



EES Consultation Plan

Hattah Lakes North and Belsar–Yungera Floodplain
Restoration Projects

June 2021



**VICTORIAN MURRAY FLOODPLAIN
RESTORATION PROJECT**

HEALTHY LANDSCAPES, STRONG COMMUNITIES

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EES Consultation Plan – Hattah lakes North and Belsar–Yungera Islands Floodplain Restoration Projects

Authorised and published by the Victorian Murray Floodplain Restoration Project

PO Box 1438, Mildura VIC 3502

June 2021

Cover photo: Environmental Watering at Hattah (Source: Mallee Catchment Management Authority)

Acknowledgment of Country

The Victorian Murray Floodplain Restoration Project (VMFRP) acknowledges and respects Traditional Owners, Aboriginal communities and organisations. We recognise the diversity of their cultures and the deep connections they have with lands and waters.

We value our relationships with Traditional Owners, Aboriginal communities and organisations for the health of People and Country.

VMFRP management and staff pay their respects to Elders past, present and emerging, and recognise the primacy of Traditional Owners' obligations, rights and responsibilities to use and care for their traditional lands and waters.

1. Introduction

Purpose of this document

This plan outlines the consultation program and communication and engagement activities that will be delivered as part of the Environment Effects Statement (EES) and draft planning scheme amendment (PSA) process for the proposed works to restore the Murray River floodplains at Hattah Lakes North and Belsar–Yungera under the Victorian Murray Floodplain Restoration Project (VMFRP).

It establishes the overarching principles, objectives and approach to engaging with stakeholders, Traditional Owners and the community as the VMFRP moves through the planning and approvals phase for the Hattah Lakes North and Belsar–Yungera floodplain restoration projects.

This plan may be modified and updated as the EES process progresses to respond to emerging issues, engagement opportunities or community preferences.

This plan is supported by an [addendum with a more detailed schedule of planned engagement activities](#).

Consultation plan objectives

The VMFRP is committed to:

- informing stakeholders, Traditional Owners and local communities about the proposed project and program of EES studies
- encouraging participation and providing opportunities for local communities, Traditional Owners and stakeholders to be involved in the EES process
- communicating in a timely, clear, accessible and easily understandable manner
- showing how community and stakeholder concerns have been considered in the project and EES development.

Background

The VMFRP aims to reconnect 14,000 hectares of wetlands and floodplains to the Murray River at nine priority sites in northern Victoria.

The planned works include removing blockages that stop water flowing into creeks and implementing options to manage water effectively and efficiently on the floodplain at each site. This water will bring new life and help these ecologically significant floodplains survive and cope with climate change and future dry conditions, so they can continue to be enjoyed by future generations.

This project is part of Victoria's obligations under the Murray–Darling Basin Plan. It will bring substantial financial investment into the region, creating jobs, attracting tourism and helping local economies, without requiring further water buybacks.

The VMFRP is being implemented through a partnership between:

- Lower Murray Water (the project proponent)
- Goulburn-Murray Water
- Mallee Catchment Management Authority (CMA)
- North Central Catchment Management Authority
- Parks Victoria
- Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP).

Assessing projects for environmental impacts

The VMFRP is targeting nine floodplain sites for restoration, two of which are Hattah Lakes North and Belsar–Yungera.

In December 2020, the Victorian Minister for Planning determined that the proposed works at these two sites are to be assessed through the preparation of a single EES under the *Environment Effects Act 1978* (EE Act). The reasons for this decision and decisions on the other seven projects can be found on the [DELWP Planning website](#). Consultation plans for all projects will be developed and implemented in accordance with the above VMFRP commitments.

An EES enables a single integrated and transparent assessment of a project's potential environmental effects, and provides opportunity for consultation with stakeholders and the community to inform statutory decision-making.

The Commonwealth Minister for the Environment also determined that the project requires assessment and approval under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). Under a bilateral agreement between the Commonwealth and Victoria, the EES process is accredited to assess impacts on matters of national environmental significance (MNES).

The Commonwealth Minister or delegate will decide whether the project is approved, approved with conditions or refused under the EPBC Act, after having considered the Minister for Planning's assessment under the EE Act.

Consultation under the EE Act

As part of the EES process, the VMFRP must prepare and implement a public consultation plan (this plan) to provide the framework for consultation during preparation of the EES. This plan also provides the framework for consultation on the draft PSA given that the two processes will run in tandem.

As part of the EES and draft PSA development, the VMFRP will document the current ecological, social, commercial, recreational, cultural and landscape values, as well as the adequacy of mitigation measures for negative environmental impacts.

During this period, stakeholders and the community will be provided with project and EES updates and formal and informal opportunities to provide feedback on expected benefits, project design, predicted effects on environmental values, cultural heritage and the PSA process.

This builds on the engagement that has already taken place throughout the life of these projects and in the lead-up to the EES process. This engagement will continue beyond the EES process into the construction and operation phases.

Figure 1 shows the key stages in the EES process and the opportunities to give feedback. Section 7: Engagement tools and schedule of activities outlines the formal and informal consultation activities planned for each stage of the EES process. Other opportunities for involvement will be further defined during project delivery.

Community and stakeholder feedback will be considered by specialists completing the EES assessments and in ongoing refinement of the project design.

Further information on the EES process is available at www.planning.vic.gov.au/environment-assessment/what-is-the-ees-process-in-victoria.

Formal consultation opportunities offered during the EES process

DELWP offers two formal public consultation opportunities:

Public exhibition of the draft scoping requirements

DELWP released the draft scoping requirements for public comment for 15 business days on the [Engage Victoria website](#) from 23 April to 14 May 2021. The scoping requirements set out the matters to be investigated and documented in the EES. The public exhibition gave stakeholders and the community an opportunity to raise key issues related to potential impacts and benefits that they would like to see covered in the EES.

Final scoping documents will be published on the [DELWP Planning website](#) when released.

Public exhibition of the EES

When the Minister is satisfied that the EES is suitable, it is released for public comment for a minimum of 30 business days. During this time, the public can make written submissions.

The Minister may appoint an inquiry to evaluate the effects of the project, having regard to the EES studies and public submissions. Depending on how complex the issues are, the inquiry may take one of three forms: a desktop review of written submissions, a conference of submitters and review of submissions, or a formal hearing, where the proponent and submitters can speak and present expert witnesses.

The draft PSA will be exhibited alongside the EES.

