

Chapter 13. Recreational values





13. Recreational values

The Victorian Government's strategic plan for how the state uses its water resources, *Water for Victoria* (DELWP 2016), defines recreational benefits or recreational values as:

The objectives and benefits that recreational users and community members associate with the use of water, reservoirs and waterways for recreational activities. These objectives and benefits include wellbeing and enjoyment derived from social interaction, physical activity, and relaxation associated with activities including sporting events, fishing, water-skiing, rowing, camping, walking and gathering with friends and family. Visitors making the most of these opportunities also results in economic benefits for local communities in regional areas.

13.1 Recreational values in the Murray-Darling Basin Plan

The Basin Plan cites various considerations regarding recreational values of water including:

Schedule 1 – Basin water resources and the context for their use

- *Item 26: The water resources of the Murray-Darling Basin are used in agriculture, non-agricultural industry, meeting critical human water needs and normal domestic requirements, for recreational and cultural purposes, and in maintaining freshwater ecosystems.*
- *Item 32: The resources are also used for water sports, wider recreational activities, to attract visitors to particular regions, and for visual amenity.*
- *Item 39: An estimated 430,000 people use Basin water resources for more than 5 million recreational fishing trips a year, with a most likely direct expenditure estimate of \$1.35 billion. Recreation and tourism use of Basin water resources is generally non-consumptive, but depends on a degree of ecological health. Ramsar-listed wetlands are significant tourist destinations.*



The objectives and outcomes in the Basin Plan include:

- *5.02 (a): Communities with sufficient and reliable water supplies that are fit for a range of intended purposes, including domestic, recreational and cultural use*

Water quality management plans prepared as part of meeting the Basin Plan also require consideration of recreational values:

- *9.07: The water quality objective for recreational water quality is to achieve a low risk to human health from water quality threats posed by exposure through ingestion, inhalation or contact during recreational use of Basin water resources.*
- *9.18: The water quality targets for water used for recreational purposes are that the values for cyanobacteria cell counts or biovolume meet the guideline values set out in Chapter 6 of the Guidelines for Managing Risks in Recreational Water.*

13.2 Summary of risks to recreational values

Recreational/social values were included in the risk assessment undertaken during the development of Victoria's North and Murray Water Resource Plan. Recreational/social issues were considered separately from Traditional Owner values and uses of water to acknowledge the unique nature of that use and to represent the significant work still required to understand those uses and values.

Risks to recreational/social values were assessed in terms of their availability and condition across the following categories.

- Availability:
 - social and recreational values
- Condition – based on state environment protection policy beneficial use categories of:
 - primary contact recreation (e.g. swimming)
 - secondary contact recreation (e.g. boating)
 - aesthetic enjoyment

The assessment found that the associated causes listed in [Table 13-1](#) pose a medium or higher risk to recreational water values in terms of the continuing availability of the resource and/or its condition.

Table 13-1: Identified medium or higher risks to the availability and condition for recreational/social values in Victoria’s North and Murray water resource plan area

Cause	Surface Water				Groundwater	
	Northern Vic WRP		Vic Murray WRP		Goulburn Murray WRP	
	Availability	Condition	Availability	Condition	Availability	Condition
Climate change	4	5	4	5	3	
Extreme drought	3	4	3	4		
Extreme wet		3				
Failure to continue to invest in improved land management practices		4				
Earth resource development		5		3		
Pests and weeds		3		3		

Legend	5	4	3
		Very high risk	High risk

13.2.1 Addressing risks to water resources for recreational needs

Victoria is preparing for a warmer, drier future with less water available and more extreme events. Dry conditions regularly affect the north and west of the state. In dry conditions and in drought, less water is available for all uses and recreational uses of our waterways can be limited. Yet it is at these times that the presence of water and recreational opportunities provide relief for people and can become even more important for communities. When water becomes scarce, community concerns can increase.

