

LCIR Land and Water Management Plan Summary 2020-2030



Foreword

The North Central CMA has led the way in integrated catchment management in north central Victoria for many years, enhancing and protecting our unique and internationally recognized natural features.

A key part of this approach is the promotion and recognition of the importance that sustainable agriculture plays in the employment and wealth of the area as a whole.

A major component of this is irrigated agriculture, which generated close to \$800 million in the 2017-18 year. With competing demands for irrigation water and climate change creating a hotter and drier operating environment, it is essential water is used in the most sustainable, adaptive, profitable and innovative manner in the future.

The Loddon Campaspe Irrigation Regional Land and Water Management Plan has undertaken extensive consultation with the irrigation community to incorporate their input to shape the direction of the plan for the next ten years. Traditional Owner and Aboriginal Landholder input has been sought and adds further depth to the plan.

Our vision of 'using water for healthy, productive, sustainable, irrigated food and fibre' will create an empowered and informed irrigation community, which will attract further investment in the region and continued protection of our natural assets.



A white, stylized handwritten signature of Sally Mitchell on a teal background.

Sally Mitchell
Chair – LCIR Land Water Management
Plan Project Steering Committee

About the plan

The Loddon Campaspe Irrigation Region Land and Water Management Plan (LCIR LWMP) is a sub-strategy of the North Central Regional Catchment Strategy.

With a focus on farm activities to improve the sustainability of irrigation, the Plan provides an integrated planning framework for the management of irrigated land, water and impacted biodiversity resources in the Loddon Campaspe Irrigation region.

The Plan provides the road-map for government and private investment in works and measures on private land that holds an irrigation water licence. It does not cover the management of public land or waterways and wetlands on public and crown land.

The key drivers of change for irrigation enterprises in the region include climate change (a drier, hotter climate and increased climate variability), drought, irrigation modernisation, changing water policy, water trade out of the region and fluctuating commodity prices.

The investment area covers all irrigated land in the North Central CMA region comprising 50% of the GMID or 447,615 hectares (Figure 1).

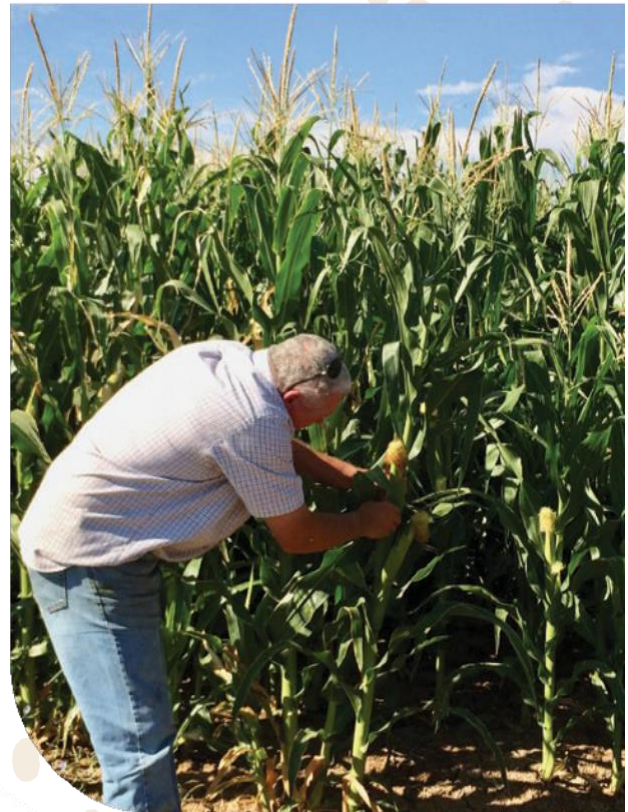
Vision: using water for healthy, productive, sustainable irrigated food and fibre

Investment in the Plan's on-farm and other activities will deliver the following long-term objectives:

- Sustainable, profitable, adaptive and innovative farming practices.
- Active involvement of Traditional Owners and Aboriginal landholder.
- Protected and improved condition of environmental assets and values.
- An empowered and informed irrigation community.



Figure 1 **Loddon Campaspe Irrigation Region - regional features**



LEGEND

Rochester Irrigation Region – Falls within the Shepparton Irrigation Region Land and Water Management Plan

- ▨ Rochester Campaspe Irrigation Area
- ▭ Torrumbarry Irrigation Area
- ▭ Pyramid Boort Irrigation Area
- Rochester Campaspe Channel System
- Rochester Campaspe Drains
- Torrumbarry Channel System
- Pyramid Boort Channel System
- ▭ Torrumbarry Irrigation System
- Loddon River System
- Waterways

Settlement in the LCIR has been strongly influenced by proximity to the Murray River, with the larger towns - Echuca, Kerang and Swan Hill - located on or near the river. Smaller inland settlements began beside river crossings and railways for the collection of grains and other agricultural produce.

Irrigated agriculture provides 4,000 full time jobs in four shires with the majority within Campaspe shire (Figure 2). Please note, not all of the Rural City of Swan Hill or Campaspe Shire is in the LCIR.