Key steps in the EES process

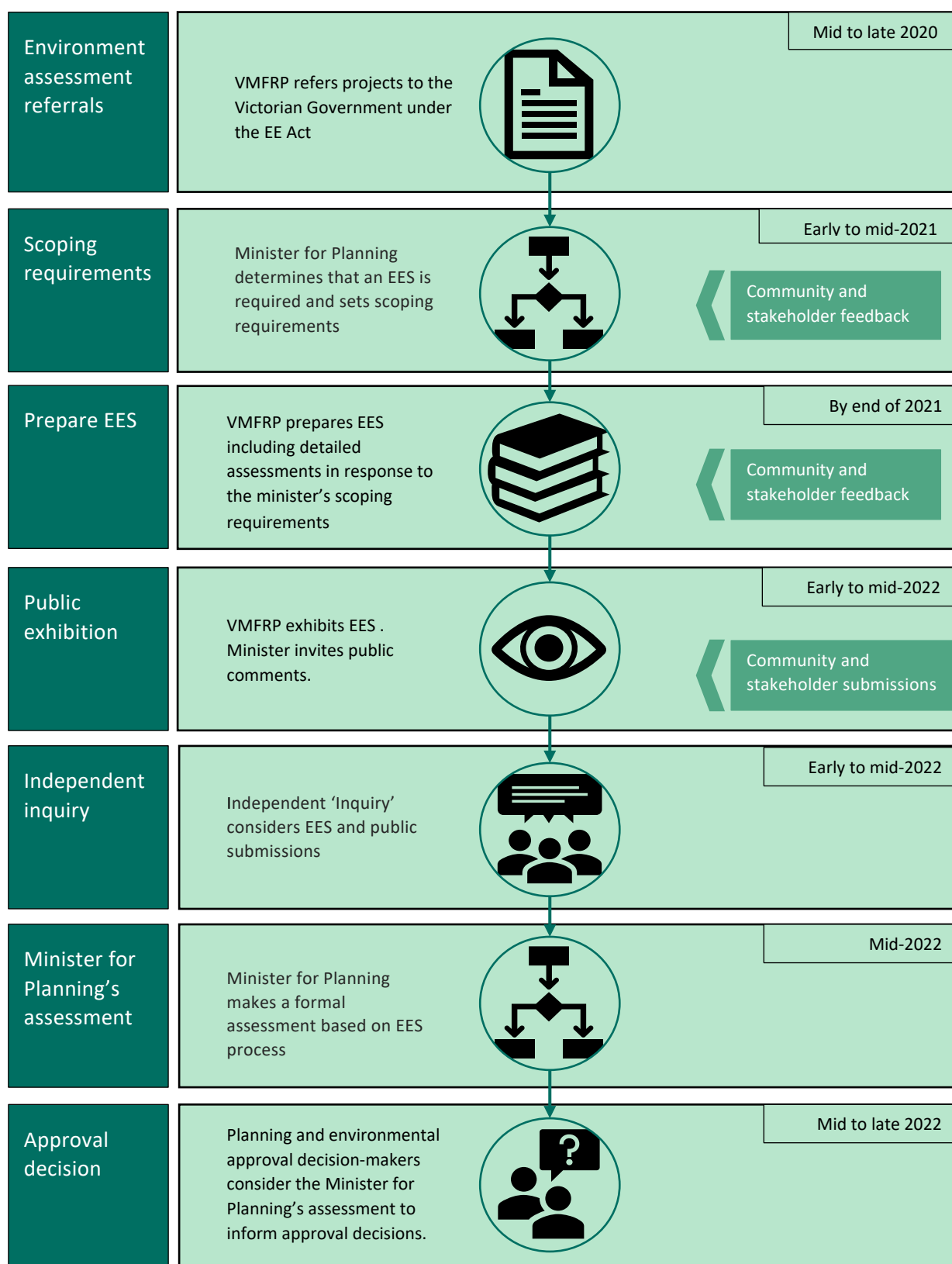


Figure 1: EES process and opportunities for community and stakeholder feedback

Planning Scheme Amendment

The projects at Hattah Lakes North and Belsar–Yungera require planning approval under the Mildura Planning Scheme and the Swan Hill Planning Scheme respectively in accordance with the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*. Planning approval can occur via planning permits under the local planning scheme or changes to the planning scheme known as a planning scheme amendment (PSA).

The VMFRP intends to make a request to the Minister for Planning under section 20(4) of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* to prepare, adopt and approve a PSA, without notice, to enable the projects to proceed without the need for further planning approval.

The draft PSA will be prepared and exhibited with the EES, giving the community and stakeholders a formal opportunity to give feedback on the draft PSA and EES process at the same time. For state projects, a draft PSA can be exhibited with the EES without having to go through the standard notice process.

Stakeholders will have other informal opportunities to give feedback leading up to the exhibition, as listed in *Section 7: Engagement tools and schedule of activities*.

In order to support the request, a report will be prepared detailing the consultation that has occurred on the draft PSA and proposed PSA process. The report will outline:

- the extent and type of notification
- a summary of key issues raised by submitters
- VMFRP's response to these issues, whether the issues have been satisfactorily addressed by the PSA or are outside the scope of the PSA.

Cultural heritage assessments

Separate to the EES process, a Cultural Heritage Management Plan is being prepared for each of the nine VMFRP sites. These plans assess the potential impact of projects on Aboriginal cultural heritage, and outline measures to be taken before, during and after construction to protect Aboriginal cultural heritage.

As part of this process, relevant Traditional Owners have been and will continue to be engaged to ensure significant sites, practices and places of Aboriginal cultural heritage are identified and protected.

2. Why do we need these projects?

The floodplains next to the Murray River have evolved to periodically receive water. Historically, the river would spill onto the floodplains as often as 8 out of every 10 years, creating rich, lush landscapes teeming with life.

As our towns, cities, agriculture and industries have grown over time, we have changed the way the river flows to suit our purposes by using weirs and dams. While this has benefitted regional communities and economies, water no longer flows naturally as it once did, and the Murray River can no longer water these floodplains often enough to keep them healthy. Figure 2 shows a natural flooding regime and the types of vegetation that benefit from wet and dry cycles at different levels of the floodplain.

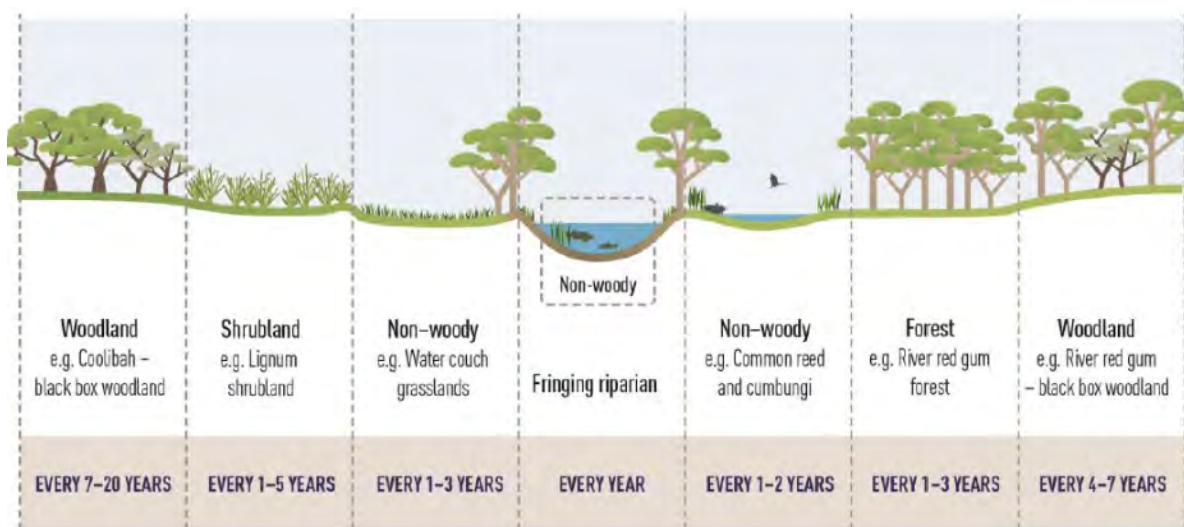


Figure 2: Stylised example of structural groups of vegetation, their position on the floodplain and their watering frequency (source: Murray–Darling Basin Authority, 2014)

The condition of forests and woodlands of the Murray River floodplains has been declining rapidly over the past two decades. Many of the river red gum and black box communities are stressed, particularly those further away from the river channel, permanent anabranches, creeks and wetlands.

River red gums are often referred to as the ‘ecological engineer’ of the floodplain – everything relies on them to maintain health. The canopy provides a home for bats and birds, fallen limbs provide habitat for snakes and small creatures, and fallen leaves add nutrients to the water. When the river red gums are struggling because they are not receiving water often enough, it indicates that the floodplain is at risk.

The VMFRP aims to return a more natural flooding regime across more than 14,000 hectares of high ecological value Murray River floodplain by removing blockages that stop floodwater flowing into creeks and building infrastructure like flow regulators, channels and containment banks to water the floodplain and hold water there for longer.

This water will bring new life by improving the condition of vegetation communities and providing habitat for native species like fish, birds, frogs and turtles. It will help the floodplains to survive and cope with climate change, future dry conditions and drought, so they can continue to be enjoyed by future generations. Figure 3 shows the difference this water can make.



Figure 3: Photo point monitoring shows river red gum tree conditions before environmental watering (above left, 2005) and after environmental watering (above right, 2007) at Hattah Lakes North (Source: Parks Victoria)

Project benefits

The project will restore the condition of the landscape, protecting threatened vegetation and the ecological and cultural values of the site through improved water quality, flows and inundation.

Healthier floodplains are good for:

Local wildlife

Lots of species rely on floodplains for food, habitat and breeding, from microscopic creatures to frogs, fish, birds, bats and other mammals.

We expect to see stable frog and fish populations, improved productivity of wetlands, improved breeding habitat for waterbirds and restoration of populations of species such as the carpet python and the Giles Planigale.

Vegetation

Flooding brings vegetation back to life, creating habitat, foraging and food for floodplain creatures.

Some flood dependent species like river red gums and black box trees rely on the bigger floods that used to happen every ten years. Animals such as bats and birds nest in the hollows of these trees.

Traditional Owners

Traditional Owners have cultural, spiritual and economic connections to land, water and resources through their relationship with Country, having managed land and water sustainably over thousands of generations.

Local communities and visitors

Healthy floodplains are beautiful places to visit and are great for recreation like boating, fishing, birdwatching, hiking, kayaking and camping.

Local economies

Projects will bring substantial financial investment into the region, creating jobs and helping local economies. Improving the health and condition of riverine landscapes can also help attract visitors to the region.

3. Planned works

Hattah Lakes North and Belsar–Yungera are located south of Mildura, close to Robinvale in northeast Victoria, as shown in Figure 4.

