

November 2023

1. Introduction

The North Central Catchment Management Authority's (CMA) region includes diverse landscapes and land-use that covers 13% of the state. It is bordered by the Murray River to the north, the Great Dividing Range and Wombat State Forest to the south and Mt Camel Range to the east.

The North Central CMA acknowledges Traditional Owners within the region, their rich culture and spiritual connection to Country. We also acknowledge the contribution and interest of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations in land and natural resource management, and pay respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

For more than 25 years, the CMA has been working with others to care for our natural resources. We are better when we work together. Bringing people together, sharing knowledge, listening, and learning from each other to act is what motivates us, and in-turn supports productive and prosperous communities.

Program and Project Steering Committees and Advisory Groups are important vehicles to support partnering with Traditional Owners, government, industry, and community. Members are appointed to these committees according to their skills, knowledge, interest, experience, and ability to reflect community views and communicate information to the community. This approach supports sound decision making with knowledge from a range of perspectives; provides a mechanism to share knowledge and information with the community; enables the community to have a voice; enables decisions to be made with a full understanding of the issues and helps to garner stakeholder support for these decisions.

Environmental Water Advisory Groups (EWAG) are established to provide community insight and advice to support the North Central CMA's management of water for the environment.

This Terms of Reference is relevant to Environmental Water Advisory Groups (Loddon and Campaspe River systems refer to Appendix 1 for maps) and intended to provide overarching roles and responsibilities.

2. Governance

The work of the North Central CMA is guided and supported by five Board sub committees and various project or program specific community advisory groups. The Chairperson of each project/program community advisory group, including the Chair of this group is appointed by the North Central CMA Board.

Chair of project and program committees are also a member of the CMA's Community Leaders' Group (CLG), one of the Board's sub committees. The CLG provides an opportunity for community groups to share information and collaborate across the region.

A deputy Chairperson is nominated by the group and reviewed annually as part of the Terms of Reference review process.

November 2023

3. Role and responsibilities of community advisory group and members

3.1 Background

The Victorian Environmental Water Holder (VEWH) is the independent statutory body responsible for holding and managing Victoria's environmental water entitlements. The VEWH works with relevant waterway managers to ensure water for the environment is delivered to achieve the best environmental outcome with the available water. North Central CMA, as the regional waterway manager, engages with public land managers, storage operators, Traditional Owners, landholders and communities to develop and implement the environmental watering program within the region. The North Central CMA undertakes community engagement on water for the environment management primarily through community advisory groups. Specific responsibilities include developing annual seasonal watering proposals (SWPs) and managing water for the environment deliveries.

SWPs are developed annually and document the following for each environmental water management system:

- The volume of environmental water potentially available.
- Long-term environmental watering objectives.
- Environmental flow recommendations that aim to meet the environmental watering objectives.
- Priority watering actions.
- Scenario planning that considers current and likely future climate conditions and water availability.
- Risks associated with environmental water delivery; and
- Recommended monitoring and communications associated with water for the environment deliveries.

3.2 Role of the group

EWAGs are established to:

- Support balanced decision making by ensuring local knowledge from a range of perspectives is considered in the development of Seasonal Watering Plans and garner community support for these decisions.
- Provide advice regarding community engagement opportunities and emerging issues specifically related to water for the environment deliveries.
- Support the development of landscape water for the environment planning.
- Facilitate communication regarding water for the environment through represented community groups and the wider community.
- Broaden exposure of the North Central CMA program of work in the local community to increase community knowledge and understanding.
- Build positive and productive relationships between Traditional Owners, local landholders, communities, recreational users and key stakeholders.
- Increase the local community's water for the environment literacy.

November 2023

While EWAGs input to the CMA's Seasonal Watering Proposals is vital it is important to note they are not a decision-making body. North Central CMA as the Statutory Authority responsible for planning and delivering environmental water in partnership and therefore maintains decision making powers.

