

Central Region Sustainable Water Strategy Review

Feedback synthesis report with responses

October 2018

Acknowledgements

The Victorian Government proudly acknowledges Victoria's Aboriginal community and their rich culture and pays respect to their Elders past and present and emerging. 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 the equality of outcomes and ensuring an equal voice.

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Contents

Having your say	2
About the Central Region Sustainable Water Strategy review	2
How we developed the public consultation	2
Outcomes of submissions and open house sessions	3
What we did with the feedback.....	3
At a glance and Chapter 1:Introduction	4
Our response	4
Chapter 2: Strategy achievements.....	4
Climate change.....	4
Water for towns and cities	4
Water for the environment	5
Our response	5
Climate change.....	5
Water for towns and cities	5
Water for the environment	6
Chapter 3: Strategy lessons and the future	6
What are the key issues and questions for the CRSWS going forward?.....	6
How can a SWS enable ongoing effort to achieve actions that were partly achieved, not yet achieved or are by their nature ongoing?	6
How can a future SWS overcome challenges and enable opportunities identified through the IWM forums?	7
What is the role of the SWS in strengthening and extending water planning and management strategic directions across the region?	7
How can SWS processes, from adaptation pathways planning through to monitoring and reporting, be improved to better manage risk and complexity and fully involve communities?	8
Our response	9
Appendix: Action status and delivery period	9
Our response	10
Other comments on the report.....	10
Our response	10

Having your say

Following requirements of the *Water Act 1989* and *Water for Victoria 2016*, the Victorian Government released the Central Region Sustainable Water Strategy Review draft report in June 2018 and has since sought feedback from stakeholders.

This feedback report outlines the key messages heard from the community and other stakeholders on Central Region Sustainable Water Strategy Review Draft report for consultation. It is a summary of the feedback received from 36 written submissions, six open houses and targeted forums, and one on one meetings during the consultation process from 27 June to 27 August 2018. A synthesis of this feedback will be incorporated in the Central Region Sustainable Water Strategy Review.

About the Central Region Sustainable Water Strategy Review

The Central Region Sustainable Water Strategy Review commenced in 2016 and will be completed after incorporating feedback received during stakeholder and public consultations, as part of the review process. The Central Region Sustainable Water Strategy Review:

- discusses the actions in the 2006 Central Region Sustainable Water Strategy, and whether these were completed or not by 2018
- details lessons learned and the legacy of the original Central Region Sustainable Water Strategy
- outlines considerations for a new strategy or strategies incorporating the Central Region to continue securing Victoria's water into the future.

How we developed the public consultation

The diagram below details engagement phases and the main tools used to engage and communicate with the Central Region community, stakeholders and interest groups.



During the public consultation, we developed six targeted forums for Water Corporations, Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs) and the Victorian Environmental Water Holder (VEWH), six public open houses and two targeted meetings with Traditional Owner groups. The Central Region Sustainable Water Strategy Review Draft report for consultation was promoted through the Victorian Government's 'Engage Victoria' website and members of the community were encouraged to register for public forums in Sunbury, Frankston, Ballarat, Melbourne, Geelong and Warragul. Other tools used to engage and communicate with the community and stakeholders were emails, letters, website updates and social media.



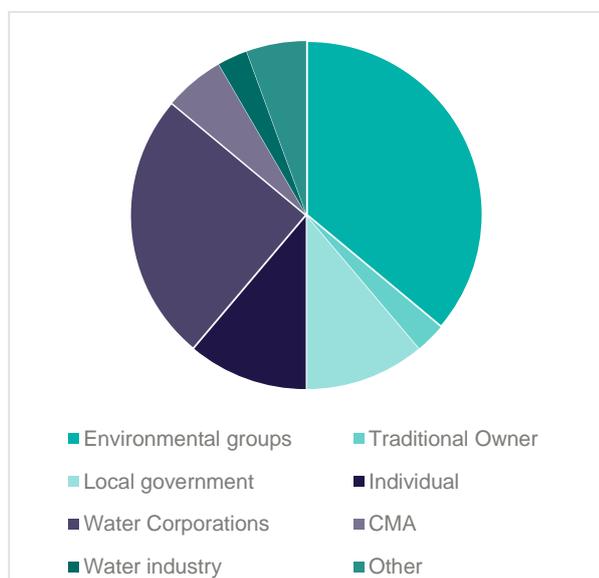
Stakeholders and community members could give feedback on the draft report by:

- completing the submission form on the 'Engage Victoria' website
- sending an email submission to sws.team@delwp.vic.gov.au
- posting the submission to DELWP
- completing a hard copy submission form during public open houses and stakeholder forums.

Outcomes of submissions and open house sessions

A total of 36 submissions were received from a broad range of organisations, interest groups and individuals as detailed below.

Category	Submissions
Environmental groups	13
Water Corporations	9
Local government	4
Individuals not affiliated to any organisation or community group	4
Catchment Management Authority	2
Traditional Owner corporation	1
Water industry	1
Other	2
Total	36



A total of 25 people attended the six public forums. More than half of those participants attended the Geelong session

Date	Location	Participants
31 July 2018	Sunbury	1 ^a
2 August 2018	Frankston	0 ^b
7 August 2018	Ballarat	5
9 August 2018	Melbourne	3
14 August 2018	Geelong	14
16 August 2018	Warragul	2
Total		25

- this participant was a representative from a stakeholder organisation who attended the open house
- feedback was collected from a participant of the stakeholder session

What we did with the feedback

All feedback has been reviewed and summarised, with common ideas and thoughts grouped by the report section they relate to and into major themes.

Themes
Water for environment
Water for towns and cities
Shared benefits
Traditional Owner groups and Aboriginal Victorian participation
Climate change mitigation and adaptation
Managing complexity and risk
Community involvement
Improving research, information and documentation
Governance and reporting

This report is not intended to capture every comment, but to reflect the diversity of issues raised in the written submissions, open house sessions, targeted workshops and one-on-one meetings.

At a glance and Chapter 1: Introduction

Key comments that we heard on the executive summary and introduction were focussed on a need to:

- Acknowledge that water authorities had drought plans since 1990
- Add a diagram showing interconnections between state and water authority strategies
- Highlight that some statements do not apply for Gippsland Water's region or are prior to the Central Region Sustainable Water Strategy
- Clarify statements in relation to water planning in the Latrobe Valley and tributaries of the Latrobe River such as the Tarago River
- Clarify the boundary of the Central Region and the overlaps with Gippsland, Western and Northern regions
- Add several acts, strategies, guidelines, studies or plans into the water management key events timeline
- Better explain the context of the Millennium Drought and clarify statements of land use and dairy farming
- Clarify monthly storage capacity information and update links
- Highlight that the Melbourne Water System Strategy (MWSS) aligns with the retail and regional water corporations' Urban Water Strategies.

Our response

The final report will incorporate additional relevant strategies into the timeline of key events. Adjustments to the Millennium Drought context and Central Region map description will be included. The narrative will be modified to acknowledge drought plans by water authorities. Statements related to Gippsland Water's region and Latrobe Valley tributaries will be corrected. A diagram showing interconnections between different state and water authority strategies will be considered in the development of the next SWS.

Chapter 2: Strategy achievements

Feedback from stakeholders and public forums agreed that the Central Region Sustainable Water Strategy had:

- Assisted the community in lobbying for protection of river reserves
- Increased uptake of recycled water
- Resulted in behaviour changes e.g. education, capacity building, building acceptance of alternative water sources
- Increased awareness of waterway health issues.

