

Applied Aquatic Ecology Research Hub

Engagement Strategy



© The State of Victoria Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning 2017



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Australia licence. You are free to re-use the work under that licence, on the condition that you credit the State of Victoria as author. The licence does not apply to any images, photographs or branding, including the Victorian Coat of Arms, the Victorian Government logo and the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning logo. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/au/deed.en>

Disclaimer

This publication may be of assistance to you but the State of Victoria and its employees do not guarantee that the publication is without flaw of any kind or is wholly appropriate for your particular purposes and therefore disclaims all liability for any error, loss or other consequence which may arise from you relying on any information in this publication.

Contents

Summary	2
.....	
Background	4
.....	
Purpose of this Strategy	6
.....	
Engagement Approach	6
.....	
Key messages	7
.....	
Target Audience	8
.....	
Engagement Methods	9
.....	
Evaluation	14
.....	
Bibliography	15
.....	

Summary

The Applied Aquatic Ecology Research Hub (the Hub) will enable a more collaborative approach to research and monitoring in aquatic science.

The Hub's vision is for the Victorian Government's investment in aquatic ecology research and monitoring to be better aligned with strategic objectives, and more efficient and effective. To enable this, the Hub has key objectives around linkages, coordination and sharing information.

Effective engagement is a key enabler to delivering these objectives.

This Engagement Strategy identifies:

- the overarching approach for engagement within and by the Hub
- the key messages for the Hub
- primary methods of engagement and evaluation
- scope and timelines

for effective engagement by the Hub.

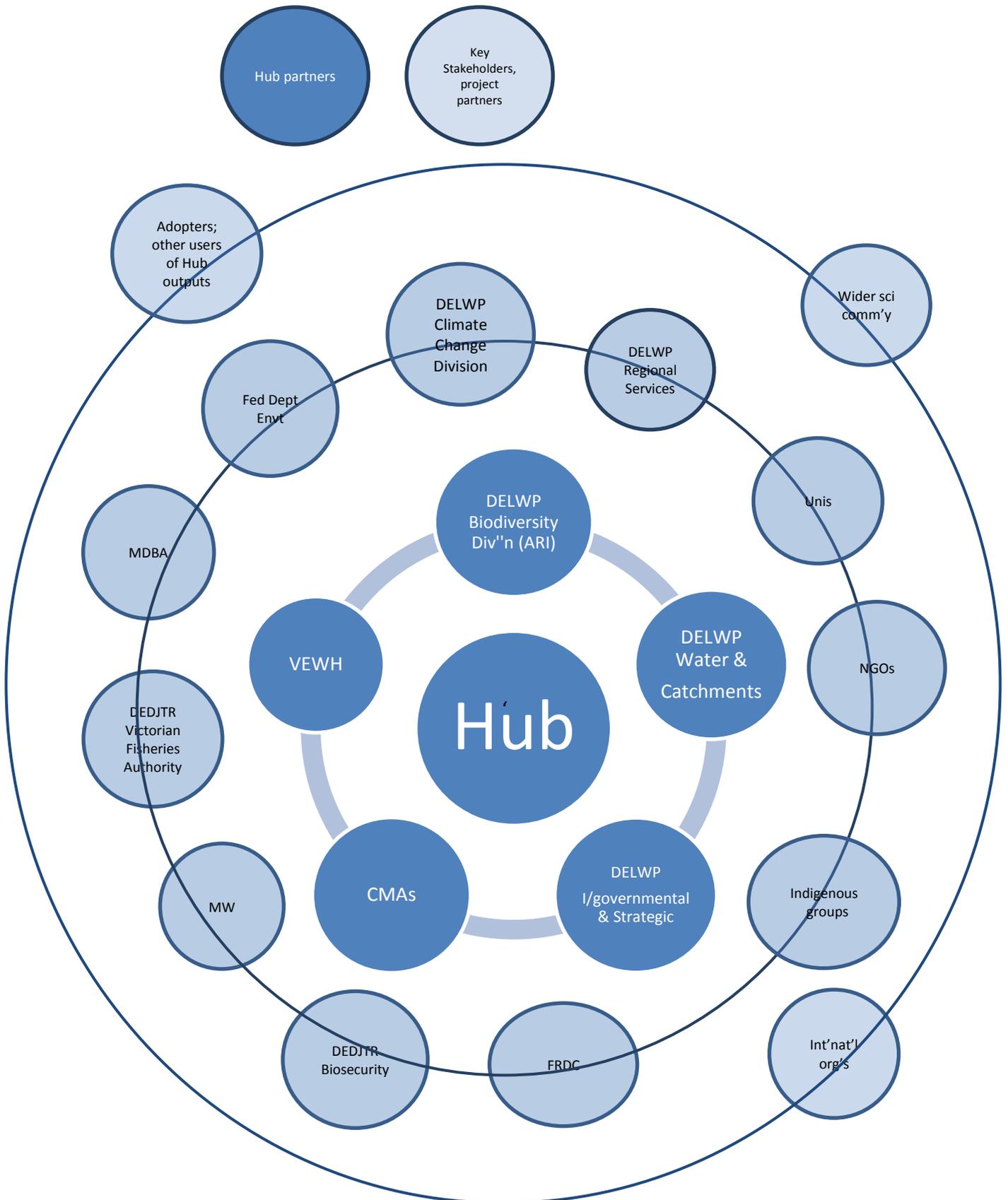
Implementation of this Strategy and Plan is aimed to:

- **Connect** Hub partners, investors and stakeholders
- **Share** information, resources, networks, knowledge and expertise, and
- **Promote** the Hub, its partners, and our collaborative successes.

The structure of the Hub (Figure 1) includes a core of founding partners (Divisions within the Victorian Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning; the Victorian Environmental Water Holder and the Victorian Catchment Management Authorities), a ring of key investors and stakeholders, and then another encircling ring of wider stakeholders, including practitioners making use of partner research outputs ('adopters'), the scientific community and International organisations. More detail on potential external investors and stakeholders for the Hub are listed in the Target audience section.

As the Hub establishes and demonstrates its effectiveness, future iterations are likely to reflect an adaptive management approach, and incorporate wider engagement with other stakeholders, including other groups within government and the broader community.

Figure 1: Hub partners and stakeholders



Background

The Applied Aquatic Ecology Hub (The Hub)

Divisions within DELWP, the Victorian Environmental Water Holder (VEWH) and the Victorian Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs) have recognized the potential mutual benefits and efficiencies in creating a collaborative Applied Aquatic Ecology Research Hub (Hub) dedicated to supporting Victoria's aquatic research needs.

Successful organisations are acutely aware of the benefits of collaboration. The current Business Plan of the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) reflects this, stating:

“We believe that we get better results when we collaborate. We seek to optimise collaboration within our department across the portfolios of Environment, Climate Change and Water, Planning and Local Infrastructure. We will also collaborate effectively with other government departments”.

The Hub aims to facilitate its Partners to achieve the environmental objectives under key jurisdictional plans and strategies. These include:

- The Murray-Darling Basin Plan
- Commonwealth and Victorian environmental watering strategies and plans
- The Victorian Government's *Water for Victoria*
- Victorian and regional catchment strategies and their waterway and coastal management strategies
- The Victorian Government Biodiversity Strategy *Protecting Victoria's Environment Biodiversity 2037*
- The Victorian Government's *Target One Million Plan* for recreational fishers

For example, a waterway research Hub is written in to Action 3.9 of Victoria's Water Plan “Water for Victoria:

“establish a waterway research hub to support more coordinated, strategic research and monitoring both within the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning and across relevant government stakeholders and research providers, and include mechanisms for independent science oversight and knowledge brokering”

The Hub's primary purpose is to facilitate more strategically aligned and more efficient research activity which meets the needs of the partners and key stakeholders. The Hub will enable improved coordination, delivery and dissemination of existing and new research relating to freshwater and estuarine systems.

The Hub aims to:

- Improve collaboration and coordination between DELWP (including ARI), the VEWH and CMAs in regarding aquatic ecology research and monitoring
- Share knowledge in aquatic research with Hub partners and their networks
- Understand and describe the research landscape in relation to the key Victorian government policy drivers
- Identify targeted research and monitoring work required to fill key knowledge gaps
- Minimise duplication of research effort and outputs

- Improve the understanding and communication of the impact of Hub partner research
- Improve management decisions through increased adoptability of research outputs
- Improve alignment of research and monitoring with government policy direction and collaboratively better leverage available research funds.

Effective engagement is integral to the success of the Hub and this Engagement Strategy will provide guidance on planning and delivering those activities, towards meeting Hub objectives.

This Engagement Strategy will also clarify scope, to be mindful of partner vs Hub responsibilities, and respective ownership and collaboration in engagement. It is important to:

- recognise and respect partner autonomy
- recognise the Victorian policies and investment contexts in which partners operate
- understand and respect the distinctions between the communications and engagement activities of each partner organisation and those of the Hub
- outline the responsibilities of the Hub in delivering communications to support Hub processes and outputs
- highlight that the Hub can provide opportunities to value add to each partner's own processes.

