The Asset Plan includes works funded through the Environmental Works and Measures Program that will improve water management in the forest.
The Gunbower Koondrook-Perricoota Forest

significante ecological asset

The Gunbower Koondrook-Perricoota Forest is a large River red gum floodplain forest downstream of Echuca and Moama. The floodplain has occurred because of the natural flooding of the River Murray. Covering an area greater than 50,000 hectares, it is the second largest River red gum forest in Australia.

The asset contains two major floodplain complexes, the Gunbower floodplain in Victoria and the Koondrook-Perricoota floodplain in NSW. They are recognised as one significant ecological asset.

The asset holds high community value. Gunbower Forest is listed as a Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention. The Koondrook-Perricoota forests are included in the New South Wales Central Murray State Forests Ramsar site.

The asset is an important breeding area for colonial waterbirds. It supports threatened plant and animal species, including egrets, Nankeen night herons, Broad-shelled tortoises, and the Violet swainson pea, and is visited by migratory birds listed under international treaties with Japan and China.

The forests have strong social and cultural meaning for Indigenous groups of the region and are regarded as a valuable natural resource.

Regulation of the River Murray has significantly reduced the frequency, duration and extent of medium to large floods, which are essential to maintain the health and biodiversity of the forests and floodplains.
Living Murray
Ecological Objectives
The Living Murray objective for the asset is to maintain and restore a mosaic of healthy floodplain communities by achieving:

- 30% of River red gum forest in healthy condition
- successful breeding of thousands of colonial waterbirds in at least three years out of ten
- 80% of permanent and semi-permanent wetlands in healthy condition
- healthy populations of resident native fish in wetlands.

These are interim objectives, which will be assessed and refined, with scope for additional objectives to be identified in the future.

The Asset Environmental Management Plan
The Gunbower Koondrook-Perricoota Asset Environmental Management Plan (the Asset Plan) will provide the framework for delivery and management of environmental flows to achieve maximum environmental benefits. The plan will be revised as we improve our understanding of the scope for using recovered water and of the environmental response.

Key Areas of the Asset Plan
The Asset Plan outlines:

- the ecological objectives
- the water requirements (volume, duration and timing) needed to achieve the objectives and to ensure the long-term sustainability of the forests
- management options for delivery and management of environmental water
- complementary management actions
- a monitoring and evaluation framework
- information on consultation arrangements and processes.

The Asset Plan is based on a large number of detailed technical investigations undertaken over the past decade by both the NSW and Victorian Governments.

Management Options
Any increased environmental water allocations through the Living Murray will be used to improve the flows to the significant ecological assets, complemented by actions under the Environmental Works and Measures Program, to maximise environmental outcomes.

To achieve the targets outlined in the Asset Plan, there is a need to develop new actions, yet maintain and improve many existing management actions. Most importantly, there is a need to integrate the management of environmental water across the asset.

Options under investigation include improving delivery of water to the asset using new channels and the current connections to the River, and managing water in the asset using flow management structures. Priority on-ground works and investigations to meet the ecological objectives in 2005-2006 include:

Gunbower Forest
- construction of Little Gunbower Creek Regulator
- refurbishment of Shillinglaws and Barham Regulators
- rehabilitation of Wattle Regulator site
- further development of Hipwells Road and Camerons regulators and Upper Forest channel options

Koondrook-Perricoota Forest
- investigations are focussing on options to periodically divert surplus water from Torrumbarry Weir into the forest during winter and spring.

Investigations and assessment of management options will continue. Refined management options for implementation will be presented in later versions of the plan.
Community Involvement

The community has been consulted in the preparation of the first stage of the Gunbower part of the plan. There will be continuing opportunities for community input into the further development, implementation and monitoring of the Asset Plan. Consultation will ensure that key stakeholder interests and broader community interests inform decision-making.

A Consultation Reference Group will provide input to the development and implementation of the Asset Plan. Although some targeted consultation has occurred in the development of the plan, further consultation will include consideration of traditional and contemporary community knowledge and experience, and guide objectives and management options for the asset.

The Asset Plan will take into account Indigenous social, spiritual and customary objectives. Consultation with Indigenous communities will be undertaken in a manner that is appropriate to Indigenous discussion and decision-making processes.

There are already existing and well-developed consultation mechanisms in place for Gunbower Forest, therefore the proposed process for consultation in the development and implementation of the Asset Plan will build on the established and successful arrangements. The North Central and Murray Catchment Management Authorities will coordinate community consultation programs.

The forests have important recreational and social values.

The community hears about the proposed works for Gunbower Forest.

'There will be continuing opportunities for community input into the further development, implementation and monitoring of the Asset Plan.'
The Living Murray

The Living Murray aims to address the decline in the health of the River Murray system that threatens the Basin’s industries, communities, and natural and cultural values.

The Australian, NSW, Victorian, SA and ACT Governments have committed $500 million to achieve the environmental objectives agreed under the Living Murray, through recovered water being built up over a period of five years to an estimated requirement of an average 500 gigalitres* per year.

Water recovery projects will address overallocation of water resources, with the recovered 'environmental water' to be used to achieve environmental benefits at the six significant ecological assets.

The ecological assets were chosen because of their importance as breeding sites for waterbirds, habitat for threatened species, and for their social, cultural and heritage significance.

Each asset has an Environmental Management Plan that explores the ecological objectives for the asset and identifies the volume and timing of environmental water and structural works needed to achieve those objectives.

The Living Murray is a partnership of the Australian, NSW, Victorian, SA and ACT Governments.

All Living Murray activities are guided by the Living Murray Business Plan and the Intergovernmental Agreement on Addressing Water Overallocation and Achieving Environmental Objectives in the Murray-Darling Basin.

A Living Murray Environmental Watering Plan provides the framework for making decisions on the volume, timing and frequency of water to be provided to each of the significant ecological assets.

Each asset has an Asset Environmental Management Plan to identify the water required to meet the Living Murray objectives for the asset and to guide the management process.

Overall management of each asset remains the responsibility of the partner Governments through their land management agencies. The Asset Managers for the Gunbower Koondrook-Perrecoota Significant Ecological Asset are the Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria and Forests NSW.

*One gigalitre of water is equal to one billion litres, or approximately the same volume of water as 1000 Olympic size swimming pools.
Copies of the *Gunbower Koondrook-Perricoota Asset Environmental Management Plan* are available for download from www.thelivingmurray.mdbc.gov.au

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