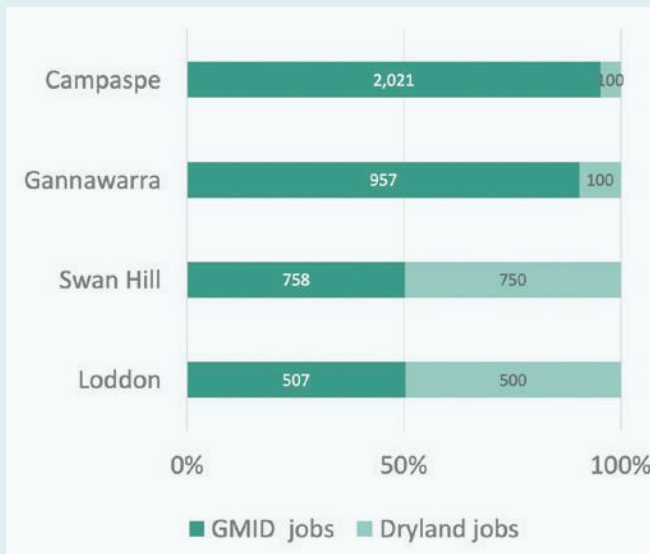


Figure 2 Jobs in agriculture by shire, 2017/18 ABS

About the region

The Loddon Campaspe Irrigation Region comprises the irrigation districts of Torrumbarry, Rochester Campaspe, Pyramid Boort and the Loddon River System. The Plan also covers all irrigation in the North Central CMA region except that covered by the Shepparton Irrigation Region Land and Water Management Plan.

Land use and production

The Plan covers almost 450,000 hectares representing around 50% of the GMID where irrigation water is supplied from four natural river systems - the Murray, Goulburn, Campaspe and Loddon - delivered to irrigators through an extensive network of natural waterways and man-made distribution supply channels.

In 2017-18 the North Central CMA region held approximately 1,400 farm businesses which irrigated 200,000 ha and used 590 GL of water for irrigation. The dominant irrigated enterprise in the LCIR is irrigated pasture, then irrigated mixed farming. There are also smaller areas of irrigated perennial horticulture which make a large contribution to the region's economy (Figure 3).

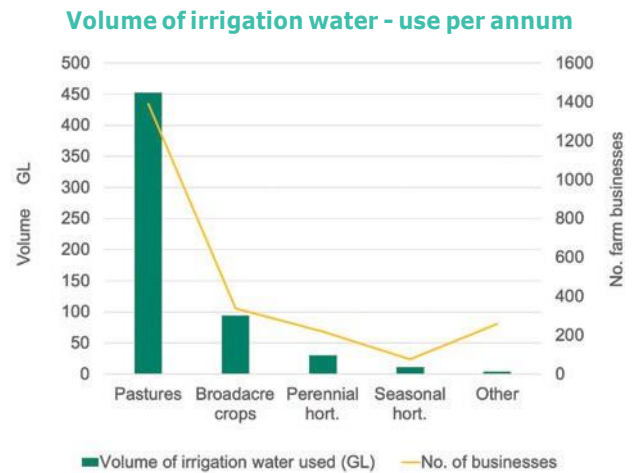


Figure 3 Annual volume of irrigation water and number of farm businesses by enterprise (ABS 2017/18)

2017/18 represents an average year of water availability in the southern MDB. There was 100% allocation of Victorian High Reliability Water Shares and 51% allocation of NSW General Security. The price of temporary water was around \$129/ML.

The farmgate value of return from horticulture per megalitre of water applied is high relative to other users which places horticulture in a strong position relative to other water users.

While dairying and mixed farming bring a lower return per megalitre, water use in these sectors is flexible and can opportunistically use more water when the price is affordable, providing the region with a strong competitive advantage.

Land Use	\$/ML farmgate value (ABS 2017/18)
Horticulture	\$2,000 - \$5,000
Dairy	\$900
Mixed farming	\$300

The highest value enterprises are dairy production and sheep and other livestock, comprising more than half of total irrigated production value. Dairying in the region contributes 10% of Victoria's production.

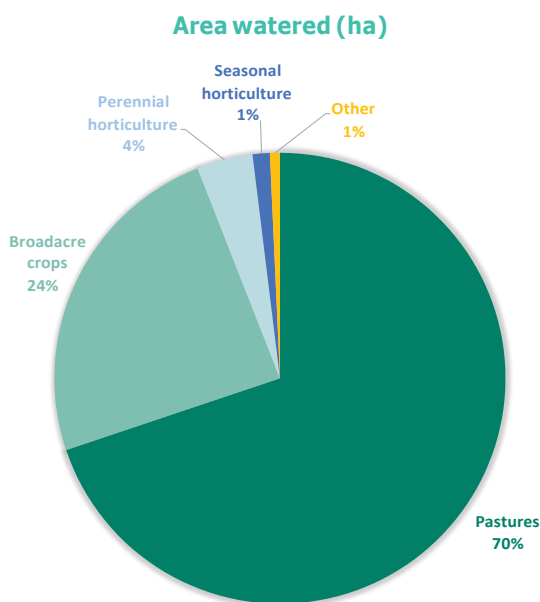


Figure 4 Area watered (ha) (ABS 2017/18)

The farmgate or gross value of irrigated production was \$777M in 2017-18 supporting an estimated 4,000 full time jobs.