In regulated systems, we capture and hold water for entitlement holders in storages and move that water to where it is needed through rivers and channels. In these systems, we may be able to move water in a way that provides recreational benefits without affecting existing entitlement holders. However, we cannot guarantee this, especially in dry times. In unregulated systems, we cannot control how water moves. This means that recreation can be significantly impacted in dry conditions.

Victoria’s water entitlement and planning frameworks ensure we meet the needs of cities and towns and supply water for agriculture, industry and the environment. As part of the recreational water initiatives in *Water for Victoria* (DELWP, 2016), the Victorian Government will continue to work within these frameworks to find ways to meet recreational objectives.



While there are many activities in and around waterways that people can enjoy regardless of water levels, some activities such as boating, and fishing require a minimum water level or a consistent presence of water. There will be times when not enough water is available to support all recreational activities at all locations. This situation is likely to happen more often with climate change.

There are already limits to activities such as boating on some water storages to maintain safety, security and quality of supply. We need to manage access to water storages according to risk, particularly storages used for drinking water supply, which will continue to be managed within the requirements of the Victorian *Safe Drinking Water Act 2003*.

The Basin Plan requires states to identify strategies to address medium or higher risks. These strategies are detailed in the final Victoria's North and Murray water resource plan risk assessment (see [Appendix B](#)).

13.3 The benefits of recreational water

Victoria's rivers, streams, lakes and wetlands provide places for recreation and connection to nature, which is important for the health, wellbeing and social fabric of Victorian communities and regional tourism and employment. Victorians and visitors appreciate and seek recreational benefits through fishing, swimming, water-skiing, rowing, camping, walking, birdwatching, sporting events, social gatherings and other activities on or near waterways.

The recreational values of waterways depend on what activities are possible, the environmental health of the waterway, water quality, accessibility, facilities and safety.

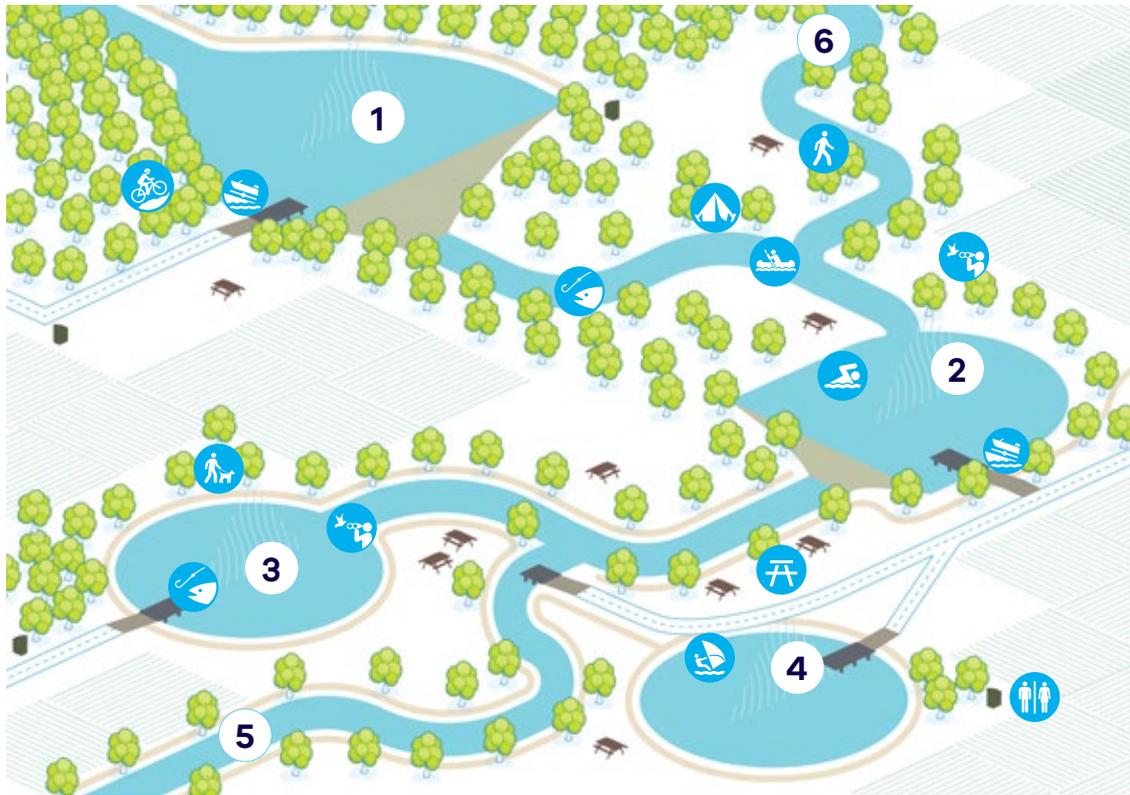
Prime recreational sites in regional areas provide opportunities for tourism and hospitality, drawing visitors from cities and towns, interstate and overseas. In small rural towns a local waterway or waterbody can be the lifeblood of a community, attracting and retaining people in the area through better amenity, social and recreational opportunities and providing an income for local businesses.

