

Report on how local communities influenced Basin Plan implementation – Victoria

The Victorian 2014- 15 annual report on using local knowledge and solutions to implement the Basin Plan (Schedule 12, Item 6)

Reporting context

The success of the Basin Plan and associated water reforms depends on working closely with communities and stakeholders who can provide the necessary local knowledge and solutions to effectively implement the Plan.

The Basin Plan requires Basin States, the Authority and the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder to draw on local knowledge and solutions across a range of Basin Plan activities including long-term watering plans, annual environmental watering priorities and water resource plans.

It also requires that the best available knowledge (including scientific, local and cultural knowledge), evidence and analysis be used where practicable to ensure credibility, transparency and usefulness of monitoring and evaluation findings.

The purpose of this report is to monitor the extent to which local knowledge and solutions have influenced implementation of the Basin Plan during 2014- 15. The report is a requirement of Chapter 13 of the Basin Plan and relates to Item 6 of Schedule 12.

Indicators for measuring success

The use of local knowledge to inform Basin Plan implementation is evaluated using the following indicators:

- How engagement influenced Basin Plan implementation (**6.1**)
- Processes used to identify stakeholders and other relevant groups and individuals from local communities and peak bodies (**6.2**)
- How stakeholders and other relevant groups were engaged (**6.3**)

6.1: How engagement influenced Basin Plan implementation

Where possible include specific examples of:

- *how local knowledge and solutions were used by the reporter*
- *how involving communities made a difference to Basin Plan implementation*
- *how decisions changed as a result of community involvement*

Local knowledge might include knowledge drawn from Traditional Owners and other Indigenous people and groups. When reporting on Aboriginal participation and influence, processes of involvement may be as important as outcomes. In 2014-15 reporting, we would expect use of local knowledge to feature in development of Water Resource Plans.

Examples or case studies are not mandatory but may be a useful way to describe how local knowledge and solutions inform implementation of the Basin Plan.

(max. 800 words)

Response

Community engagement in Victoria occurs throughout the year. In particular, engagement for the 2014-15 water year was completed to inform:

- Development of annual watering proposals by Victorian Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs)
- Management of environmental water through the year
- Development of Environmental Water Management Plans (EWMPs) for specific sites or rivers
- Development of long-term watering plans for water resource plan areas

Annual watering proposals

During 2014-15, input and feedback from stakeholders and communities was used to inform the development of CMA seasonal watering proposals, which form the basis of the Victorian Environmental Water Holder's (VEWH) seasonal watering plan. This included direct engagement with interested community members and groups, private landholders, land managers, Committees of Management, public meetings, Environmental Water Advisory Groups (EWAGs), agencies and Traditional Owner groups.

Management of environmental water through 2014-15

Throughout the water year, CMAs engage stakeholders and the community in environmental watering activities, providing information on planned releases and intended outcomes. In some instances this engagement has provided an opportunity to adjust the planned timing of releases to optimise benefits to the local community, whilst achieving the desired environmental outcomes. An example of this was in the delivery of a winter fresh in the Wimmera River, where as a result of engagement, the timing and delivery of the event was adjusted to support a water skiing exhibition at the annual Kanamaroo Festival. Wimmera CMA delivered their planned fresh and worked closely with the Horsham City Council to hold the water in Horsham Weir pool for a few days to support the community event. The water

was then 're-released' from the weir pool to deliver a fresh to the downstream reaches of the Wimmera River.

Environmental water management plans and long term watering plans

In 2014-15, CMAs conducted community consultation for 28 Environmental Water Management Plans (EWMPs). These EWMPs will provide key input to long-term watering plans and are specific to particular river and wetland sites (assets).

Consultation focussed on collecting information from the community in relation to the wetland or river values and current environmental water management. The information was used in defining ecological values, objectives and associated environmental water requirements. The community consultation component of developing the plan is essential in ensuring that the plan is meaningful and robust into the future. Key information sought through consultation is in the areas of local knowledge and providing local opinions about the values and threats to rivers and wetlands. Stakeholder feedback helped shape all of the EWMPs developed in 2014-15.

For example, stakeholders gave critical information to North Central CMA in developing the Coliban River EWMP; stakeholders were able to identify how far freshes were reaching in the system and where stagnant pools and issues with deteriorating water quality were located. They also related platypus sightings – not seen since prior to the millennium drought. For the Gunbower Creek EWMP, stakeholder identification of Growling Grass Frog in reach 3a (not previously recorded) meant this species was included as a significant ecological value and ecological objective in the EWMP.

