



What are the new interim operating rules?

Why are interim operating rules being introduced?

The Victorian Government is introducing new interim operating rules for 2021-22 that build on the last two years of interim arrangements. The new interim operating rules will see similar volumes of water delivered as in recent years, but in a more ecologically sustainable pattern with lower and more variable flows over summer and autumn. These rules will be matched to interim trade and tagging rules, to support trade from the Goulburn within ecological tolerances and without impacting the reliability of other entitlements.

The aim of the new interim rules is to reduce the risks of further environmental damage from prolonged high flows over summer and autumn, and to enable some recovery from damage that has occurred in recent years.

What are the new interim operating rules?

The rules prescribe average base flows of 1,100 ML per day over summer and autumn – lower than flows in any recent years – for six to eight weeks between three short higher volume releases (or 'pulses'). Pulses will last 14 days in total, peaking only for a few days before prescribed rates of recession return flows to 1,100 ML per day for another base flow period.

The rules have been refined based on recent consultation on the Goulburn to Murray trade review regulatory impact statement to provide additional flexibility for environmental water managers and to ensure the rules are practical and able to be implemented by river operators.

How will water be delivered this summer and autumn?

In 2021-22 river operators will aim for six to eight weeks of base flows averaging 1,100 ML per day before the first late spring/early summer pulse is delivered. There will then be another month-long period of lower base flows averaging 1,100 ML per day before each of the two subsequent pulses to help vegetation establish before each short higher release of water.

Releases of up to 6,000 ML per day will be trialled in late spring/early summer and in autumn, in line with times when environmental water managers have used higher volume releases before. Trialling larger releases of water using inter-valley trade won't create additional trade opportunity but will help to provide more information about how we can use larger releases of water in future to support trade without increasing delivery risks.

A smaller pulse of up to 3,000 ML per day will be delivered during summer, peaking in early February, but only after the prescribed period of at least a month of lower base flows has been met.

What will be tested in 2021-22?

Further scientific assessment of summer pulses

Through consultation we heard strong mixed views about operating rules for the lower Goulburn River. In response to stakeholder concerns about larger releases of water being delivered over summer, further scientific assessment will be undertaken in this year to better understand how the river would likely respond.

Mid-summer pulses will be kept to 3,000 ML per day until we learn more based on the best available science.

Goulburn to Murray trade rule review: 2021-22 Operating rules and monitoring

Trialling larger pulses

To learn more about using higher volume releases over summer and autumn to deliver inter-valley trade, we will trial two specifically timed larger pulses of up to 6,000 ML per day using the existing notification process for pump owners that environmental managers use.

While not delivered every year, late spring/early summer and autumn higher volume releases are current practice by environmental water managers to achieve a range of ecological objectives.

Feasibility study

Trialling larger releases will require sending notifications to pump owners in the lower Goulburn who may be irrigating at the time. Mid-summer pulses – at the peak of the irrigation season – will be kept lower in 2021-22 which will avoid impacting pump owners at a critical time of year.

A feasibility study that looks at how privately owned pumps may be impacted by higher releases of water through summer and autumn and options for moving works will be undertaken this year. The Victorian Government is partnering with the Commonwealth and Goulburn-Murray Water to pursue this project, for improved long-term outcomes for the lower Goulburn River.

Moving in-channel pumps in the Lower Goulburn to the top of the bank could enable greater operational flexibility to deliver pulses up to 6,000 ML per day over summer and autumn, within ecological tolerances. It would also provide greater flexibility for environmental water holders to deliver water at short notice and provide improved flood resilience for the pump owners.

On-ground monitoring

The Victorian Government has secured funding for a three-year monitoring program for the lower Goulburn River. We will partner with Traditional Owners, scientists and environmental managers to monitor:

- Aboriginal cultural values such as sites of cultural significance and totem animals that depend on a healthy lower Goulburn River
- Riverbank and vegetation condition before and after each summer/autumn period
- Native fish species and their habitats, including surveys of adults, larvae and eggs during base flow periods and higher flows (pulses).

When will long-term rules be put in place?

The outcomes of this first year of monitoring, further scientific assessment of summer pulses and pump feasibility study will all be made publicly available and will help inform a decision on long term trade and operating rules ahead of 1 July 2022.

Long-term operating rules will see improvements made to the interim operating rules, which will be embedded into legislative instruments to ensure they are complied with going forward.

Additional information

- [Interim operating rules for 2021-22](#)
- [Summary: Closing the loop on Goulburn to Murray review RIS consultation](#)
- [How we're addressing community feedback](#)

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Printed by Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning

ISBN 978-1-76105-659-8 (pdf)

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