

Planning of environmental watering in 2024-25



Above: Catfish Billabong, Merbein Common

What is a Seasonal Watering Proposal?

Each year, the Mallee Catchment Management Authority (CMA) develops a Seasonal Watering Proposal (SWP); a plan that identifies potential sites to receive water for the environment. The SWP draws on scientific research, Environmental Water Management Plans (EWMPs) and Traditional Owner and community input. The SWP is submitted to the Victorian Environmental Water Holder (VEWH), an independent statutory body responsible for managing Victoria's environmental water entitlements. VEWH use the SWP to create a Seasonal Watering Plan which is the legislative document which enables environmental allocation delivery in Victoria.

Why do we need to deliver water to wetlands and floodplains?

Murray River wetlands and floodplains contain plants and animals that have evolved to rely on regular flooding and drying in order to survive and breed. River regulation through the construction of dams and weirs has created a river

system which delivers water to our farms and towns all year around.

This has affected the rivers water variability, specifically it has reduced flooding of off-channel wetlands and floodplains. During pre-river regulation, small to medium sized floods would have occurred in the Mallee CMA region, on average, seven in every ten years. Currently, flooding is on average only occurring two in every ten years. The duration of flooding has also been impacted from river regulation, it has been reduced from an average of four months for small to medium sized floods to two and a half months on average. This altered inundation regime is having a negative impact on the native plants and animals found within the Murray River's floodplains and wetlands. This in turn has negative consequences impacting cultural and social values of the floodplain and wetlands.

Wetting and drying phases of a wetland

Pre-river regulation most wetlands and floodplains experienced wetting and drying phases. The Murray River would

have typically experienced flooding over late winter and spring. Over summer and autumn, many of the wetlands and floodplains would have gone through a draw-down/drying phase. Many wetlands will not thrive without wetting and drying phases, and this variability is an important part of creating healthy wetlands for our region. Where possible, we seek to reinstate wetting and drying phases at local wetlands and floodplains similar to pre-river regulation.

How do you know how much water to deliver and when?

There is a limited amount of water available to deliver for the environment. Decisions are made based on:

- Environmental water availability;
- Climatic conditions and river flows;
- Previous watering events;
- Requirements of plants and animals at the different sites;
- Consideration of any constraints or obstacles in delivering water to a wetland and/or floodplain; and
- Any potential inundation risk to private property.



Above: Lake Wallawalla, Murray-Sunset National Park

Each site considered for water delivery must have an EWMP. This plan outlines the environmental objectives for a site and the volume and timing of water needed to meet these objectives. The objectives are established from scientific research and on-ground surveys undertaken at the site. As well as drawing on scientific research, the EWMP considers input and feedback from Traditional Owners and the broader community. When considering sites for water delivery, we take into account four different climatic scenarios: drought, dry, average and wet (refer to Figure 1).

How can you be involved in planning for 2024-25?

Mallee CMA will soon be undertaking planning for watering actions in 2024-25. With recent flooding occurring in late 2022 and 2023 many sites were fully inundated for an extended duration.

Allowing many of these sites to undergo their drawdown phase is important, with a number of other sites likely to require topping up or consecutive waterings to continue to improve condition and resilience in preparation for future dry periods.

We would like to understand what sites are important to you, and why. Is your favourite wetland great for fishing, walking, socialising? There are a number of ways you can provide feedback:

- 1). Look out for our engagement van at markets and events. We will have an interactive map for you to mark your important wetlands.
- 2). Phone **5001 8600** to speak to a member of the Environmental Water Team.



Above: People enjoying their visit to Hattah-Kulkyne National Park

Figure 1: Example of environmental watering objectives under different planning scenarios

