

Report on environmental watering coordination and principles – Victoria

Victoria's annual report on implementing the environmental management framework (Schedule 12, Item 10)

Reporting context

The Basin Plan aims to protect and restore water-dependent ecosystems to support a healthy working Basin. To help achieve this, the Plan makes more water available for the environment and also guides how environmental watering is planned, coordinated and used at a Basin-scale.

The processes for planning and delivering environmental water including principles to be applied when watering occurs are set out in the environmental management framework set out in Chapter 8 of the Basin Plan. It includes:

- processes to co-ordinate the planning, prioritisation and use of planned environmental water and held environmental water, under which:
 - the Authority is obliged to prepare a Basin-wide environmental watering strategy
 - each Basin State is obliged to prepare long-term watering plans for water resource plan areas
 - each Basin State is obliged to identify annual environmental watering priorities for water resource plan areas
 - the Authority is obliged to identify Basin annual environmental watering priorities (Division 5)
- the principles to be applied in environmental watering
- a mechanism to enable the Authority to co-ordinate the recovery of additional environmental water

The purpose of this report is to monitor how Basin governments are implementing the environmental management framework. The report is a requirement of Chapter 13 of the Basin Plan and relates to Item 10 of Schedule 12.

Indicators for measuring success

Implementation of the environmental management framework is evaluated using the following indicators:

- Basin-wide environmental watering strategy, long-term watering plans and annual priorities were prepared as required (**Indicator 10.1**)
- Watering strategies, plans and priorities were prepared as required (**Indicator 10.2**)
- Environmental watering principles were applied (**Indicator 10.3**)

Indicator 10.1: Basin-wide environmental watering strategy, long-term watering plans and annual priorities were prepared, with the required content, published, reviewed and updated as obligated under Part 4 of Chapter 8, Divisions 2-5

Response

No response required from Authority or Basin States. CEWH report only.

Indicator 10.2: Watering strategies, plans and priorities are prepared consistently with Part 4 of Chapter 8, in relation to coordinating, consulting and cooperating with other Reports and the matters to which regard must be had (Chapter 8, Part 4)

Response

The Victorian environmental water legislation and planning framework applies principles consistent with those principles identified in Parts 2 and 4 including in identifying environmental watering priorities, maximising environmental benefits from all available water, undertaking consultation with stakeholders and the community, coordinating with other water holders, assessing and managing risks, and applying adaptive management principles.

The VEWH Seasonal Watering Plan 2013-14 identifies the annual environmental watering priorities (AEWPs) for all Victorian rivers, wetlands and floodplains. The Plan also identifies the Water Holdings available in each system, including those held by other water holders. In identifying the environmental water demand in each system, consideration is given to all water sources that may contribute to the achievement of environmental objectives, including environmental water entitlements, rules-based water, consumptive water en route, and unregulated flows. Information provided in the Plan is consistent with environmental water management plans (which will feed into long term watering plans), currently being developed by waterway managers in Victoria, which identify the ecological values and long-term environmental water requirements of each site or system.

The Plan is provided to the MDBA by 31 May each year, to assist in informing the development of the Basin AEWPs.

Victorian waterway managers consult with a range of groups and individuals in relation to environmental water planning and use. This consultation varies across the State, and includes engagement with technical advisory groups, established environmental water advisory groups, Indigenous stakeholders, land manager agencies, private landholders, community groups, community members, water authorities, contractors (for water delivery), and land managers.

Throughout the planning and delivery of environmental water, engagement and coordination between environmental water holders and delivery partners (including land managers, policy makers, storage managers and river operators) occurs on a regular and ongoing basis. This includes annual environmental water planning forums, regular meetings between water holders regarding water commitments, convening of Operational Advisory Groups during the planning and implementation of large-scale watering actions, and other activities as required.

Indicator 10.3: Environmental watering principles are applied as set out in Division 6 of Chapter 8, Part 4

Response	
Principle	Description
Principle 1: Basin annual environmental watering priorities	Where, geographically, Basin annual environmental watering priorities were established for Victorian waterways, all watering actions were undertaken in alignment with the priorities.
Principle 2: Consistency with the objectives for water-dependent ecosystems	The application of environmental water was undertaken consistently with the objectives in Chapter 8 Part 2. The regional planning carried out by the CMAs incorporates assessment of the environmental requirements and objectives for wetlands and rivers.
Principle 3: Maximising environmental benefits	Environmental water was delivered in 2013-14 to maximise environmental benefits for the water, including the use of return flows, consumptive water en route and consideration of complementary social and economic needs in the regions where the complementary benefit did not detract from the environmental objectives and outcomes.
Principle 4: Risks	Through the regional planning process, risks are identified and assessed by delivery partners and mitigating actions are applied where required to reduce the risk to an acceptable level. If it is not possible to reduce the risk to an acceptable level, the watering action is not undertaken.
Principle 5: Cost of environmental watering	The costs of delivery of environmental water were considered for every watering action to maximise the value of environmental outcomes.
Principle 6: Apply the precautionary principle	The delivery of environmental water in Victoria is based on best available science and incorporating new knowledge and information.
Principle 7: Working effectively with local communities	The Victorian environmental watering program is based on a consultation model that includes the CMAs carrying out local consultation, with input and contribution from the VEWH where required. This includes consultation with persons materially affected by the management of environmental water.
Principle 8: Adaptive management	Adaptive management practices are carried out in the planning, prioritisation and use of environmental water in Victoria, within and between years. Our understanding of the impact of watering actions is constantly improving and new knowledge is applied to future watering actions. During 2013-14, watering was carried out according to the Seasonal Watering Plan; however, where additional needs were identified through the year, these were assessed and delivered, if appropriate, through a variation of the Seasonal Watering Plan.
Principle 9: Relevant international agreements	Environmental values, including those for which international agreements apply, are considered when CMAs set objectives for Victorian waterways through regional waterway strategies, environmental water management plans and seasonal watering proposals. These are subsequently considered in the delivery of environmental water.
Principle 10: Other management and operational practices	The VEWH works with storage managers and waterway managers to maximise the opportunity to operate Victoria's rivers to achieve multiple objectives.
Principle 11: Management of water for consumptive use	The VEWH works closely with storage managers to maximise beneficial environmental outcomes from delivery of consumptive water.
Case study (if available)	Refer to ' Case study 2: Using consumptive water to achieve environmental purposes – Gunbower Creek, Victoria ' (p.40, <i>Basin-wide environmental watering strategy (draft for public comment)</i> , MDBA 2014).