The general comments received on this section highlighted a need for:

- Transparency in action outcomes and what lead to these outcomes, including consistent metrics that tell the whole story
- Reinvigoration and continuation of efforts once targets have been met to realise the full potential of actions
- Greater flexibility of actions in a new SWS, as the Central Region Sustainable Water Strategy was swiftly superseded, and the value of some actions reduced
- Add discussion of future SWS boundaries and the pros/cons of various approaches
- Consider including optimisation of existing assets as a fifth approach to secure water in the Central Region Sustainable Water Strategy
- Incorporate agricultural water use in a new SWS as the original strategy had few actions and clarify the Government's commitment to irrigated agriculture and horticulture in Greater Melbourne.

Comments on specific themes of the chapter are provided below.

Climate change mitigation and adaptation

We heard that stakeholders would like to see:

- Recognition of regional and urban water corporations in preparing long-term water supply demand strategies
- Clarity on the drivers of the Water Supply Demand Strategy for Melbourne, which was not necessarily a direct response to the Central Region Sustainable Water Strategy
- Increased flexibility to adapt to a changing climate in a future SWS.

Water for towns and cities

The key feedback received on this section was that:

- Water efficiency targets in the Central Region Sustainable Water Strategy were useful
- There is a substantial Melbourne focus, with more attention to regional urban water corporations needed
- Acknowledgement of approach and trade-offs between water savings and liveability on the context of Millennium drought would be helpful
- Community understanding of how transfers and supply augmentation works is essential
- A future SWS could examine local scale augmentations
- Transparency in how water savings are reported is needed, including consistent metrics and reduced reliance on averages
- Many outstanding actions were hampered by a lack of a water sharing framework
- Commitments to wastewater recycling by water corporations should be acknowledged
- A lack of engagement with the planning sector and community, especially regarding the urgency of water supply issues has created a barrier to IWM implementation
- The termination of Target 155 was disappointing and there is a need to promote this water education program to incentivise water use efficiency
- A future Central Region Sustainable Water Strategy should emphasise the planning and management of septic tank systems in relation to urban growth and protection of waterways and aquifers.
- Many of the outstanding actions of the Central Region Sustainable Water Strategy were in relation to environmental water, with substantial detrimental impacts
- The use of recycled water to offset extractions, not as an environmental flow substitute should be explicitly explained
- While environmental entitlements have been granted, this doesn't tell the whole story of delivering environmental water, and outcomes have not always been achieved as stated
- Reliability and long-term delivery of environmental water needs to be transparent
- There are concerns around environmental flows from the Lancefield reservoir and Barwon River, the future of environmental water from the Fyansford Quarry and the impact on environmental flows from the development of the Lethbridge Agricultural Precinct
- Headwaters of urban rivers should be better protected
- Concerns of protection and conservation of Mountain Ash forests and their importance to water resource quantity and quality.

Our response

Most of the general comments received on Chapter 2 are viewed as ideas for the Central Region Sustainable Water Strategy going forward and ways to achieve the actions that are partially or not achieved to date. These comments are addressed in Chapter 3 and will be discussed in the development of the next SWS.

Responses to specific comments are detailed below:

Climate change mitigation and adaptation

- The report will incorporate that urban water corporations have prepared water supply demand strategies and urban water strategies
- Clarity will be provided on the drivers of the Water Supply Demand Strategy for Melbourne, which was not necessarily a direct response to the Central Region Sustainable Water Strategy.

Water for towns and cities

- The role of regional and urban water corporations will be recognised in water efficiency and conservation initiatives

Water for the environment

Key comments regarding water for the environment included:

- The Central Region Sustainable Water Strategy improved agency coordination, enabling increased environmental benefits
- An enlarged network of transparent groundwater bore monitoring is needed
- There are concerns of continued proliferation of farm dams and agricultural intensification and effects on the effectiveness of environmental flows
- Infrastructure upgrades and physical constraints to water flow need to be addressed to facilitate environmental watering

- Trade-offs between water savings and liveability impacts on Millennium drought will be incorporated into the final report
- Community engagement, transparency in decision making processes, integrated water management, governance and implementation comments were included in Chapter 3.
- Although there is a desire for a Sustainable Water Strategy to inform local decisions, they are regional strategic documents. It is appropriate for a Sustainable Water Strategy to set a framework for local decisions, but decisions at a local scale are not likely to be part of a SWS.

