

# **Environmental Water Advisory Group (EWAG)**

## **Draft Terms of Reference**

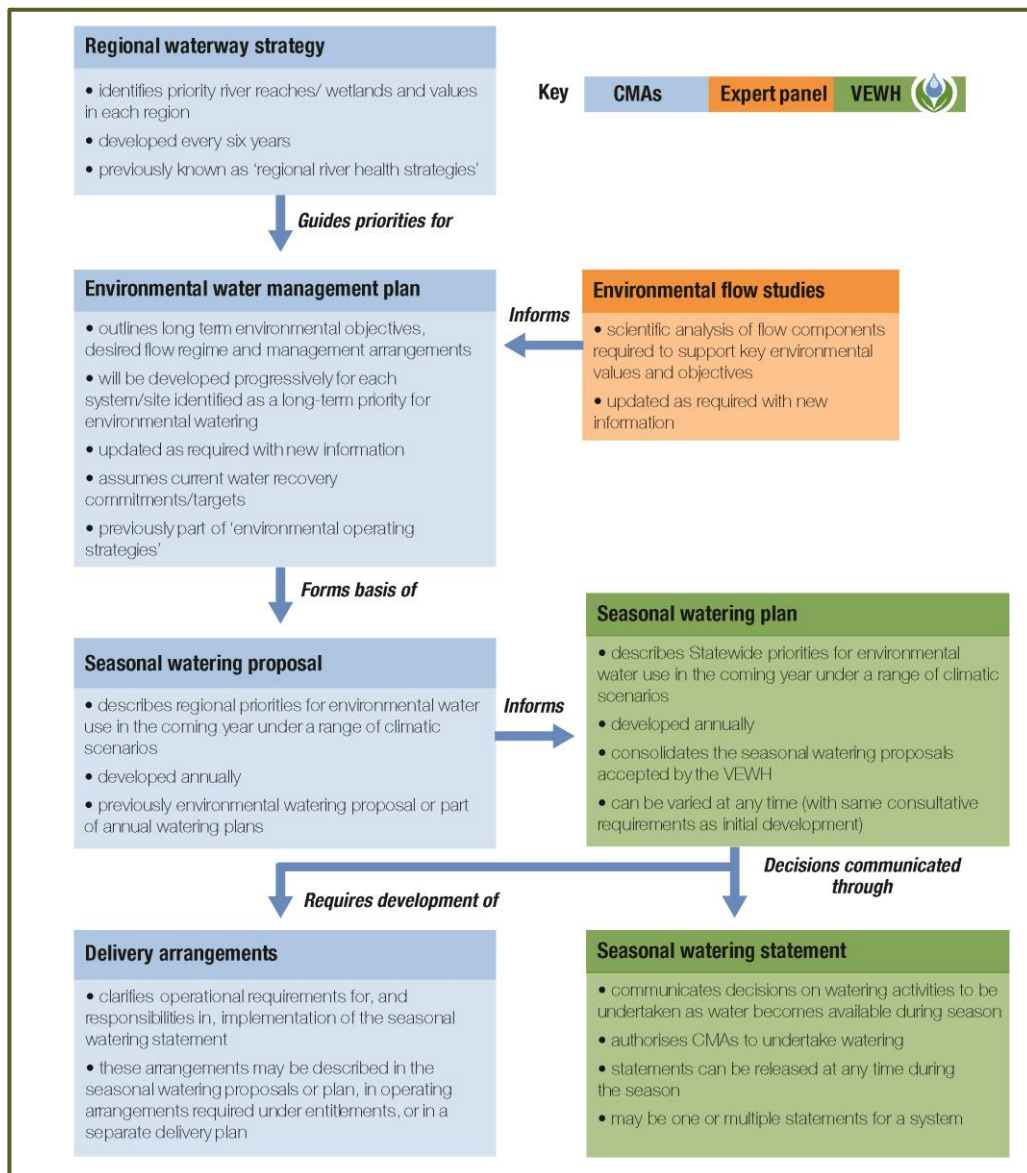
**December 2016**

### **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 the environmental entitlement is used to achieve the best environmental outcome with the available water. The North Central CMA, as the regional waterway manager, has a statutory responsibility to prepare Seasonal Watering Proposals (SWPs) under Section 192 of the Victorian *Water Act 1989* (see. SWPs are developed annually and document the following for each environmental water management system:

- 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 environmental water delivery.

