



Australian Government



The Living Murray environmental watering outlook 2015–16



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Cover image: Barmah Forest and River Red Gums near the old cattle yards (photo by David Kleinert)

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Coordination of environmental water in the southern connected system

Over recent years the total volume of environmental water available in the southern connected Basin has increased considerably. This water is held by a number of different environmental water holders, including:

- The Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder (CEWH)
- The Living Murray Program (TLM)
- The Victorian Environmental Water Holder (VEWH)
- NSW Office of Environment and Heritage
- South Australian Minister for Water and the River Murray

The Southern Connected Basin Environmental Watering Committee (SCBEWC) was established by the Murray- Darling Basin Ministerial Council in October 2014 to coordinate the efficient and effective delivery of all environmental water in the Southern Connected Basin. This committee also makes decisions on the planning and use of the TLM portfolio, River Murray Increased Flows and River Murray Unregulated Flows.

SCBEWC has been meeting regularly since February 2015. The current SCBEWC membership consists of State and Commonwealth environmental water holders and managers of planned environmental water, key river operators and waterway managers.

Opportunities to coordinate the use of TLM environmental water in 2015- 16 with other environmental water holders and river operators have been provided through SCBEWC. As in previous years, TLM environmental water is being delivered in conjunction with water provided by both the Commonwealth and Victorian Environmental Water Holders. These coordinated watering actions are expected to support priority environmental outcomes across the southern connected basin, including specific outcomes associated with proposed TLM watering actions (see Table 1). Environmental water holders will continue working together seeking opportunities to maximise the environmental outcomes in southern connected system.

Coordinating the planning and delivery of TLM water

The Living Murray Program is a joint partnership between the MDBA, Australian Government and Murray- Darling Basin state governments. Decisions are made jointly on the use of TLM portfolio by members of SCBEWC. TLM icon site managers and state partners of TLM are responsible for the development of watering proposals and for the actual delivery of environmental flows to their TLM icon sites. This ensures that the environmental water planning processes are well aligned and don't duplicate state environmental water planning processes.

TLM watering actions in 2014-15

The 2014- 15 water year started with average inflows to the River Murray system, with some early unregulated flows. Conditions turned drier in August 2014 and this has continued into 2015, with rainfall events not significantly improving storage levels.

TLM, with the support from other environmental water holders, undertook watering actions at Koondrook-Perricoota, Gunbower, Hattah, Chowilla and Lower Lakes, Coorong and Murray Mouth. In total over 17,100 hectares of forest, floodplains, wetlands and lakes were watered throughout the River Murray system generating wide ranging environmental benefits included bird, native fish and vegetation outcomes.

These watering actions also tested the operation of recently completed environmental structures, which assist in the efficient delivery of environmental water.

TLM watering actions planned for 2015–16

The Bureau of Meteorology has reported that the 2015 El Niño continues to strengthen. El Niño has brought wide spread drought in 65% of the cases where it has occurred so drier conditions maybe expected to continue into 2016/17. Currently storage levels are low, with outlooks by [Victorian Resource Manager](#) and [State Water](#) forecasting significantly lower allocations than last year.

In preparation for a potentially dry outlook and to provide some flexibility in case higher rainfall eventuates, planning for TLM environmental water delivery in 2015- 16 has considered both median and dry water resource scenarios and the Basin Plan annual priorities.

This year we are planning watering actions at five icon sites (see Table 1). The watering actions will focus on providing flows for river and floodplain connectivity as well as for the inundation of forest, floodplains and wetlands. The watering actions will look to further test environmental structures recently built at some sites, provide water to key wetlands and continue to build resilience at the icon sites in drier conditions.

Delivery of environmental water to these watering actions will respond to real-time conditions. As a result the watering actions may change depending on conditions that unfold across the water year.

Updates will be provided on TLM watering actions on the MDBA TLM website page throughout the year.

Table 1: Proposed 2015-16 TLM Watering Actions

Icon site	Description	Volume (GL) & contributors	Timing	River and floodplain connectivity	Inundation of forest, floodplains and wetlands	Structure testing	Building resilience
Barmah Millewa Forest	Millewa floodplain watering, including Moira Grass and filling of creeks and refuge/habitat. Some water will flow through Barmah forest	Up to 60 GL (TLM) as part of a larger coordinated watering event with CEWH)	Sept - Oct	ü			ü
Gunbower-Koondrook-Perricoota Forest	Inundate around 3,000 ha of wetlands and fringing vegetation in Gunbower Forest, including Reedy Lagoon and Black Swamp.	Up to 25 GL (TLM & VEWH)	Late Winter Spring	ü	ü	ü	ü
Hattah Lakes	Partial top up of wetlands and deliver a pulse to stimulate movement of fish back into the River Murray	Up to 15 GL (CEWH)	Sept - Oct	ü	ü	ü	
Chowilla-Lindsay	Provide base flows through Potterwalkagee Creek to maintain large bodied fish habitat	TBC (CEWH)		ü			ü
Chowilla Floodplain and Lindsay-Wallpolla Islands	Provide water to Wallpolla East Creek to increase the diversity and extent of littoral zone vegetation and provide temporary habitat for aquatic species	Up to 0.6 GL (TLM)	Sept - Nov				ü

Icon site	Description	Volume (GL) & contributors	Timing	River and floodplain connectivity	Inundation of forest, floodplains and wetlands	Structure testing	Building resilience
Chowilla Floodplain and Lindsay-Wallpolla Islands	Re-instate variability in hydraulic conditions at Chowilla (depth, velocity, turbulence), reduce salinity of near bank ground water and improve growth of riparian vegetation.	Up to 22 GL (TLM)	Oct - Dec	ü	ü	ü	ü
Chowilla Floodplain and Lindsay-Wallpolla Islands	Pump to wetlands at Chowilla	Up to 375 ML (TLM)	Sept - March		ü		ü
Lower Lakes, Coorong, Murray Mouth	Spring delivery to inundate the fringing lower lakes wetlands and continue barrage releases.	Up to 40 GL (TLM) ¹	Sept	ü	ü		ü
River Murray Channel	Opportunities to provide fish and vegetation outcomes through delivery to icon sites	Water delivery en-route to other sites	Across the year	ü	ü		ü

¹ 40 GL of TLM allocation has been committed to the LLCMM. This volume does not include 45 GL of SA allocation or return flows from upstream watering actions. Delivery of TLM water to the site will be coordinated with the planned CEWH watering action.