Crop types	Gross Value Irrigated Production \$M
Dairy production	\$237
Production from sheep & other livestock	\$176
Fruit and nuts (excluding grapes)	\$101
Other	\$95
Production from meat cattle	\$72
Vegetables	\$55
Hay	\$18
Grapes	\$12
Other broadacre crops	\$10
Total	\$777

Waterways, floodplains and wetlands

The LCIR includes a complex system of waterways, many being flood distributaries across the floodplain. The region's major river systems are the lower stretches of the Loddon, Avoca and the Campaspe, with the Murray River forming the northern boundary.

The shallow floodplains can extend many kilometres wide with flooding lasting from weeks to months, as experienced during the 2010 – 2011 floods, resulting in significant damage and disruption to landowners and communities. Their hydraulic function and connections to the natural waterways and wetlands across the LCIR have been disrupted due to settlement.

The extensive network of significant wetlands vary from permanent water bodies to ephemeral wetlands and are a majestic feature of the region. The majority of these are located on public land, there are a small number of wetlands on private land.



Quick facts

- 112,337 km waterways (major and minor)
- 120 significant wetlands covering almost 40,000 ha or 6% of land area, 23 listed under the Ramsar Convention and are of international importance



MacDonald Swamp - North Central CMA

Biodiversity

Habitat loss, fragmentation, salinity, altered flooding regimes, declining water quality, urban development, agricultural activities, inappropriate recreation, pest plants and animals, changes to fire regimes, and climate change have all impacted upon the extent and health of the region's native vegetation.

The Plan outlines systems and processes to support farmers to be active environmental stewards and to safeguard the health of the natural environment through a mixture of information, incentives and regulations. Farmers will be encouraged to include environmental objectives in their farm plans to enhance regional biodiversity values. Through their efforts and adoption of sustainable practices, farmers can increase the resilience and long-term productivity of farm ecosystems.

Quick facts

- **1,367** native flora and fauna species
- **978 species of remnant vegetation**; 15% of native flora species are listed as rare or threatened
- Plains Grasslands that once dominated the region now only covers 2% of land area yet **only 12 % of the region's original native vegetation remains**
- **120 significant wetlands** underpin the environmental values of the region.
- Lakes and wetlands act as refuge during drought for **14 bird species** listed under international Migratory Birds agreement
- **Largest ibis breeding colonies** in Victoria

Ground water and salinity

The North Central CMA region comprises more than 20 different groundwater systems. These include localised fractured rock aquifers common within the bedrock uplands and larger alluvial sands and gravels aquifers within the northern plains.

Groundwater in many areas is saline and can cause substantial salinity problems where it comes close to the surface. Saline groundwater discharge and salinity issues are widespread throughout the region and extend from the smaller groundwater flow systems common to the uplands through to the regional aquifers of the northern plains.

Salinity from rising groundwater levels has been a major threat historically and the focus of much investment both within the LCIR and more broadly across the Murray-Darling Basin. In response to several changes, salinity threats have reduced overall in the Loddon and Campaspe catchments.

The ongoing reduction in salinity threat from lower watertables changes in the LCIR since 2011 can be attributed to climate change; water use efficiency (WUE) on-farm; GMW Connections Program; water trade; land use change and lower dairy prices relative to water price expanded groundwater pumping on farm.

There has been a considerable reduction in watertable levels since 2004, as indicated in Figure 5.

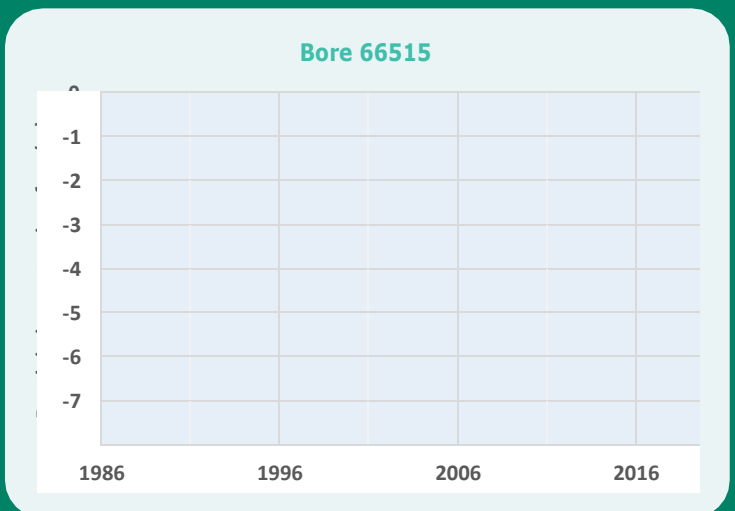


Figure 5 **Changes in depth to water table near Gunbower**

Source: Visualising Victoria's Groundwater 2017
www.vvg.org.au

Regional challenges and opportunities

Declining water availability due to climate change, water recovery for the environment and water trade is driving land use change and farm adjustment.

