

The recent bushfires have had an impact on vegetation in riparian zones, the areas of land and vegetation along rivers and creeks. Vegetation has been burnt or scorched and in some areas, completely lost.

Experts in fire rehabilitation worked with Melbourne Water and the Department of Sustainability and Environment to complete an assessment of fire damage to water supply catchments, including waterways. This assessment will help short and long term planning for the rehabilitation of catchments and waterways. Melbourne Water is working with public land managers (for example local councils and Parks Victoria), private landholders and the community to help riparian zones recover.

Through the Stream Frontage Management Program we are working with private landholders to rebuild fences to keep stock out of waterways and to co-ordinate weed control activities along waterways. We will monitor the natural regeneration of vegetation over the coming winter and spring to help determine where and when we should intervene and begin replanting native vegetation. All of these activities will help give our riparian zones a better chance at recovery.

### Riparian Zones

#### What are riparian zones?

They are areas of land and vegetation that adjoin waterways like rivers to connect land and water based ecosystems. They vary in width from narrow strips to wide corridors and are made up of a broad range of different plants and animals.

#### Why are riparian zones important?

Healthy riparian zones are critical to a healthy waterway. They provide food, habitat and shade for the waterway and help stabilise river banks, filter nutrients and sediment from rainfall runoff and control the growth of weeds.

Healthy riparian zones also help improve the overall quality and productivity of agricultural lands and are important for plants and animals. They can act as natural barriers to fire and in zones with mature canopies, reduce light penetration to the ground to inhibit the growth of fine vegetation that can catch fire easily.

#### Why should I protect or look after my riparian zone?

Looking after your riparian zone means you are looking after your waterway and the plants and animals living within it. A healthy riparian zone provides a level of fire protection. Most evidence indicates that fires are less likely to spread along and across healthy green riparian zones compared to adjacent agricultural lands.

#### Can cleared riparian zones become a problem?

Yes. Clearing of riparian land can lead to a range of environmental issues, including weed invasion, erosion and a lack of animal habitat. Melbourne Water can help you to rehabilitate your riparian zone through the Stream Frontage Management Program.

#### What is the Stream Frontage Management Program?

It is a Melbourne Water program which works with landowners to protect, improve and manage their dams and off-stream stock watering facilities.

## **Will replanting of riparian vegetation result in more bushfires?**

No. They can act as natural barriers to fire, help improve the overall quality and productivity of agricultural lands and in zones with mature canopies, reduce light penetration to the ground to inhibit the growth of flammable fuels. There are examples where creeks and green swampy areas slowed or stopped a fire spreading across the countryside.

## **Trees**

### **Can Melbourne Water assess or remove unsafe or fallen trees within the riparian zone?**

No. Landholders are responsible for managing trees on their property. Talk to your local council to find out more about assessing and removing unsafe trees.

### **Will Melbourne Water remove tree debris from the waterway?**

Tree debris within the waterway not posing an immediate risk to downstream infrastructure, should remain in-stream as they play an important role in slowing down the water flow and creating habitat.

However, if you are concerned about tree debris redirecting water flow in the waterway, contact Melbourne Water and we can help assess debris build up and determine actions for removal if required.

### **Can Melbourne Water remove native trees to help me with my revegetation site preparation?**

No. The removal of native vegetation is not encouraged. After fire, it is important to retain vegetation and tree cover to help stabilise soil and provide much needed habitat for surviving native animals.

However, it is important to control non-native vegetation. Through the Stream Frontage Management Program, we can help to plan and fund a weed control program along your riparian zone.

## **Revegetation**

### **When should I begin planting vegetation along my riparian zone?**

Before planting in your riparian zone, it is important to see what native vegetation recovers naturally during the upcoming winter and spring. This will help to identify if any revegetation is required.

We're already seeing seedlings germinate, mature vegetation re-sprout and the wind and animals re-introduce seed in many areas. However, some native plants find it hard to re-generate because the cleared ground provides an opportunity for increased weed growth. Weed control is a very important part of our recovery works.

### **Is Melbourne Water helping the recovery of native plants?**

Yes. Melbourne Water is undertaking weed control programs and is providing assistance to landowners to fence off waterways to reduce weed invasion and threats to native vegetation.

In the longer term, we're conducting studies into the impacts of the fires on riparian vegetation and the ecosystem's response.

### **Will Melbourne Water pay to replace my bushfire damaged riparian vegetation and materials?**

Financial support is available for plantings, materials and weed control via the Stream Frontage Management Program. The level of financial support is by agreement between landholder and Stream Frontage Management Program representative.

## **Contact details**

### **Melbourne Water's Stream Frontage Management Program** – call

03 9235 2231 or visit [melbournewater.com.au](http://melbournewater.com.au)  
(> Partnerships)

**This fact sheet is also available at** [melbournewater.com.au/bushfires](http://melbournewater.com.au/bushfires)