Water for the environment

- Groundwater management and monitoring is added in the section on knowledge management in Chapter 3
- Measures to deliver environmental flows
- Understand possible effects of farm dams and large-scale groundwater extraction within agricultural precincts for continuing achievement of water for the environment actions (Chapter 3)
- The final report will acknowledge that the provision of environmental water, in some cases, did not always meet the outcomes sought due to multiple factors. Ideas to fully achieve the environmental water recovery and availability are provided in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: Strategy lessons and the future

What are the key issues and questions for the CRSWS going forward?

Submissions on this section highlighted the need for:

- Community engagement
- Continuing to build catchment knowledge of water sources and threats to water supply at a catchment scale
- Whole of catchment planning for future water security, with clear governance arrangements

We heard that in a future SWS, respondents would like to see:

- A holistic approach to water use planning at a regional scale and consideration of water issues across catchment and water supply system

- A focus on the intersecting issues, challenges and actions that cut across or fall between different agencies
- A shift to an outcome-focused approach rather than an actions approach
- Community centred engagement, knowledge transfer, capacity building, and avenues to assess trade-offs for water use
- Implementation of comprehensive and high-quality monitoring programs to include all sources of water, including groundwater
- Water resources planning that recognises regional population growth and development
- Climate change modelling and science informing the strategy's direction.

How can a SWS enable ongoing effort to achieve actions that were partly achieved, not yet achieved or are by their nature ongoing?

Comments on this section highlighted the need for:

- Acknowledgment that environmental flows and wetlands have a role in maintaining waterway health
- Community partnerships to assist in planning and implementation
- Continued recovery of water for the environment
- Making use of all sources of water
- Use of the water grid in the future

We heard that in a future SWS, respondents would like to see:

- A balance between the needs of land uses, water supply and protection of environmental values
- Agency coordination that enables environmental benefits to be achieved through transfer of urban water between systems.
- Allowances for adaptive management, incorporating new science and learnings as they become available
- Clearer reporting on water for environment allocations
- Community involvement in planning at a larger landscape/regional level, to ensure the optimum use of all water sources
- Determination of water requirements for the environment, including above-cap water

- Measures to better secure water for the environment in unregulated waterways and for groundwater-dependent ecosystems
- Protection of rivers, headwaters and waterway health as a key part of future consumptive supply security
- Stronger connections between land use and water use planning
- Use of alternative water sources rather than reductions in environmental allocations
- Viable strategies to ensure sufficient water for the environment, considering the impacts of farm dams and large-scale groundwater extraction

How can a future SWS overcome challenges and enable opportunities identified through the IWM forums?

Comments on this section highlighted the need for:

- Alternative sources of water to supply multiple needs (such as urban, environmental and agricultural) and keep cities and towns cool and green in the face of urban densification
- IWM as a place-based planning process to collaborate and provide long-term planning solutions at the local level
- Making use of all sources of water
- Water recycling and re-use including the management and harvesting of stormwater to retain water in the landscape and use recycled water for multiple uses.

We heard that in a future SWS, respondents would like to see:

- Assistance to overcome barriers and enable opportunities identified in IWM forums
- Support for improved outcomes through IWM with guiding principles

What is the role of the SWS in strengthening and extending water planning and management strategic directions across the region?