Challenges

The region has faced major challenges and has already adapted in many ways. The main challenges include:

- Social and economic impacts in the region: Irrigated enterprises and communities are under pressure to remain economically viable due to changes in water availability, water price, trade, climate change, farm restructuring and succession, and commodity returns.
- Protecting Aboriginal cultural heritage sites: Stronger engagement with Traditional Owners and Aboriginal Landowners to identify and protect their Cultural Heritage on land in the LCIR.
- Threats to natural assets: Climate change, salinity, flooding, habitat loss and fragmentation, declining water quality, fire, pest plants and animals, farm dams and afforestation (upper catchments), water reform policy, land use change and social change are all threats to natural assets in the region.

Many of these challenges are ongoing and the Plan seeks to address declining water availability; potential re-emergence of salinity; poor water quality from farm runoff; floodplain management, including consideration of cultural heritage values into planning; increasing access for Aboriginal people to natural resources and loss of terrestrial biodiversity.

Strengths of the region

- Successful adjustment to changing water availability by diversifying enterprises and increasing irrigation water use efficiency
- High performing farm businesses
- Resilient and engaged community

Opportunities

The focus of this Plan is to deliver support to farmers that will increase public benefits from irrigation on private land. Delivering change on private irrigated land is critical to achieving the Plan's vision.

The main opportunities presented to the community by this investment are:

- A narrower scope and stronger focus on the needs of the irrigation community – this will increase community interest and engagement.
- Increased investment in agency staff delivering services directly to landholders in the form of support advice and incentives to encourage on-ground works.
- Better targeted education and training on matters critical to assisting existing and new irrigation businesses to adapt to rapid change.
- A better understanding of Cultural Heritage, Traditional Owner and Aboriginal landholder water values, uses and objectives - responses will be built directly into programs.
- A better appreciation of the needs of recreational water and other users downstream.
- A more cost-effective drainage program targeted to where drains are needed to service areas where the public benefits of drainage are greatest.



Investing in the future

The LWMP determines priorities for investing in works and measures in the irrigation region to ensure public funds are targeted to actions that will bring the greatest public benefit.

The overall framework of the Plan includes an aspirational goal that is supported by long-term objectives and desired outcomes with targets to be achieved through the delivery of LWMP programs (Figure 6).

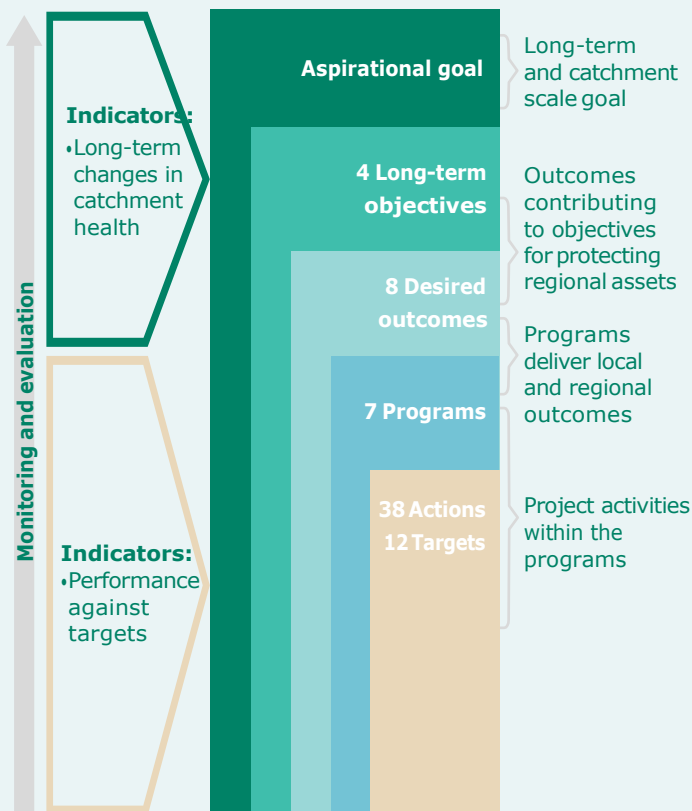


Figure 6 Overall Plan framework



Whole farm planning - North Central CMA

Programs

There are seven programs in the Plan that will contribute to a more sustainable irrigation region.

The programs will deliver better outcomes for the region by supporting sustainable, profitable and adaptive farming practices, Traditional Owner and Aboriginal landholder involvement, protecting and improving environmental assets and an informed community.