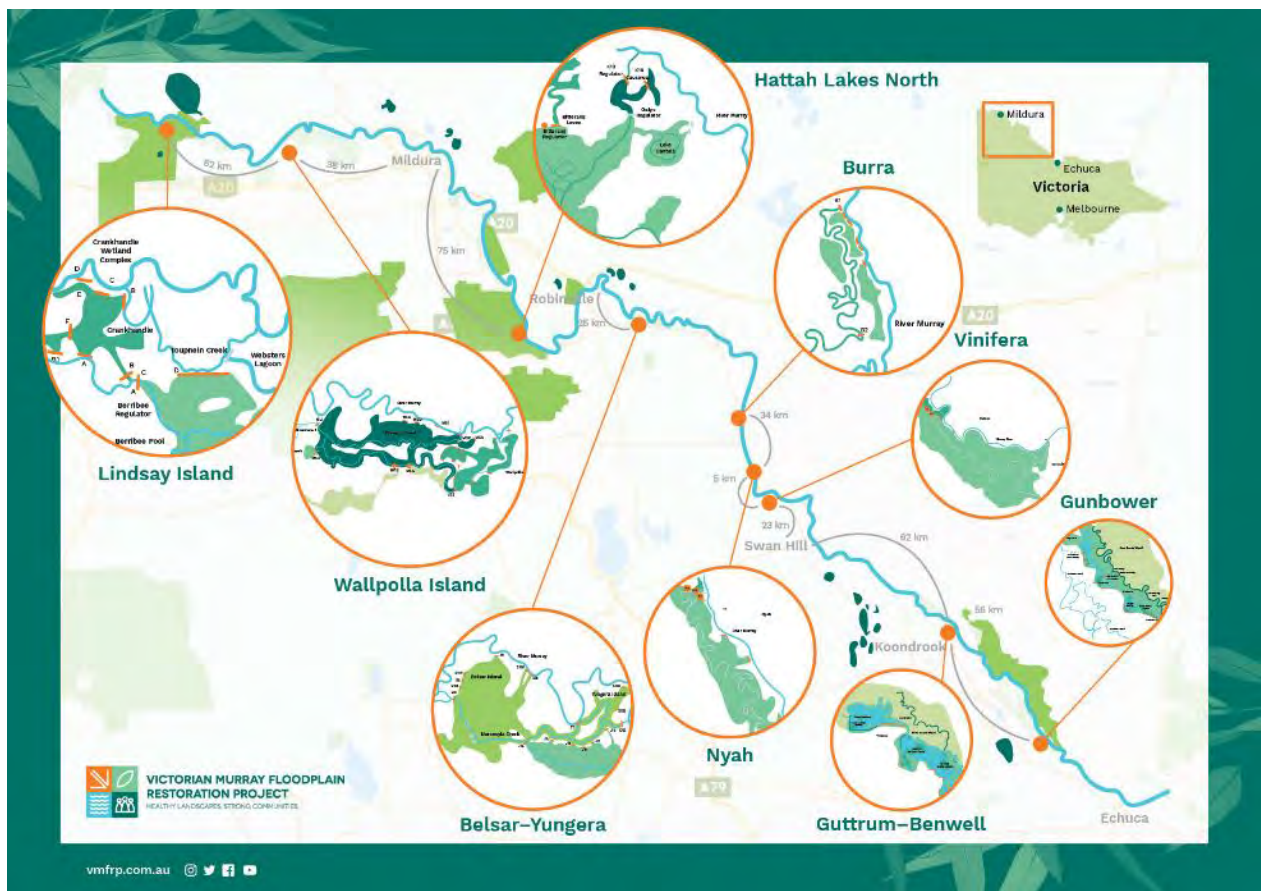


Figure 4: Map of the nine VMFRP sites

Planned works at Hattah Lakes North

The Hattah Lakes are located in the Hattah-Kulkyne National Park, about 75 km south of Mildura. The lakes are of great cultural and environmental importance and are Ramsar listed and are also one of The Living Murray Icon sites.

Hattah Lakes provides important waterbird breeding sites in an arid landscape. A total of 34 species of waterbirds are known to breed at the lakes when conditions are suitable. Another six species of waterbirds breed in the surrounding floodplain. Wetland drought-refuge sites are limited in the region, making Hattah Lakes critically important for waterbirds and terrestrial animals.

The Hattah Lakes complex can be broadly divided into the southern Hattah Lakes, which contain permanent to semi-permanent wetlands, and the higher-elevation northern Hattah Lakes, which are mostly ephemeral wetlands. Ephemeral wetlands are formed in closed depressions that are wet only seasonally or in wet years. They are isolated without a permanent inlet or outlet, but may overflow in times of high water.

Refer to Figure 5 in Appendix 1 for a map of the site and proposed works.

Floodplain works and river regulation have substantially reduced flooding in this area, leading to deterioration of wetlands and forests.

The project aims to restore a more natural flooding regime at up to 1,130 hectares of water-dependent floodplain habitats, including river red gum and black box forests and woodlands.

Proposed works involve building three regulators and about 1.8 km of raised access tracks (containment banks) to facilitate managed flooding of the Chalka Creek North floodplain and the floodplain north of the existing Bitterang Containment Bank through to Lake Boolca.

The proposed works complement the existing environmental infrastructure at Hattah Lakes built under The Living Murray program between 2013 and 2015.

Planned works at Belsar–Yungera

The Belsar–Yungera floodplain complex is a network of waterways, wetlands, lakes and floodplain. Altered flow regimes and floodplain inundation patterns caused by the regulation of the Murray River and Narcooyia Creek, together with extended periods of drought have resulted in a decline in floodplain health.

In response to this evident decline, localised environmental watering has already been undertaken using temporary infrastructure, resulting in positive ecological outcomes (Mallee CMA, 2014).

To mimic the impact of natural flood events, the VMFRP proposes to build three large regulators, one fishway, a number of small regulators, containment banks, pipelines and temporary pumping over four areas. These works have been designed to best align with the existing track network to minimise the potential impacts from the project.

The proposed works would facilitate an inundation of up to 2,374 hectares of river red gum and black box forests and woodlands.

There are currently six active apiary sites across the Belsar–Yungera floodplain complex which depend on seasonal flowering of river red gums. The project would increase the regularity and reliability of flowering due to the direct benefits of increased flooding on river red gum populations.

Refer to Figure 6 in Appendix 1 for a map of the site and proposed works.

4. Engagement approach

We need a mix of consultation methods to effectively engage with the spectrum of stakeholders interested in the EES process for these two projects.

The project will promote all engagement activities and provide up-to-date information about the process, so that stakeholders and communities can easily and meaningfully have their say.

A **stakeholder** refers to an individual, group or organisation with a stake or interest in the outcome of a decision. Stakeholders may also have the ability to influence the decision given their role or position.

Community, for the purpose of this project, refers to a group of people that has something in common such as identity, behaviours, interests or values. A community often share a sense of place in a given geographical area (e.g. a country, city, town or neighbourhood) or in virtual space through communication platforms.

This Plan acknowledges that groups or individuals may fall across all categories.

IAP2 Spectrum

We will use the [International Association for Public Participation – IAP2 International spectrum](#) to guide how the community and stakeholders will be engaged during the project planning and approval process. The IAP2 Spectrum is an internationally recognised tool for planning public participation in major projects.

The IAP2 Spectrum will allow us to tailor our approach depending on the different stakeholder groups and their needs. While the full spectrum goes from Inform to Empower, the EES consultation is focused on the first three engagement categories listed in Table 1.

Table 1: IAP2 Spectrum (inform to involve only)

	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE
Goal	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.
Promise	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision. We will see your feedback on draft proposals.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.

Consultation and engagement principles

The VMFRP is committed to meaningful, inclusive and transparent engagement at all times. Our work is informed by the engagement principles in the best practice guidelines in the [Victorian Government's Public Engagement Framework](#) (see Table 2).

Our approach also aligns with the Community Engagement and Partnerships Framework for Victoria's Catchment Management Authorities, and reflects the intent of the principles to be applied in environmental watering outlined in the Murray–Darling Basin Plan, specifically Principle 7, which states that environmental watering should be undertaken with regard to the view of the local communities and persons materially affected by the management of environmental water.

Table 2: Engagement principles

Principles	
Meaningful	Meaningful communication and engagement involves clearly articulating the purpose and objectives, as well as developing a shared understanding of the negotiables and non-negotiables.
Inclusive	Communication and engagement must be inclusive and accessible, both in terms of language and design/delivery. This is a proactive approach to considering and overcoming barriers to understanding and engagement. Asking an individual or group in how they would like to participate and designing the process accordingly demonstrates respect.
Transparent	This means sharing information about the project, its background and rationale. It also means explaining why elements are non-negotiable (cannot be influenced), and why other elements are negotiable (can be influenced) from the outset.
Informed	This principle is particularly relevant to communication. Stakeholders need to receive relevant, tailored and timely information about the projects. They also need to understand their role in the decision-making process, where this is relevant. Community members need to be informed of the opportunities to take part in engagement. They need to understand how their contributions will be considered.
Accountable	This involves addressing concerns/requests; discussing how stakeholder input has affected/or did not affect a decision. This is known as 'closing the loop'.
Valuable	Value is delivered through the appropriate and efficient use of resources. Value also includes building social licence with the community and reducing financial and reputational risks to government. Value also applies to participants and their time – community members should always be treated respectfully.

5. Stakeholder identification

We have many stakeholder groups with diverse needs and interests as listed in Table 3. Our engagement approach will be tailored to each group based on the IAP2 categorisation in Table 1.

We recognise that stakeholder relationships are dynamic, and interest and involvement can ebb and flow across project stages. Our stakeholder list may also expand over the course of the EES and PSA process as awareness grows and to reflect the evolving issues landscape.

The six VMFRP partners work together to deliver these projects and meet monthly through a Project Control Group. Since the projects started in 2010, a stakeholder consultation database has been developed and now contains more than 500 contacts across all nine sites.

Engagement specialists across all project partners organisations were involved in the stakeholder analysis.

The Hattah Lakes North project is located entirely in the Rural City of Mildura and the Mallee Catchment Management Authority region.