A further example of local stakeholder feedback included in an EWMP can be found in Mallee CMA's development of the Piambie EWMP – this asset includes Fishers Lagoon, which is partly on private land. The landholder and member of his family spent half a day with the CMA, providing a guided tour of the site and discussing the ecological values and history of the site. The lagoon has been part of the landholder's family history for three generations and has been used by the family as a site to meet for their Christmas celebrations each year. The landholder was very positive about the site receiving environmental water; however, he wanted Mallee CMA to take into consideration that the main lagoon was used as a holding basin for his irrigation water. The EWMP then included the requirement to take into consideration the main lagoon's irrigation role when planning the environmental water regime for the site.

Development of business cases for works-based supply measures

In partnership with the Mallee and North Central CMAs, DELWP developed and submitted nine works-based supply measure business cases to the MDBA in January 2015. Both CMAs worked closely with interested stakeholders and community groups during the development of each business case. This direct approach to engagement enabled the views and local knowledge of key stakeholders and community members to be integrated into the projects.

Constraints Management Strategy

DELWP, in partnership with the Goulburn Broken CMA, is developing a business case for the Goulburn River Constraints Management project. Engagement activities carried out during 2014-15 have been designed to:

- Inform the community about the business case and deliver associated key messages
- Receive feedback from the community regarding the anticipated pattern of movement of overland flows
- Better understand the potential impacts of such flows (positive and negative)
- Assist the development of mitigation options to address negative impacts on stakeholders.

Engagement activities have included one on one discussions with community members, formal advisory group meetings and targeted stakeholder discussions. Local knowledge regarding potential impacts on public and private land has been collated and documented. This information will be used during the risk assessment and identification of appropriate mitigation strategies.

Water Resource Plans

Preparation of Victoria's Basin Plan Water Resource Plans (WRPs) commenced on 1 July 2015. During the ongoing development of Victoria's WRPs it is proposed that there will be continual engagement with the MDBA, CMAs, Rural and Urban Water Corporations, the EPA, the VEWH and Indigenous groups. Work has commenced in relation to engagement with Indigenous Groups (discussed more at 6.3).

6.2: Processes used to identify stakeholders and other relevant groups and individuals from local communities and peak bodies

Where possible include process used to identify stakeholders and other relevant groups/individuals (max. 800 words)

Response

Seasonal watering proposals, management of environmental water and long-term watering plans

Victoria's catchment management authorities (CMAs) have an established network of stakeholders from local communities and peak bodies that are engaged on a range of issues, including the development and implementation of regional waterway strategies, environmental water management plans and annual seasonal watering proposals.

These networks have been established for many years and have been an effective mechanism to engage with local communities. In more recent years, as the environmental water portfolio has expanded, some CMAs have established specific environmental watering advisory groups (EWAGs) through public advertisements, nominations and/or recommendations. In some instances, additional stakeholders have also been identified opportunistically.

CMAs adopt a range of methods to encourage participation from community and stakeholder groups. This includes identifying individuals or groups that stand to be directly affected by environmental water management of an asset, or groups that have a keen interest in the areas being managed. Key contacts may be identified by CMA staff and existing stakeholders such as local boards and advisory groups. Consideration is given to the level of interest or involvement the stakeholder may have, which will inform the level and purpose

for engagement. Following stakeholder analysis, an action plan is developed that outlines which stakeholders the CMA will engage with, and the method of communication. Contacts were invited to participate, and in some cases asked to advise of others that might be interested in participating. For some CMAs, invitations were also extended to the general community through flyers and pamphlets in local meeting places.

Sites that have been the subject of extensive investigations or previous work tend to have key community contacts already identified.

Work-based supply measures

During development of Victoria's nine business cases for works-based supply measures, the Mallee and North Central CMAs developed communication and engagement strategies for each project. These strategies include:

- Identification of key stakeholders
- Detailed analysis of the stakeholders, according to their level of interest in and influence on the project
- Analysis of stakeholders' issues and sensitivities
- Clearly articulated objectives and engagement approaches designed to meet the needs of different stakeholder groups, and
- Communication and engagement activities for each business case and implementation phases of the projects

Constraints Management Strategy

In this regard, DELWP draws attention to the work done to identify and engage key stakeholders in Victoria's Goulburn-Broken catchment with a material interest in the MDBA's Constraints Management Strategy (CMS), the updating of the MDBA's Goulburn River Reach Report and the development of a business case for the Goulburn River Constraints Management Project. DELWP worked closely with the Goulburn-Broken CMA to prepare a Communications and Engagement Plan to support the development of the business case.

