Respondents
Seventy-nine (79) surveys were completed over March-April-May. Of the respondents;
- ½ were from the south-eastern part of the region,
- ¼ were from the irrigation districts, and
- ¼ were either full time or part time farmers.

In the next round of community engagement, we will seek to engage more people from other parts of the region and more farmers.

RCS Local Areas
The North Central RCS 2021-27 will define Local Areas that reflect the region’s unique communities. We asked what people thought about the boundaries and descriptions of our draft Local Areas:
- **Irrigated Riverine** – most agreed with the boundary noting that irrigated agriculture in the area had declined and will continue to do so.
- **Dryland Plains** – small number of respondents, but all agreed with boundary
- **Midlands** – small number of respondents, only a slim majority agreed with boundary
- **Southern Uplands** – only a slim majority agreed with the boundary, with several suggesting that Heathcote be included. Many comments were made regarding the description of this area:

  “Identifying rural residential land use as a problem to be managed ignores the flipside that this is a source of innovation and rejuvenation of rural community, agriculture and conservation.”

  “The large number of absentee and lifestyle property owners in our area is possibly the major factor in the increasing problems with invasive weed and pest management.”

  “As well as small properties there are still large commercial farming operations that should be mentioned ... Could also mention a large proportion of ‘artisan farms’ e.g. pig farming, organic vegetable growers”

Considering the feedback received, we’re making some changes to the Midlands and Southern Uplands areas, which we will share and discuss in the next round of online community engagement in September.

Top challenges for rural landholders and community based NRM groups
When asked to pick the top five challenges for rural landholders and community based NRM groups – the most common responses were;
- Climate change,
- Less water available for agriculture, recreation, environment,
- Decline in biodiversity (including threatened species), and
- Current dry conditions
Top challenges for rural landholders and community based NRM groups

The top challenge by draft RCS Local Area offered further insight:

- **Irrigated Riverine** - Reduced availability of water
- **Dryland Plains** - Declining population of rural community
- **Midlands** - Current dry conditions
- **Southern Uplands** - Climate change
Support to play their part...
When asked what is needed to support landholders and community to play their part in the future; there was not a lot to distinguish the responses, however the most common by a small margin were; financial incentives, peer support and information/advice. Other suggestions included:

“Stronger policing of landholders responsibility in regard to weeds and pest animals. Non-compliance needs to have consequences.”

“Less red tape & charges”

“Acknowledgement of agricultural stewardship”

“Activities that enable dissemination of local knowledge build community capacity and encourage new ways of doing things”

Health of waterways, wetlands, soils and biodiversity
When asked to rate the overall health of waterways, wetlands, soils and biodiversity, the overall response was ‘moderate’ to ‘poor/very poor.’ In relation to health over the last 10 years; for waterways and wetlands, most responses were split between ‘stayed the same’ and ‘declining’. Whilst a clear majority of respondents selected ‘declining’ for biodiversity and ‘stayed the same’ for soils.
RCS Renewal for 2021-27
Engage Victoria Online Survey
and Map: Summary Outcomes

Threats
The top threats selected for natural resources were;

- Drying climate,
- Pest plants
- Reduced stream flows
- Pest animals

Some also expressed concern about the loss of habitat associated with irrigation modernisation and waterway erosion caused by high environmental flows.

Vision
Most survey respondents outlined a long-term vision for the waterways, wetlands, soils and biodiversity (native flora and fauna) in their area. The visions provided by respondents living in the Dryland Plains and Irrigated Riverine areas have been reviewed and combined into the draft visions outlined below, to be discussed further in the next round of engagement. Draft visions for the other areas will be developed once new boundaries are confirmed.

- **Dryland Plains:** Healthy environment with productive soils, thriving waterways, with biodiversity protected and connected across the landscape
- **Irrigated Riverine:** Productive soils and water for irrigation sustaining farms alongside healthy waterways, wetlands and habitat for flora and fauna to thrive

Interactive map results
There were two activities for respondents to complete on the interactive map:

- From the 32 ‘My Favourite Place’ pins four winners were selected, one from each local area. Each nominated a local business for their $100 voucher prize. See Engage Vic page for details.
- Of the 25 Draft RCS Priority Place pins;
  - 17 were either partially/fully within or directly adjacent to a draft RCS priority place
  - 8 were outside a draft RCS priority place

Comments were provided as to the value of these places, and some great photos too. These will be considered as part of the RCS asset review and discussed further with community members as part of the next round of engagement.