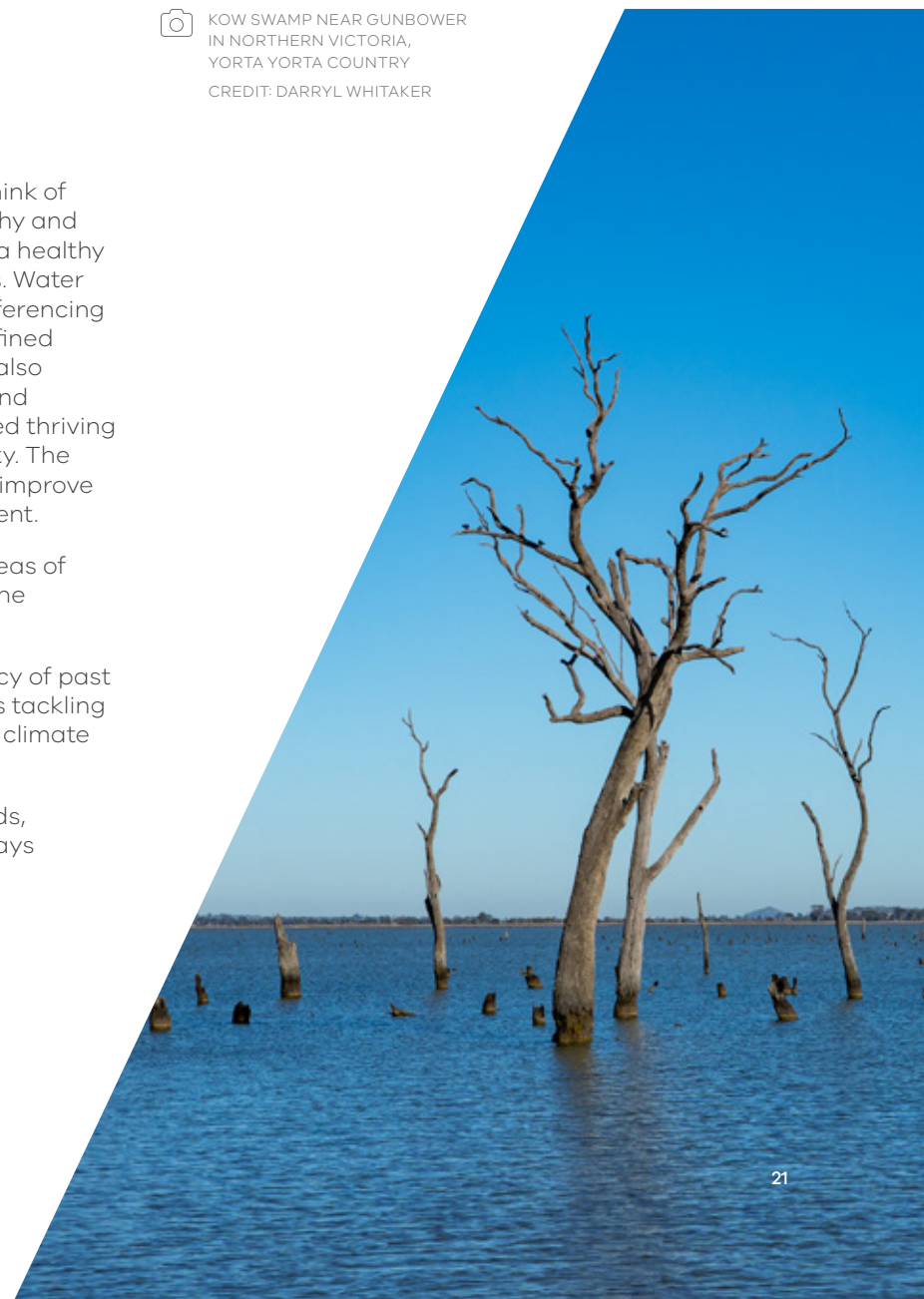
During the My Victorian Waterway Survey, respondents were asked about what they think of when they imagine a waterway that is healthy and well-managed. Most respondents prioritise a healthy environment for people, plants, and animals. Water quality was the highest priority, with 39% referencing clean, clear, or fresh water. Respondents defined 'clean water' as water free of pollution that also supports a shared ecosystem for humans and animals. 21% of respondents also emphasised thriving aquatic life, flora and fauna as a high priority. The survey showed a strong desire for action to improve the way all Victorians care for the environment.

