



Stream News

A bulletin for Melbourne Water diverters

Enviro Flows to Boost Yarra River's Health

The Yarra River received the first flows of its reinstated environmental water entitlement in September, to help improve the health of one of Melbourne's natural icons.

The week-long release of 3 billion litres from the Upper Yarra Reservoir marks the first time the Yarra has received water above minimum flow since the entitlement was reinstated in October last year.

The Yarra has long supplied the majority of Melbourne's drinking water, and the city's reliance on the river increased during the drought, which meant less water for the environment.

The release was approved by the Victorian Environmental Water Holder (VEWH), the new independent statutory body for holding and managing Victoria's environmental water entitlements.

Waterways General Manager, Chris Chesterfield, said the flows would help address the impact that damming the Yarra, to create

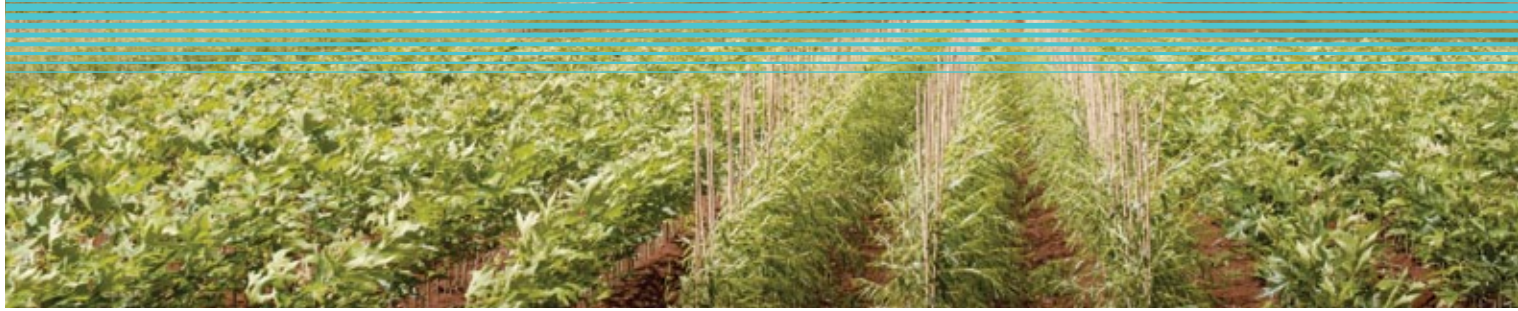
Upper Yarra Reservoir, had on the health of the waterway and the plants and animals that live there.

"The dam has altered the natural flow of the Yarra, increasing the amount of soil and other loose vegetation on the river bed, which reduces habitat and food availability for significant native animals such as river blackfish and the Yarra spiny crayfish," said Mr Chesterfield.

"The flows are being used strategically to help flush out the upper reaches of the river, as would naturally be the case before the dam was built.

"It may seem odd to some, but the ideal time to make the release is in the wetter months of spring when there's a greater chance of distributing the material along the length of the Yarra and mimicking the natural processes.

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Irrigation and Drainage Plans

New irrigation developments, including increases to existing irrigation areas, must meet the standards necessary to minimise the impacts of their water use on other landowners and the environment.

In particular this includes managing impacts of waterlogging, sediment runoff, nutrient impacts and biodiversity across the site. This must involve an assessment of local conditions and appropriate design of irrigation systems.

To demonstrate appropriate management of these impacts, farmers applying to trade water for new development or more intensive use at current sites will be required to prepare an irrigation and drainage plan and submit it to Melbourne Water with their application.

Irrigation and Drainage Plans detail the irrigation requirements and scheduling of application as well as drainage and runoff controls to be put in place on the site.

The key purpose of an irrigation and drainage plan is to match the way land is irrigated and drainage disposed of, with the characteristics of the land and soil, in order to minimise harmful side-effects of irrigation.

Irrigation and Drainage Management plans must incorporate:

- [a map of the development](#)
- [topographical details](#)
- [soil assessment](#)
- [irrigation design and management](#)
- [arrangements for drainage disposal and runoff control](#)
- [biodiversity protection arrangements.](#)

A lot of the information required can be captured on a series of site plans relatively simply, supported by associated documentation.

Melbourne Water can assist farmers by providing base plans of their site to work from and has further guidelines available detailing the general requirements of each of the listed components above. Irrigators needing to prepare a plan should contact the Diversions team for a copy on 131 722.

Further, in meeting the requirements to minimise site impacts, it may be necessary to provide vegetation buffers along waterways and / or to capture and treat drainage and nutrient runoff from your site. Melbourne Water has incentive programs to assist landowners in this regard.

As detailed in our last newsletter, the Water Sensitive Farm Design program uses incentives on a cost share basis for a broad range of works and activities to improve on-farm management practices and support increased productivity through the prevention of soil and nutrient loss – leading to reduced run-off, higher quality of water leaving properties, and improved waterway health.