To ensure that SWPs capture the knowledge and experience of local landholders and communities, public land managers and storage operators the North Central CMA has established Environmental Water Advisory Groups (EWAGs) for its environmental watering program within the region.



**Figure 1 : Victorian environmental water planning process**

## Priority Sites

Seasonal watering proposals are prepared for the following systems in the North Central CMA region (see Figure 1 for specific locations).

### 1. Coliban River

The Coliban River downstream of Malmsbury Reservoir flows for approximately 58 kilometres before entering Lake Eppalock.

### 2. Campaspe River

The Campaspe River lies in the east of the region flowing 245 km north from its headwaters near Woodend to its confluence with the Murray River at Echuca. The Campaspe River downstream



of Lake Eppalock is made up of three environmental flow reaches -Reach 2 (Eppalock to Campaspe Weir), Reach 3 (Campaspe Weir to Siphon) and Reach 4 (Siphon to Murray River).

### **3. Birch's Creek - Bullarook Creek**

Birch's Creek is a tributary of the Loddon River and rises on the northern slopes of the Great Dividing Range to drain a catchment area of 707km<sup>2</sup>. Three reaches are considered in terms of environmental water management with flow regulated by the operation of Newlyn Reservoir. Reach 1 extends from the outlet of Newlyn Reservoir to the Hepburn Race; a distance of approximately 7.5 km. Hepburn Race to Lawrence Weir (Reach 2) is a distance of approximately 10.5 km and includes the township of Smeaton. Reach 3 is approximately 19.3 km in length from Lawrence Weir to the confluence with Creswick Creek.

### **4. Loddon River (including Tullaroop, Serpentine, Twelve Mile and Pyramid creeks)**

The Loddon River system comprises six reaches of the Loddon River, from Cairn Curran to the Murray River, including Tullaroop, Serpentine, Twelve Mile and Pyramid creeks.

### **5. Boort District Wetlands**

The Boort District Wetlands consist of six actively managed, public land wetlands of bioregional significance (Lakes Boort, Lake Yando, Lake Leaghur, Lake Meran and Little Lake Meran) located on the floodplain of the Loddon River system.

### **6. Gunbower Forest and Gunbower Creek**

Gunbower Forest is a large flood dependent forest situated on the Murray River floodplain in northern Victoria between Torrumbarry and Koondrook. Covering 19,450 hectares, it is bounded by the Murray River to the north and Gunbower Creek to the south. It is an internationally significant site (Ramsar Convention) forming part of The Living Murray Gunbower-Koondrook-Perricoota Icon Site.

As the southern border to Gunbower Forest, Gunbower Creek is also a priority for watering. Gunbower Creek is 144 kilometre long anabranche of the Murray River. Twelve lagoons also feature along the creek system. Taylor's Lagoon will be actively managed with environmental water in the near future.

### **7. Guttrum and Benwell Forests**

Located on the mid-Murray floodplain of northern Victoria, Guttrum (1,270 hectares) and Benwell (660 hectares) forests are floodplain systems within the Murray-Darling Basin. Guttrum and Benwell Forests receive flood water during high and overbank flow events in the River Murray. At present, there is no infrastructure in either forest to deliver environmental water, but temporary pumping from the River Murray is a potential option to water the semi-permanent wetlands closer to the river, such as Reed Bed Swamp and Little Reed Bed Swamp.

### **8. Central Murray Wetlands**

The Central Murray Wetland Complex consist of eight actively managed, public-land wetlands of international (Ramsar Convention) and/or regional significance (McDonalds, Johnson, Hird swamps, Lake Murphy, Lake Elizabeth, Lake Cullen, Round Lake and Richardson's Lagoon) and one private wetland (Wirra-Lo Wetland Complex).

### **9. Wimmera Mallee Pipeline (WMP) Wetlands**

The WMP Wetland Complex is part of the Wimmera-Mallee Wetland System, which comprises 52 sites across the North Central, Wimmera and Mallee CMA regions. In the North Central CMA region, the complex consists of seven public (Creswick and Chirrip swamps, Corack Lake and

Jeffcott Wildlife Reserve) and private (Davis Wetland, Fella Dam and Jesse Swamp) land sites located within the Wimmera bioregion of the Avon-Richardson Catchment.