The Belsar–Yungera project is located almost entirely in the Rural City of Swan Hill and the MCMA region, with the exception of the temporary suction line during pumping events which would be located on the bank of the Murray River within the border of New South Wales (NSW) in the Balranald Shire Council area.

The main stakeholder groups and their needs and interests are listed in Table 3. A more detailed list of stakeholders is included in Appendix 2.

Table 3: VMFRP stakeholder groups

IAP2 engagement approach	Group	Needs and interests
Involve	Traditional Owners	Ongoing connection to Country and protection of cultural heritage and values. Environmental impacts and benefits. Basin Plan implementation. Involvement of Traditional Owners in decision-making roles.
	Australian Government	Delivering the Murray–Darling Basin Plan, which includes the nine Victorian floodplain restoration projects. Environmental impacts and benefits (EPBC approvals).
	State government	Cultural heritage, environmental impacts(EES), planning approvals. Alignment with NSW watering schedules.
	Local government	Planning scheme amendments, construction impacts, environmental impacts and benefits, tourism impacts and opportunities.
	Aboriginal community/groups	Ongoing connection to Country and protection of cultural heritage and values. Environmental impacts and benefits. Basin Plan implementation. Involvement of Traditional Owners in decision-making roles.
	Landholders – directly affected (need landholder agreements)*	Access to property during construction and/or operation, or impact of water on property during operation.

IAP2 engagement approach	Group	Needs and interests
		Land dealings, consumptive water use/access, construction impacts – traffic, dust, noise. Environmental impacts and benefits.
Consult	Landholders – adjacent and other (no landholder agreement needed)*	Consumptive water use/access, construction impacts – traffic, dust, noise. Environmental impacts and benefits.
	Research community and natural resource management practitioners	Floodplain health, biodiversity and use of environmental water, environmental impacts and benefits, Basin Plan implementation, preserving cultural heritage.
	Consumptive water users	Consumptive water use/access, environmental impacts and benefits, environmental water allocation.
	Recreational groups	Access to parks and river during construction and operation, visual impact of infrastructure on landscape, preservation of the landscape and ongoing tourism opportunities.
	Environmental groups	Impacts and benefits at project sites including ecological, flora and fauna, surface water, groundwater and hydrology and landscape. Basin Plan implementation.
	Commercial users of parks and waterways	Access to parks and river during construction and operation, visitor experience and tourism. Preservation of the landscape.
	Peak bodies	Economic, tourism and recreation benefits.
Inform	Local businesses	Economic, tourism and recreation benefits.
	Park visitors / seasonal communities	Economic, tourism and recreation benefits.
	Local residents	Access to parks and river during construction and operation. Visitor experience and access to amenities. Preservation of park landscapes.
	Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities	Project benefits and impacts on local communities, access to parks and river during construction and operation.
	Media	Project benefits and impacts on local communities.

* Directly affected landholders are landholders that will experience impacts on their land during construction and/or operation. These landholders will need agreements, e.g. tenure for access, borrow pits, inundation and flood easements. Adjacent landholders may be affected due to proximity to the works, but it will not directly impact their land and no landholder agreement is required.

Technical Reference Group

DELWP has convened an interagency Technical Reference Group (TRG) to advise the proponent and the department, as appropriate, on scoping and adequacy of the EES studies during the preparation of the EES, as well as coordination with statutory approval processes. TRG representatives are supported by internal experts on specific aspects of the EES studies.

The TRG has been set up to cover the environment assessment process at multiple VMFRP sites, with the following members:

- DELWP – Impact Assessment
- DELWP – Loddon Mallee Region
- Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment
- Department of Transport
- Aboriginal Victoria
- Heritage Victoria
- First People of the Millewa-Mallee Aboriginal Corporation
- Swan Hill Rural City Council
- Mildura Rural City Council
- Campaspe Shire Council
- Gannawarra Shire Council
- Mallee Catchment Management Authority
- North Central Catchment Management Authority
- Parks Victoria
- Lower Murray Water
- Goulburn-Murray Water
- Environment Protection Authority

Community reference group

In late 2019, the VMFRP set up a community reference group to facilitate community, landholder and key stakeholder input into the project.

The group has broad community and landholder representation and members provide feedback to the VMFRP on various aspects of project delivery, particularly in the communications and engagement space and give a diverse local perspective on the project.

Working with Traditional Owners

Hattah Lakes North and Belsar–Yungera are located in areas of Aboriginal cultural heritage sensitivity. Traditional Owners have cultural and spiritual connections to the land, surrounding waters and the plants and animals that live on the floodplains. As part of their culture, their health is intrinsically linked to a healthy landscape.

The EES will include an assessment of cultural heritage, and separate to the EES process, a Cultural Heritage Management Plan is being prepared for each site, as required under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*. These plans assess the potential impact of projects on Aboriginal cultural heritage, and outline measures to be taken before, during and after construction to protect Aboriginal cultural heritage.

The VMFRP is directly engaging with local Traditional Owner groups via face-to-face meetings and site visits in order to:

- ensure each Traditional Owner group understands exactly what is proposed for each site, and to address any concerns prior to the designs being finalised
- better understand the broader Traditional Owner land and aspirations for each site and how the VMFRP can support these through both the project design and the ongoing operations
- determine exactly how each Traditional Owner group would like to be engaged throughout the process
- develop Cultural Heritage Management Plans for each site
- explore how to incorporate Traditional Owner knowledge and science into the environmental assessment process.

The VMFRP will ensure Traditional Owners receive adequate time, appropriate engagement and are able to have meaningful interactions to ensure free, prior and informed consent relating to the project where appropriate.

VMFRP partners have existing relationships with Traditional Owners through their existing work on Country. Where possible, VMFRP will coordinate across the six partners to integrate environmental assessment conversations into their current engagement activities, to avoid consultation fatigue.

6. Consultation to date

Mallee Catchment Management Authority started working with key stakeholders and interested community groups to develop the concept for the Hattah Lakes North and Belsar–Yungera floodplain restoration projects as early as 2010.

Business cases for what were then known as the nine Sustainable Diversion Limits (SDL) projects were submitted to the Murray–Darling Basin Authority in late 2014.

Following state and commonwealth approval of the business cases, the VMFRP was proposed as a business model in 2017–18 and engagement began under this model in 2019.

VMFRP communication and engagement activities conducted before the EES process have included:

- more than 200 face-to-face briefing sessions, meetings, presentations, onsite visits and consultations, engaging more than 500 people, which is reflective of the wide range of project stakeholders
- fact sheets, media releases, electronic communication (website, emails, newsletters), brochures and correspondence.

Table 4 outlines the key project milestones with stakeholder engagement to date highlighted.

It is planned for construction to start in 2023 with all 9 floodplain restoration projects to be operational by mid-2024.

Table 4: VMFRP project milestones and consultation to date

Year	Milestone	Activity
2010	Scope out projects	Mallee CMA and North Central CMA start early planning with support from DELWP.
2013	Basin Plan water-saving projects	Victoria is invited to put forward a package of environmental water projects to be implemented as SDL projects under the Murray–Darling Basin Plan.
2014	Develop SDL business cases	SDL business cases developed after extensive consultation with community, Traditional Owners and other stakeholders.
Engagement activities during development of the business cases included briefing sessions, meetings, presentations and field visits, fact sheets, media releases, on-Country visits with Traditional Owners, electronic communication (website, emails, newsletters), brochures and correspondence.		
2017–18	Propose delivery model	Victorian Government prepared a delivery strategy for the nine sites outlining governance, delivery and asset ownership arrangements and proposes to form the VMFRP to deliver works under a partnership model.
2018	Projects incorporated into Basin Plan	36 projects, including the nine VMFRP sites, are incorporated into the Basin Plan.
2019	Form VMFRP	Australian and Victorian governments announced that the nine projects will be delivered as a program of works under the VMFRP. Initial funding of \$29 million provided to start detailed design of the nine projects.
2019–20	Prepare for environmental referrals	VMFRP continued to develop the projects, including preliminary Cultural Heritage Management Plans, fieldwork, engagement, scientific studies and baseline monitoring to prepare for environmental referrals process.

Year	Milestone	Activity
Engagement recommenced in 2019 after funding was received to start the project and has been ongoing since then. Engagement activities to date have included face-to-face engagement, site visits, information sessions, meetings (including a community reference group), phone calls, presentations and project briefings. COVID-19 restricted the format of the engagement activities during 2020. When social distancing restrictions prevented face-to-face engagement, engagement was done online and via phone.		
2020	Submit environmental referrals	Environmental referrals sent to Commonwealth and Victorian governments to get decisions on the assessment process.
2021	Environment assessment process	EES preparation began.

Issues identification

Stakeholder engagement to date and preliminary technical investigations have helped the VMFRP to understand the existing conditions and key issues for consideration within the project area, as well as stakeholder and landholder concerns. This has helped the VMFRP to develop and refine the project design and alignment.

Table 5 lists the main project concerns raised to date by stakeholders and what the VMFRP is doing to resolve these issues. This list will be continually assessed as the project progresses so that issues can be addressed with the relevant stakeholder groups as needed.

