

# Draft Victorian Rural Drainage Strategy - Summary



The Victorian Government is developing the Victorian Rural Drainage Strategy (the Strategy) to help landholders make choices about how they manage water logging on agricultural land to improve agricultural productivity in dryland areas while managing the environmental and cultural impacts of drainage.

The release of a draft Strategy is a key milestone, delivering on the Government's commitment in *Water for Victoria*, to develop a rural drainage strategy for Victoria through an open and consultative process.

The community is invited to have its say on the proposals in the draft Strategy and to contribute to setting the new contemporary arrangements for rural drainage, supported by clear roles and responsibilities for government and landholders.

Rural drainage management – defined as the act of directing excess water away from dryland agricultural areas for the purposes of improved farm productivity – is inherently complex. Rural drainage systems often involve multiple landholders, who often depend on interactions between private drainage assets and public assets such as roads, table drains, culverts and bridges. This draft Strategy seeks in large part to ease this complexity and to clarify the roles and responsibilities around managing rural drainage.

The draft Strategy proposes improvements to rural drainage management by:

- Supporting landholders to make choices about how they want to manage rural drainage
- Clarifying the roles, responsibilities and obligations for landholders and agencies in rural drainage
- Rebuilding the capability for agencies and landholders to manage rural drainage to support agricultural productivity in their region
- Streamlining the environmental and cultural approvals processes to help landholders manage rural drainage while providing the additional benefits of protecting and improving environmental and cultural values
- Promoting opportunities for landholders and Traditional Owners to collaborate in the ways they manage rural drainage.

The public release of this draft Strategy now provides an opportunity for the community to provide comments on the proposed improvements and to contribute to the final strategy.

## Aboriginal acknowledgement

The Victorian Government proudly acknowledges Victoria's Aboriginal community and their rich culture, and pays respect to their Elders past and present.

We acknowledge Aboriginal people as Australia's first peoples and as the Traditional Owners and custodians of the land and water on which we rely. We recognise and value the ongoing contribution of Aboriginal people and communities to Victorian life, and how this enriches us. We embrace the spirit of reconciliation, working towards equality of outcomes and ensuring an equal voice for Aboriginal Victorians.

## Front cover image:

David Fletcher

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## The proposed approach

This draft Strategy responds to the findings of the 2013 Environment and Natural Resource Committee Inquiry into Rural Drainage in Victoria. Importantly, it also builds on the extensive public consultation conducted for that inquiry, which revealed significant community concern about the management, performance and maintenance of Victoria's rural drainage.

The release of the draft Strategy supports the commitment the Victorian Government made in *Water for Victoria* to develop a rural drainage strategy through an open and consultative process.

The draft Strategy responds to the consultation process, proposing improvements to rural drainage management by:

### Supporting landholders to make choices about how they want to manage rural drainage

The draft Strategy outlines four ways landholders might choose to manage rural drainage.

1. Individually
2. Collectively through amicable agreements
3. Collectively through written agreements
4. Collectively through written agreements with support from government agencies, and with councils offering administrative support where landholders are prepared to pay for that service.

Where existing arrangements are working well and landholders are meeting their obligations to protect environmental and cultural values, these arrangements for rural drainage can continue.

This draft Strategy aims to clarify the issues, where existing arrangements are not working by removing barriers and supporting landholders to choose alternative drainage management options. For example, under the proposed arrangements, they may seek administrative support in managing drainage systems.

This draft Strategy proposes that key agencies with roles and responsibilities in drainage management will provide landholders with a drainage resource kit which will include information they need to make decisions about how they want to manage rural drainage.

### Clarifying the roles, responsibilities and obligations for landholders and agencies in rural drainage

Under the draft Strategy, councils would provide local drainage committees administrative support to establish and administer management arrangements for rural drainage systems. They would do this where the landholders could demonstrate the following:

- Landholders within the drainage area support the need to manage the drainage system.
- Landholders benefiting from the drainage system agree to pay for the system's maintenance and administrative costs.
- Landholders are willing to participate in a local drainage management committee in the form of an incorporated association (or other legal entity).
- The legal entity holds appropriate insurance.

Where landholders demonstrate, they can meet the criteria, councils will provide administrative support to landholders who choose to manage drainage collectively. Other government agencies will be available to provide technical support to landholders. This draft Strategy proposes formal commitments, at the regional level, from all relevant agencies to provide that support.

For more detail refer to the draft Strategy;

- Part 3 – What improved management of rural drainage will mean  
*Chapter 4 Landholders making informed choices*