These points should also be considered with respect to partner relationships with other stakeholders. The Hub, by definition, is a strong supporter of stakeholder relationships, and respects all existing arrangements and future arrangements partners may develop with other stakeholders. The Hub is an enhancing and enabling process, building on and developing networks and relationships. The Hub will build and retain trust and respect with other organisations/ stakeholders.

The implementation of this Strategy, particularly the evaluation components, will also provide information to support ongoing evaluation of the Hub's performance.

Hub evolution

The Hub has begun with a core group of partners most directly involved in research, management and restoration of freshwater environments in Victoria. The first stage of the Hub established the Hub governance, project management systems, collated information on Partner activities and provided a 'proof of concept' stage. Following this establishment phase, Hub activities have focussed on mapping and assessing the Partner's monitoring and research needs and delivering a number of knowledge exchange forums. It is intended that the Hub will expand its working partnerships to include other relevant stakeholders and agencies involved in aquatic research and monitoring.

Purpose of this Strategy

This Hub Engagement Strategy aims to:

- ensure effective communication among the Hub partners
- provide a strategy to share knowledge and coordinate activity among the Hub partners
- provide clarity and consistency in the development and delivery of key messages
- provide a framework to build awareness of the Hub and celebrate achievements
- define roles and scope with respect to communications and
- define review and evaluation processes.

Engagement Approach

IAP2 spectrum

Broadly, we will apply the IAP2 (International Association of Public Participation) approach, used by most DELWP projects. Although IAP2 was developed as an engagement approach for decision making, it is useful and relevant for many engagement strategies, including that for the Hub.

The IAP2 approach to engagement encompasses a range of involvement, from a simple one way flow of information, through to true empowerment and delegation of decision making. The IAP2 spectrum thus includes:

Level of participation:	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Objective:	To provide information, keep people informed	To seek feedback, to listen to and acknowledge concerns	To work with people and ensure aspirations and concerns understood; to exchange information and ideas.	To fully engage with people, explore alternatives and identify preferred solutions, to seek advice and innovations from various perspectives.	To create structures which delegate decision making, and to implement agreed decisions.

Key messages

- The founding Hub Partners are DELWP (Catchments and Water, Intergovernmental, and Biodiversity- including ARI), the VEWH and CMAs, with a view to expand in number over time to incorporate other key aquatic stakeholders.
- The Hub facilitates and supports improved coordination, delivery and sharing of research and monitoring knowledge of aquatic systems, which is relevant and adoptable.
- The Hub represents a cost-effective solution for planning and delivery of aquatic ecology research activities using evidence to support key government management investments and policies.
- The Hub facilitates Partners achieving actions set out in the “Victorian Waterway Management Strategy”, “Water for Victoria”, Regional Waterway Strategies and/or the “Protecting Victoria's Environment - Biodiversity 2036” plan.
- The Hub recognising partner autonomy.

Our Partners

- are committed to the Hub partnership
- actively participate in Hub processes
- share relevant ideas and information as fully as able.

Partner Participation

- Collaborate to provide direction for the Hub through activities as reflected in the annual works plans
- Are represented within the governance framework including on the Partner Group and Control Group
- Collaborate in identifying research needs and knowledge gaps
- Participate in identifying collaborative research and funding opportunities
- Contribute to a knowledge base of current research and monitoring activities of Partners (i.e. Research and Monitoring Directory - RaMond)
- Facilitate and host regional research forums
- Identify other opportunities to share research and monitoring activities and outputs

Hub Outputs

- There will be a suite of outputs to outline progress of annual works plans. These include:
 - Quarterly activity updates
 - RaMond – a shared directory of current research and monitoring activities across Partners
 - Internal Hub forums to investigate and initiate collaborative research and funding opportunities
 - Public Research forums to showcase the research achievements of the CMAs
 - A map showing the relationship between Hub partner activities and key policy drivers
 - A systematic gap analysis of current and future research and monitoring needs
 - An annual evaluation of the performance of the Hub in achievements against the annual works plan

Target Audience

Founding Hub Partners:

Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning:

- Water and Catchments Division
- Intergovernmental and Strategic Projects Division
- Biodiversity Division, including Arthur Rylah Institute for Environmental Research

Victorian Environmental Water Holder (VEWH)

Victorian Catchment Management Authorities.