Table 5 Issues identification and project response

What we've heard	What we're doing about it
Access to parks and river during construction and operation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to parts of the park will be maintained during construction. • All changes to public access during construction will be communicated to the public ahead of time. • Disruption to public access to the parks during operation will be minimised where possible.
Environmental impacts and benefits. Risk of negative environmental impacts such as blackwater and increased salinity, removal of native vegetation and impacts on flora and fauna	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VMFRP is carrying out extensive research into the potential environmental impacts during construction and beyond, and how these impacts will be managed. This includes plans for each watering event and plans for monitoring, to reduce the likelihood of adverse environmental outcomes. • VMFRP will expand groundwater and salinity modelling to better understand and mitigate potential impacts. New monitoring bores installed in 2020 to enable collection and use of data to best inform models. • The community will have the opportunity to provide feedback on these studies as part of the EES process.
Governance structures do not allow for involvement of Traditional Owners in decision-making roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VMFRP is working with Traditional Owners to establish relationships and facilitate meaningful opportunities for input into both project-specific decisions, and future operational decisions (e.g. influencing environmental water deliveries via seasonal watering plans).
Ongoing connection to Country and protection of cultural heritage and values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intensive engagement is under way with Traditional Owners to seek early input and understand landscape values and how the project can support and protect these. • VMFRP is preparing Cultural Heritage Management Plans at all sites with input from Traditional Owners.

What we've heard	What we're doing about it
Project benefits and rationale need to be clearly communicated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing targeted communications materials which outline the project benefits and rationale and using various engagement methods to reach different stakeholder groups. • Developing a Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting framework and program which will demonstrate the benefits and how these will be achieved. • Intensive engagement with the community and stakeholders. • Aboriginal Waterway Assessments will be supported to help improve understanding of Traditional Owners' values of each site and how the projects could positively impact these.
Projects will take water away from irrigators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VMFRP will work closely with landholders to communicate that projects will use existing environmental water entitlements and will protect farmers and irrigators, by improving the environment without need to buy back more water.

7. Engagement tools and schedule of activities

Successful coordination and integration of stakeholder and community engagement, planning and design is critical to achieving successful project outcomes. We will provide regular updates via email and the website on the outcomes of the engagement, including what feedback has been received and how this feedback has been considered in project planning, design and methodology.

A range of engagement tools and activities will be used to keep people informed about the EES investigations and highlight opportunities for involvement at each stage of the EES process. Feedback will be received in written and verbal form, via digital and traditional channels. All communications will be kept clear, concise and culturally appropriate.

Stakeholder communications will be strategically planned and combined to minimise the risk of consultation fatigue in the community.

Consultation during COVID-19

If faced with COVID-19 restrictions that prevent face-to-face engagement, all engagement will be delivered online and via phone using alternative methods such as those listed in Table 6.

Table 6: Consultation during COVID-19 restrictions

Face-to-face engagement method	Alternative option in the event of COVID-19 restrictions
Meetings	Phone calls and video meetings
Information sessions, briefings and presentations	Webinars and online meetings
Site visits	Virtual site visits using video footage

Engagement tools

The following illustrates some of the communication and engagement tools and activities that will be used to keep people informed and provide meaningful opportunities or involvement.

Project website

The VMFRP website (www.vmfrp.com.au) provides a central hub of project information and is continually updated with project news. Written materials such as e-updates and printed communication materials and advertising will direct people to the website as a central project resource.

Community events

VMFRP representatives will attend key community events to promote the projects and get feedback on social values relating to the project sites.

Community reference groups

A community reference group was set up in late 2019 for the central VMFRP sites (Hattah Lakes North, Belsar–Yungera, Nyah, Vinifera and Burra Creek). The group has broad representation from local stakeholders and the community with meetings expected to take place quarterly. Members provide feedback to the VMFRP on various aspects of project delivery and give a local perspective on the project.

Targeted meetings/workshops

Targeted meetings will be held with stakeholder groups requiring focused and tailored information such as special interest groups, consumer representatives and industry groups, regulators and policymakers and Traditional Owner groups. These opportunities allow for targeted conversations on specific interests or issues with technical experts. Meetings and workshops can be held online or face-to-face (where possible), as required.

Online interactive sessions

Online sessions will be used to give the public project updates and share feedback with key members of the project team and with technical specialists.

Dedicated project email

A dedicated project email provides a direct contact point for stakeholders and the community to ask key questions and seek support to participate in the EES and PSA process.

Project e-news

Project e-news will be sent to contacts in the project database and new subscribers that we log via specific engagement sessions or the VMFRP website. Updates will be sent at regular intervals and key project milestones to keep people informed and highlight opportunities to get involved.

Printed communication materials

Printed materials such as project factsheets, letters and posters will be distributed to key locations and to directly affected landholder to raise awareness of the project and opportunities to be involved.

Media and advertising

We will work through key local media outlets, digital channels and social media to provide project updates and raise awareness of opportunities to participate in upcoming engagement. Media and advertising will also seek to investigate opportunities through existing community communication channels where appropriate.

Directly affected landholder engagement

In addition to the public and community stakeholder engagement methods outlined above, targeted one-on-one consultation with directly affected landholders will continue throughout all project phases, due to the need to negotiate landholder agreements. This engagement will focus on face-to-face methods and direct email and phone channels.

Hard to reach

Consideration has been given to the following cultural and social factors that may impede the participation of some groups in consultation for the Hattah Lakes North and Belsar–Yungera floodplain restoration projects. We will use a range of communication approaches to help us communicate more broadly with these groups, as listed in Table 7.

Table 7: Hard-to-reach stakeholder approach

Lack of reach	Communication needs	Communication approach
Residents with no internet access	Access to information via non-web-based channels.	Send mailouts and printouts to nearby landholders.
Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities	Needs to be determined through engagement with CALD community.	Provide tailored information for CALD communities.
Casual park users or visitors from out of the local area	Onsite information	Install Signage installed in parks. Statewide environmental groups will be engaged and may send information onto members outside of the local area. Local tourist information centres will be kept informed of upcoming work.
Workers, such as agricultural workers may work outside of standard business hours or be constrained by seasonal activities	Need to access information outside of business hours	Promote online resources such as the VMFRP website portal as an 'always on' engagement mechanism.

Schedule of activities

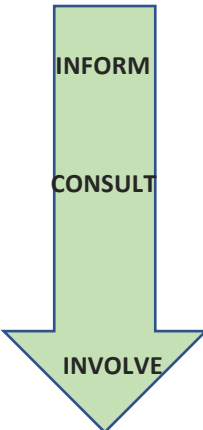
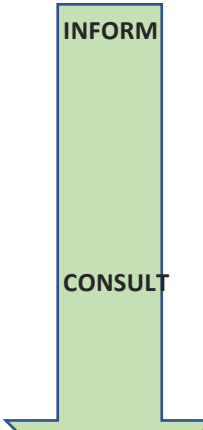
Table 8 lists the engagement and communication methods planned for each stage of the EES process based on the IAP2 Spectrum.

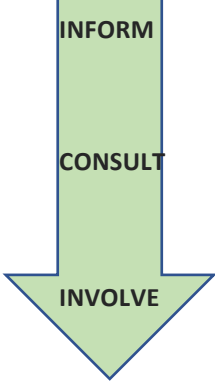
The schedule is focused primarily on the EES process, but it is worth recognising that considerable work has already gone into project planning and engaging with stakeholders and the community on these projects.

After the EES process, if projects are approved to go ahead, the VMFRP will develop and implement a separate communications and engagement plan for the construction phase of the project. The VMFRP will continue to work with all interested parties to inform them about proposed road, track or park facility closures in a timely and readily available manner to minimise disruption.

This plan is supported by an [addendum with a more detailed schedule of planned engagement activities](#).

Table 8: Engagement activities (high-level)

Project stage	Timing	Engagement purpose	Examples of planned activities	Engage level
<p>Scoping of EES</p> <p>Minister for Planning determines that an EES is required and releases draft scoping requirements for comment</p>	<p>Early to mid-2021</p>	<p>Introduce the EES process, explain the role stakeholders and communities can play and project timelines (ongoing throughout the EES activity).</p> <p>Promote the public exhibition of draft EES scoping requirements.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publish preliminary project and EES information on vmfrp.com.au • Send project updates to registered subscribers and project stakeholders (anyone can subscribe on the VMFRP website) (ongoing throughout EES process) • Updates on social media and VMFRP website (ongoing throughout EES process) • Advertise key EES stages in the local media (via DELWP) • Email update to stakeholders listed at the 'consult' level • Letter drop to landholders and Traditional Owners • Email and phone enquiries (ongoing throughout EES process) • TRG meetings and presentations (ongoing throughout EES process) • Onsite investigations and cultural heritage assessments (ongoing throughout EES process) • Contact directly affected landholders to discuss projects and formal agreements • Improve diversity of the Project Control Group through Aboriginal membership 	
<p>Preparing the EES</p> <p>VMFRP prepares and EES including detailed assessments in response to the Minister's scoping requirements. The draft PSA will be prepared alongside the EES</p>	<p>Mid to late 2021</p>	<p>Provide information on the project design, impact assessments, benefits, key design considerations, concepts, constraints and options being considered.</p> <p>Get community feedback to help further refine and shape the project design, inform measures to avoid, mitigate and manage impacts.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to update project website with EES information • Signage at parks to inform park visitors • Letter drop to local businesses • Posters and signage for local councils, MP offices, libraries and community notice boards • Continue to produce and publish project materials – FAQ, videos, maps, factsheets, case studies • Media requests/releases • Community reference group meetings • Promote projects at community events • Roadshow at community events to obtain community feedback • Targeted stakeholder site visits and fieldtrips • Briefings and information sessions • Collect and collate feedback from engagement and events • Prepare and share a report on benefits to communities of healthy floodplains • Produce consultation report to show issues raised and how they were addressed by the project • Develop monitoring and evaluation system 	

