

# stream news

A bulletin for  
Melbourne Water  
diverters



**Melbourne  
Water**

## New Farm Dams Legislation Passed

Water is a finite and precious resource. We need to share our water fairly amongst both users and the environment. Victoria's Water Act provides the framework for the licensing and sharing of our water resources.

The Water (Irrigation Farm Dams) Act 2002 was passed by Parliament on 26 March 2002 and came into operation on 4 April 2002. It amended the Water Act 1989 and extends licensing arrangements to cover all irrigation and commercial use in the catchment.

Irrigation and commercial dams of any size built off waterways have the same effect on water availability as dams built on waterways. They affect the amount of water available for use in the catchment and they reduce stream flows.

The amendments to the Water Act will help to ensure that water use across Victoria is sustainable. They will protect the health of our rivers and streams and ensure that reliability of supply to existing users is not reduced.

Irrigation or commercial use of water from new dams must be licensed whether or not the dam is located on a waterway. The use of water from springs or soaks for irrigation or commercial purposes also has to be licensed. Licensing helps to ensure that water is allocated in an equitable manner to maximise the opportunity for all farmers to access the water resource, without adversely affecting the security of supply to existing farmers. A proper licensing regime is aimed at preventing over-allocation of the water resource.

While many dam owners are already licensed for their water use, there are many more dams utilised for irrigation or commercial purposes without a licence. As from 1 July 2002 these dam owners will have the choice of registering their usage or obtaining a standard water licence.

Existing users will have 12 months from 1 July 2002 to register their use or to apply for a standard licence. Use of water for irrigation or commercial purposes without authorisation after 30 June 2003 will be an offence under the Water Act.

## Registration

Registration of existing dams is free, there are no application fees and no annual charges. Registration is in perpetuity. Farmers who register their water use cannot transfer this water off the property. If the property is sold, the registration automatically transfers to the new property owner. However, a registration may be converted to a standard licence at any time upon application.

## Standard Licence

A standard licence for an existing unlicensed dam incurs annual charges but there is no initial application fee. If you have a standard licence you are able to apply to transfer the water off the property, ie to sell your entitlement.

## Domestic & Stock, Reuse

The changes to the Water Act do not affect a property owner's right to domestic and stock water, which can be captured by a property owner without need of a licence. Other dams such as aesthetic dams or reuse dams do not require a water licence along with dams filled solely from hothouse, shed or roof runoff.

All new irrigation and commercial use of water must be licensed. Property owners considering new development should contact Melbourne Water prior to engaging in any dam design to ensure first that the water they need will be available to them under licence.

## Farm Dams Support Measures

To help introduce the new arrangements, financial support measures are being made available to help meet the cost of establishing an irrigation/commercial enterprise as follows:

- 50% of the cost of an approved farm plan
- 100% of the cost of an approved environmental assessment of the impact of the proposed dam
- 50% of the cost of an approved engineering design of the dam

The farm plan incentives will be available for a period of five years from 4 April 2002 and will apply only to the land subject to the new irrigation/commercial development.

A maximum of \$6,000 will be available to any individual for these plans/assessments. Additional support measures are also available for the purchasing of water in capped catchments.

## Dam Construction & Safety

Improvements to the rules concerning the safety of dams have been incorporated into the legislation and large dams off waterways will now require a construction licence. Dams constructed on waterways already need a construction licence. The changes to the Water Act will also require operating licences for hazardous or potentially hazardous dams so that appropriate monitoring procedures can be specified.

*Further information regarding any of the changes to licensing and farm dams can be obtained by contacting Melbourne Water on 9840 5700 or 131 722.*



## Diversion Licence Pricing

Diversion accounts for 2002/03 are currently being forwarded to all licence holders. Most licence holders will notice a small increase in their licence fees with an average increase of 3.1% in line with CPI.

Licence and construction application fees have been revised after several years of remaining static. In considering also the additional requirements under the revised Water Act these fees have increased substantially in order to recover true costs. It should be noted that these are once-off fees applicable only to new applications.

## Postal Addresses

Melbourne Water does its best to try and maintain up to date postal address information on licence holders in order to ensure that information and accounts are correctly received. In some cases it can be a considerable length of time since the postal address was supplied and with most rural properties now having been provided with street numbers, many of our current postal records are incomplete or incorrect.

As a result it would be appreciated if licence holders could check the postal address supplied with this newsletter and account to ensure that their details are correct. Should any changes be necessary these can be faxed to Melbourne Water on 9840 5710 along with the licence holders signature.

It is a licence holder's responsibility to notify Melbourne Water of any change to postal details. Failing to do so may result in accounts being incorrectly forwarded and subsequently not being paid. This may lead to cancellation of the licence.

## Streamflow Management Plans

Streamflow Management Plans (SFMP) are being prepared in those catchments where demand for water is high and more intense management is necessary to protect the reliability of supply to farmers, other water users, and the environment. The Streamflow Management Plan aims to promote long-term sustainability of the waterway by reaching a balance between environmental requirements and consumptive uses of the water.

The April 2002 changes to the Water Act provide legislative backing to existing and future SFMPs. Consultative committees are to be appointed by the Minister for Environment & Conservation for the development of new SFMPs. At least one half of the membership of new consultative committees will be farmers who own or occupy farming land in the area concerned. The Victorian Farmers Federation will be consulted on the appointment of farmer members. If you require further information please call Steve Nicol on 9235 2155.

## Draft Hoddles Creek Streamflow Management Plan

The Draft Hoddles Creek SFMP will be released in July 2002 with public comment invited over a 60 day period. Copies of the draft SFMP will be forwarded to all Hoddles Creek diverters, government agencies, key interest groups and interested parties. As part of the consultation process all Hoddles Creek



catchment diverters were invited to attend a presentation of the draft plan in June 2002. If you require further information please call Steve Nicol on 9235 2155.

## Diamond Creek and Plenty River Streamflow Management Plans

Working Groups are proceeding with the development of SFMPs and water sharing arrangements in these catchments with substantial progress made to date. To date the Plenty working group have:

- Identified objectives for the Plan
- Endorsed an environmental flow report
- Reviewed a farm dam impact assessment report
- Recommended appropriate summer diversion limits (caps)
- Recommended appropriate summer environmental flow regime
- Identified conditions associated with trading of licence entitlements
- Recommended appropriate measurement and monitoring requirements

The Diamond Creek working group is currently reviewing a draft plan for public consultation purposes. The Draft is expected to be released in July 2002.

## Want More Information?

*Please contact Steve Hosking, Phil Biasi or Peter Rankin on telephone (03) 9840 5700.*