

# Maintaining wetlands in a dryland environment

The water saving benefits for Wimmera Mallee communities from completion of the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline Project are well documented. Completion of this major infrastructure project will also result in a more secure and reliable water supply for our environment - including rivers, streams, creeks, lakes and wetlands.

## Wetlands

As channels and dams are decommissioned within the Wimmera Mallee supply system, community members expressed concern about maintenance of existing wetland habitat and impacts on flora and fauna.

The significance of these wetlands was recognised in design of the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline Project, which allocates up to 1,000 megalitres (ML) of water for off-stream wetlands. This water aims to protect and sustain significant wetlands that currently rely on water from the open channel system.

This allocation is separate to the Victorian Government's Wimmera-Glenelg Bulk Entitlements, which allocates water to urban and rural customers. The bulk entitlement includes the allocation to Wimmera and Glenelg waterways through the Environmental Water Reserve. Pipeline savings will also restore environmental allocations to the Avon Richardson system and Avoca River.

## Community and CMA input

To determine the most effective use of the 1,000 ML for off-stream wetlands, a joint Catchment Management Authority working group has been established to develop allocation criteria. This group has representatives from Mallee, North Central and Wimmera CMAs. It is also identifying eligible wetlands in the pipeline area and making recommendations on how to prioritise wetlands, water allocation and management.

The Pipeline Community Reference Group has also provided community input into determining eligibility and priority of wetlands for this water allocation. Landcare groups are also providing input.

The CMAs will be responsible for the annual allocation process, including the monitoring and reporting of the wetland allocation's benefits to the environment.



The Wimmera contains about 25 percent of Victoria's wetlands, including this wetland area in the Wimmera's west.

*Photo by David Fletcher and courtesy of Wimmera Catchment Management Authority.*

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## Recommendations

The current proposal is that when the pipeline is built, it will deliver water to a number of eligible wetlands between July and October, during the off-peak demand period. Because wetlands rely on a natural wetting/drying cycle to maintain their health, not all wetlands will be watered each year.

Recommendations are that the 1,000 ML allocation will:

- > Go to the highest ecological value wetlands in the pipeline region.
- > Maintain identified environmental values in wetlands and water bodies that have been determined as eligible and of greatest priority.
- > Mimic the natural wetting/drying cycles of regional wetlands.

Wetlands and water bodies may be eligible if they are:

- > Off-stream; meaning they do not receive water from a recognised watercourse and will not be eligible for water from the Wimmera-Glenelg Bulk Entitlements.
- > Do not receive water from the recreational water allocation (*refer to 'Recreational lakes' Fact Sheet for more detail*).
- > On public land which is not subject to licences for grazing or cropping.
- > On private land containing a conservation covenant.
- > Of high environmental value, according to the CMAs' agreed wetland prioritisation process.
- > Fresh, not brackish or saline.
- > Surface-water dominated.
- > Not receiving sufficient water from catchment run-off to maintain their condition.

## Watering Process

Eligible wetlands across the Wimmera Mallee pipeline region will be prioritised according to their environmental values. An independent consultant will assess and recommend eligible wetlands.

Water required for each priority wetland and the volume needed to supply the wetland to its natural extent will be assessed each year. Water will be allocated to each wetland, working through the list of priorities until that year's allocation is used. This will be detailed in an annual watering plan.

## Monitoring

Each wetland to receive an allocation will be subject to a monitoring and reporting plan.

The Index of Wetland Condition is a process of assessing the ecological and habitat values of wetlands, and will be the basis of evaluating the impact of water allocations.

## Wildlife Ponds

Birchip Cropping Group is researching different ways to maintain diversity values on-farm, following the implementation of the pipeline. A number of demonstration 'wildlife ponds' have been developed, with information now available detailing the design criteria, costings and management of the ponds. This information may be accessed at [www.bcg.org.au](http://www.bcg.org.au)

Further information regarding maintaining wetlands in a dryland environment is available by contacting the **Horsham Piping It Office** on **1300 659 961** or by dropping into the office at **42-44 Kalkee Road**.

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