Project stage	Timing	Engagement purpose	Examples of planned activities	Engage level
		Identify where consultation and engagement should be modified.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information sessions with environmental and technical specialists Work with local government on draft planning scheme amendment, local impacts and opportunities 	
Public review of EES Exhibit EES for public comment. Inquiry established and submissions considered. Prepare inquiry report. Draft PSA goes on display with the EES.	Early to mid-2022	Release the project design. Present and explain the EES and draft PSA. Explain the next steps in the EES assessment process. Help the community make panel submissions.	Continue with activities planned for scope and preparation phase, plus: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Publish relevant EES and draft PSA documents online or provide links Advertise exhibition Promote DELWP's submissions process Roadshow at community events to obtain community feedback Respond to public submissions at the Independent Assessment Committee hearings 	
Minister for Planning's Assessment	Mid-2022	Minister for Planning makes a formal assessment based on EES process to inform decision makers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep stakeholders and community informed about assessment status and possible next steps via channels mentioned above such as e-news, website, social media and phone calls Announce Minister's assessment 	

8. Recording, monitoring and reporting

Capturing feedback and closing the loop

VMFRP has a feedback loop process in place to capture all feedback received and to direct it to the relevant section of the project for consideration. When the EES is published for public consultation in 2022, it will include a consultation report which summarises all the issues raised during the EES process and how the project proponent responded, enabling stakeholders to see how their feedback has been addressed.

Stakeholder management database

VMFRP will maintain a stakeholder management database for the life of the project to retain information relevant to the development of the project. The stakeholder management database, Consultation Manager (CM), will also record enquiries, feedback and complaints raised and details of the relevant response/resolution. CM will be used to record all external communications and stakeholder engagement activities.

Complaints

VMFRP has established a Complaints Register which is being maintained throughout the life of the Project. The Complaints Register provides a structure for lodging and managing all information in relation to complaints. The VMFRP will register and endeavour to acknowledge it as a complaint within 48 hours of receiving it and provide a timeframe for the follow-up and close-out of any investigation (within 5 business days where possible).

Complaints will be carefully distinguished from adverse project feedback from the community or key stakeholders, or comments given during difficult discussions with owners and occupiers of land – all of which will be recorded in the stakeholder management database, and actioned as appropriate.

A complaint may relate to the quality of an action taken, decision made or service provided by VMFRP or its contractors or a delay or failure in providing a service, taking an action or making a decision by VMFRP or its contractors.

Media enquiries

All media enquiries are directed to the VMFRP Communications Team responsible for handling media enquiries on behalf of the project.

Personal information

VMFRP is committed to handling and protecting personal information in accordance with Australian Privacy Principles set out in the *Commonwealth Privacy Act 1988*. Information collected in discussions with landholders will solely be used by VMFRP and its representatives for project purposes.

All other information gathered during the project will be archived securely in accordance with Australian Privacy Principles set out in the *Commonwealth Privacy Act 1988*.

Measuring engagement

The VMFRP has an engagement evaluation process which will monitor the effectiveness of our engagement approach over time against the key performance indicators listed in Table 9.

We will use this information to progressively improve our consultation activities.

Table 9: Evaluating our approach

Objective	How we will measure
Inform stakeholders, Traditional Owners and local communities about the proposed project and program of EES studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number/rate of website visits • Information sent out by letter and email • Number of participants at events and participant feedback • Signage installed in parks • Number of media articles and interviews • Number of posters in community areas • Number of email and phone discussions
Encourage participation and providing opportunities for local communities, Traditional Owners and stakeholders to be involved in the EES process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No. of formal submissions to DELWP • Website visits and downloads of information documents • Interactions with social media • Number of participants at events and participant feedback • Feedback from TRG • Number of adverts and media interaction • Number of field trips • Number of meetings/workshops/briefings • Number of working groups • Surveys
Communicate in a timely, clear, accessible and easily understandable manner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of methods used to distribute communications • Tracking of deliverables against the Consultation Plan
Show how community and stakeholder concerns have been considered in the project and EES development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring issues/complaints recorded through stakeholder interactions • Demonstrated consideration of community and stakeholder input in project development/decision-making • Final consultation report • Feedback on how community and stakeholder input was used

9. More information

To learn more about the VMFRP, visit vmfrp.com.au

DELWP's planning website has lots of information on the [EES process](#) and lists [current EES projects](#).

To find out more about the Hattah Lakes North and Belsar–Yungera EES process, visit: www.planning.vic.gov.au/environment-assessment/browse-projects/projects/hattah-lakes-north-floodplain-restoration-project-and-belsar-yungera-floodplain-restoration-project

The original referral documents can also be viewed under [referrals and decisions](#) on the Planning website.

Table 10 lists the VMFRP's contact information.

Table 10: Project contact information

Proponent	Lower Murray Urban and Rural Water Corporation
Project name	Victorian Murray Floodplain Restoration Project (VMFRP)
Office location	PO Box 1438, Mildura VIC 3502
Website	www.vmfrp.com.au
Email	Info@vmfrp.vic.gov.au
Follow us	twitter.com/vmfrp facebook.com/VMFRP/ instagram.com/vmfrp/ youtube.com/channel/

Get involved

Email info@vmfrp.vic.gov.au to register your interest in the EES consultation process.

Appendix 1: Detailed maps

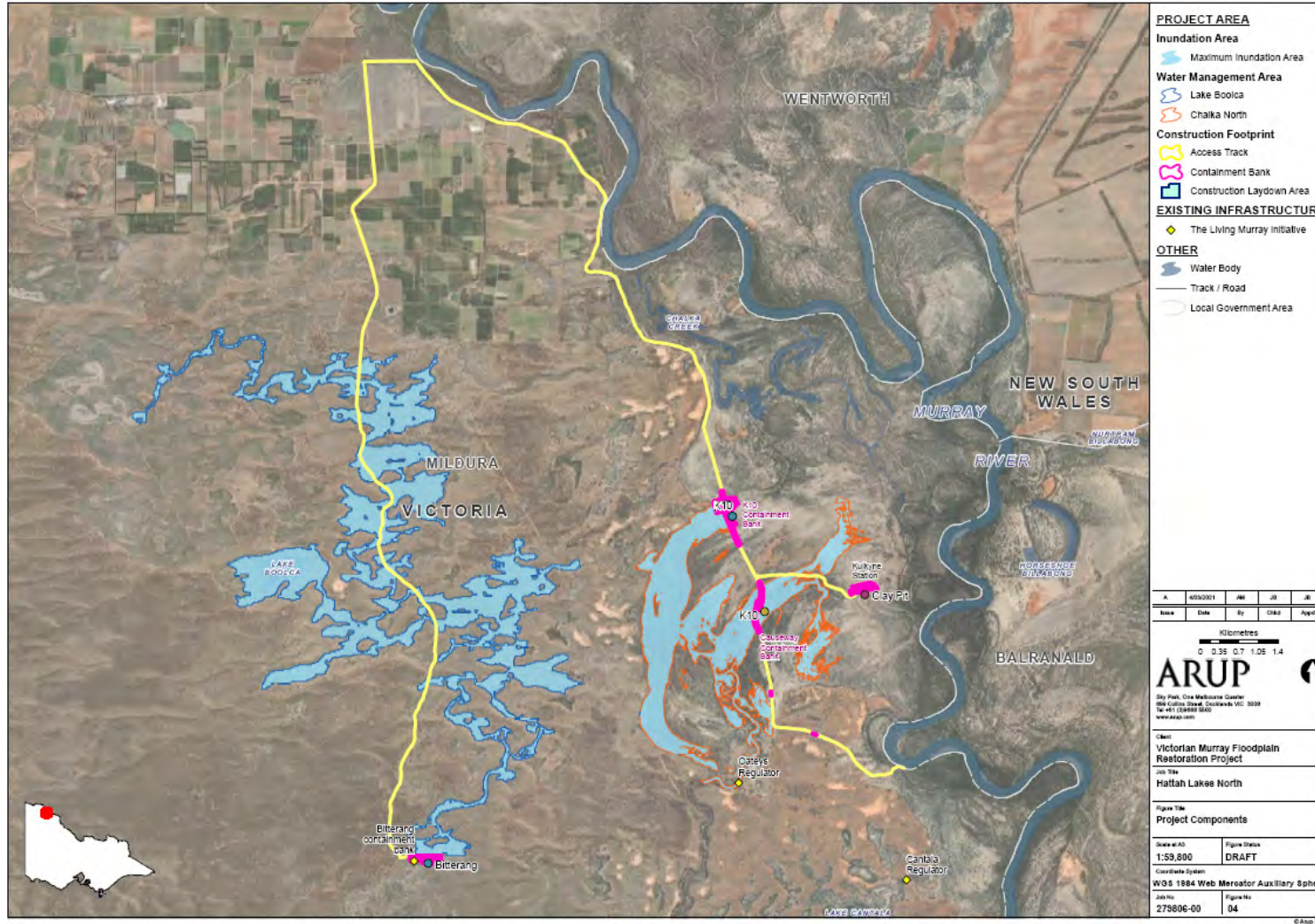


Figure 5: Site location and planned works at Hattah Lakes North (Source: ARUP)

