

Victorian Rural Drainage Strategy

Mid-term Progress Report

Introduction

Dryland rural drainage is defined as drainage that benefits agriculture in dryland (not irrigated) regions outside of urban areas. It is the works and functions related to the collection, and timely removal, of excess water generated by high rainfall to support agricultural production.

Released in 2018, the *Victorian Rural Drainage Strategy* supports landholders as private beneficiaries to make choices about how they want to manage dryland rural drainage.

The strategy outlines actions and policies that clarify roles and responsibilities of landholders and agencies, rebuild capability to manage drainage, simplify statutory approvals and outline landholder obligations to protect environmental and cultural values. The strategy vision is:

'Landholders are empowered to work together and will be supported to improve their management of dryland rural drainage.'



Figure 1: Nullawarre main drain upstream of Skuses Road Bridge. Credit: Glenelg Hopkins CMA

The Victorian Government invested \$4.9 million to implement the strategy through 15 pilot projects delivered by catchment management authorities (CMA) in priority drainage schemes. A number of projects focussed on encouraging landholders to work together and formally agree to future management arrangements, while others assessed and aimed to protect and/or restore environmental and Aboriginal cultural values.

Mid-term Progress

Progress in delivering the *Victorian Rural Drainage Strategy* is described under the five strategy outcomes which are:

1. Landholders understand the various ways they can manage dryland rural drainage.
2. Cultural values, environmental values and water resources are protected.
3. Revised arrangements for former drainage areas involving priority waterways result in cultural and environmental values being restored.
4. Relevant government agencies have clear roles and responsibilities and are aware of opportunities to work in partnerships to support landholders managing dryland rural drainage.
5. Government agencies work together with landholders to rebuild capability and support ongoing arrangements for dryland rural drainage management.

The following outcomes tables summarise the achievements and include the findings from a mid-term evaluation report completed by Tim Cummins and Associates in late 2021. The independent evaluation process involved a review of pilot project reports and products and included interviews with project participants including agency and landholder representatives.

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The findings of the evaluation will be used to adapt and continue to deliver the strategy priorities and policies. The overall finding of the evaluation is that implementation of the strategy is delivering on the vision, with 8 of 11 actions completed and others in progress.

Outcome 1 – Landholders understand the various ways they can manage dryland rural drainage.

Achievements	Report findings
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 9 pilot projects completed in 10 priority drainage areas including extensive CMA consultation with landholders regarding roles and responsibilities and options to collaboratively manage drainage.• A revised <i>Dryland Rural Drainage Resource Kit for Landholders</i> developed with additional information regarding approvals for works, drainage management planning, forming committees and formalising management arrangements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Most landholders in the pilot project areas now understand their management options, with direct engagement by CMA being central to this outcome.• Landholders generally understand the private beneficiary-pays model, but it is not necessarily accepted by all.• Willingness for landholders to be part of formalised coordinated schemes was tested, with most preferring ad hoc arrangements such as in the Bullock Creek and Upper Mid-Broken Creek pilot projects.• Landholders know that other than managing infrastructure vested in CMA, government funds will not be provided to operate or maintain schemes for private benefit.• The landholders resource kit has proven useful; however, it could be simpler.

Outcome 2 - Cultural values, environmental values and water resources are protected.

Achievements	Report findings
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 10-year Eumeralla and Nullawarre Drainage Management Plans and memorandums of understanding agreed to by landholders and agencies to protect values in south-west Victoria. Prepared by Glenelg Hopkins CMA, the plans have simplified statutory approvals required for drain maintenance work.• Information on statutory approval requirements to protect values and drainage management planning included in the revised landholder resource kit.• 10 drainage management plans drafted to protect values in the Black Dog Creek, Pearsondale, and Moe River Flats systems.• Infrastructure maintenance and/or upgrades undertaken by CMA to manage risk and prevent erosion in the Black Dog Creek, Woody Yaloak, Lough Calvert, Pearsondale and Bullock Creek drainage areas.• Cultural heritage assessments completed where required to protect Aboriginal cultural values prior to undertaking infrastructure and land management works.• Assessments undertaken in a number of pilot projects such as for environmental values, drainage assets, hydrology, and flood mapping/modelling.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There have been significant achievements in moving towards protecting cultural values, environmental values, and water resources.• Values are being protected through the Eumeralla and Nullawarre Drainage Management Plans with some stages retaining 50% native vegetation as an acceptable balance for signatories between drainage function and maintaining environmental values.• Drainage management plans drafted by CMA to protect values in the Black Dog Creek, Pearsondale, and Moe River Flats systems have not achieved agreement. The range of reasons for this include that some landholders may prefer to undertake maintenance themselves on an ad hoc basis; accept/benefit from the water on their property; and/or believe that they are not the sole beneficiary.• Some landholders still have concerns with taking on responsibility and potential liability for assets.• Infrastructure maintenance/upgrades and associated rigorous statutory approvals have protected cultural values, environmental values, and water resources.