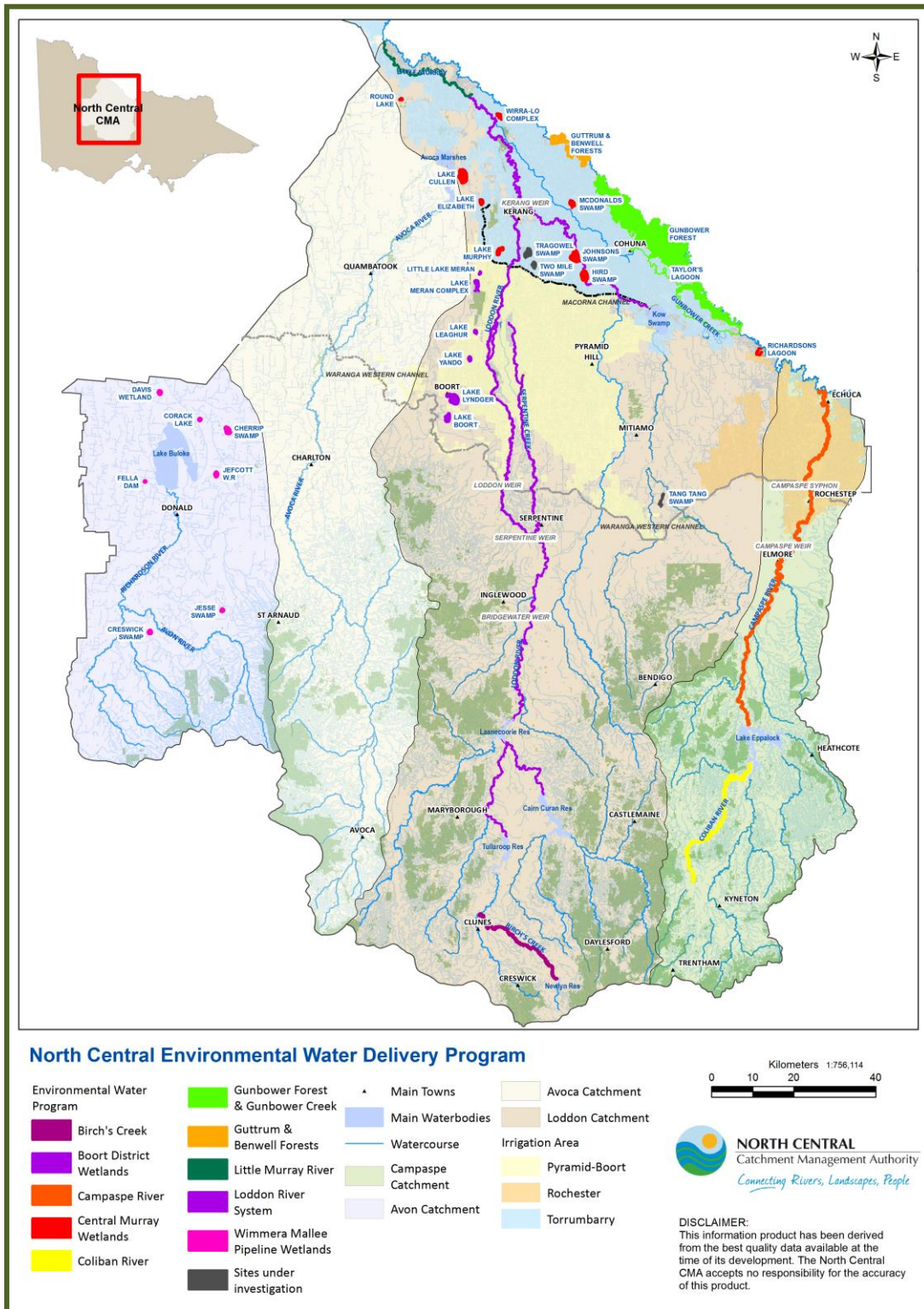
Table 1 identifies the environmental water sources that are available for each environmental water management system in the north central region.