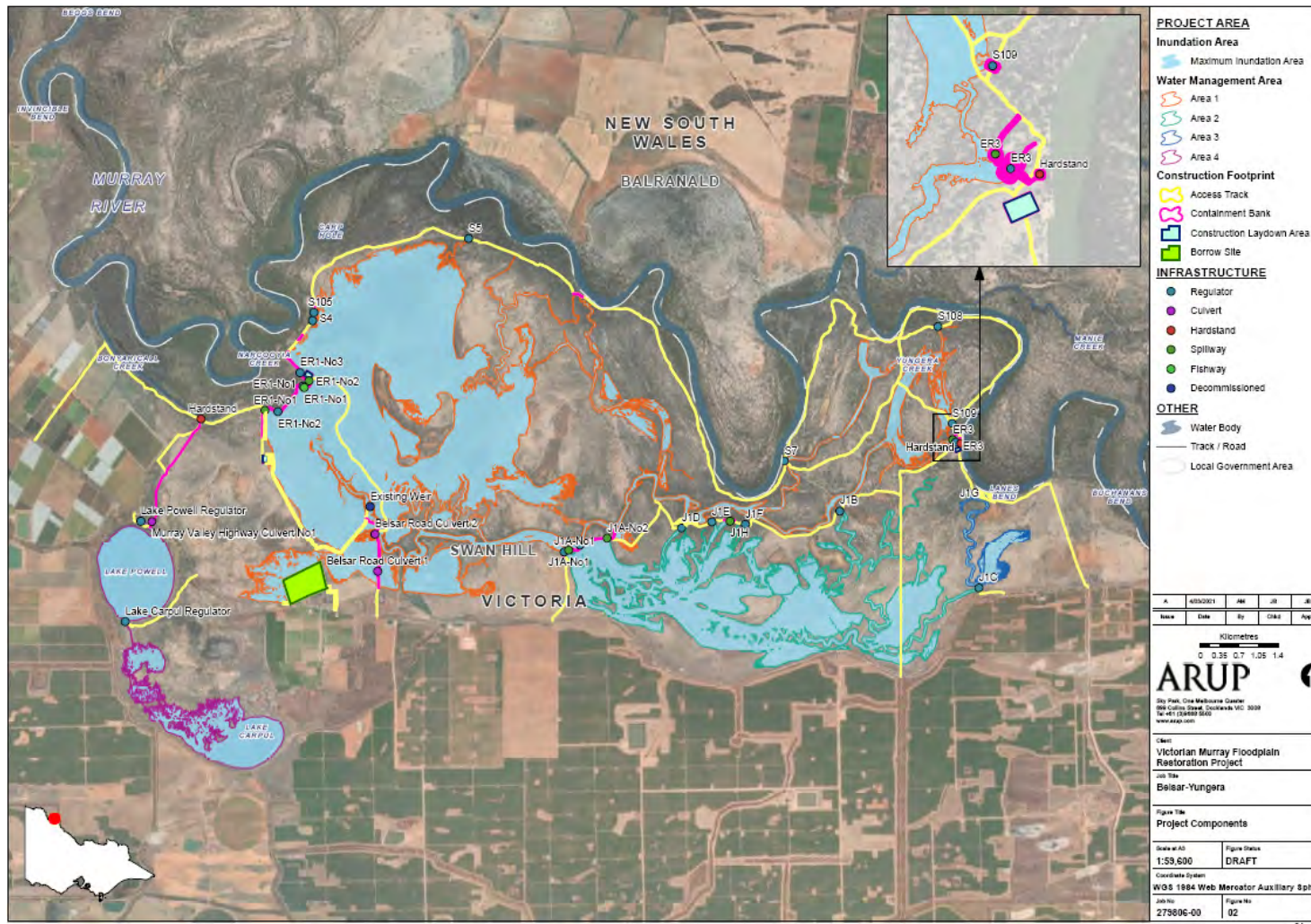


Figure 6: Site location and planned works at Belsar–Yungera (Source: ARUP)

Appendix 2: Detailed list of stakeholders

Table 11 provides a more detailed list of stakeholders. This list may be incomplete and more stakeholders will be added over the course of the EES and PSA process as awareness grows and to reflect the evolving issues landscape.

Table 11: Detailed stakeholder list

Group	Stakeholder
Traditional Owners	Traditional Owner groups: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wadi Wadi Land & Water Indigenous Corporation • Tati Tati Aboriginal Corporation • Latji Latji Mumthelang Aboriginal Corporation • Dadi Dadi Weki Weki Aboriginal Corporation • Tati Tat Land and Water Indigenous Corporation • Gilbe Aboriginal Corporation • Murray Valley Aboriginal Corporative (Belsar–Yungera only)
Australian Government	Minister for Resources, Water and Northern Australia –the Hon Keith Pitt MP Federal MP for Mallee – Anne Webster Minister for the Environment and Federal MP for Farrer, NSW – Sussan Ley Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment Murray–Darling Basin Authority Commonwealth Environmental Water Office
State Government	Victorian Minister for Water – The Hon. Lisa Neville, MP Victorian Minister for Planning – The Hon Richard Wynne MP Victorian Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change – The Hon Lily D’Ambrosio MP Victorian Minister for Aboriginal Affairs – The Hon Gabrielle Williams MP Victorian MP for Mildura – Ali Cupper DELWP, Planning Group DELWP, Forest, Fire & Regions Group Victorian Environmental Water Holder Department of Transport Mallee Catchment Management Authority Lower Murray Water Parks Victoria Sports and Recreation Victoria Regional Development Victoria Invest Victoria Agriculture Victoria Heritage Victoria Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions – Earth Resources Regulation Environmental Protection Authority Victorian Minister for Aboriginal Affairs – The Hon Gabrielle Williams MP Aboriginal Victoria Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council SA Water NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment Victorian Fisheries Authority Other prescribed Ministers under the <i>Planning and Environment Act 1987</i> : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Hon. Mary-Anne Thomas, Minister for Agriculture

Group	Stakeholder
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Hon Jaclyn Symes, Minister for Resource
Local government	<p>Mildura Rural City Council (Hattah Lakes North) Rural City of Swan Hill (Belsar–Yungera) Balranald Shire Council (NSW) Municipal Association of Victoria Murray River Group of Councils Murray Darling Association</p>
Aboriginal community/groups	<p>Mallee District Aboriginal Services Munatunga Elders Corporation Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations (MLDRIN) Robinvale Indigenous Landcare Group (also listed under local environmental groups) Robinvale Aboriginal Elders Committee</p>
Landholders	<p>Includes directly affected and adjacent landholders. Directly affected landholders are landholders that will experience impacts on their land during construction and/or operation and require landholder agreements. Adjacent landholders may be affected due to proximity to the works, but it will not directly impact their land and no landholder agreement is required.</p>
Research community and natural resource management practitioners	<p>Arthur Rylah Institute for Environmental Research (ARI) CSIRO MDBA Research programs at universities</p>
Consumptive water users	<p>Amaretto Almonds Citrus Australia Dried Fruits Australia LMW Private Diverters Irrigation Customer Services Advisory Committee Nangiloc Farms NSW Irrigators Group OLAM almonds Robinvale Wines Select Harvest (almond grower) Sunvale Produce Tumut Grove Citrus</p>
Recreational groups	<p>Boating Industry Association of Victoria Far West Anglers Association Mildura 4WD Club Inc. Murray Downs Angling Club Inc. OzFish Sunraysia Sunraysia Bushwalkers Association Swan Hill 4WD Club Swan Hill Inc. Swan Hill Motor Racing Club Tooleybuc & Piangil District Fishing Club Victorian Apiarists Association – Sunraysia Branch Victorian Recreational Fishing</p>
Environmental groups - local	<p>350 Mallee Climate Action Group Australian Conservation Foundation Community Mildura</p>