Recreational users benefit from Victoria's water management system as some water storages already support a variety of activities that visitors enjoy on and around water. Environmental water management and works to improve the condition of our waterways and wetlands also support recreational fishing, camping, walking and other social activities at these sites.

Figure 13-1 shows how water can be managed for recreational values at different water assets in a typical regional water system.

During the Millennium Drought, activities like boating, fishing and swimming were affected by low lake and storage levels and low river flows. Some water storages and lakes were dried up during this period. Climate modelling predicts a warmer, drier future with more droughts, floods and bushfires.

Water management opportunities for recreational values



1	2	3	4	5	6
Source storage	Transfer storage	End point lake or wetland	Disconnected lake or wetland	Regulated river	Unregulated stream
Harvest unregulated inflows	Provide temporary storage during season to enable water supply for entitlement holders	Water cannot be returned for consumption elsewhere	No existing connection to water grid	Recreational benefits from water supply and environmental flows	Sustainable limits on taking water support recreation
Critical for supplying downstream entitlement holders' water demands	Possible management of through-flows to support recreational values	Can receive supply that supports recreational values, where available	Infrastructure investment required to supply water for recreational use	Some ability to manage flows to support recreational values	Limited active management options to support recreational values
Ability to manage water to support recreational values very limited					

Figure 13-1: Water management opportunities for recreational values

Source: DELWP 2016

13.4 Recreational values in Victoria's North and Murray water resource plan area

Rivers, weir pools, storages and lakes throughout Victoria's North and Murray water resource plan area provide many social and economic benefits. Water in rivers and creeks offers amenity and recreation opportunities for local communities and supports tourism.

The purpose of this chapter on recreational values is to:

- articulate recreational values and connected benefits of these values to the community in Victoria's North and Murray water resource plan area, and the management practices that deliver these values
- outline the steps the Victorian Government is taking to better recognise recreational values in the state's existing water management framework as it delivers on actions in *Water for Victoria* (DELWP, 2016)
- discuss the risks to achieving improved outcomes for recreational values which emerged from the risk assessment conducted as part of the requirements of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan
- inform communities how they can continue engaging with government in upcoming processes to consider recreational values

Victoria's North and Murray water resource plan area contains an assortment of water-related recreation activities. Notable recreation destinations and tourism for the northern area include fly-fishing in the high-country rivers like the Kiewa River and Ovens River, water skiing on the River Murray, power boating on Lake Eppalock, sailing on Lake Boga, birdwatching at the Kerang Lakes and camping around and houseboating on Lake Eildon.

There are also many locations for swimming, powered water craft, white water rafting and sightseeing. River swimming pools are also in high demand on the Ovens River at Bright and Porepunkah over the summer months. Traditional Owners and their Nations also hold significant recreational and cultural values for the waterways in the water resource plan area.

