



Environment Report Consultation Plan

Guttrum–Benwell and Gunbower Floodplain Restoration Projects

Updated March 2025



**VICTORIAN MURRAY FLOODPLAIN
RESTORATION PROJECT**

HEALTHY LANDSCAPES, STRONG COMMUNITIES

Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Why do we need these projects?	5
3. Planned works	7
4. Engagement approach.....	10
5. Stakeholder identification.....	12
6. Consultation to date	16
7. Engagement tools and schedule of activities	19
8. Recording, monitoring and reporting.....	24
9. More information	26
Appendix 1: Detailed maps	27
Appendix 2: Detailed list of stakeholders.....	29
Appendix 3: Project factsheet	33

Environment Report Consultation Plan – Guttrum–Benwell and Gunbower Floodplain Restoration Projects

Authorised and published by the Victorian Murray Floodplain Restoration Project

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Updated May 2025

Cover photo: Reed Bed Swamp at Guttrum State Forest in flood (Source: North Central Catchment Management Authority)

Acknowledgment of Country

The Victorian Murray Floodplain Restoration Project (VMFRP) acknowledges and respects Traditional Owners, Aboriginal communities and organisations. We recognise the diversity of their cultures and the deep connections they have with lands and waters.

We value our relationships with Traditional Owners, Aboriginal communities and organisations for the health of People and Country.

VMFRP management and staff pay their respects to Elders past, present and emerging, and recognise the primacy of Traditional Owners' obligations, rights and responsibilities to use and care for their traditional lands and waters.

1. Introduction

Purpose of this document

This plan outlines the consultation program and communication and engagement activities that will be delivered as part of the Environment Report (ER) and planning scheme amendment (PSA) processes for the proposed works to restore the Murray River floodplains at Guttrum and Benwell State Forests and the Gunbower National Park.

It establishes the overarching principles, objectives and approach to engaging with stakeholders, Traditional Owners and the community as the Victorian Murray Floodplain Restoration Project (VMFRP) moves through the planning and approvals phase for the Guttrum–Benwell and Gunbower floodplain restoration projects.

This plan may be modified and updated as the ER process progresses to respond to emerging issues, engagement opportunities or community preferences.

This plan is supported by an addendum with a more detailed schedule of planned engagement activities. The addendum will continue to be periodically updated until the scope of the currently funded approvals phase of the VMFRP is completed. Subsequent project phases (pending business case and funding decisions) will require a new fit for purpose consultation program, beyond the scope of this document.

Consultation plan objectives

The VMFRP is committed to:

- informing stakeholders, Traditional Owners and local communities about the proposed project and program of environmental studies
- encouraging participation and providing opportunities for local communities, Traditional Owners and stakeholders to be involved in the ER process
- communicating in a timely, clear, accessible and easily understandable manner
- showing how community and stakeholder concerns have been considered in the project and environmental reporting.

Background

The VMFRP aims to reconnect around 14,000 hectares of wetlands and floodplains to the Murray River at priority sites in northern Victoria.

The planned works will enable water onto and off the floodplains effectively and efficiently to bring new life and help these ecologically significant floodplains survive and cope with climate change and future dry conditions, so they can continue to be enjoyed by future generations.

This project is part of Victoria's obligations under the Murray–Darling Basin Plan. It will bring substantial financial investment into the region, creating jobs, attracting tourism and helping local economies, reducing the need for further water buybacks.

The VMFRP is being implemented through a partnership between:

- Lower Murray Water (the project proponent)
- Goulburn-Murray Water
- Mallee Catchment Management Authority
- North Central Catchment Management Authority
- Parks Victoria
- Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA).

Assessing projects for environmental impacts

The VMFRP is targeting floodplain sites in Northern Victoria for restoration, including the Guttrum and Benwell State Forests (Guttrum–Benwell), and the Gunbower National Park (Gunbower).

On 6 December 2020, the Minister for Planning decided that an Environment Effects Statement (EES) was not required for the two projects, subject to specific conditions being met. The Minister's decision requires the VMFRP to prepare an ER (in lieu of an EES) under the *Environment Effects Act 1978* to assess and manage specific potentially significant environmental effects of the Guttrum–Benwell and Gunbower projects.

Assessment scope

The core scope of the ER is included within the conditions set by the Minister in [his decision on the environment assessment referrals](#). DEECA will prepare a scoping document to help specify these matters needing to be investigated and documented by the proponent in the ER and supporting technical studies.