3.3 Role of members

EWAG members will:

- Provide local knowledge, guidance and advice to North Central CMA to inform decision making on planning and delivery of water for the environment through the development of Seasonal Watering Proposals including identifying constraints and opportunities.
- Advocate for North Central CMA projects amongst their community networks, user groups and relevant industry groups.
- Provide feedback to the North Central CMA about the impacts and possible issues related to water for the environment and implementation of other CMA related projects.
- Provide individual but specific advice on community engagement approaches and opportunities.
- Provide a local perspective, including, historical and technical knowledge about the associated river systems.
- Maintain a respectful and safe working environment where the opinions and views of all members can be heard.
- Members that represent a community group that have specific responsibilities e.g., ensuring their respective organisations or community group are kept up to date regarding North Central CMA projects

4. Role of Chair

It is the Chairperson's (and deputy Chairperson) responsibility to:

- Ensure members have opportunities to provide to input into the development of the agenda.
- Participate at meetings and convey community concerns or commentary related to the work of the CMA.
- Ensure meetings are run concisely, respectfully and support members to actively engage in the agenda items.
- Effectively communicate with members during the meeting and if required outside of the meeting.
- Provide committee updates and/or recommendations to the Community Leaders' Group.

The deputy chairperson provides support to the Chairperson and in the absence of the Chairperson the deputy chairperson has full chairing responsibilities.

5. Membership

Membership on EWAGs will be up to 16 community members. Membership should represent the diversity of the community, localities, interests, and backgrounds represented in the project area.

Members appointed to the EWAG are:

- Knowledgeable about the environmental, cultural, social and/or economic values of the area.
- Passionate about achieving good environmental and community outcomes for the area.

Terms of Reference Environmental Water Advisory Group (EWAG) Campaspe and Loddon River Systems

November 2023



- Committed to understanding issues relating to natural resource management.
- Interested in strengthening relationships between the agencies responsible for managing and delivering natural resource management projects, local communities and relevant interest groups.
- Able to motivate and inform others.

5.2 Guests

Representation from GMW, VEWH, CEWH, local government, other partner representatives and interested stakeholders may attend meetings as deemed by the North Central CMA.

The Chair is to give prior approval for the attendance of other community members (who are not EWAG members) to attend meetings. A minimum of 24 hours' notice must be provided for such a request. Other additional advice may be co-opted, and attendance requested at meetings through the Chair.

6. North Central CMA role

North Central CMA staff will:

- Provide management leadership to support the group.
- Retain accountability for project delivery and will look to this group in an advisory capacity.
- Provide the group where possible, with at least two weeks advance notice of meetings.
- Maintain meeting agendas, meeting notes and action lists.
- Provide project updates at meetings (as required).
- Gather and consider local knowledge in Seasonal Watering Proposal development and implementation.
- Be responsible for formal communications and media activity relating to the program.

7. Number of meetings

The EWAG meets twice per year – spring and summer. There may be times when the group is required to meet outside these two meetings however at least two weeks notices will be provided to members.

Meetings will be held at the most convenient times for community members and will last up to four hours. Meetings will be held face to face. Consideration may be given to members who need to join online under special circumstance. Members are to contact the chair if they need to join the meeting online.

Field visits can form part of a meeting and may be longer than four hours in duration.

8. Review

The Terms of Reference, including the Operating Protocols (Attachment 1), will be reviewed every annually. Following review, the agreement to the Terms of Reference and Operating Protocols will be sought from members (Attachment 2).

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Attachment 1: SYSTEM MAPS



Campaspe River downstream of Lake Eppalock
 Environmental Flow Reaches



Figure 1: Campaspe river Environmental Flow reaches

Terms of Reference
 Environmental Water Advisory Group (EWAG)
 Campaspe and Loddon River Systems