Annual recreation events and important regional drawcards include the Massive Murray Paddle, the Mildura Easter Power Sports competitions, the Speedboat Eppalock Gold Cup and the Dartmouth Cup Fishing Classic. The internationally-recognised wetland system of the Barmah Forest, part of the largest river red gum forest in the world, is one of the major sites for recreational activities like birdwatching, walking and biking.

Water storages are important valued sites for recreation in the region. Goulburn-Murray Water (GMW) is the region's storage manager and actively works with local communities to improve recreational experiences at the lakes, dams and reservoirs it manages. GMW manages boating and recreation activities across most of its storages and is also Victoria's largest inland boating authority.

GMW works with reference committees of local waterbody users to develop management rules. It also works with local communities to manage water availability for recreational uses when storage levels decline during drought. Goulburn-Murray Water is investing in projects to provide more opportunities for recreation.

However, any extended dry periods impact on recreational activities, as this case study shows.

Case study: Creating great recreational opportunities at Goulburn-Murray Water storages

Fishing, boating and camping opportunities at Goulburn-Murray Water (GMW) storages attract many people each year in the northern region. GMW reports that thousands of people share the recreational benefits of these valued sites when the weather is fine, and visitors and locals flocked to lakes, dams and reservoirs for recreation in the dry conditions of 2017-18.

Recent initiatives like online interactive water level mapping for Lake Eppalock and Lake Eildon help people make the most of these recreational opportunities. This tool makes accessible, user-friendly information more available to help recreational users plan their activities on the foreshore of storages, lakes and waterways.

GMW has land and on-water management planning and implementation groups where the water corporation partners with community and recreation groups and agencies to support recreational activities and facility upgrades across many storages (see [section 13.8.2](#)).

Targeted advisory groups have helped realise the potential for better recreational experiences with the opening of Dartmouth pondage for recreational anglers and priority facilities upgrades at Lake Eppalock.

Case Study: Measuring the social and economic value of recreational water in selected waterways and waterbodies in the north east region

The North East Catchment Management Authority (NECMA) recently assessed the economic and social contribution that selected waterways and waterbodies make to the regional economy. The study interviewed providers supplying products and services to the lakes and weirs, users of waterways and waterbodies and local businesses.

The report was specific to north east Victoria and considered waterbodies in the Alpine Shire, Towong Shire, East Gippsland Shire, Rural City of Wangaratta and Wodonga City.

Findings from the report included:

- In 2017-18 the study estimated that the 15 selected recreational waterways and waterbodies contributed \$25.948 million to the north east region
- Families, club groups, retired couples and friendship groups are the most frequent users of recreational water facilities
- In 2017-18, 45.42 per cent of visitors to waterways in the north east region came from Melbourne, while local users made up 16.66 per cent
- There is a wide range of tourism experiences in the north east beyond water-based activities. At times of the year when these broader tourism activities are not at their peak, waterways and waterbodies contribute to the overall appeal of the region and bolster visits
- Water-based recreation in the region improves the physical and mental health of locals and visitors. In 2017-18 total health benefits calculated from participation at waterways and waterbodies were:
 - Physical health: Annual benefits: \$1,963,146
 - Mental health: Annual benefits: \$227,421
 - Total annual health benefit: \$2,190,567



13.5 Providing for recreational values

As the storage manager for the Northern Victoria system, Goulburn-Murray Water may provide opportunities for recreation in the region's reservoirs and rivers where this is compatible with other system management objectives including the primary role of supplying water to entitlement holders. As a result, much has been done in Victoria's North and Murray water resource plan area to improve access to water for recreation.

Land and on-water management plans have been developed for many of GMW's water storages including:

- Lake Eildon
- Lake Eppalock
- Cairn Curran Reservoir
- Lake Nillahcootie
- Waranga Basin
- Greens Lake
- Lake Hume
- Lake William Hovell
- Lake Boga
- Kow Swamp
- Lake Mulwala
- Nagambie Waterways
- Lake Buffalo

Each plan is developed and put into action by an implementation group of 12 people representing the community, local councils, recreation groups and other agencies. It is part of GMW's role to manage these plans.