Investigations will be undertaken to further understand the expected ecological benefits and impacts, potential effects to Aboriginal cultural heritage, potential effects to hydrogeology and groundwater quality, possible project design alternatives, potential for cumulative impacts of these projects and other VMFRP projects and how any potential impacts from constructing and operating the proposed infrastructure will be managed.

Scoping documents are published on the Department of Transport and Planning website at planning.vic.gov.au/environment-assessment/browse-projects/projects/gunbower-guttrum-benwell

Public exhibition and finalisation of the ER

Once the ER is prepared and DEECA is satisfied that it meets the requirements of the relevant ER scoping document, the ER and draft PSAs will be made available for public comment.

An Advisory Committee will consider the ER, draft PSAs and public submissions received, and will prepare a report for the Minister for Planning.

A revised ER (or addendum to the ER, if requested) will then be prepared and submitted to DEECA.

At the conclusion of the ER process, the Minister for Planning's assessment report is prepared, which is then considered by relevant decision-makers.

EPBC assessment

The Commonwealth Minister for the Environment also determined that the project requires assessment and approval under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). Under a bilateral agreement between the Commonwealth and Victoria, the ER process is accredited to assess impacts on matters of national environmental significance (MNES) and will be integrated into the ER process. The Commonwealth Minister or delegate will decide whether the project is approved, approved with conditions or refused under the EPBC Act, after having considered the Minister for Planning's assessment under the EE Act.

Consultation under the EE Act

The EES process requires the VMFRP to prepare and implement a public consultation plan to provide the framework for consultation during preparation of an EES. This plan also provides the framework for consultation on the draft PSA given that the two processes will run in tandem.

While the preparation of a consultation plan is not specifically required for the statutory ER process, the VMFRP has chosen to prepare a consultation plan (this plan) for the Guttrum–Benwell and Gunbower projects to reflect a consistent level of consultation and investigation across all VMFRP projects and to align with key stages of investigation.

As part of the ER and draft PSA development, the VMFRP will document the current ecological, social, commercial, recreational, cultural and landscape values, as well as the adequacy of mitigation measures for negative environmental impacts.

During this period, stakeholders and the community will be provided with project and ER updates and opportunities to provide feedback on expected benefits, project design, predicted effects on environmental values, cultural heritage and the PSA process.

This builds on the engagement that has already taken place throughout the life of these projects and in the lead-up to the ER process. This engagement will continue beyond the environment report assessment process into the construction and operation phases if the projects are approved.

Section 7: Engagement tools and schedule of activities outlines the key ER stages and consultation activities planned. Other opportunities for involvement will be further defined during project delivery.

Community and stakeholder feedback will be considered by specialists completing the ER investigations and in ongoing refinement of the project design.

Planning Scheme Amendment

The projects at Guttrum–Benwell and Gunbower require planning approval under the Gannawarra Planning Scheme and Campaspe Planning Scheme in accordance with the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*. Planning approval can occur via planning permits under the local planning scheme or changes to the planning scheme known as a planning scheme amendment (PSA).

The VMFRP intends to make a request to the Minister for Planning under section 20(4) of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* to prepare, adopt and approve a PSA, without notice, to enable the projects to proceed without the need for further planning approval.

The draft PSA will be prepared and exhibited with the ER, giving the community and stakeholders a formal opportunity to give feedback on the draft PSA and ER at the same time.

Stakeholders will have other opportunities to give feedback leading up to the exhibition, as listed in *Section 7: Engagement tools and schedule of activities*.

In order to support the request, a report will be prepared detailing the consultation that has occurred on the draft PSA and proposed PSA process.

The report will outline:

- the extent and type of notification
- a summary of key issues raised by submitters
- VMFRP's response to these issues, whether the issues have been satisfactorily addressed by the PSA or are outside the scope of the PSA.

Cultural heritage assessments

Separate to the ER and EES processes, a Cultural Heritage Management Plan is being prepared for each of the VMFRP sites. These plans assess the potential impact of projects on Aboriginal cultural heritage, and outline measures to be taken before, during and after construction to protect Aboriginal cultural heritage.

As part of this process, relevant Traditional Owners have been and will continue to be engaged to ensure significant sites, practices and places of Aboriginal cultural heritage are identified and protected.

2. Why do we need these projects?

The floodplains next to the Murray River have evolved to periodically receive water. Historically, the river would spill onto the floodplains as often as 8 out of every 10 years, creating rich, lush landscapes teeming with life.