Program objectives

Promotion and partnerships

- To coordinate, collaborate and work with other programs
- Promoting stewardship of region
- Engagement with stakeholders

Planning and governance

- To ensure the programs remain relevant
- Establish MERI framework and monitor progress

Adoption

- To support stewardship and build capacity to improve:
 - Water use efficiency
 - Nutrient management and soil health
 - Reduce surface run off
 - Farm biodiversity
 - Aboriginal cultural heritage awareness
 - Business performance

Regulation and Standards

- To ensure best practice for new irrigation development
- Lift standards of new irrigation developments
- Meet salinity reporting requirements.
- Meet State Environment Protection Policy targets
- Meet cultural heritage requirements

Education and training

- Build capacity for stewardship, adaptability and resilience
- To increase the skills and capacity of agencies and the community

Research and Catchment Monitoring

- Measure and improve the effectiveness of the Plan
- Measure change in catchment condition and impacts

Draining infrastructure Development and Operations

- Drainage is affordable and fit for purpose
- There is on-going management in place for existing drainage infrastructure

Program actions

There are 38 actions across the programs.

Each action has been assigned a level of priority which has been classified depending on its relative importance in meeting the stated outcomes and long-term objectives of the plan. An explanation of two priority ratings follows:

Priority	Description
High	Core obligations including monitoring and reporting to meet legislative requirements, and where there is a strong need identified by the community and agency stakeholders.
Medium	Actions where there is a substantial need recognised and identified by the community

Priority actions by program

The high priority actions in the Regulation and Standards program are core statutory obligations for the North CMA. The relative priority of actions by program area is shown in Figure 7.

Five of the high priority actions are also immediate and will be commenced within the first six months of implementation.

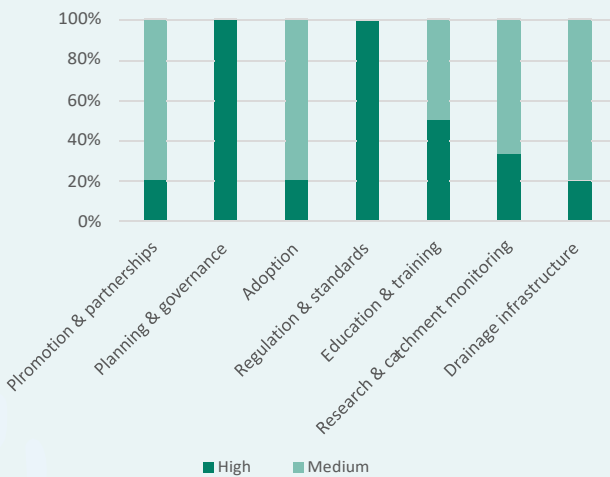


Figure 7 Priorities by program area.

Promotion and partnerships

This program will lead to better awareness of environmental stewardship on farms and better link programs to foster collaboration between farmers, the broader community and agencies.

Supporting actions	Priority
1.1 Establish inter agency/ stakeholder group to oversee R&D activities	Medium
1.2 Promote uptake of new irrigation development guidelines (IDG) and coordinate extension support for irrigation redevelopment	Medium
1.3 Design, pilot and implement an environmental stewardship program	Medium
1.4 Develop an engagement plan for working with Traditional Owner and Aboriginal landholders	High Immediate

Planning and governance

This program will ensure the Plan remains relevant as farmers, their practices and the environment changes over time.

Supporting actions	Priority
2.1 Confirm MERI framework, establish MERI plans for funded projects and implement process to monitor the progress of the Plan	High
2.2 Support the LWMP community steering committee to review progress and provide oversight.	High Immediate
2.3 Planning and reporting support for implementing the Plan and achievement of outcomes of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> efficient irrigation improved regional irrigation drainage meeting regulatory obligations best practice new irrigation development increased community awareness and involvement better understanding and management of downstream irrigation impacts increased awareness of Aboriginal landholders' and Traditional Owners' values and their involvement in the Plan 	High

Adoption

This central program will support farmers to boost efficiency and productivity on their farms, by delivering farm business and whole farm planning support and encouraging adoption of better practices through incentives and education.

Supporting actions	Priority
3.1 Deliver farm business and whole farm planning support and training	High
3.2 Provide extension and incentives for adoption of efficient irrigation technology and best nutrient and soil management practices	Medium
3.3 Explore opportunities and provide extension support to horticulture	Medium
3.4 Set up and support paddock-based demonstrations and trials on water use efficiency, nutrient and soil management	Medium
3.5 Extension and incentive support for the construction of farm reuse systems where there is substantial public benefit	Medium
3.6 Extension support for the adoption of the new irrigation development guidelines (IDG) by the private sector	Medium
3.7 Provide extension and incentives for environmental stewardship projects (e.g. riparian and wetland restoration and replanting native vegetation in sensitive areas and regional bio-links). These would be delivered through a range of farmer led models (e.g. cluster groups, one-on-one extension, focus/discussion groups)	Medium
3.8 Incorporate assessment of cultural heritage values into whole farm planning support	High

Regulation and standards

This program will ensure that off-site impacts from irrigation are minimised, new irrigation development standards are lifted and that BSM 2030 and other reporting obligations are met.