Eligibility for funding will be determined after a site visit to discuss ideas for works and activities. Activities considered for funding include, but are not limited to:

- [fencing off and revegetating water sensitive areas](#)
- [farm track construction, improvement and drainage](#)
- [shade & shelter points away from water sensitive areas](#)
- [erosion stabilisation and protection](#)
- [sediment and nutrient retentions systems.](#)

The Water Sensitive Farm Design program is being delivered in partnership with the Department of Primary Industries. Melbourne Water is still actively seeking landowners to participate in the program.

For more information and to express an interest in participating in the program, please contact Clinton Muller on 0429 709 708 clinton.muller@melbournewater.com.au.



“Careful river watchers may have noticed the Yarra slightly higher than it would otherwise be, but most of the benefits will be under the surface. The 3 billion litres in flows represents a fraction of what is harvested into Upper Yarra Reservoir each year, but they’re a very important part of improving the Yarra’s health.

“Just as restrictions were introduced in Melbourne to help save water, the Yarra did it very tough throughout the drought, so it’s only right that it shares the benefits of an improved outlook for our water storages.

“Higher rainfall over the past two years has increased flows in the Yarra but it will take years of higher flows for these ecosystems to properly recover,” he added.

The Auditor General last year commended Melbourne Water’s management of the Yarra during the drought and the strategic release of these flows will help bolster these efforts.



Water being released from the Upper Yarra Reservoir on 19 September 2011

Is your dam about to collapse?

Melbourne Water is warning landowners to re-check that their dams are not at risk of collapse and to maintain an ongoing surveillance program of their dams.

Across our region approximately 26 dams have been reported as failed wholly or partially during the past year – more than the last six years combined. Coming into summer, landowners need to be even more vigilant that their dams are in good repair. Some of the causes of dam collapses over the past few months have included vegetation being allowed to grow on the dam bank, excessive rainfall and spillways being undersized or blocked.

A collapsed dam can cause significant damage to the environment, flooding to downstream properties and, as in several cases this year, can even cause damage to downstream dams.

If your dam collapses and causes damage to someone else’s property, you may be liable for the costs. We recommend that landowners check their dams regularly as part of their weekly routine.

If anyone notices an issue with a private dam, we advise them to immediately phone either Melbourne Water or a qualified farm dam engineer. Melbourne Water is available on 131 722.



Failed dam in Gembrook Area



Stream Flow Management Plan Updates

Streamflow Management Plans are prepared on major sub-catchments to determine the appropriate rules and flow triggers for managing access to water. The aim is to share the available water sustainably between all users, including the environment.

Each plan is developed by a committee, which is made up of local licensed diverters, representatives from local and state government, Environment Victoria and Melbourne Water. Melbourne Water also provides executive and technical support to these committees

Work has been underway now for some time in preparing management plans for the Woori Yallock Creek catchment and the combined Little Yarra River and Don River catchments.

The Consultative Committees for each of these areas have finalised draft management plans following a community consultation period. All submissions were considered whilst finalising the plans.

Following approval from the Minister for Water, all licensed diverters in these catchments will be provided with a copy.

For further information please contact Anna Lucas on 9235 1477 for the Little Yarra River and Don River management plan, or Sarah Gaskill on 9235 7045 for the Woori Yallock Creek management plan.

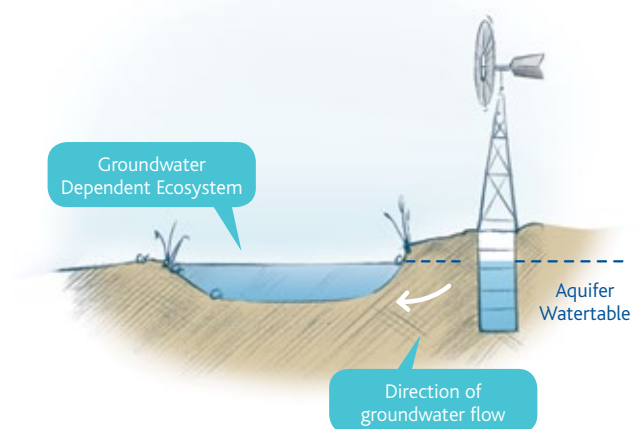
Mapping Groundwater Dependent Ecosystems

Have you ever wondered how some wetlands support plant and animal life even if it hasn't rained for ages? Or how some rivers continue to flow during drought periods? The answer is that they may be supported by and depend upon groundwater.

We currently know little of groundwater dependent ecosystems (GDE's), their location and their condition. To help improve our knowledge in this area and identify our Groundwater Environmental Water Reserve, we have been working with the Department of Sustainability and Environment, Southern Rural Water and consultant's Sinclair Knight Merz (SKM) to map GDE's across our region.

We have identified twenty eight areas of similar geological and ecological characteristics, called eco-hydrological zones. Using a variety of information available on Geographical Information Systems, we have identified high value GDE's and then undertaken a risk assessment.

The project will produce a map of groundwater dependent ecosystems with the 28 eco-hydrological zones, along with fact sheets to help inform management decisions e.g. referrals from Southern Rural Water for bore applications.



Example groundwater dependent ecosystem