Shared benefits

Comments on this section highlighted the need for:

- Local liveability enhancement through connection to water in the landscape, including green infrastructure
- Shared benefits outcomes as an important consideration

- Water for many uses including agricultural, recreation, environment and Traditional Owners' and Aboriginal Victorian's needs

We heard that in a future SWS, respondents would like to see:

- Better promotion and communication of shared benefits through multiple lenses (such as social, environmental) to reach broader audiences both within local communities and within and across agencies
- Consideration of liveability in future water use
- Coordinated regional land use and water planning to achieve liveability outcomes
- Understanding and inclusion of new water use needs (such as recreational and Traditional Owner's and Aboriginal Victorian's values)

Traditional Owner's, Aboriginal Victorian's values and capacity building

Comments on this section highlighted the need for:

- Engagement with Traditional Owners and Aboriginal Victorians in decision making for water planning and management
- Protection of sites of cultural significance
- Providing water for cultural values (cultural flows)
- Including Traditional Owner's and Aboriginal Victorians' inclusion in the development of water values

We heard that in a future SWS, respondents would like to see:

- Capacity-building and water-based economic development opportunities for Traditional Owners and Aboriginal Victorians
- The needs and values of Traditional Owners and Aboriginal Victorians considered, and increased opportunities to strengthen Traditional Owners' outcomes and inclusion in water management
- Use of Traditional Owners' and Aboriginal Victorians' knowledge and expertise in future water use planning.

Climate change mitigation and adaptation

Comments on this section highlighted the need for:

- A greater capacity for the bulk entitlement to reflect changing catchment conditions
- Clear management actions under climate change for water recovery and use

We heard that in a future SWS, respondents would like to see:

- Adaptive management to understand the impacts of climate change and population growth on future water recovery and water use in drought.
- Climate change modelling and science informing the strategy's direction
- Greater understanding of the interdependencies between the water and energy sectors
- Monitoring of the water resources base, to understand the impacts of climate change

How can SWS processes, from adaptation pathways planning through to monitoring and reporting, be improved to better manage risk and complexity and fully involve communities?

Managing complexity and risk

Comments on this section highlighted the need for:

- Adaptive management focus within the decision-making framework to plan and manage risks and threats
- Consideration and assessment of trade-offs
- Scenario planning of future threats and risks
- Understanding planning interdependencies and accountabilities across the water sector

We heard that in a future SWS, respondents would like to see:

- Clarity about how plans and strategies across the water sector can work together to address challenges in the future
- Flexibility in how outcomes are achieved to ensure shared benefits are delivered
- Increased community knowledge about components and inter-connectivity of the macro water system
- Integrated water planning across the whole of the water industry, to plan for risks and threats and assist decision-making for future water use

Using adaptation pathways planning for flexibility and resilience

Submission of this section highlighted the need for:

- An adaptive management approach to understand and response to emerging issues

We heard that in a future SWS, respondents would like to see:

- Engagement of the community in the adoption pathways planning approach to understand and communicate trade-offs that will need to be made in the future.

Community engagement

Comments on this section highlighted the need for:

- A commitment to behaviour change and community education programs.

We heard that in a future SWS, respondents would like to see:

- Engagement with the community, Traditional Owners and Aboriginal Victorians to build capacity and exchange knowledge
- Transparent communication of the challenges for water management facing the community in the future

Improving research, information and documentation

Comments on this section highlighted the need for:

- Increased and robust monitoring of water resources
- Preparedness for water scarcity and droughts
- Transparent and measurable targets for water use
- Use and integration of local knowledge to support decision-making

We heard that in a future SWS, respondents would like to see:

- Engagement with the community to understand and discuss trade-offs, in preparation for droughts and water scarcity
- Furthering of the science and understanding of our groundwater resources to inform decision making
- Integration of water and land use planning to ensure secure water supplies in the future

Governance and reporting

Comments on this section highlighted for the need for:

- Understanding of planning interdependencies and accountabilities across the water sector

We heard that in a future SWS, respondents would like to see:

- A focus on the intersecting issues, challenges and actions that cut across or fall between different agencies
- Clarity about how plans and strategies across the water sector can work together to address challenges in the future
- Clearer institutional arrangements and the overcoming of barriers for water delivery
- Clearer, transparent reporting about whether actions have been completed and use of the same metrics on which targets were based

Our response

We have received multiple reflections on this chapter. This information has been incorporated into text boxes in Chapter 3. The text boxes are: water for the environment, water for towns and cities, shared benefits, Traditional Owners and Aboriginal Victorians participation, climate change mitigation, managing complexity and risk, community involvement, improving research information and documentation and management and governance and reporting.