Supporting actions	Priority
4.1 Partner with key organisations (EPA) to ensure the SEPP (Waters)/GED obligations is adhered to. For example, no impact on the beneficial users of groundwater	High
4.2 Participate in quarterly partner meetings and report under the Basin Salinity Management 2030 Strategy salinity accountability requirements annually	High
4.3 Implementing the Murray-Darling Basin Salinity Management 2030 Strategy	High
4.4 Manage accountable actions for Murray-Darling Basin Salinity Management 2030 Strategy Salinity Registers	High
4.5 Provide review and monitoring reports to the Victorian Government to meet their reporting requirements under Basin Salinity Management 2030 Strategy	High
4.6 End of Valley monitoring sites are monitored and reported on to achieve compliance with the Murray-Darling Basin Salinity Management 2030 Strategy and the Basin Plan.	High
4.7 New Irrigation developments and environmental watering within the Basin Salinity Management 2030 Strategy guidelines are consistent with appropriate standards	High



Lateral walker - North Central CMA



Dairy herd – North Central CMA

Education and training

This program will provide the resources to build the skills and capacity of farmers, agencies and community in irrigation efficiency, environmental stewardship, adaptability and resilience.

Supporting actions	Priority
5.1 Offer irrigation management training courses (e.g. Irrigation 101, Water Trade Literacy, ExtensionAUS, Irrigation Risk Management, Impacts of climate change)	High Immediate
5.2 Co-ordinate farm business planning support and training to irrigators (including redevelopment projects)	High
5.3 Establish training opportunities with key industry groups (including dairy, horticulture, cropping) to build confidence with irrigation technology, options for new crops and new land use options including means to adapt to climate change.	Medium
5.4 Educate agency staff and wider community about impacts of irrigation on downstream users using a wide range of communications media	Medium
5.5 Work with Aboriginal Landholders and Traditional Owner groups to establish a community-based approach to sustainable irrigation that is informed by an improved understanding of cultural practices and potential management options in a changing climate.	Medium
5.6 Explore feasible business planning support to Aboriginal landholders and offer culturally appropriate training opportunities	Medium
5.7 Agency staff and landholders complete field based cultural heritage training	High Immediate
5.8 Educate irrigators on the risks of irrigation with saline/brackish groundwater in northern Victoria	High

Research and catchment monitoring

This program will support irrigation investigations and research, monitoring of impacts of irrigation on downstream users and ground water monitoring.

Supporting actions	Priority
6.1 Irrigation investigations and research into: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New WUE technologies in a drying climate • Regional land and water use mapping with considerations of a changing climate • Best practice nutrient management techniques • Soil management practices including those that maintain and enhance soil structure • Provide a quantitative assessment of the impacts of soil management practices on soil structure and consequences in terms of soil hydrology (permeability) 	Medium
6.2 Investigations and monitoring of impacts of irrigation on downstream water users and recreation values of irrigation	Medium
6.3 Improving the groundwater monitoring network across northern Victoria consistent with meeting the reporting needs under BSM2030 through the adoption of digital technology including telemetry	High Immediate

Drainage infrastructure development and operations

This program will ensure drainage is present where needed and affordable and fit for purpose.

Supporting actions	Priority
7.1 Assess need for regional drainage infrastructure upgrades such as community surface drains with guidance from the surface water management plan	High
7.2 Develop projects to execute regional irrigation drainage infrastructure upgrades	Medium
7.3 Implement the Irrigation Drainage MOU with all partners	Medium
7.4 If identified, Drainage Course Declarations will be implemented on North Central CMA drains with guidance from the surface water engagement plan	Medium
7.5 Support construction of new drains (only where needed)	Medium

Cost of the plan

The cost benefit ratio for investment in the Plan is 1:1.9 with a positive net present value of \$26.4M over 20 years. Valuation of benefits is included where there are ready market values, such as increased gross value of irrigated agricultural production. Other benefits that do not have established economic measures of value have not been included in the plan e.g. benefits from improved water quality and from regulation and standards.

The positive cost benefit ratio represents a sound investment for government and facilitates a partnership with the irrigation community to grow the regional economy.

The Adoption program is central to the success of the Plan because it will support farmers to boost water use efficiency and productivity of their farms. This will help foster a partnership between farmers and the government to undertake environmental improvement works and farm adjustment where needed.

The tailored nature of the programs means they are interdependent and the synergy between programs will help address declining water availability through improved water use efficiency, farm business restructuring and achieving enhanced environmental outcomes. This will increase regional pride and sustainability.

The maximum annual investment for the next five years is represented in Figure 8. A midterm review will determine the funding requirements for the remaining five years of the Plan.

