

## WATER DIVERTERS UPDATE No. 3 – AUTUMN 2005/06

### Yarra River to get additional flows

Licence holders may have seen the recent news coverage on television and newspapers announcing additional environmental flows to be made available to the Yarra River.

Melbourne Water has been working with key stakeholders on a study to determine what flows the Yarra River needs in order to remain healthy. Stakeholders have comprised: government agencies, local government, diverters, Environment Victoria and Yarra River Keepers Association.

The study's recommendations fed into the government's Central Region Sustainable Water Strategy. This Strategy, which has been released recently, is open to public comment for two months, following which the government will determine the actual amount of water to be made available for the river and its users.

The study has shown that the Yarra River is in reasonable health, but would benefit from additional water. Melbourne Water has recommended to government that all of the environmental flows recommended for the Yarra River in the 2005 environmental flow study be provided. The study does not recommend artificially creating bank full and overbank flows by making releases from storages, although Melbourne Water will protect these events when they naturally occur.

To summarise, Melbourne Water is recommending that the minimum environmental flows be met and reserve a total of 17,000 ML for release from harvesting points in the upper Yarra River, or for temporary storage to meet high flows and freshes as recommended in the study. To provide these flows, Melbourne's water entitlement from the Yarra will be reduced from an average of 420,000 to 400,000 ML/year.

Of course the actual volume of water taken from the Yarra will still vary considerably from year to year, provided the long-term average does not exceed 400,000 ML per year and the environmental flows are fully provided.

Melbourne Water will also ensure that its waterway management works, such as revegetation and water quality improvement works, are integrated with the environmental flows to maximise the environmental benefits. The combined package will be adaptively managed with regular monitoring and reporting to our stakeholders.

#### Impact on Diverters

Diverters licence entitlements will not be effected by the proposal to release more water for the Yarra River, but they will not be permitted to access water released specifically for environmental purposes. A cap on water licence entitlements remains, which means that the total amount of water currently licensed is fixed at the existing volume. New licences can be issued, but only if the applicant is able to purchase water from an existing licence holder. Again, existing licence volumes will not be altered or reduced as a result of increasing flows into the Yarra.

Diverters seeking additional information from Melbourne Water, should contact Steve Hosking, Phil Biasi or Tim Donovan on 9784 6373 or visit [www.melbournewater.com.au](http://www.melbournewater.com.au)

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