November 2023

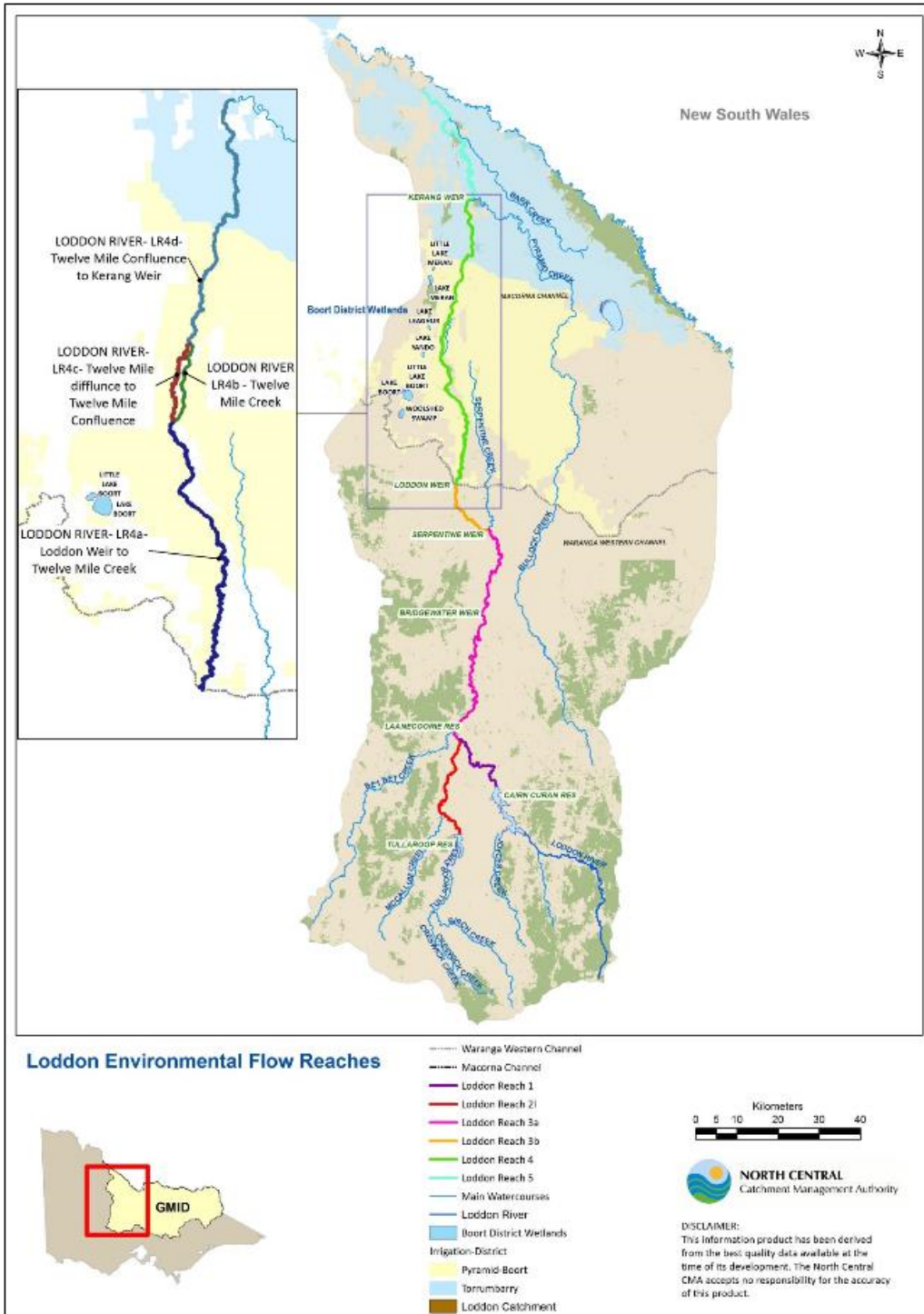


Figure 2: Loddon River Environmental Flow Reaches and Boort District Wetlands

Attachment 2: OPERATING PROTOCOLS

1. Purpose

To provide members with operational and administrative guidance relevant to membership and meetings.

2. Meetings

2.1 Participation and conduct

The North Central CMA values the differences between people and the contribution these differences make to our work. We believe in the inherent value of a diverse communities in which we operate. We will actively manage diversity, finding ways of utilising the differences that exist to improve the way we work. We will actively seek to accommodate the unique needs of many different employees, partners and stakeholders. Above all, we are committed to ensuring that all people are treated with respect and dignity.

Members will:

- Act in a reasonable and fair manner, which is not discriminatory on the basis of gender, religion and race or contrary to the *Equal Opportunity Employment Act 1995*.
- Support a collaborative approach through
 - Respect for individuals
 - Open and honest discussion
 - Working together
 - Communicate decisions accurately.
- Encourage innovative thinking and be open to different ways of resolving issues.
- Acknowledge that difficult discussions and recommendations may need to be made by the North Central CMA.
- Act honestly, in good faith, and to the best of their ability in the interests of the North Central CMA.
- Provide an honest and open environment for concepts, issues and knowledge to be shared in a safe and collaborative environment.
- Treat sensitive issues discussed within the group with respect.
- Comply with specific requests from the Chairperson to maintain confidentiality outside the group.
- Are punctual and make every effort to attend all meetings.
- Do not invite community members (who are not EWAG members) to attend meetings without prior approval of the Chairperson. Approval from the chair for a community member guest to attend must be sought a minimum of 24 hours in advance of a meeting date.
- Accept a duty to avoid a conflict of interest and the associated duty not to misuse their position or information that comes to the group.
- Distribute accurate and up to date information back to the broader community.