The text boxes above include key issues raised in consultation including: a need for an outcomes-based strategy; water trading and supply augmentation; Traditional Owner and Aboriginal Victorians participation; better science, monitoring and research into water resources (particularly groundwater resource management), climate change, unregulated surface water and the integration of land and water planning to better address population growth and urban density with respect to liveability.

The text boxes may inform the continued delivery of ongoing actions and partially achieved actions and be considerations in future consultation for a new sustainable water strategy.

Appendix: Action status and delivery period

Feedback on the achievements of the Central Region Sustainable Water Strategy include:

- There is support for continued, transparent water accounts, which include all extractions and stock and domestic use to better understand the water balance
- Environmental water studies have been undertaken for the Latrobe, Thomson and Macalister Rivers and should be acknowledged

- Although delivered through the Gippsland SWS, improved efficiency of the Thomson environmental entitlement should be acknowledged.

Comments concerning the status of the actions of the Central Region Sustainable Water Strategy include:

- Catchment dam actions may not have been fully achieved, with registration of dams not going far enough to mitigate impacts
- There is scepticism in the achievement of water recycling targets given the volume of recycled water has not increased in the last 10 years
- There is major concern over groundwater extraction and river health targets in the Barwon basin and Gerangamete groundwater management area, meaning some of these targets are not considered by some stakeholders to have been achieved
- While the FLOWS methodology has been updated, monitoring of consistent application and implementation is needed
- Although water savings through modernisation (e.g. MID) are continuing, it is important to be transparent about where/who these savings are going to
- Some actions have been superseded by alternative water management and catchment strategies
- While some water recovery and environmental water targets have been achieved, the Environmental Water Reserve (EWR) still doesn't meet scientific requirements for improving environmental conditions.

Comments also included feedback on areas that had been missed in the Central Region Sustainable Water Strategy and review, such as:

- Clarity and transparency of reporting on whether actions have been completed and use of the same metrics on which targets were based
- A lack of information on why certain pilot studies or business cases were not pursued further
- Some targets were ambiguous, unclear or had already been achieved prior to publication of the Central Region Sustainable Water Strategy
- Groundwater monitoring is lacking, with little knowledge of groundwater extraction impacts on aquifer recharge

- A continuous review of all licenses (not just new licenses) is needed to ensure no decline in river health
- Actions could be less reliant on the volume of (mainly low reliability) water and focus on attainable environmental outcomes

will provide ideas from the submissions to continue implementing actions partially or not yet achieved. A new SWS or SWSs will consider lessons learned from 2006 consultation process and effectiveness of governance arrangements and implementation programs.

Our response

Statistics, values and language will be adjusted to provide clarity on the status and delivery period of some actions. Factual comment will be checked and updated. Different comments on topics such as groundwater extraction, groundwater monitoring and research will be included in Chapter 3: strategy lessons and the future. Investigation of options to provide additional water will be included in Chapter 3 and will form part of the discussion of new SWS process.

Other comments on the report

General comments on the report focussed on a need to:

- Balance engineering or technical language and include language that acknowledges the natural ecology, referring to rivers and catchments as natural ecological systems
- The Victorian Aquifer Framework is an achievement of state and national significance and should be acknowledged in the review
- Include consideration of marine and coastal ecosystems, recreational water users, coastal communities and citizen science
- Review the pros and cons of the 2006 consultation process, governance arrangements and implementation program and provide guidance to how this can be enhanced for a future SWS
- Better describe failures, non-achievements and partial achievements of the strategy
- Consider addressing actions in urban areas that do not have cross boundary implications in urban water strategies rather than in a future SWS
- Further the science of understanding our groundwater resources

Our response

The final report will incorporate changes to the narrative to address these comments on language. The Victorian Aquifer Framework will be acknowledged in the final report. The final report