**Table 1: Environmental water sources available for each environmental water management system**

<b>Environmental water management system</b>	<b>Environmental water sources</b>
<b>1. Coliban River</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bulk Entitlement (Campaspe System - Coliban Water) Amendment Order 2012</li> <li>• Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder (CEWH)</li> </ul>
<b>2. Campaspe River</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bulk Entitlement (Campaspe System - Goulburn Murray Water) Conversion Order 2000</li> <li>• Campaspe River Environmental Entitlement 2013</li> <li>• Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder (CEWH)</li> <li>• Environment Entitlement (Campaspe River - Living Murray Initiative 2007)</li> <li>• Bulk Entitlement (River Murray Flora and Fauna) Conversion Order 1999</li> <li>• Inter Valley Transfer: Goulburn Valley Account and Campaspe Valley Account</li> </ul>
<b>3. Birch's Creek-Bullarook system</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environmental Entitlement (Birch's Creek – Bullarook System) 2009</li> </ul>
<b>4. Loddon River (including Tullaroop, Serpentine, Twelve Mile and Pyramid creeks)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bulk Entitlement (Loddon River – Environmental Reserve) Order 2005</li> <li>• Goulburn River Environmental Entitlement 2010</li> <li>• Environmental Entitlement (Goulburn System – NVIRP Stage 1) 2012</li> <li>• Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder (CEWH)</li> <li>• Bulk Entitlement (River Murray Flora and Fauna) Conversion Order 1999</li> <li>• Inter Valley Transfer – Loddon Inter Valley Trade Account</li> </ul>
<b>5. Boort District Wetlands</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bulk Entitlement (Loddon River – Environmental Reserve) Order 2005</li> <li>• Goulburn River Environmental Entitlement 2010</li> <li>• Environmental Entitlement (Goulburn System – NVIRP Stage 1) 2012</li> </ul>
<b>6. Gunbower Forest and Gunbower Creek</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Living Murray Initiative (TLM)</li> <li>• Bulk entitlement (Murray River – Flora and Fauna) Conservation Order 1999</li> <li>• Bulk entitlement (Murray River – Flora and Fauna) Conservation Order 1999- River Murray Unregulated Flow (RMUF)</li> <li>• Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder (CEWH)</li> <li>• Environmental Entitlement (Murray System - NVIRP Stage 1) 2012</li> <li>• Irrigation and consumptive water on-route</li> <li>• River Murray Unregulated Flows</li> </ul>



<b>Environmental water management system</b>	<b>Environmental water sources</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Private donations</li></ul>
<b>7. Guttrum and Benwell forests</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bulk Entitlement (River Murray – Flora and Fauna) Conversion Order 1999 (incl. Amendments Orders and Notices 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2009)</li><li>• River Murray Unregulated Flows</li><li>• Commonwealth Environmental Water Holdings</li></ul>
<b>8. Central Murray Wetlands</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bulk Entitlement (River Murray – Flora and Fauna) Conservation Order 1999</li><li>• Environmental Entitlement (Goulburn System - NVIRP Stage 1) 2012</li><li>• Environmental Entitlement (Murray System - NVIRP Stage 1) 2012</li><li>• Commonwealth Water Holdings</li></ul>
<b>9. Wimmera Mallee Pipeline Wetlands</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Wimmera and Glenelg Rivers Environmental Entitlement 2010</li></ul>



**Figure 2: Map of the North Central CMA region showing the location of each Environmental Water Management System**



## Environmental Water Advisory Group

### Purpose

Environmental Water Advisory Groups (EWAGs) have been established as the primary mechanism for engaging the community and stakeholders on annual environmental watering activities in the North Central CMA region. They play a critical role in ensuring the SWPs incorporate local community and stakeholder knowledge and expertise. EWAG members can provide feedback to the North Central CMA about the effects of environmental watering events as they occur, and can help to explain the purpose and effect of environmental watering actions to the broader community. Some EWAGs (for example the Gunbower Community Reference Group) may have an expanded scope to consider other NRM related projects in the environmental water management system. Where relevant, those additional roles and responsibilities will be clearly outlined to potential EWAG members before they join.

EWAG members will not determine environmental water requirements for any waterway or wetland. Watering requirements are determined by scientists with specialist skills in environmental water, ecology, geomorphology and hydrology. EWAG members may however provide advice on how recommended watering events can be delivered in a way that either enhances or minimises disruption to social and economic activities in the catchment. For example, EWAG members may advise how a recommended autumn or spring high flow could be scheduled to enhance or avoid disrupting a significant local event (e.g. increased visitation during the Easter holiday period or a community festival) or critical farming activities.

### Membership

Most EWAGs will include representatives from the North Central CMA, water corporations e.g. Goulburn Murray Water, environmental water holders (Victorian and Commonwealth), land managers (Parks Victoria and Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning), directly relevant interest groups and local landholders and community members. The North Central CMA Chief Executive Officer will determine the required membership of each EWAG.

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

- Knowledgeable about the environmental, social and/or economic values of the system
- Passionate about achieving good environmental and community outcomes for the system
- Committed to understanding issues relating to environmental water management
- Interested in strengthening relationships between the agencies responsible for managing and delivering environmental water, local communities and relevant interest groups
- Able to motivate and inform others.

