

Report on environmental watering coordination and principles – Victoria

The Victorian 2014- 15 annual report on implementing the Basin Plan 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 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; and
 - 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 with the required content and are published, reviewed and updated, **(10.1)**
- Watering strategies, plans and priorities are prepared in consultation with other parties and having regard to matters as required **(10.2)**
- How environmental watering principles are applied **(10.3)**

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 (CEWH only)

NA for Victoria in 2014-15

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

10.2.1. Describe how coordination, consultation and cooperation occurred including with other governments

Response

The Victorian environmental water legislation and planning framework applies principles consistent with those principles identified in Chapter 8, Parts 2 and 4, including 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 Victorian Environmental Water Holder (VEWH) Seasonal Watering Plan 2014-15 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 (EWMPs), which feed into long term watering plans (LTWPs), currently being developed by waterway managers in Victoria. EWMPs identify the ecological values and long-term environmental water requirements of each site or system.

The VEWB Seasonal Watering Plan 2014-15 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, private landholders, community groups, community members and partner agencies in the Victorian environmental watering program.

Throughout the planning and delivery of environmental water, engagement and coordination between environmental watering program partners – including environmental water holders, land managers, storage managers and river operators – occurs on a regular and ongoing basis. This includes annual environmental water planning forums and regular meetings between water holders to negotiate environmental water commitments through: the Southern Connected Basin Environmental Watering Committee; Operational Advisory Groups (during the planning and implementation of large-scale watering actions); and other activities as required. Refer to the attached case study for further information.

Victoria's LTWPs were under development during 2014-15. Coordination and cooperation for the plans occurred during Basin Plan Implementation Group (BPIC) Environmental Water Working Group meetings, LTWP workshops, teleconferences and other informal correspondence with the MDBA, CEWH and upstream/downstream states (NSW and SA). Example: Victoria drafted a framework for the Murray Coordination Plan based on workshop outcomes and teleconference discussions. They then distributed the framework to the MDBA, SA and NSW and received comments on the draft.

Further consultation on Victoria's LTWPs will occur in 2015-16.

10.2.2. Describe what difference coordination, consultation and cooperation made

Response

Coordination and cooperation between Victorian environmental watering program partners is critical in ensuring the success of environmental watering activities across the state. Ongoing and regular communication between storage managers and environmental water managers provides an opportunity to integrate environmental watering into system operations to optimise outcomes. For example, in the Campaspe system, collaboration between environmental water managers and the storage manager resulted in the planned release of consumptive water to the Murray system. This water was managed to contribute to the achievement of a planned spring fresh. It was also delivered throughout the summer period in a way that was sensitive to the environmental requirements of the system. This allowed for the optimisation of all water in the system to contribute to the achievement of environmental requirements; environmental water could be reserved to meet demands later in the year.

Environmental water holders regularly communicate to discuss priorities, negotiate watering commitments, review watering actions and report on outcomes. The effectiveness of this coordination was highlighted in the 2014-15 Hattah Lakes watering, which relied on contributions from the VEWH, CEWH and TLM. The water contributions from each water holder were flexibly managed to maximise the efficient use of available environmental water. The watering

utilised TLM and VEWH return flows from the Goulburn system, with TLM and CEWH Murray entitlements used to supplement this supply.

Coordination and cooperation also occurred during 2014-15 in the development of long-term watering plans. This included discussions to understand how the plans will be used by the MDBA and CEWH, discussions with other jurisdictions to share methods such as approaches to the development of ecological targets, and progressing the content for a Murray Coordination Plan. Long-term watering plan consultation in Victoria will occur in 2015-16.

10.3: How environmental watering principles were applied, consistently with Division 6 of Chapter 8, Part 4

10.3.1. Provide at least one case study that demonstrates how environmental watering principles were applied and identify the relevant principles.

Response

Refer to attached Gunbower case study.

Principle 1: Environmental watering to be undertaken having regard to the Basin annual environmental watering priorities

Principle 2: Consistency with the objectives for water-dependent ecosystems

Principle 3: Maximising environmental benefits

Principle 4: Risks

Principle 5: Cost of environmental watering

Principle 6: Apply the precautionary principle

Principle 7: Working effectively with local communities

Principle 8: Adaptive management

Principle 9: Relevant international agreements

Principle 10: Other management and operational practices

Principle 11: Management of water for consumptive use