

4. Appendices – Appendix 1: Importance Ranking of Rivers and Creeks in the Regional River Health Strategy and the Prioritisation of Actions

Values

Values (also referred to as assets) are those features of rivers and creeks that we appreciate and want to protect, such as native fish and water quality. These values or assets were grouped into three categories:

- Environmental assets that reflect the rarity, naturalness and representativeness of rivers and creeks, and include features such as the presence of native fish and streamside vegetation
- Social assets that reflect the community's appreciation and use of waterways for recreation, landscape amenity and also European and Aboriginal heritage values
- Economic assets, which are an indirect measure of the financial contribution the rivers and creeks and includes, for example, tourism and provision of water supply.

Threats

Threats are those activities or pressures that have the potential to degrade waterways and adversely affect river values described above. Threats included in the Port Phillip and Westernport region are largely based on those management issues identified in the Victorian River Health Strategy.

Risk assessment

Risk assessment provides a measure of the likelihood and consequences of a threat impacting on a value and the associated decline in the quality of river and creek assets that would result. For example, the likelihood of water quality deteriorating would have an associated impact on the health of the river and/or its suitability for recreation.

The risk assessment process involved identifying these assets and the threats that could lead to a deterioration in their condition. This information was then used, along with additional information on the relationship between the asset and threat, to determine what the risk was, and then develop suitable programs to help minimise such risks. and Westernport Regional River Health Strategy

Prioritisation

Every river and creek within the region has value and supports a range of assets. It is not feasible to manage all rivers and undertake all required improvement works within the five-year time frame of this plan. Therefore a prioritisation process is needed to determine which of these rivers and creeks are a priority and the river health programs to be implemented. This prioritisation process will also ensure that the associated expenditure is justified and efficient.

The process adopted in this strategy is based on the Victorian River Health Strategy. It is designed to ensure the protection of existing high-value rivers and creeks that are in good condition and improve rivers and creeks in areas where there is:

- The highest environmental and community gain for the resources invested
- Community commitment towards long-term improvement of river health.

The prioritisation involved three steps.

Step one – determining regional importance

Step one involved determining the importance of each river and creek in the regional context using the values and risk ratings (see table below). A river or creek was assigned a “very high” regional importance rating if all three values (social, environmental and economic) were assessed as very high or high. A river or creek was also regarded as having “very high” regional importance if it was a Heritage River or Representative River. A river or creek a “high” regional importance rating if it had a high value rating and corresponding high risk rating. Rivers and creeks with a “moderate” importance rating are those rivers and creeks with a high value rating and corresponding moderate risk rating.

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Criteria for determining level of Importance			
Importance	Value	Risk	Other Criteria
Very high	All three social, environmental and economic values very high or high	N/A	Ecologically healthy, Representative river or Heritage river reach within sub-management unit
High	Very high or high value for one of social, environmental or economic value	Connection between very high/high value and very high/high risk i.e. If high social value and high risk to the social values	
Moderate	Very high or high value for one of social, environmental or economic value	Moderate or low risk to the value	
Low	All other sub-management units		

Step two – prioritise actions

Each action identified during the risk assessment process was prioritised according to:

- Degree of public perception/support
- Opportunity to improve river health
- Multiple benefits
- Return of investment
- Downstream benefits
- Link to regional importance rating (see step one).

Step three – prioritise timeframes

The timeframes for implementation were determined by the following:

- Results of step one (the regional importance rating) and step two (action priorities) were used to determine the timeframes for the implementation of the river health programs. All 'very high' and 'high' priority actions for improving river and creek vegetation form the basis of the five-year program.
- Rivers and creeks that have a moderate to low importance rating in the regional context are often highly valued locally by the community or feed into a highly valued downstream environment such as a Ramsar site. These have been identified as priority because of their local community value. Therefore many rivers and creeks that have a moderate to low importance in the regional context can become a priority and thus can also be included in the five year program in conjunction with regionally important rivers and creeks.