Annual Investment \$M

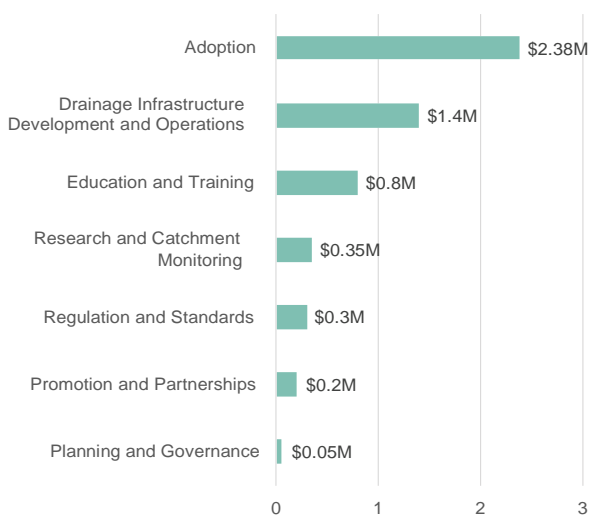
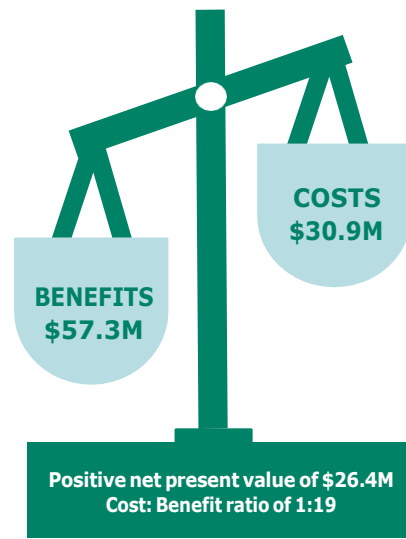


Figure 8 Annual investment \$M

Benefits outweigh costs

The LWMP is value for money for landholders, governments and industry, and will enhance our precious land and water resources – land, waterways, wetlands and birds, fish, plants and other animals.



The Adoption program provides \$29.1M worth of benefits for the broader community.

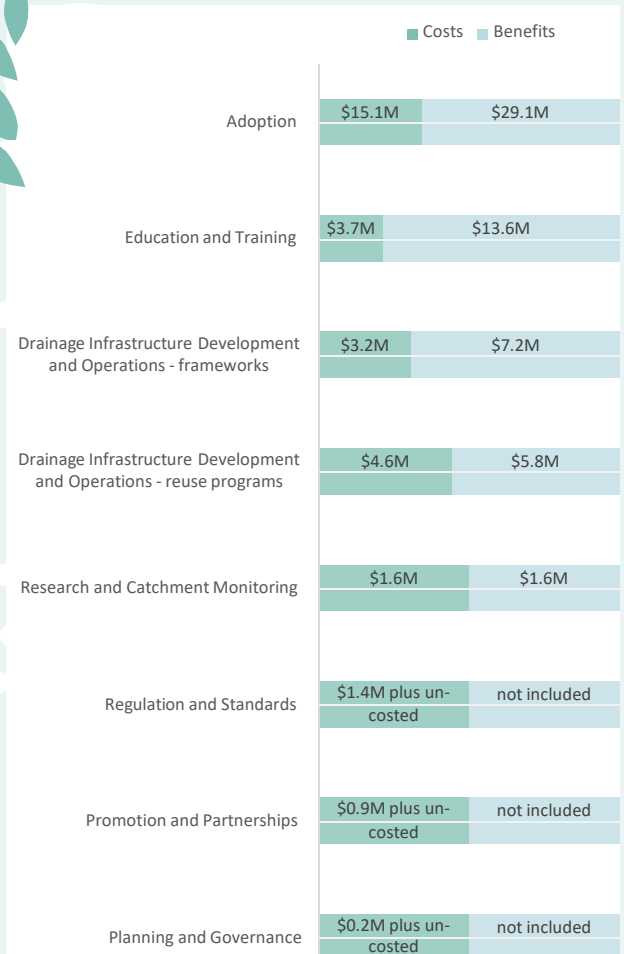
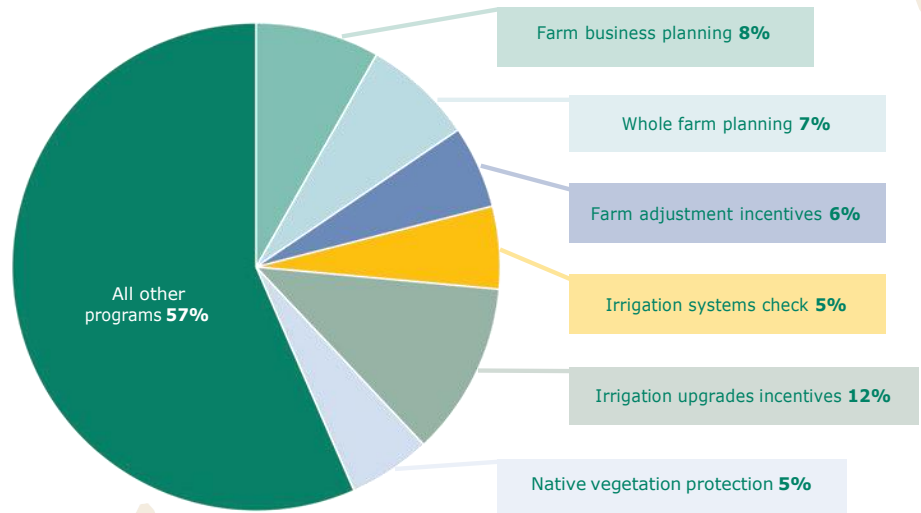


Figure 9 Costs and benefits of the programs

Adoption program investment is dominant

This central program will support farmers to boost efficiency and productivity on their farm. By delivering farm business and whole farm planning support and encouraging adoption of better practices through incentives and education.