The Independent Review identified some areas of improvement based on the learnings from the existing Strategy, including:

- A continued focus on addressing the legacy of past impacts to Victoria's waterways, as well as tackling significant new pressures associated with climate change and population growth.
- Improved approach for managing wetlands, estuaries, floodplain ecology, and waterways facing urban development pressure.



KOW SWAMP NEAR GUNBOWER
IN NORTHERN VICTORIA,
YORTA YORTA COUNTRY
CREDIT: DARRYL WHITAKER



Relevant advances in policy and legislation since 2013


There has been a range of advances in policy and laws that will need to be addressed in the new Strategy:

- **Traditional Owner self-determination:** new policies and laws have been introduced to increase Traditional Owners' self-determination in the management of Country. Further information on this is in the next sub-section titled '*Caring for Country: living, connected water landscapes*'.
- **Climate change:** in 2022, the Victorian Government committed to an action that the new Strategy will consider a climate change adaptation lens and associated principles, to incorporate climate change adaptation thinking into the way waterways are managed (see the [Climate Action webpage](#) for more information).
- **Management of water landscapes:** new policies and laws relating to managing rivers, estuaries, wetlands and their floodplains (making up complex water landscapes) have been released and will be reflected in the new Strategy, including supporting Aboriginal and recreational water values, protecting urban waterways, preserving biodiversity in the face of climate change, and integrated water management.
- **Development of regional waterway strategies:** the new Strategy will need to update the policy framework for the next round of regional waterway strategies, including guidance for partnering with Traditional Owners and fulfilling any other legal requirements that have emerged since 2013.

Summary

Based on what we've heard to date and new policy and legislative requirements, we have identified the following as important topics to explore further in the new Strategy.

- 1 Responding to a changing climate
- 2 An updated approach for managing water landscapes
- 3 Updated guidance for regional decision-making
- 4 What else?

 FRINGING WETLANDS
AT WESTERN PORT,
BUNURONG COUNTRY
CREDIT: ANDREA WHITE




We are seeking your feedback on what else you think the new Strategy needs to achieve.

Healthy waterways in a changing climate

In addition to the topics we have identified, are there any other opportunities the new Strategy should explore?





 **MIRRORING – COUNTRY, DEECA'S ABORIGINAL CULTURAL IDENTITY BY ARTIST TOM DAY OF THE GUNDITJMARA, YORTA YORTA AND WEMBA WEMBA TRIBES**

Caring for Country: living, connected water landscapes

Traditional Owners have a custodial obligation to manage the health of Country, including waterways. Healthy Country, in turn, supports healthy people and strong culture.

In developing the new Strategy, we will work in close partnership with Traditional Owners to increase their self-determination in waterway management by increasing their roles and resources for caring for water landscapes. This is already a Victorian Government commitment. The new Strategy will identify how we can apply this in our new waterway management framework and work with Traditional Owners and the community to care for Country - together achieving better outcomes for our waterways and people.

This section outlines existing government commitments relating to this theme. Policy development to increase self-determination will be progressed with our Traditional Owner partners.

As such, public comment on this theme is not being sought at this time. The outcomes of these partnership discussions with Traditional Owners will be integrated across all parts of the new Strategy.

What we've heard so far

DEECA has been connecting with Traditional Owners since 2021 to have early discussions about the new Strategy. Alongside these discussions, many First Nations and Traditional Owner groups across Victoria developed Nation Statements as part of [Water is Life – Traditional Owner Access to Water Roadmap](#), which express Traditional Owners' cultural and water-related values, goals, aspirations, outcomes and other relevant information deemed

“It is our human right — the rights of the Indigenous people of Australia. To be involved in water, have the right of access to water, and be participating players in the decisions made regarding water.”