The implementation groups plan and source external funding for initiatives to address land and on-water issues such as:

- increasing community awareness and involvement
- community safety
- recreation and tourism
- maintaining healthy ecosystems
- cultural heritage

13.5.1 Providing shared benefits for recreation

Victoria's water sector works with communities and other agencies to explore ways of maximising shared or complementary benefits of all water uses, without compromising the needs of the environment, agriculture, towns and businesses. By sharing benefits from the storage, delivery and use of water, we can make the most of limited resources to better meet objectives of key groups in the community.

As there are no specific entitlements for recreation in the water resource plan area, management of water can be carried out to provide benefits for recreation. Water corporations consider shared benefits as they make decisions about managing storages and operating rivers, and catchment management authorities and the Victorian Environmental Water Holder consider shared benefits in their decisions about environmental watering.

The Victorian Environmental Water Holder and catchment management authorities report each year on outcomes achieved through managing water for shared benefits. They also seek community feedback on any recreational benefits experienced after environmental water is delivered to sites.

13.5.2 Environmental water providing shared recreational benefits

The Basin Plan includes several requirements relating to environmental watering (see [Chapter 12](#)). Environmental water is critical to protect the native plants, wildlife and overall health of rivers, wetlands, floodplains and estuaries. It can also have social, cultural and economic benefits.

Environmental watering can increase recreational activities, sustain healthy Country for Traditional Owners and improve water quality for farmers. There are many examples where people enjoying recreation have shared the benefits of environmental flows, such as birdwatching and duck hunting at Hird Swamp, which is part of the Kerang Lakes.

Where possible, deliveries of environmental water entitlements are managed to boost the benefit to major recreational events and peak recreational periods. This can include adjusting the timing of flows to raise water levels and water quality, while still delivering environmental benefits.

The planning and delivery of environmental entitlements can consider recreational benefits where the environmental outcome will not be compromised. Members of community and recreational groups give feedback on the functions of delivering environmental water, including potential shared benefits like recreation.

Case Study: Kayaking down the Campaspe River

When water for the environment is released into the Campaspe River, the North Central Catchment Management Authority (CMA) and Goulburn-Murray Water notify landholders and other stakeholders so that people can take advantage of increased flows.

The North Central CMA notified stakeholders about the release of the 2017 spring high flow to the Campaspe River and the local canoe club took a trip down the river, navigating the rapids heightened by the increased flow. Their experience was captured on a Go-Pro provided by the North Central CMA and is available on the web: www.nccma.vic.gov.au/media-events/videos/kayaking-down-campaspe

13.6 Costs associated with recreational water management

Water for Victoria (DELWP, 2016) recognises the importance of maintaining affordable water services, while also noting that investment in infrastructure to provide services to homes and businesses, deliver environmental protection and recreational benefits and adapt to climate change will create pressure on costs.

This will be balanced by downward pressure on costs as the water sector continues to deliver efficiency through shared services and smarter procurement, innovative technologies and processes, greater interconnection of water resources and reduced red tape.

The Essential Services Commission is responsible for approving the price proposals of water corporations, in line with government policy and pricing processes for other water users. It is intended that people who benefit from recreational infrastructure and facilities contribute to the water corporations' investment in those services. Some water corporations recover the costs of land and recreation management functions at water storages through fees paid by urban water customers. Costs are also recovered through other activities such as licensing. GMW controls and manages the operations of houseboats on Lake Eildon through licensing and manages caravan parks and community clubs.

13.7 Recognising recreational values

Water for Victoria (DELWP, 2016) recognised the importance of recreational values to the community and noted this objective for recreational values of water:

'Water for Victoria will support the wellbeing of rural and regional communities who enjoy the recreational benefits our regional waterways provide. We will consider these values in the way we manage water.'