As our towns, cities, agriculture and industries have grown over time, we have changed the way the river flows to suit our purposes by using weirs and dams. While this has benefited regional communities and economies, water no longer flows naturally as it once did, and the Murray River can no longer water these floodplains often enough to keep them healthy. Figure 1 shows a natural flooding regime and the types of vegetation that benefit from wet and dry cycles at different levels of the floodplain.

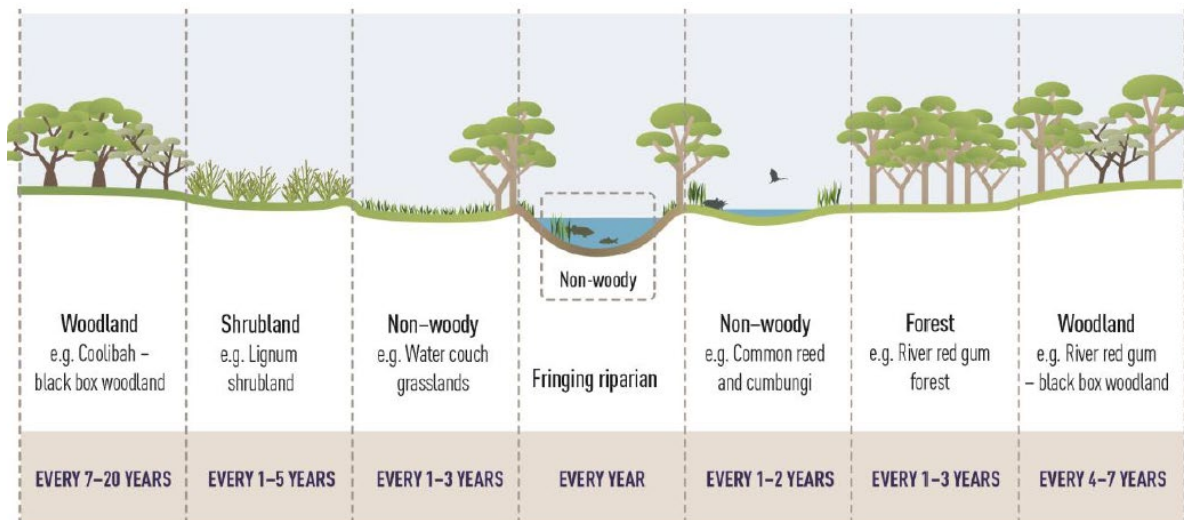


Figure 1: Stylised example of structural groups of vegetation, their position on the floodplain and their watering frequency (source: Murray–Darling Basin Authority, 2014)

The condition of forests and woodlands of the Murray River floodplains has been declining rapidly over the past two decades. Many of the river red gum and black box communities are stressed, particularly those further away from the river channel, permanent anabranches, creeks and wetlands.

River red-gums are often referred to as the ‘ecological engineer’ of the Murray River floodplain – everything relies on them to maintain health. The canopy provides a home for bats and birds, fallen limbs provide habitat for snakes and small creatures, and fallen leaves add nutrients to the water. When the river red gums are struggling because they are not receiving water often enough, it indicates that the floodplain as a whole is not well.

The VMFRP aims to return a more natural flooding regime across around 14,000 hectares of high ecological value Murray River floodplain by removing blockages that stop floodwater from flowing into creeks and floodrunners. Building infrastructure like pump stations, flow regulators, and culverts to water the floodplain and hold water there for longer or allow water to drain back to the river.

This water will bring new life by improving the condition of vegetation communities and providing habitat for native species like fish, birds, frogs and turtles. It will help the floodplains to survive and cope with climate change, future dry conditions and drought, so they can continue to be enjoyed by future generations. Figure 2 shows the difference this water can make.



Figure 2: A healthy and productive floodplain in Guttrum State Forest during natural flooding in 2016. There is no easy way to deliver environmental water into the Guttrum or Benwell State Forests and natural floods are becoming less frequent. The project will enable more frequent watering events in these forests, increasing floodplain productivity and diversity and boosting the chances of successful bird breeding cycles.

(Source: North Central Catchment Management Authority)

Project benefits

The project will restore the condition of the floodplain, protecting threatened vegetation and the ecological and cultural values of the site through improved water quality, flows and inundation.

Healthier floodplains are good for:

Local wildlife

Lots of species rely on floodplains for food, habitat and breeding, from microscopic creatures to frogs, fish, birds, bats and other mammals.

We expect to see improved frog and fish diversity, improved productivity of wetlands, improved breeding habitat for waterbirds and restoration of populations of species such as the carpet python and the Giles Planigale.

Vegetation

Flooding brings vegetation back to life, creating habitat, foraging and food for floodplain creatures.