Group	Stakeholder
	<p>Australian Plants Society – Mildura BirdLife Australia – Mildura Mallee Conservation and Landcare Group Mid-Murray Field Naturalists Inc. Mid-Murray Seed Bank Murray Darling Wetlands Working Group Ltd Red Cliffs Community Landcare Group Robinvale Indigenous Landcare Group Sunraysia River Watch Sustainable Living in the Mallee (SLIM) Tyntynder Landcare Group Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group</p>
Environmental groups - state	<p>Australian Conservation Foundation BirdLife Australia Environmental Defenders Office Environmental Justice Australia Environment Victoria Field Naturalists Club of Victoria Fishcare Victoria Inc – AAA Friends of the Earth Landcare Victoria Nativefish Australia (Vic.) People and Parks Foundation Platypus Australia Victorian Apiarists Association Victorian Environmental Friends Network Victorian Field Naturalists Victorian National Parks Association Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists Wildlife Victoria</p>
Commercial users of parks and waterways	<p>Discover Mildura - Day Tours Gippsland High Country Tours (birds of Hattah-Kulkyne and Murray Sunset Tour) Houseboat Hirers Association Lock 9 Lodge Mildura Paddle Steamers Melbourne, Rothbury and Mundoo Murray Offroad Adventures</p>
Peak bodies	<p>Almond Board of Australia Citrus Australia Dried Fruits Australia Irrigation Australia Mildura Regional Development Murray Regional Tourism Board National Irrigators Council Paddle Victoria Robinvale Euston Agriculture Society Ski Racing Victoria</p>

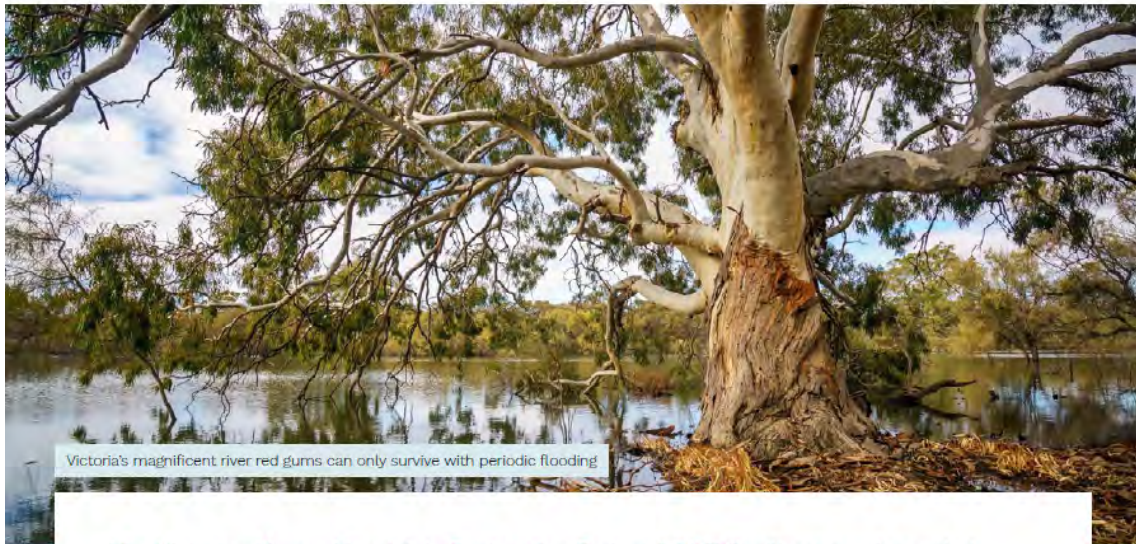
Group	Stakeholder
	<p>Victorian Apiarists Association – Sunraysia Branch</p> <p>VicWater</p> <p>VRFish</p>
Local businesses	<p>Businesses/ suppliers / contractors and trader groups</p> <p>Austrek Adventure Centre - TJM Mildura valley Distillery</p> <p>Blue Sky Swan Hill</p> <p>Hattah Roadhouse</p> <p>Mildura 4WD - ARB & Markraft Engineering</p> <p>Robinvale Estate (olive growers)</p> <p>Robinvale Golf</p> <p>Robinvale Golf Club</p> <p>Sportz 'N' Craft</p>
Park visitors / seasonal communities	<p>Big4 Swan Hill</p> <p>Big4 Swan Hill Riverside</p> <p>Discover Mildura</p> <p>Eusto Club Resort</p> <p>Exquisite Houseboat</p> <p>Mildura Visitor Information Centre</p> <p>Murray Regional Tourism Board</p> <p>Robinvale Bridge Motel</p> <p>Robinvale Euston Agricultural Show</p> <p>Robinvale Motel</p> <p>Robinvale Riverside Caravan Park</p> <p>Robinvale–Euston 80 Ski Race (Labour day weekend - cancelled in 2021)</p> <p>Robinvale–Euston Tourist Information Centre</p> <p>Visit Mildura</p> <p>Other recreational park users (not part of a group)</p>
Local residents	<p>Boundary Bend Progress Association</p> <p>Mildura Senior Citizens Club</p> <p>Nangiloc / Colignan & District Community Association</p> <p>Nangiloc Progress Association</p> <p>Ouyen Inc.</p> <p>Red Cliffs and District Historical Society</p> <p>Robinvale & District Lions Club</p> <p>Rotary Club of Robinvale Euston</p> <p>Sunraysia Farmers Market</p> <p>Swan Hill Farmers Market</p> <p>Swan Hill Lions Club Inc.</p> <p>Swan Hill Rotary Club</p> <p>Wemen Progress Association</p>
CALD communities	<p>Sunraysia Mallee Ethnic Communities Council (SMECC)</p>
Media	<p>Media – local</p> <p>3SH radio</p> <p>5RM</p> <p>ABC Mildura Swan Hill</p> <p>ABC Riverland</p> <p>Country News</p>

Group	Stakeholder
	Mildura Weekly Nine News Central Victoria River 1467 Robinvale Sentinel Sunraysia Daily Swan Hill Guardian The Murray Pioneer
	Media – statewide Weekly Times ABC Victoria WIN TV

Appendix 3: Project factsheet

The [project fact sheet](#) is available for download on the VMFRP website.

Bringing Murray River floodplains back to life



Victoria's magnificent river red gums can only survive with periodic flooding

The Victorian Murray Floodplain Restoration Project (VMFRP) will get much needed water back onto nine high-value floodplains along the Murray River. Without this water, these iconic landscapes will continue to decline – along with the many native trees, animals and plants that depend on them.

Restoring the floodplains

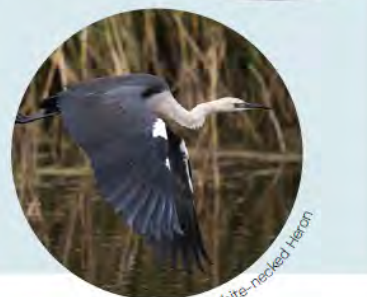
The floodplains next to the Murray River have evolved to periodically receive water. Historically, the river would spill onto the floodplains as often as 8 out of every 10 years, creating rich, lush landscapes teeming with life.

As our towns, cities, agriculture and industries have grown over time, we have changed the way the river flows to suit our purposes by using weirs and dams.

While this has benefited regional communities and economies, water no longer flows naturally as it once did, and the Murray River can no longer water these floodplains often enough to keep them healthy.

The VMFRP will remove blockages that stop floodwater flowing into creeks and build infrastructure like flow regulators, channels and containment banks to water the floodplain and hold water there for longer.

This water will bring new life and help these nine ecologically significant floodplains to survive and cope with future dry conditions and drought, so they can continue to be enjoyed by future generations.



White-necked Heron

Healthy floodplains are teeming with life

Here are some of the species that will benefit from these floodplain restoration projects.



Healthier floodplains are good for:

Local communities and visitors

Healthy floodplains are beautiful places to visit and are great for recreation like boating, fishing and camping.

Traditional Owners

Traditional Owners have cultural, spiritual, and economic connections to land, water and resources through their relationship with Country, having managed land and water sustainably over thousands of generations.

Local wildlife

Lots of species rely on floodplains for food, habitat and breeding, from microscopic creatures to frogs, fish, birds, bats and other mammals.

Vegetation

Flooding brings vegetation back to life, creating habitat, foraging and food for floodplain creatures.

Some flood dependent species like river red gums and black box trees rely on the bigger floods that used to happen every ten years. Animals like bats and birds nest in the hollows of these trees.

Local economies

Projects will bring substantial financial investment into the region, creating jobs and helping local economies.

Examples of infrastructure



We'll remove infrastructure that blocks the flow of water through the floodplain, like this small pipe blocking the creek in Nyah Park.



Regulators will help us to move water onto the floodplains and hold it there before opening the regulator to return water to the river. Regulators will include fishways to help native fish on their journey.

Knowing when to add water

These restoration projects will help return a more natural watering regime at the nine high-value floodplains. We will monitor how often natural flooding occurs and will release water in the years where the environment needs a 'top up' to keep it healthy. We will not release water every year unless the floodplain needs it.

The watering plans at each site will be flexible; each year and each watering event will be tailored depending on things such as the conditions of the floodplain, water availability, river flows and timing since the last flood or watering.

Similar projects have already been successfully implemented under The Living Murray program. Visit www.mdba.gov.au for more information on these sites.

Delivering the projects

We've been working on these projects for some time already, doing the planning to ensure the infrastructure we build will improve floodplain health.

Moving forward, projects will be rolled out in stages. The regulatory approvals process involves planning and consultation to get approval and funding to go ahead. We aim to start construction in 2023 and will work with local communities during this time to minimise any disruption.



Projects will go through a long period of consultation with communities, Traditional Owners and stakeholders before they get approval to go ahead.

If you have questions about any of these projects or want to join the community consultation, email us at info@vmfrp.vic.gov.au

February 2021

vmfrp.com.au    