Water for Victoria (DELWP, 2016) acknowledged that until recently, incorporating recreational values in water planning had been inconsistent and community engagement on water and waterway management activities had not always considered recreation. It committed the water sector to improving its understanding of these values by including communities in conversations about water and waterway planning. This requires the water sector to collaborate with recreational water users, including the community, while still supplying water to entitlement holders and meeting environmental water and waterway health objectives.

Water for Victoria Action 7.1 – Include recreational values in water and waterway planning

The government will explicitly incorporate recreational values in state-wide and regional water planning processes.

Water corporations, catchment management authorities and the Victorian Environmental Water Holder will plan for and provide water services that explicitly consider recreational values within our existing frameworks and with awareness of the realities of dry conditions and climate change.

Water corporations, catchment management authorities and the Victorian Environmental Water Holder will engage with the community to identify and prioritise opportunities to deliver recreational outcomes. They will seek input from recreational users and regional and rural community members. They will report back on what is agreed and what has been done.

Water for Victoria (DELWP, 2016) also acknowledges that people may have new ideas about how to meet their recreational objectives that cannot be achieved in the day-to-day management of water and waterways. For example, recreational users could buy entitlements to increase the certainty of having water for recreation, complete works such as removing rubbish to improve enjoyment of activities, or develop tourism strategies to attract visitors. However, they may not know how to progress their ideas or who can help them.

It can be difficult for community members to know where to start, but many agencies from the water and land management sector can help, including those shown in [Table 13-2](#). This sector has knowledge it can share to help people meet their recreational goals. Water corporations already share information about water levels and availability to help tourism operators plan events or fishery agencies make decisions about where to stock fish.

Table 13-2: Roles and responsibilities for recreational proposals at waterways

Role	Who
Driver of recreational objectives for waterways	Local community members Recreational clubs Peak recreational bodies Land managers e.g. Parks Victoria
Approvals for works on land or waterways	Catchment management authorities Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning Land managers
Information about water availability, quality, supply and trade	Water corporations Catchment management authorities
Information about water and waterway management, infrastructure and access	Rural water corporations Urban water corporations Catchment management authorities Victorian Environmental Water Holder
Potential investors in recreational objectives	Local community members Land managers Recreational clubs Peak recreational bodies Private investors Local government Regional Development Victoria Visit Victoria Catchment management authorities

Land managers for waterways can help communities contact the right agencies to discuss their ideas or proposals. Land managers include committees of management for Crown land, local government, Parks Victoria and the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning. The land manager may be a water corporation responsible for a water storage location, or a catchment management authority responsible for managing Crown land. The government expects its agencies to work collaboratively to explore these requests and communicate the results of any efforts that are made.

Water corporations are the organisations to lead discussions about water storages.

Buying water or building facilities such as toilet blocks or water infrastructure can take significant funds. Recreational groups and communities can sometimes pay, but this is not



always possible. People using recreational facilities and benefiting from investment in recreation are expected to cover the costs. Depending on the site and activities, these diverse users could be local people or businesses, recreational club members and visitors from other regions, interstate or overseas. Sites of high social and economic regional importance may benefit people across an entire region.

Existing ways of recovering costs from people who benefit from recreational services include fees charged for fishing licences, camping, boat ramp access and boating registration. These can support recreational aims at waterways.

Land managers may have their own ways of recovering the costs spent on recreational activities at the waterways they manage. It is essential that government agencies collaborate to access investment opportunities and increase the likelihood of achieving recreational aims. The availability of funds will depend on criteria for investment and funding priorities.

Water for Victoria Action 7.2 - Help communities understand how to achieve their recreational objectives

Public land managers will help recreational users connect with the right people, including local government, tourism boards and potential investing bodies, to progress actions relating to visitor experience at valued waterways. For water storages, water corporations are the right organisation to lead this.

The water sector will share knowledge, user-friendly information and expertise with community members, land managers and potential investors to help achieve recreational objectives.