Traditional Owner, Water is Life, 2022

important by each Nation. These statements were written by Traditional Owner groups, in their own words, and were published without alteration in Water is Life. While these Nation Statements were not written for the purpose of inputting into the new Strategy, they are being used as a starting point to progress discussions with Traditional Owners about what they would like to see from the new Strategy.

The Independent review also recommended that Traditional Owner self-determination should be a key focus area. The new Strategy presents an opportunity to transition from a model of engagement and involvement of Traditional Owners to one of First Nations leadership and partnership in waterway management.

Relevant advances in policy and legislation since 2013


There has been a range of advances in policy and laws that will need to be addressed in the new Strategy:

- The Victorian Government is committed to reforms that connect waterway management and caring for Country, which is outlined in Water is Life. Water is Life was released in 2022, being an important step towards self-determination, to reduce barriers and increase access to water and management of water landscapes. The new Strategy will play a role in delivering Water is Life by increasing Traditional Owner roles and resources for the management of waterways. Already, DEECA and the Victorian Environmental Water Holder have begun working with Traditional Owners on a pathway towards interested groups becoming holders of environmental water. This is one of Water is Life's long-term outcomes and will be reflected within the new Strategy.

- Recognition of Aboriginal water values were enshrined into law in 2019. The Water Act 1989 now provides greater recognition and involvement of Traditional Owners and Aboriginal Victorians in the management and planning of waterways and catchments, including requirements for increased consideration of Aboriginal cultural values and uses. Specifically, this law includes a requirement that the preparation of regional waterway strategies must take into account Aboriginal cultural values and uses of waterways. The new Strategy will play an important role in this by updating the framework for regional waterway strategies and providing guidance for partnering with local Traditional Owners.

Summary

We will continue to work directly with Traditional Owners to determine how the new Strategy can increase self-determination in waterway management and how it can progress other Traditional Owner priorities for the benefit of our waterways and communities.

 CORANGAMITE CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY AND WADAWURRUNG TRADITIONAL OWNER ABORIGINAL CORPORATION CONDUCTING AUSTRALASIAN BITTERN SURVEYS AT LAKE CONNEWARRE, WADAWURRUNG COUNTRY
CREDIT: IMY ARTON-POWELL



Community connection to waterways

Waterways are the lifeblood of many Victorian towns and communities. Waterways and surrounding environments are visited every day for a variety of reasons, such as relaxation and peace, recreation and fun, commercial and economic activities, a place to engage with nature, experience mental health benefits, and for family and social connections. For those living in metropolitan areas, waterways are particularly valuable as they provide an urban escape. As our population grows, we will need to continue finding ways to support the many values that waterways provide to Victorian communities.

Communities care for Victoria's waterways in many ways. Victoria has a strong history of community-based natural resource management, particularly through the [Landcare](#) movement and [citizen science programs](#). Every day, hundreds of passionate landholders, First Nations and Traditional Owner groups, Friends Of groups, recreational angler groups and other volunteers are undertaking activities to care for our waterways, such as planting trees and monitoring water quality. DEECA thanks everyone who has contributed time and effort into caring for Victoria's water landscapes. The new Strategy will explore how we can continue supporting the important role that communities play in caring for waterways.

This section outlines some requirements that will need to be delivered. **We are seeking your input on what else you think is needed to support community connection to waterways.**

We try and explore Vic whilst exercising and the thing we usually look up is waterfalls or lakes with tracks nearby. Our [favourite] and closest one would be Dights Falls.

2022 My Victorian Waterway Survey respondent



COMMUNITY DISCUSSING RIVER HEALTH, CITIZEN SCIENCE PROGRAM, WADAWURRUNG COUNTRY
CREDIT: CORANGAMITE CMA

What we've heard so far

The 2022 My Victorian Waterway Survey found that 69% of respondents visit a waterway at least once a month for a wide variety of experiences and activities. Popular activities include exercising, enjoying the scenery and native flora and fauna, dog walking, spending time with family, boating, picnics and barbeques, visiting cultural or historical sites, fishing, game hunting, undertaking volunteer activities, camping and caravanning. When asked about the waterway that they most like to visit, 47% of respondents said that the reason they visit is that it's closest to where they live. This was followed by 37% who said they visit because the waterway fits their needs. As our population grows, more people will be seeking to connect with and access waterways for the range of benefits they provide.