Some flood dependent species like river red gums and black box trees rely on the more regular floods that inundate the floodplains for months on end. Animals such as bats and birds nest in the hollows of these trees.

Traditional Owners

Traditional Owners have cultural, spiritual and economic connections to land, water and resources through their relationship with Country, having managed land and water sustainably over thousands of generations.

Local communities and visitors

Healthy floodplains are beautiful places to visit and are great for recreation like boating, fishing, birdwatching, hiking, kayaking and camping.

Local economies

Projects will bring substantial financial investment into the region, creating jobs and helping local economies. Improving the health and condition of riverine landscapes can also help attract visitors to the region.

Site locations

Figure 3 shows the site locations. More detailed maps can be found in Appendix 1.

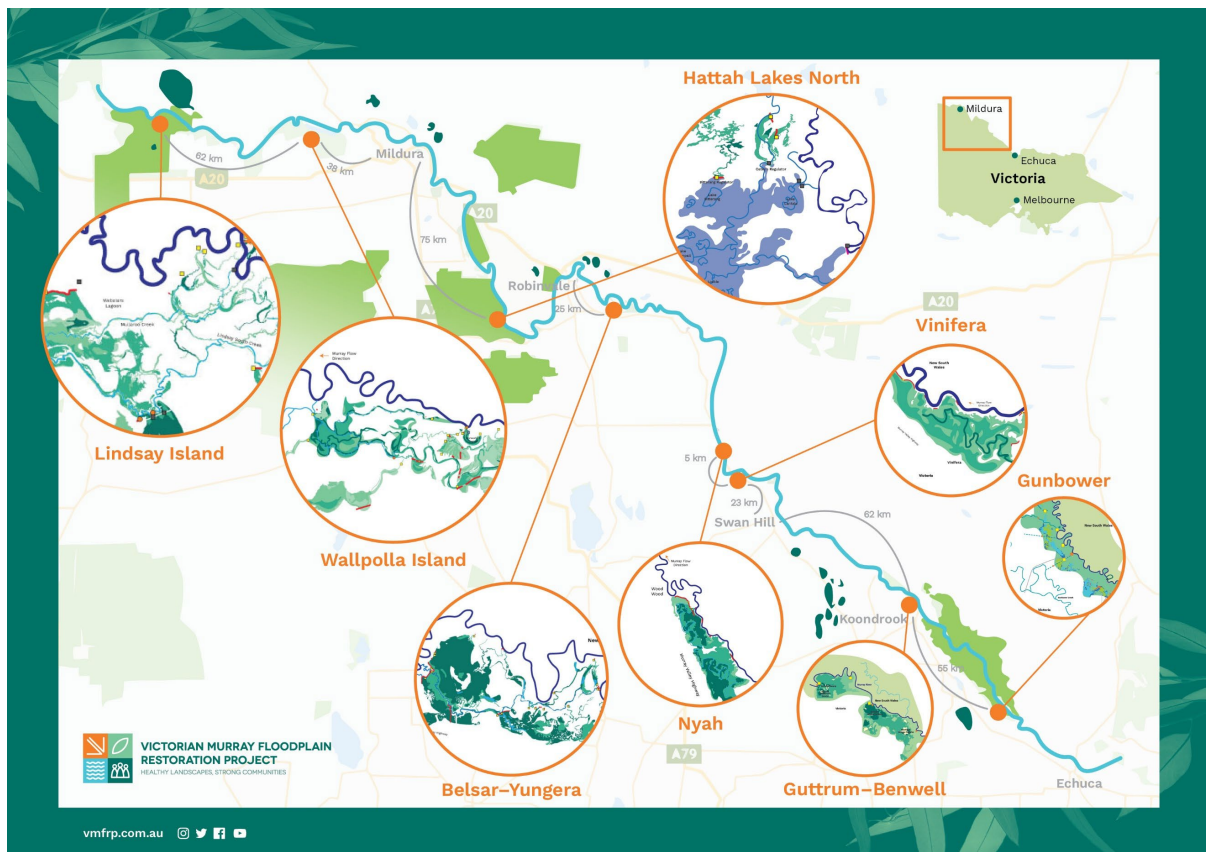


Figure 3: Map of the VMFRP sites

3. Planned works

The Guttrum-Benwell Floodplain Restoration Project is on the doorstep of the Koondrook township, and about 20 km north-east of Kerang in north central Victoria.

The Gunbower Floodplain Restoration Project is located 5 km to the north-east of Gunbower township, with proposed project works extending between the rural localities of Torrumbarry through to Burkes Bridge.