**Table one – Summary of the roles and responsibilities proposed in this draft Strategy**

Who	Roles and responsibilities
The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investment to prepare the tools and templates required to support rural drainage (including the proposed drainage resource kit), and identify opportunities to streamline environmental approvals</li> <li>Set the policy direction for rural drainage</li> <li>Set the policy direction for state-wide partnership arrangements</li> </ul>
Forest, Fire and Regions Group (Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regulate native vegetation removal</li> <li>Provide pathways for rural drainage approvals and lead a program to identify opportunities to streamline environmental approvals</li> </ul>
Landholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Make choices about how they want to manage rural drainage</li> <li>Agree to fund all the management and maintenance costs of rural drainage</li> <li>Comply with regulations and obligations</li> </ul>
Catchment management authorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support landholders to manage environmental and cultural benefits</li> <li>Build capability and skills in rural drainage</li> <li>Invest in environmental works and measures to improve the management of rural drainage areas on a priority basis</li> <li>Feasibility work to understand priority works for the rural drainage systems they manage</li> <li>Drive regional partnership arrangements</li> </ul>
Councils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide point of contact and administrative support to landholders</li> <li>Manage drainage assets vested in them and infrastructure such as table drains, bridges and culverts in line with their existing obligations</li> </ul>
Melbourne Water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide regional drainage services within its waterway management district</li> <li>Develop and implement plans or schemes related to rural drainage</li> </ul>
Rural Water Corporations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Share lessons from community arrangements in northern Victoria</li> <li>Regulate the take and use of water</li> <li>Manage drainage infrastructure in irrigation districts where it interacts with dryland rural drainage</li> </ul>
The Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport, and Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to support agricultural productivity in Victoria</li> </ul>
VicRoads and Victrack	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to manage infrastructure which interacts with rural drainage (except where the infrastructure is licensed to third parties)</li> </ul>

For more detail refer to the draft Strategy;

- Part 4 How rural drainage will be supported in Victoria  
*Chapter 7 Governance (including clear roles and responsibilities)*

**Rebuilding the capability for agencies and landholders to manage rural drainage to support agricultural productivity in their region**

The State Government is committed to re-building rural drainage management capability among organisations and landholders.

The draft Strategy proposes to develop a capability building program to support councils, key agencies, Traditional Owners and landholders to manage rural drainage. The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning will work closely with catchment management authorities to deliver this.

For more detail refer to the draft Strategy;

- Part 5 - How the Strategy will be implemented  
*Chapter 8 - Transitional arrangements (including 8.2 Building skills and capability)*



Roadside drainage, southwestern Victoria (Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning)

**Streamlining the environmental and cultural approval processes to help landholders manage rural drainage while providing the additional benefits of protecting and improving environmental and cultural values**

The draft Strategy proposes the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (the Department) would work with relevant organisations to develop a risk-based framework for environmental approvals. Under this framework, the approvals process will be easier in instances where the risks to the environment are low. For example, the Department could consider approval exemptions in low risk scenarios.

Where the risks are higher, there will be a consistent, streamlined approach to minimising them. Landholders will be supported to prepare rural drainage management plans. As well as streamlining approval processes, these plans reassure decision makers that cultural and environmental obligations will be met. Those plans, made with agency support, should cut costs and the red tape currently affecting the approval process. This approach will also provide increased certainty for landholders about the likelihood of gaining approvals.

For more detail refer to the draft Strategy;

- Part 3 – What improved management of rural drainage will mean  
*Chapter 5 - Improvements for the environment and*
- Part 4 – How rural drainage will be supported in Victoria  
*Chapter 7 - Governance (including pathways through environmental and cultural approval processes)*

**Promoting opportunities for landholders and Traditional Owners to collaborate in the ways they manage rural drainage**

The draft Strategy recognises the impacts some rural drainage has on cultural heritage. It proposes developing guidelines to help landholders better understand them. The draft Strategy highlights the collaborative relationships between the Taungurung Corporation and local landholders and where restoration activities have occurred such as at Long Swamp and Lake Condah. The draft Strategy proposes to apply these arrangements, more broadly, supporting Traditional Owners to work collaboratively with landholders to encourage restoration works, with landholders to manage the impact drainage has on cultural heritage.

For more detail refer to the draft Strategy;

- Part 3 – What improved management of rural drainage will mean

*Chapter 6 - Recognising Aboriginal Victorian values in rural drainage and including Traditional Owners and Aboriginal Victorians in rural drainage management*



*Sharing information and making informed choices (West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority)*



## Who was involved in developing the draft Strategy?

In developing this draft Strategy, a range of stakeholders were consulted. Their input helped a ministerially appointed reference group and its independent Chair navigate the complex existing arrangements, and ensured proposed new arrangements would be workable.



### Members of the reference group

- Independent chair – Peta Maddy
- Municipal Association of Victoria
- Baw Baw Shire Council
- Moyne Shire Council
- West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority
- Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authority
- Victorian Farmers Federation
- Victorian Catchment Management Council
- Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources
- Melbourne Water
- Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning

## Have your say on the final strategy

The Victorian Government is now seeking community feedback to determine the final Victorian Rural Drainage Strategy. This draft Strategy gives community members an opportunity to have their say on rural drainage management in Victoria. The government welcomes and encourages input to help shape a final strategy. The draft Strategy will be open for public consultation for eight-weeks.

Community members and other stakeholders can get involved by:

- Attending a Regional workshop and forum
- Making a submission online via Engage Vic at [www.engage.vic.gov.au/ruraldrainage](http://www.engage.vic.gov.au/ruraldrainage)
- Having one-on-one discussions with the project team as part of the consultation program.

Please visit the website for details on how you can get involved. It has information on how to make a submission, when the project team will be in your area and information about the consultation period, including dates for public submissions. Visit [www.engage.vic.gov.au/ruraldrainage](http://www.engage.vic.gov.au/ruraldrainage)