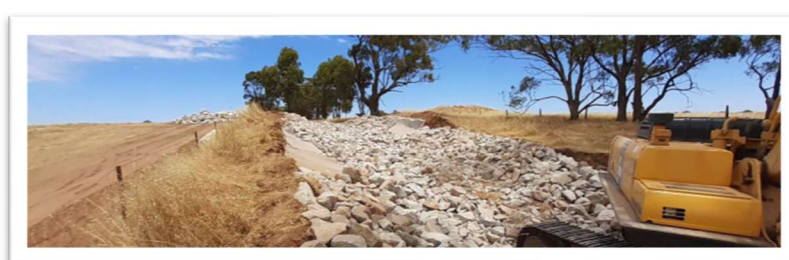


Figure 2: Replacement of a rock chute - Escort Bridge Road Drain. Credit: North East CMA

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Outcome 3 - Revised arrangements for former drainage areas involving priority waterways result in cultural and environmental values being restored.

Achievements	Report findings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 CMA pilot projects completed with Traditional Owners to protect/restore culture and environmental values. • Glenelg Hopkins CMA worked with Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation to complete modelling across the Budj Bim landscape to inform options for reinstating flows. Management options for Lake Gorrie have been identified to reinstate wetland and traditional aquacultural systems. The operating rules for Lake Condah weir have been revised. • North Central CMA, Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation and Trust for Nature completed the Long Swamp restoration pilot project. Completed actions include installation of an earthen bank and a lockable pipe, an Aboriginal water assessment and weed control. • Corangamite CMA completed a Cultural Heritage Survey within the Cundare Pool/Lake Martin area prior to maintenance and asset upgrades. • A restoration and rehabilitation plan prepared by Wimmera CMA for Northern Dunmunkle Creek has been agreed by landholders. • Drainage information provided for the process to renew the <i>Victorian Waterway Management Strategy</i>. The strategy will direct requirements for regional waterway strategies prepared by CMA including identifying actions to mitigate the impacts of drainage and restore areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The lessons from the Long Swamp and Budj Bim projects provide a good model for future restoration of wetlands. • Engagement with Traditional Owners is key to protect and enhance cultural values. This requires a long-term commitment and engagement at the start of the process. • The hydrological and hydraulic studies for the Budj Bim landscape have generated critical data to inform the evaluation of options for reinstating flows to culturally and ecologically important areas. • The Long Swamp project has given access to Country under private ownership (Trust for Nature) which is a significant barrier in maintaining connection to Country. Djaara people now have a place that is inaccessible to the broader public for their own cultural purposes. • In the Woody Yaloak and Lough Calvert systems, flood studies have revealed significant opportunities to protect cultural values, restore environmental values, and improve recreational values by changing the operational rules for the upgraded infrastructure.



Figure 3: Restoration of Long Swamp. Credit: Loddon Plains Landcare Network

Outcome 4 - Relevant government agencies have clear roles and responsibilities and are aware of opportunities to work in partnerships to support landholders managing dryland rural drainage.

Achievements	Report findings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities for agencies to understand roles and responsibilities and support landholders have become known through the pilot projects. • A <i>Dryland Rural Drainage Resource kit for Agencies</i> developed to clarify roles and responsibilities and assist the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP), CMA and local government in supporting landholders. • 10-year Eumeralla and Nullawarre Drainage Management Plans and memorandums of understanding agreed to by landholders and agencies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The pilot projects have achieved this outcome with the main variation from the strategy being that local government has not supplied a coordinating role or been requested by landholders to provide administrative support for formal agreements. • The agencies kit has assisted agencies to understand roles and responsibilities and support the community. • The Eumeralla and Nullawarre Drainage Management Plans and memorandums of understanding ensure that roles and responsibilities are clear, relationships are effective and streamlined statutory approval arrangements occur.

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Outcome 5 - Government agencies work together with landholders to rebuild capability and support ongoing arrangements for dryland rural drainage management.

Achievements

- The capability of agencies and landholders to manage drainage has been rebuilt through the pilot projects.
- The 10-year Eumeralla Drainage Management Plan and memorandum of understanding have been agreed to by Glenelg Hopkins CMA, Eumeralla River Restoration Committee, Moyne Shire Council and DELWP.
- The 10-year Nullawarre Drainage Management Plan and memorandum of understanding have been agreed to by Glenelg Hopkins CMA, Lake Gilliear Drain Association, Moyne Shire Council, Warrnambool City Council and DELWP.
- The revised landholder resource kit provides information on preparing individual and collective drainage management plans and options for dispute resolution.

Report findings

- The first part of Outcome 5 has been achieved where agencies have worked together to rebuild capability within the pilot project areas.
- Ongoing formal collective arrangements have not always been possible as many landholders prefer that individual management arrangements remain in place.
- To date, pilot projects have not resulted in the transfer of public assets to private beneficiaries.
- The Black Dog Creek (North East CMA), Bullock Creek (North Central CMA), Pearsondale, (West Gippsland CMA), Lough Calvert and Woady Yaloak (Corangamite CMA) systems still have public assets managed and vested in state entities. These CMA continue to have direct infrastructure risk management responsibilities.
- There is a need for monitoring of assets, associated values, and public risks to be formalised and standardised across the State.
- Some landholders believe that the Pearsondale drainage area is potentially being overloaded due to hard surfaces from development and the need to pump water over the levee. Evidence of this is not clear.

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