2.2 Conflict of Interest

At the beginning of each meeting members must declare any potential or perceived conflict of interest in respect of any item and where appropriate to absent themselves from discussion and/or the room while the item is being considered.

2.3 Administrative support

November 2023

The group is supported by a CMA Project Officer and other support as required.

2.4 Agenda

Members seeking to request Agenda items are to discuss the inclusion with the Chair for consideration no less than two weeks prior to the meeting. The agenda and relevant supporting information will be made available to members one week prior to meeting.

2.5 Meeting notes

Brief meeting notes capturing key points, and any actions from the meeting will be taken by the CMA and made available to the Chair for review and approval within ten working days. The approved meeting notes (and copies of presentations when requested by members and when relevant for detail) will be circulated to the members with the agenda papers for endorsement at the next meeting.

3. Sitting Fees, Travel and Member Expenses

EWAG membership is voluntary. Meeting types and positions where sitting fees/travel expenses are payable is determined by North Central CMAs Policy - Reimbursement and Remuneration of Community Members.

The North Central CMA Board will appoint the Chair of the group, and the members will be appointed by the responsible Executive Manager.

4. Recruitment, behaviour, length of term, resignation and termination

Recruitment:

Community members will be required to nominate, through a publicly available Expression of Interest process to be considered for EWAG membership of the group should represent the diversity of the community, area, interests, and backgrounds represented in the project area.

The North Central CMA may also invite community members who have knowledge of a specific area, or specific skills and experience to join the group to fill an identified gap in the membership.

Upon official commencement, a six-month probation period applies after which time a member can voluntarily resign from the group.

Behaviour:

While EWAG members are not direct employees of the Public Sector, they are expected to behave in line with the *Victorian Public Sector Code of Conduct* that outlines standards of behaviour.

In addition, the seven values and the Code of Conduct provide the foundation of the integrity and accountability framework for all public sector employees.

Terms of Reference Environmental Water Advisory Group (EWAG) Campaspe and Loddon River Systems



November 2023

Values define what is important to an organisation and how things will be done. They also articulate member interaction with North Central CMA staff, government, community and partners.

1. Responsiveness
2. Integrity
3. Impartiality
4. Accountability
5. Respect
6. Leadership
7. Human Rights

The North Central CMA also has its own set of values that guide internal and external interactions, and these values extend to EWAG members:

- Care
- Courage
- Connection

Selection criteria:

Membership should include people who live and or work in the region and who are:

- Knowledgeable about the environmental, social, cultural and/or economic values of the area.
- Passionate about achieving good environmental and community outcomes.
- Knowledgeable and interested about understanding issues relating to natural resource management and environmental water management.
- Interested in strengthening relationships between the agencies responsible for managing and delivering natural resource management projects, water for the environmental, local communities and relevant interest groups.
- Committed to sharing information with the broader community about the work of the North Central CMA.
- Able to motivate and inform others.

Members will be offered a position including term through a letter of offer and asked to accept in writing.

Length of term:

To manage succession, community members will be asked to nominate their preferred term e.g., two or four years at the time of recruitment. With prior discussion, at the end of the member term the CMA may ask the member to renominate.

Resignation:

Resignations can occur through written correspondence to the Chair who will advise the North Central CMA responsible Executive Manager.

Termination:

The North Central CMA has the right to terminate a member's term, effective immediately, if they

- Do not act within the Terms of Reference

November 2023

- Are verbally or physically abusive toward CMA staff or other members of the group.
- Breach the *Victorian Public Sector Code of Conduct*.
- Have a negative impact on other group member or CMA staff members' physiological safety.
- Are removed by way of consensus.

5. Correspondence

Inward:

Committee members may at times receive correspondence from individuals and/or organisations addressed to a members' private address that has relevance to the CMA or their role on the group.

If this occurs, please contact the Project Manager and copies of inward correspondence must be made available to the CMA for registration to determine the most appropriate response.

If correspondence requires a reply, the Project Manager will discuss

correspondence with the Chairperson regarding an appropriate response. A copy

of the correspondence, if appropriate, will be tabled at the next meeting for

information or for further discussion.