The survey showed an incredibly strong connection between access to waterways and community health, with 94% of respondents agreeing that waterways nurture their own health and wellbeing. More than 80% of respondents agreed that taking care of the environment will help everyone have a better quality of life and that waterways should be as healthy as possible so that they can continue providing for community needs.

Given these findings, it is not surprising that the survey also revealed that most people feel a personal responsibility to care for waterways and the environment, and provided they have direction and guidance, would do their bit. Thousands of helping hands and hours have already gone into caring for and managing waterways. 45% of respondents have already participated in a volunteer environmental or conservation effort, and almost half expressed interest in doing so in the future. These efforts include local projects, environmental advocacy, planting native trees, participating in a citizen science project, and many more.

The Independent Review found that the existing Strategy led to significant advances in strengthening community partnerships – this was considered a key strength. The new Strategy can build on these successes and foster increased community stewardship of water landscapes into the future.



Relevant advances in policy and legislation since 2013

There has been a range of advances in policy and laws that will need to be addressed in the new Strategy:

- **Consideration of multiple values associated with waterways:** keeping waterways healthy supports Aboriginal, social and recreational values, as well as environmental and ecological values. Policy and laws have been introduced requiring greater consideration of social and recreational values by water sector agencies in managing water landscapes. This includes identifying ways to achieve 'shared benefits' when delivering waterway management programs. There are often opportunities to increase social and recreational benefits for the community, whilst ensuring that the underpinning environmental values and objectives are supported. This also includes identifying ways to achieve additional 'shared benefits' — increasing social, cultural and recreational benefits where possible. The new Strategy will have strengthened policies to support and enhance a range of waterway values.

- **Management of urban waterways:** new policies and laws are in place to better protect waterways in urban areas so they can continue to be enjoyed by communities. This includes a commitment that the new Strategy will offer clearer guidance on planning for the enhancement of amenity and other social values of urban waterways and potential threats to them.
- **Communities connecting with waterways:** the Victorian Government has committed to promoting Victorian's engagement with nature, raising awareness of its importance and encouraging people to protect and care for the environment. The new Strategy will reflect these commitments in a waterway management context.

Summary

Based on what we've heard to date and new policy and legislative requirements, we have identified the following as important topics to explore further in the new Strategy.

- 1 Supporting multiple values associated with waterways
- 2 Fostering community and landholder stewardship in caring for waterways
- 3 Managing visitor experience and amenity
- 4 What else?



We are seeking your feedback on what you think the new Strategy needs to achieve.

Community connection to waterways

In addition to the topics we have identified, are there any other opportunities the new Strategy should explore?

General question relating to Section 5

Do you have any other comments relating to the development of the new Victorian Waterway Management Strategy?



ETIWANDA WETLANDS IN MILDURA, FIRST PEOPLES OF THE MILLEWA-MALLEE CORPORATION COUNTRY
CREDIT: DARRYL WHITAKER




05 What is next?

Your feedback will be carefully reviewed and analysed, and will inform the development of the draft Strategy. A summary of ‘what we heard’ from this consultation will be released later this year.

 THE BARWON RIVER IN GEELONG,
WADAWURRUNG COUNTRY
CREDIT: CORANGAMITE CMA



 DISCUSSIONS WITH LOCAL LANDHOLDERS,
GUNAİKURNAI COUNTRY
CREDIT: WEST GIPPSLAND CMA

Your feedback will be carefully reviewed and analysed, and will inform the development of the draft Strategy. A summary of 'what we heard' from this consultation will be released later this year.

During 2023-2024, we will work closely with project partners and key stakeholders on policy and strategy development. The next round of formal public consultation is expected to take place in 2024 when we release the draft Victorian Waterway Management Strategy for public comment.

The final Strategy is expected to be released in 2025. Alongside this, a comprehensive public engagement closing-the-loop report will also be released, detailing how your responses informed policy and the new vision.

If you'd like to know more or be added to our list to receive project updates, please get in touch via Vic.WaterwayStrategy@delwp.vic.gov.au

Further information can be found on the [project webpage](#).



water.vic.gov.au

