

MEDIA RELEASE

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Victoria's rivers and wetlands get a helping hand from watering plan

Rivers and wetlands across Victoria will benefit from the Victorian Environmental Water Holder's statewide plan for environmental watering over 2018-19.

"This is Victoria's eighth watering plan which provides the blueprint for delivering water to the environment for healthy waterways. Environmental flows over the year will provide big benefits for plants, animals and communities," said VEWH Chairperson Denis Flett.

"Victorians are passionate about their rivers and wetlands with 95 per cent using them for recreation such as camping, birdwatching, swimming, boating and fishing. These environments, and the plant and animal life they sustain, are for everyone to enjoy.

"There are nineteen systems of rivers and wetlands across Victoria that have the potential to receive water during 2018-19. In the previous watering year of 2017-18 all nineteen systems – including a total of 43 rivers or creeks and 85 wetlands – were provided with environmental flows to maintain or improve the health of the ecosystem."

Many of Victoria's rivers and wetlands have been impacted by modifications for human use, in addition to the ongoing impacts of drought and a changing climate.

"Water flows are captured in storages and used for farming, towns, cities and industry. Some of our rivers give up more than a third – and sometimes half – of their water each year for human use," Mr Flett said.

"Previously, high flows and floods connected rivers, wetlands and floodplains in most years - other than during severe droughts - giving plants and animals an opportunity to feed and breed.

"Now, instead of flowing naturally with high flows in winter and low flows in summer, some regulated rivers run higher in summer when water needs to be delivered for farming and urban use.

"These modifications interrupt many of the natural river and wetland processes needed by native plants and animals to survive, feed and breed. Through the seasonal watering plan, water for the environment aims to give nature a helping hand to survive these changes so we all have rivers and wetlands to enjoy for the long-term."

In planning for environmental watering, the VEWH and local waterway managers in each region of Victoria have considered a range of factors to determine environmental watering under different conditions. This includes watering site condition, climate and water availability, the best available science, community input, and shared benefits for communities and Traditional Owners.

“For the 2018-19 watering year, most river systems still have good volumes of water for the environment in reserve, which provides opportunities to build the resilience of plants and animals so they can withstand any future dry years,” said Mr Flett.

“If 2018-19 continues to be a dry year then water for the environment may be scarce in some systems such as the Loddon River and the Werribee River.”

Studies show that environmental watering is producing results. Fish are breeding and there are stronger populations of animals such as platypus, birds, frogs and turtles in waterways that have been receiving water for the environment.

“Improving waterway health in Victoria is a long-term plan to alleviate some of the damage to rivers, wetlands and catchments that has been prevalent over the last century,” said Mr Flett.

“Environmental watering isn’t the only solution. It is only effective if complementary measures to reduce other negative impacts such as high nutrient loads or invasive species are also undertaken.

“This year’s watering plan builds on a range of measures being undertaken in catchments around Victoria to address other impacts. It is a demonstration of the ongoing commitment of agencies involved in environmental watering to achieve the best possible outcomes for the health of Victoria’s waterways and communities.”

The *Seasonal Watering Plan 2018-19* has been developed by the VEWH in collaboration with catchment management authorities and Melbourne Water, considering the use of all water for the environment held in Victorian river systems. In northern and western Victoria, the VEWH coordinates with other environmental water holders to deliver environmental outcomes at the broader Murray–Darling Basin scale.

The *Seasonal Watering Plan 2018-19* is available online at www.vewh.vic.gov.au/watering-program/seasonal-watering-plan.

Victorian Environmental Water Holder

The VEWH is an independent body, established by the Victorian Government in 2011, responsible for managing environmental water entitlements to improve the environmental values and health of Victoria’s rivers, wetlands and floodplains, and the plants and animals that rely on them.

Media contacts:

Kylee Carpenter, Team Leader Communications and Engagement
kylee.carpenter@vewh.vic.gov.au | 03 9637 8951

Mark Toomey, Team Leader Planning and Reporting
mark.toomey@vewh.vic.gov.au | 03 9637 8951