Outward:

There may be times when EWAG group/members are required to respond to inward correspondence or prepare correspondence on behalf of the committee. The following process applies:

- Outward correspondence on behalf of the group or member, is to be discussed and approved by the North Central CMA Program Delivery Executive Manager and Chairperson.
- It may be appropriate for the content of the correspondence to be discussed at the EWAG meeting. The North Central CMA Program Delivery Executive Manager and/or Chairperson will determine if this is necessary.
- In most instances the correspondence is prepared (with input from EWAG member/s if appropriate), signed and circulated by the Program Delivery Executive Manager and/or Chairperson.
- All committee members receive a copy of the correspondence.
- Copies will be recorded in the appropriate section of the document management system of the North Central CMA.

6. Communication Protocol

The following outlines the normal responsibilities in relation to communicating with the Board, staff, the community and the media. It also provides clear protocols for staff-initiated communication with members.

With the EWAG Chair and North Central CMA staff:

November 2023

The relationship and open communication between group members and the Chair are the foundation of a well-functioning group and are important for the success of the Environmental Water Advisory Group as a whole.

If members have specific questions or concerns regarding project activities outside of regular meetings, they are to be directed to CMAS staff members in the first instance

If a member has concerns with a North Central CMA staff member or the operation of the EWAG, the issue should be raised with the North Central CMA Executive Manager Program Delivery, through the Chair, in the first instance. The Executive Manager will then discuss the issue with the appropriate staff. An approach to resolve the issue will be communicated with the member.

If concerns are raised about a member's behaviour which contravenes the Terms of Reference and supporting documentation, the Executive Manager will communicate with the member either directly or through the Chair to address the concern.

With the media:

Generally, responding to media requests or making comment on behalf of the North Central CMA is the responsibility of the North Central CMA Board Chair, CEO or authorised staff representative. Media requests relating to CMA projects should be directed to North Central CMA staff. However, on occasion members may speak to the media on behalf of the project if authorised and with guidance from the CMA.

Social media: If engaging on social media, members are expected to be respectful, factual and not comment in a way which undermines the North Central CMA or State Government policy or culture.

7. Use of Information

There is an expectation that members will make reasonable and informed decisions and recommendations on matters presented at meetings where a community perspective is sought. Through the engagement process members need to be:

- Aware that they are only entitled to access information which is relevant to matters before the group.
- Mindful that, except on matters before the group, they enjoy the same access rights to information as any other member of the community.
- Prudent in the use of information that they acquire as members.
- Careful that information is not used in a way which may cause detriment to others.
- Distribute accurate and up to date information back to the broader community

8. Confidentiality

The North Central CMA, through its functions and responsibilities, seeks to ensure that the public is well informed about issues under consideration.

To this end, matters considered by the group in closed sessions is relatively few. However, it may be necessary at times to consider some matters in closed sessions. Only matters which have been classified as confidential can be considered in closed sessions. Items classified as confidential generally relate to

November 2023

commercial in confidence information that has been provided to the group by tenders, contractors, joint ventures, or other confidential information which is a confidential right prior to a public announcement.

A policy on confidential information and processes has been developed because of:

- The confidential nature of certain materials which comes before the North Central CMA and its committees.
- The need for members to be clear as to what material is properly characterised as confidential, to lessen the likelihood of an inadvertent breach of the provisions relating to improper use of information.
- The necessity to ensure that any confidential information to which members and officers have access remains confidential for as long as required, in order not to prejudice any negotiations or compromise the position of the other parties who may be involved.
- Having determined information as confidential, it is necessary that members ensure that appropriate processes are in place for dealing with confidential material.

The following describes the process:

- The group operates in an environment of public accountability and scrutiny. The North Central CMA seeks to comprehensively inform the public on issues under consideration and the nature of decisions made after engagement with the community, as appropriate.

Confidential information shall not be:

- disclosed to any third party without the North Central CMA's consent
- incorporated in the agenda or minutes of any meeting (except by reference) unless it is the agenda or the minutes of a closed meeting of the group.

9. Safety

Members and officers are expected to adhere to OH&S standards that require protective footwear and appropriate protective clothing according to weather conditions, if in the field.

Cultural and psychological safety standards are also expected to be met. For further information please refer to the North Central CMA Cultural Safety Guide 2021.

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