It is important that EWAGs for large environmental water management systems include community representatives from a large geographic area that collectively have a detailed understanding of the whole system.



The North Central CMA will invite relevant government agencies, water authorities and interest groups to nominate staff members or individuals to represent them on particular EWAGs. It is expected that these organisations will take reasonable steps to ensure their representatives are able to participate in EWAG activities and minimise turnover of their representatives.

The North Central CMA will call for expressions of interest from community members who would like to join their local EWAG. Community representatives will be asked to serve a minimum term of two years on an EWAG. At the end of their term, community members may nominate to be re-appointed for a subsequent term. Ideally some community members will serve more than one term to ensure continuity within the group. The North Central CMA Chief Executive Officer will appoint members to each EWAG.

#### **Minimum requirements of EWAG members**

Members of the Group will be required to:

- Attend EWAG meetings. EWAGs will meet at least twice per annum, but may meet up to six times per year depending on the requirements of each environmental water management system. As a minimum each EWAG will have:
  - At least one meeting during the planning and development of the Annual SWP; and
  - At least one other meeting/field day per year
- Provide input to the development of annual watering activities
- Provide advice on the condition and impact of environmental watering activities on the river or wetland
- Provide feedback from the community on environmental water management
- Provide advice on community engagement and communication activities
- Provide information back to community groups on environmental watering decisions.

Note that EWAGs for more complex water management systems may have additional responsibilities. These will be determined on a case by case basis.

The North Central CMA will consult with the EWAG before making material changes to Seasonal Watering Plans.

The primary role of the EWAG is to inform the development of the Seasonal Watering Proposals that the North Central CMA submits to the VEWH as required under the *Water Act 1989*. The VEWH reviews all of the SWPs in the context of its statewide priorities and produces a final Seasonal Watering Plan that describes the agreed environmental water regime for relevant waterways in the coming water year. The North Central CMA is responsible for implementing the Seasonal Watering Plan for waterways and wetlands in its region. Climatic conditions, new information or unforeseen circumstances may mean environmental water cannot be delivered exactly as prescribed in the Seasonal Watering Plan. The North Central CMA will consult with the EWAG before making any material changes to the planned environmental water releases in a given year.





### **Meetings**

EWAG meetings will be chaired by a North Central CMA Board member or a North Central CMA Community Consultative Committee member. The North Central CMA will appoint the Chairperson for each EWAG. The location and starting time of the meetings will be a decision of the Chairperson upon the advice of the members.

A draft agenda will be developed with the Chairperson and sent at least five days prior to the meeting. Minutes will be recorded and reviewed by the Chairperson, then distributed to the Group within ten working days of the meeting.

### **Responsibility of Members**

EWAG members must commit to attend scheduled meetings and read prescribed pre-meeting papers as required. Further to this, members are expected to:

- Support a collaborative approach through
  - Respect for individuals
  - Open and honest discussion
  - Working together
- Encourage innovative thinking and be open to different ways of resolving issues
- Acknowledge that difficult discussions may take place and recommendations may need to be made
- 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 EWAG Chairperson to maintain confidentiality outside the group.
- Direct any requests for comment from the media to the EWAG Chairperson or North Central CMA staff representative.

EWAG members will be encouraged to inform the communities and organisations they represent about environmental watering issues and decisions and provide relevant feedback from their communities to the EWAG. Each EWAG will decide how such feedback should be reported and documented to ensure efficiency and effectiveness. At each EWAG meeting, the North Central CMA will report how it has responded to specific feedback provided by members of the EWAG.

Each EWAG will have a nominated North Central CMA staff member who will be the primary point of contact for EWAG members outside of scheduled meetings. All communication about EWAG business should be directed to that contact person to ensure appropriate information is recorded and acted upon.

Any members that fail to adhere to the responsibilities outlined above may be suspended or disqualified from the EWAG.



### Reimbursement of expenses

The North Central CMA will pay for venue hire and catering costs associated with all scheduled EWAG meetings and any relevant costs associated with field days.

Time and travel costs for representatives from government organisations and water authorities shall be paid for by each organisation.

The North Central CMA will reimburse community members and unpaid representatives from invited special interest groups consistent with its Reimbursement and Remuneration of Community Members policy (FIN094). This will generally extend to the issuing of fuel cards to recognise travel costs and the reimbursement of any other reasonable and unavoidable expenses.

### Environmental Water Advisory Group Membership (TBA)

Name of Member	Organisation/representation	Singatures
Active members		
Corresponding members		

*Connecting Rivers, Landscapes, People*