Other Stakeholders:

Victorian investors and stakeholders

Melbourne Water

Victorian Fisheries Authority (DEDJTR)

DEDJTR Biosecurity

Universities

Parks Victoria

Local government

Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations (MLDRIN)

Indigenous organisations and communities

Wetland managers, e.g. Murray Wetlands Working Group, Winton Wetlands

Landcare and landholders

Interest groups and organisations e.g. (VRFish, ATF, NFA)

Interstate and National investors and stakeholders

Commonwealth Department of Environment

Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder (CEWH)

Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA)

Threatened Species Commissioner

Fisheries Research and Development Corporation (FRDC)

Murray-Darling Freshwater Research Centre (MDFRC)

NSW Department of Primary Industries

South Australian Research and Development Institute (SARDI)

Universities

The Nature Conservancy

Greening Australia

Trust For Nature

Nature Glenelg Trust

Australian River Restoration Centre (ARRC)

Australian professional associations (e.g. ASFB, ASL, RBMS)

International stakeholders

Scientific community

International natural resource management agencies

Australian Aid agencies (e.g. ACIAR).

Engagement Methods

Table 1 lists key actions for the audiences and messages identified above, and their role in the IAP2 spectrum (the engagement approach adopted by DELWP).

Table 2 lists key types of actions (face to face, media, online and outputs etc) along a timeline, recognising that the Hub will effectively have three stages after the initial development: Implementation, Expansion, Growth and Consolidation. Driving this progression is evaluation, feedback and improvement of the Hub's performance.

Effective engagement actions will include face to face engagement, tangible outputs such as reports and summary information sheets, and online sharing and exchange of information. The precise format of online sharing will be regularly reviewed in consultation with the Hub partners.

Table 1: Hub: IAP2 spectrum actions

Level of participation:	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Objective:	To provide information, keep people informed	To seek feedback, to listen to and acknowledge concerns	To work with people and ensure aspirations and concerns understood; to exchange information and ideas.	To fully engage with people, explore alternatives and identify preferred solutions, to seek advice and innovations from various perspectives.	To create structures which delegate decision making, and to implement agreed decisions.
Key Audience and Actions:					
<i>Minister</i>	Updates via Dep Sec				
<i>Partners</i>	Emails and phone. Regular Information flow to and from partners (including via shared agency drives and Google drive) Hub Strategic Plan Hub Engagement Strategy	Emails and phone. Presentations and discussion at Control Group meetings, Partner Group meetings, RaMonD User Group, CMA Waterway Managers' Forums, EWRO Forums, CEO forum etc. Hub Engagement Strategy	Emails and phone. Presentations and discussion at Control Group meetings, Partner Group meetings, RaMonD User Group, CMA Waterway Managers' Forums, EWRO Forums, CEO forum Hub Strategic Plan. Hub Engagement Strategy Internal Hub Forums Public Research Forums Research projects	Emails and phone. Presentations and discussion at Control Group meetings, Partner Group meetings, RaMonD User Group, CMA Waterway Managers' Forums, EWRO Forums, CEO forum Hub Strategic Plan. Hub Engagement Strategy Internal Hub Forums Public Research Forums Research projects	Hub governance processes. Meetings. Research outputs.

Level of participation:	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Objective:	To provide information, keep people informed	To seek feedback, to listen to and acknowledge concerns	To work with people and ensure aspirations and concerns understood; to exchange information and ideas.	To fully engage with people, explore alternatives and identify preferred solutions, to seek advice and innovations from various perspectives.	To create structures which delegate decision making, and to implement agreed decisions.
<i>Other Victorian agencies/ bodies</i>	Online sources including Yammer, agency Facebook pages, ARI e-news, AAE Quarterly Updates, Hub Updates, other agency newsletters, FisheFax	CMA Waterway Managers' Forums. EWRO Network. Survey/ focus group processes for relevant projects (eg SurveyMonkey questionnaires)	Internal Hub Forums Public Research Forums Research projects	Internal Hub Forums Public Research Forums Research projects	Research outputs
<i>National stakeholders</i>	Conference presentations eg Riversymposium, ASFB, Australian Stream Management Conference, contributions to email newsletters e.g. The Chirp, ARRC, Finterest,	Research Forums (involvement of MDBA, CEWH)	Research Forums (involvement of MDBA, CEWH)	Research projects	
<i>International stakeholders</i>	Conference presentations eg Riversymposium, conferences overseas			Research projects	
<i>Scientific community</i>	Journal publications			Research projects	