Measuring success

A monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement framework is in place to measure the success of the Plan.

Monitoring outcomes

Success will be measured by tracking progress against each of the Plan's desired outcomes using targets. Below are each of the eight desired outcomes and their corresponding targets – to be met over 5 to 10 years.

Outcome 1 More efficient and integrated irrigation (on and off farm)

Target: Increase Gross Value (Irrigated) Agricultural Production (per ML water use) by 10% in an average allocation year (as represented in Figure 3).

Outcome 2 Improved on farm irrigation nutrient and soil management

Targets: 10 farms in the LCIR demonstrate best practice nutrient and soil management by 2025.
10 case studies developed demonstrating best practice.

Outcome 3 Improved regional irrigation drainage infrastructure and management

Targets: All irrigation drains designed and managed to minimise risks to receiving waters each year.
100% of North Central CMA drains under a management agreement within 10 years.

Outcome 4 Impacts of irrigation on salinity, biodiversity and water quality managed within agreed limits

Targets: Meet all regulatory obligations including monitoring and reporting under BSM2030, every year.
Improve regional biodiversity and environmental values and measures by 5% by condition.

Outcome 5 New and significant irrigation redevelopments are best practice

Targets: 100% compliance with standards in IDG by all new irrigation development.
100% compliance with new standards in IDG by all significant re-development.

Outcome 6 Increased community awareness and involvement in plan activities

Target: 250 irrigators engaged in at least one of the programs over the life of the Plan; 125 irrigators participating by 2025.

Outcome 7 Impacts of irrigation on other third parties are better understood and managed e.g. recreation and users downstream

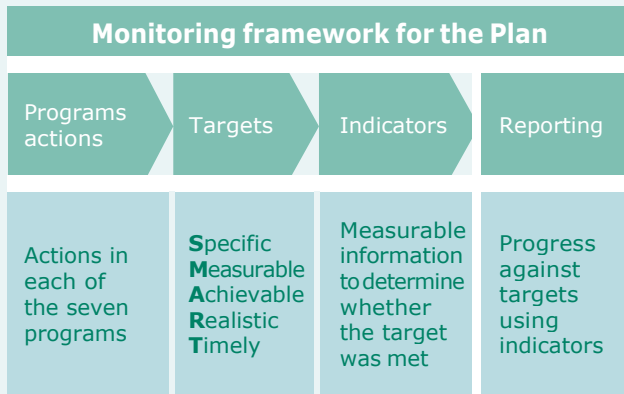
Target: Downstream salinity and water quality meet Irrigation Drainage MOU targets.

Outcome 8 Aboriginal values are better understood and integrated into management decisions

Target: Traditional Owners and Aboriginal landholders are aware and resourced to actively participate by 2025.

Monitoring actions

The Plan monitoring framework covers 38 actions with measurable targets from seven programs. For each action there are a set of indicators that measure progress towards each target. An initial monitoring framework is outlined in supporting evidence Appendix 5 of the Plan. This will be updated to reflect funded programs.



Evaluation framework

During the implementation of the plan there will be consistency between monitoring and evaluation frameworks, and measurement against indicators and targets to monitor progress.

Below is a brief outline of the evaluation framework for the Plan. The full evaluation framework, when developed, will align with the state-wide Sustainable Irrigation Program processes undertaken by DELWP.

Evaluation theme	Key evaluation questions (example):
Legacy	How has the plan improved land and water management in the LCIR?
Impact	What difference has the Plan made? Were the desired outcomes met? What is the evidence of this?
Effectiveness	To what extent were the stated outputs achieved? Have the outcome level targets been met?
Efficiency	What resources have been used to achieve the outcomes? To what extent did partnerships contribute to the success of the projects.
Appropriateness	Are the approaches to delivering the Plan appropriate to the local conditions and community?

For further information refer the Land and Water Management Plan 2020-2030 Loddon Campaspe Irrigation Region Full Report.

Acknowledgment

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Acknowledgment of Country

The North Central Catchment Management Authority 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.

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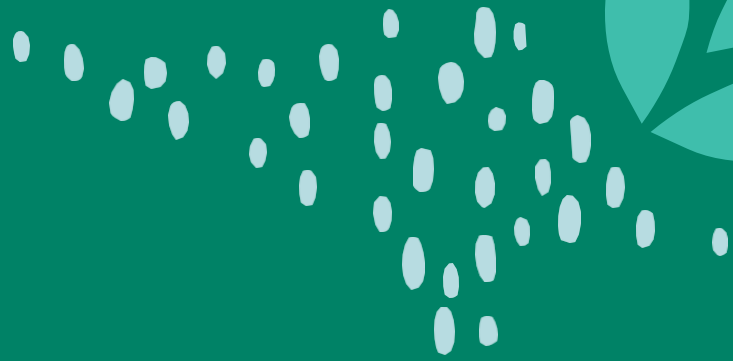
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