

What does the review mean for recreational users of the lower Goulburn River?



The Victorian Government is reviewing Goulburn to Murray trade and operating rules to protect the lower Goulburn River from damage caused by sustained high flows over summer and autumn, which impact the river's recreational values.

How have high flows impacted recreational values on the lower Goulburn?

Consistently high flows in 2017-18 and 2018-19 reduced still water areas and vegetation along the river's edges and lower banks over summer and autumn. This affected native fish habitat and hindered breeding. High flows over summer and autumn have also inundated sandbars, impacting access to the river.

It also led to severe erosion and notching of the lower riverbank. If these sustained high unseasonal flows continue, the condition of the riverbank could worsen, and increase the risk of upper banks collapsing.

This would make it difficult for people to access the river, and the loss of habitat would lower fish numbers. Over time, the natural environment and look of the river could be irreparably damaged.

How will the proposed operating rules help?

There are currently no formal rules that set limits on flows for the lower Goulburn River over summer and autumn based on the river's ecological tolerances.

The preferred operating rules set lower more variable flows over summer and autumn that aim to avoid the damage seen in recent years. The rules are informed by the findings of an independent scientific panel and help protect river health and support fish species. The rules will improve the community's ability to use the lower Goulburn for recreation, with safe, more accessible sandbars compared to recent years.

The scientific panel indicated that while the proposed rules (1,100 ML/day) do not offer the same opportunities for recovery that even lower flows (940 ML/day) would, they are expected to avoid the kind of damage to the river seen in 2017-18 and 2018-19 and allow it to slowly heal over time.

How high will the river be?

The rules allow for average baseflows of 1,100 ML per day and three short, higher-flow pulses in summer and autumn (peaking at 3,000 ML per day, or 6,000 ML per day in future if privately owned pumps are moved from within the river channel). The rules prescribe that pulses will last

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up to 14 days, peaking at higher volumes for only a few days each time.

Example river heights are shown below.

Flow level	Murchison	Shepparton	McCoy's Bridge
1,100 ML/day	0.85 m	2.78 m	1.55 m
3,000 ML/day	1.83 m	3.35 m	2.56 m
6,000 ML/day	3.04 m	4.19 m	3.98 m
Minor flood	9.00 m	9.50 m	9.00 m

Water level at Shepparton during flows of 1,100 ML/day



Water level at Shepparton during flows of 3,000 ML/day



These pulses would increase river operators' flexibility in delivering water for the environment and irrigation downstream.

The timing and length of pulses are designed to minimise harm to fish species and riverside vegetation, and to avoid peak recreation periods, such as the opening of the Murray cod season and the Christmas holidays.

How will we know if the new rules are working?

To understand if the preferred operating rules are succeeding in balancing the river's values, we are proposing monitoring the river over the first three years to understand any impacts on riverbank condition, vegetation, native fish, and Aboriginal cultural sites.

If monitoring identifies that the rules are not working as intended, a review will be undertaken to establish whether changes to the rules are needed and propose modifications.

Additional information

- [Fact sheet 1: Why we're doing this review](#)
- [Summary of proposed operating rules](#)
- [Scientific panel environmental risk assessment](#)
- [Scientific panel's comments on proposed operating rules](#)

Making a submission

We are now seeking feedback on the preferred option identified in the recently released [regulatory impact statement](#).

Visit <https://engage.vic.gov.au/goulburn-murray-trade-rule-review> to make a formal submission or to fill out a short survey capturing your feedback.

Submissions now close 9 May 2021.

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