Table 2: Action Plan for Hub Engagement: Timeline 2017 -2019

	Jan – May 2017	June-Aug 2017	Sept-Dec 2017	Jan 2018	Feb-Dec 2018	2019 focus
Key objective:	<i>Implementing the Hub</i>			<i>Reflection, Evaluation and Review</i>	<i>Expand</i>	<i>Grow and improve</i>
Key Activity:						
Face to Face						
<i>Meetings</i>	Control Group meeting, Partner meeting	Control Group meeting, Partner meeting, Meeting with CERDI for preliminary discussion about RaMonD (data fields, searchable fields, options for spatial layers, etc).	Control Group meeting, Partner meeting Regional meeting	Control Group meeting, Partner meeting Regional meeting	Control Group meeting, Partner meeting Regional meeting	Control Group meeting, Partner meeting Regional meeting
<i>Forums</i>		Public Research Forum	Public Research Forum (E-water forum)	Evaluate 2017 Forums Plan 2018 forums	Public Research forums	Build reach and impact of forums
<i>Conferences</i>					Collaboration for Environmental Evidence	Riversymp, ASFB
<i>Email/ tel</i>	Partner dialogue and updating, sharing of meeting minutes	Partner dialogue and updating, sharing of meeting minutes	Partner dialogue and updating, sharing of meeting minutes	Partner dialogue and updating, sharing of meeting minutes	Partner dialogue and updating, sharing of meeting minutes	Partner dialogue and updating, sharing of meeting minutes
Outputs						
<i>Publications</i>	Work Plan, Governance Framework,	Hub quarterly update, Hub Engagement	Hub quarterly update, Share Knowledge	Hub quarterly update, Review and	Hub quarterly update Implement and adaptively refine the Research Strategy and Engagement Strategy. Share Knowledge products at	Hub quarterly update

	Jan – May 2017	June-Aug 2017	Sept-Dec 2017	Jan 2018	Feb-Dec 2018	2019 focus
Key objective:	<i>Implementing the Hub</i>			<i>Reflection, Evaluation and Review</i>	<i>Expand</i>	<i>Grow and improve</i>
	Draft Hub Engagement Strategy, Draft Strategic Plan, First version of Research and Monitoring Directory (RaMonD) (Version 1)	Strategy, Strategic Plan, Develop Key Knowledge products (Research landscape map, Research gap analysis)	products - RaMonD Version 2.0, Research landscape map, Research gap analysis	evaluate Research and Engagement Strategies	Forums and distribute to stakeholders.	
<i>Journal publications</i>					Draft paper of Hub progress	
Online						
<i>Online portal</i>	Discuss with Partner Group	Prepare briefing paper for Partner group for consideration – on purpose, audience, content, linkages, costing, ongoing requirements etc	Evaluate options and reach decision regarding online portal – to share RaMond and other components of Hub – Partner Group	Dependent on decisions	Dependent on decisions	Dependent on decisions

Evaluation

The Hub represents a new way of collaborating between Victorian agencies interested in applied aquatic research. It is intended to evaluate the Hub on an annual basis regarding achievements against the relevant year Work Plan.

Evaluation of the Engagement Strategy will relate to the objectives identified above and will assess the effectiveness of our efforts to:

Connect,
Coordinate, and
Share.

Ongoing monitoring of communication and engagement will enable an adaptive management approach, allowing for modification of approaches which are not achieving their aims.

Evaluation criteria will reflect the engagement strategy objectives and consider:

- the **engagement process** and achievement of particular milestones and targets
 - (e.g. work plan actions – Partner meetings, Control Group meetings, forums organised, Hub updates produced and shared, Strategic Plan produced, Knowledge products produced – RaMond, research landscape map, Gap analysis)
- the **engagement outcomes**, their extent and quality
 - (e.g. changes in awareness of the Hub and attitudes towards the Hub, use of and contribution to Hub outputs such as RaMond, evidence of Hub partners sharing, coordinating and connecting in regards to aquatic research and monitoring).

Annual evaluation will include:

- Project process documentation
- Feedback from target audiences and stakeholders, via direct feedback, focus group discussions and interviews and survey questionnaires
- Evidence of sharing of information
- Evidence of application of shared information
- Evidence of improved coordination of research projects
- Online sharing analytics.

Evaluation will inform biannual review of the Hub Engagement Strategy.

This in turn will inform review of the Hub, and evaluation of Hub success in delivering improved effectiveness and efficiencies of knowledge sharing in aquatic ecology in Victoria.

Bibliography

- DELWP (2015) Applied Aquatic Ecology Research Hub Project Proposal.
- DELWP (2015) Applied Aquatic Ecology Hub Workplan 2015-2016.
- DELWP Business Plan 2015-16: <http://intranet.delwp.vic.gov.au/how-do-i/business-reporting/corporate-and-business-planning/guidelines/DELWP-Business-Plan-2015-16-Nov.pdf> Accessed online 6/12/2015.
- DELWP Water for Victoria
- IAP2's Public Participation Spectrum: <https://www.iap2.org.au/resources/iap2s-public-participation-spectrum> Accessed online 25/09/2015.

www.delwp.vic.gov.au