The water sector will share information about community recreational objectives relating to waterways with organisations seeking to prioritise investment in regional development, recreation, community wellbeing and tourism objectives.

13.8 Opportunities for community involvement in water decision-making that affects recreational opportunities

13.8.1 Sustainable water strategies

Sustainable water strategies identify and manage threats to the supply and quality of the state's water resources and identify the potential to improve waterway health. The process provides a mechanism for methodical and thoughtful engagement to set priorities and directions in the regions. In 2009, the government released the *Northern Region Sustainable Water Strategy* (Department of Sustainability and Environment, 2009) that covers Victoria's share of the River Murray and the major Victorian tributaries that flow north into it.

The Victorian Water Act requires the strategies to be comprehensively reviewed at least every 10 years. A review of the first strategy to be developed, the Central Region Sustainable Water Strategy, started in late 2016.

Water for Victoria (DELWP, 2016) introduced a requirement to assess the sustainable water strategies after five years. The five-yearly assessments will identify any key trends and issues to be taken up for the 10-year reviews, and will inform the methodology of long-term water resource assessments.

Water for Victoria (DELWP, 2016) outlines a possible timetable to develop new sustainable water strategies. The review of the Northern Region Sustainable Water Strategy will begin in 2019.

Any new sustainable water strategy will include an appropriate range of climate change scenarios, a consultative committee with participation by Traditional Owners, and make sure it considers opportunities for achieving shared benefits for Aboriginal and recreational water values.

The *Northern Region Sustainable Water Strategy* (Department of Sustainability and Environment, 2009) notes the obligation of system operators to manage water quality without reducing the amount of water available for entitlement holders. System operators are obliged 'to work with interested parties (for example, the environmental manager or recreational interest groups to investigate options to manage water quality in this way)'.

Water for Victoria (DELWP, 2016) also requires the Department of Land, Environment, Water and Planning to provide a strong and responsive water entitlement system that seeks shared benefits with recreational users.

Water for Victoria Action 8.1 - Ensure a strong and responsive water entitlement system

The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning will work with water corporations and the Victorian Environmental Water Holder to review and streamline regulatory instruments to improve transparency, and clarify roles and responsibilities to reduce red tape and improve water literacy. The first phase of this work is to:

- clarify roles and responsibilities set out in bulk entitlements and associated instruments for the management of water systems, and ensure consistency, transparency and accountability to water users and the community
- rationalise and simplify existing regulatory instruments
- investigate opportunities to increase community involvement in system management arrangements and achieve shared benefits for Traditional Owners and recreational users

13.8.2 Land and On-water management plans

Action 7.3 of *Water for Victoria* outlines how water corporations will support recreation at water storages through infrastructure and better information. The action notes that water corporations will maintain infrastructure and facilities to support recreational objectives at their water storages under existing arrangements.

Action 7.3 requires water corporations to prepare land and recreation management plans for all major water storages of recreational value. In preparing and implementing the plan they will:

- work closely with the community and stakeholders
- consider the short, medium and long-term water resource management purposes and arrangements for the storage
- define agreed actions including the responsible agency and funding arrangements
- provide public progress reporting on the implementation of these plans and actions

Land and On-water management plans are in place for major Goulburn-Murray Water storages, these will be progressively reviewed over the coming years with community and stakeholders consulted throughout the process.



13.8.3 Including recreational values in water and waterway planning

Under Water for Victoria Action 7.1 the government will explicitly incorporate recreational values in future state-wide and regional water planning processes. Key agencies, water corporations, catchment management authorities and the Victorian Environmental Water Holder will plan for and provide water services that explicitly consider recreational values within our existing frameworks and with awareness of the realities of dry conditions and climate change.

Water corporations, catchment management authorities and the Victorian Environmental Water Holder will engage with the community to identify and prioritise opportunities to deliver recreational outcomes. They will seek input from recreational users and regional and rural community members. They will report back on what is agreed and what has been done.