

Why do we need this review?



The Victorian Government is reviewing Goulburn to Murray trade and operating rules to protect the lower Goulburn River from sustained high flows over summer and autumn, and to make sure traded water doesn't increase delivery risks.

What led to these high unseasonal flows?

There have been significant changes in the southern connected Murray-Darling Basin over the past 20 years. More water is being delivered to the Murray downstream of Barmah Choke and supplying this water is becoming more difficult due to the reduced capacity of the Barmah Choke and decreased inflows from Menindee Lakes.

To meet sustained irrigation and environmental water demands, we are seeing increasing reliance in recent years on moving water from the Goulburn River to the Murray.

During 2017 to 2019 the drought in New South Wales meant there was less water available from other sources to meet demands – this increased pressure on the Goulburn River with record volumes of traded and tagged water delivered.

Delivering this water kept river flows in the lower Goulburn consistently high over summer and autumn, when the river would naturally be lower and with more variable flows.

What has the impact been on the lower Goulburn River?

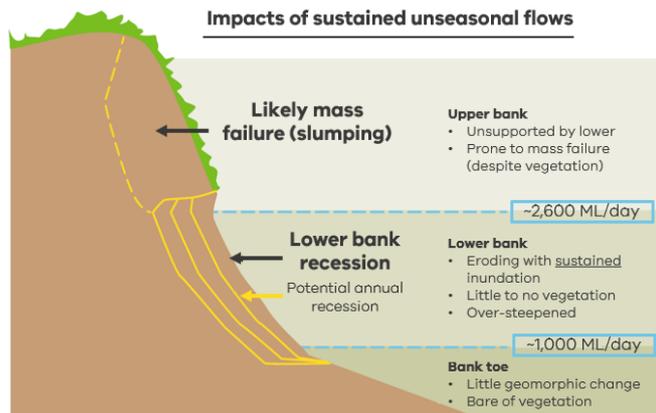
Consistently high river flows over summer and autumn have kept plants submerged that usually grow at the river's edges and on its lower banks and prevented their regrowth. High unseasonal flows have also reduced habitat for water bugs and many native fish species. Sustained high flows have also concentrated wave action and boating wash on the areas where vegetation had been lost, making riverbank erosion worse.

Together, these problems have led to severe erosion and notching (large incisions) of the lower riverbank, as seen in the photograph below.



What are the risks of allowing this to continue?

If sustained high flows over summer and autumn continue, the upper riverbank could collapse – this would increase the risk of mass failure and steepening of the riverbank, as illustrated in the diagram below.



Aboriginal cultural values would not be protected from damage from high flows over summer and autumn and further erosion could impact culturally significant sites as well as damaging the health of the lower Goulburn River.

Recreational fishing opportunities would be reduced due to the riverbank steepening hindering access to the river, and habitat loss lowering fish numbers.

While it may be possible to address erosion issues with remediation works, this would be costly and would irreparably change the natural habitat and look of the river. This would not protect the Goulburn River's important environmental, Aboriginal cultural and recreational values.

What has been done to date to protect the lower Goulburn?

In 2019, the Victorian Government established interim operating arrangements to help prevent further damage to the environment. This has meant that over the past two years, flows have been kept lower over summer and autumn.

Since then, the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) has worked with an independent scientific panel to better understand the ecological tolerances of the lower Goulburn River, including the impacts of different flow regimes.

As part of the Goulburn to Murray Trade Rule, we are now proposing long-term operating rules informed by scientific assessment, as well as new trade rules and continued regulation of tagged water use that create a level playing field and sustainable opportunities to trade. These are proposed as the preferred option in the regulatory impact statement, now open for public consultation.

We are now seeking feedback on the regulatory impact statement about the proposed long-term options to protect the lower Goulburn River with new operating and trade rules – see <https://engage.vic.gov.au/goulburn-murray-trade-rule-review>. This feedback will help to inform a Victorian Government decision on long-term Goulburn to Murray trade and operating rules that will start to come into effect from 1 July 2021.

Additional information

- [Fact sheet 2: Proposed long-term changes](#)
- [Fact sheet: Managing delivery risks in the River Murray](#)

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