Water Resource Plans

A stakeholder engagement plan was not prepared during 2014-15 for the development of Water Resource Plans. This work will be completed during the 2015-16 reporting period.

6.3: How stakeholders and other relevant groups and individuals were engaged

Where possible include:

- *range of audiences engaged*
- *range of opportunities (types of engagement)*
- *relate these to the Basin Plan obligations to have regard to local views (Chapter 8 and 10)*

(max. 800 words)

Response

Seasonal watering proposals, management of environmental water and long-term watering plans

Victoria is now operating under the 2013 Victorian Waterway Management Strategy and its sub-components – regional waterway strategies. Through these long-term strategies, local communities are consulted about priority waterway sites and values to be targeted for investment, and the priority management activities that are subsequently identified including, where possible, environmental watering.

During 2014-15, Victorian communities were engaged in the development of seasonal watering proposals through the various CMA environmental watering advisory groups (EWAGs) and other community meetings. These seasonal water proposals form the basis of the Victorian Environmental Water Holder's seasonal watering plan (which details the annual watering priorities for Victoria). The groups are also used to input to delivery of environmental water during the year.

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 groups, indigenous stakeholders, land manager agencies, private landholders, community groups, community members, Committees of Management, water authorities, river operators, water holders, local Government and contractors (for water delivery).

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.

Example - Environmental Water Management Plans (EWMPs)

During the development of EWMPs (which are a key input to Victoria's long-term watering plans), CMAs consult with local communities and stakeholders in order to gain input and feedback on all or a selection of the following (as the CMA sees appropriate for a particular asset and stakeholder): identification of the asset's ecological values; the long-term management goal for environmental watering of the asset; the ecological objectives for environmental watering; and the environmental watering requirements.

Consultation is undertaken through a mix of telephone interviews, site visits, workshops on water-dependent ecological values, and review of the draft EWMP. Communications materials were developed, such as North East CMA's one-page flyer aimed at indigenous groups and key stakeholders on the Murray Floodplain wetlands. For the Wimmera River EWMP, in addition to workshops with targeted stakeholders, the CMA chose to engage the local community through a media campaign, requesting feedback on environmental values and responses to watering; this was deemed the most suitable way to engage with the community.

Indigenous groups were either included in the above, or approached for separate face-to-face discussions, including on-country visits.

Works-based supply measures

A range of engagement activities were carried out during the development of business cases for Victoria's nine works-based supply measures. For example, communication and engagement activities conducted for the Lindsay Island Business Case included:

- More than 125 face-to-face briefing sessions, meetings, presentations and on-site visits. This resulted in direct engagement with more than 450 people. This number is reflective of the large number and wide range of project stakeholders.
- Development and distribution of project fact sheets, media releases, electronic communication (website, emails, newsletters), brochures and correspondence.

Constraints Management Strategy

For the Goulburn River Constraints Management, project stakeholders were identified through a workshop whereby the attendees (agency, local government, indigenous) analysed all identified stakeholders (including broader community) for their potential to be i) directly impacted (positively or negatively) by the changes or ii) likely to be significantly interested in Constraints Management Strategy activities. The workshop participants then drew from their knowledge of existing community networks and engagement channels to help select effective methods for engaging with all impacted / interested stakeholders.

Water Resource Plans

While the stakeholder engagement process for Water Resource Plans (WRP) was not commenced during the 2014-15 reporting period, some work has been done with Indigenous groups. In order to facilitate engagement with Indigenous Australians, DELWP has appointed an Aboriginal Water Policy Officer to manage consultation with Indigenous groups. To prepare for WRP development, the following engagement has occurred:

- Engagement with the Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations (MLDRIN). Consultation with this group assisted in the development of the Department's approach to addressing Basin Plan requirements, including the establishment of case studies to inform the approach to the design, implementation and refinement of policy to meet Basin Plan requirements and the appointment of regional Aboriginal Water Officers.
- Engagement with the Federation of Traditional Owners to discuss water issues. Meetings with this group are going to occur monthly.
- Engagement with CMA Indigenous facilitators
- Engagement with the VEWH and CEWH

A departmental advisory group comprised of Traditional Owners from the WRP areas is also being established.