Gunbower Forest as a whole is recognised as internationally significant under the international Ramsar Convention and forms part of an 'Icon Site' under The Living Murray program. The majority of the Gunbower Forest is also listed as a Directory of Important Wetlands in Australia.

Planned works at Guttrum and Benwell

Under the proposal, three pump stations are proposed to be installed in Guttrum and Benwell forests on the Murray River, to deliver water for the environment to the forests (Figure 4).

Regulators are proposed to be built on forest outlets to control the water on the floodplain.

This will ensure the river red gums and semipermanent wetlands get a drink, plants have time to flower and set seed, soil moisture is replenished and waterbirds can feed and breed.

Forest perimeter levees already contain large floods and protect adjoining private property. Full forest watering events are a lot smaller than floods, so these levees will be repaired where and when required to fully contain water for the environment within the forests.

Refer to Appendix 1 for a more detailed map.

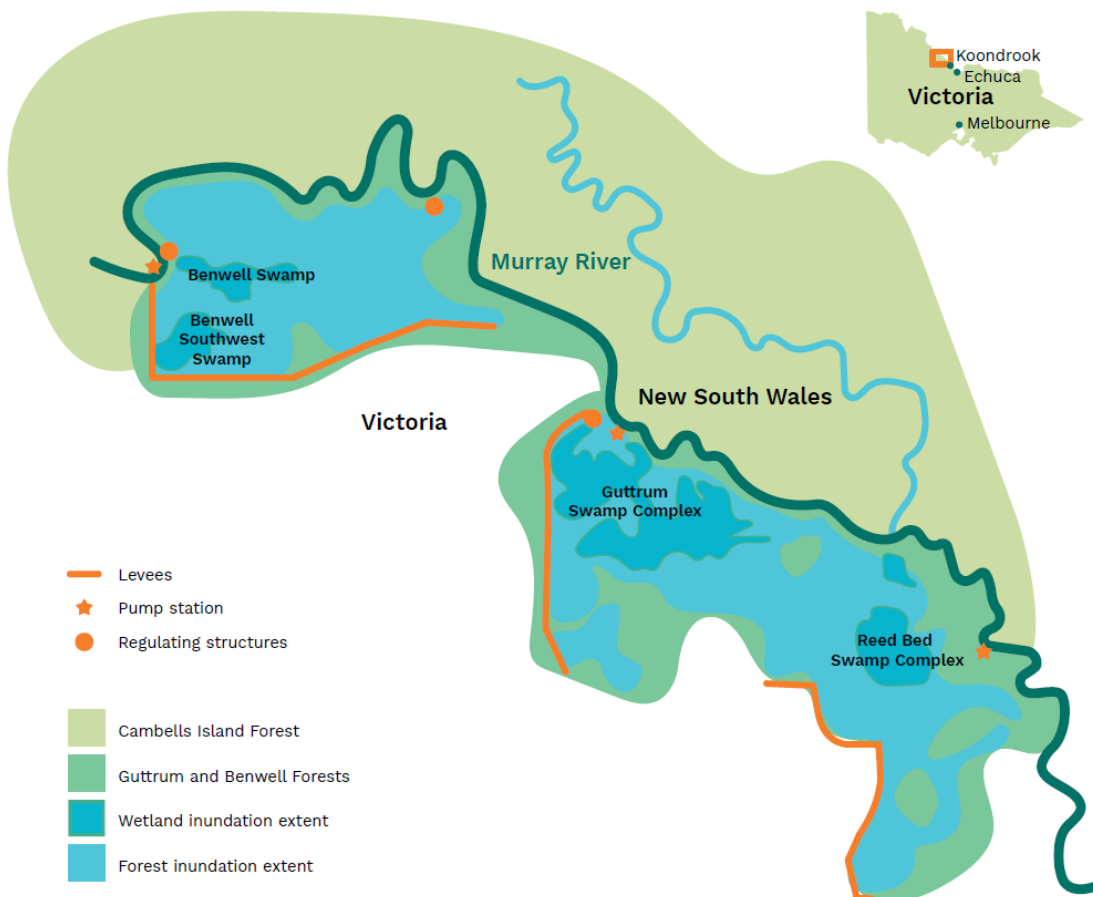


Figure 4: Guttrum-Benwell concept map

Planned works at Gunbower

Under the proposal, small regulators will be constructed along forest floodrunners to control the flow of water into and out of the inundation areas that are flood dependant. River regulating structures will contain water on the floodplains or drain water back to the river. Two pump stations will be constructed, one to deliver environmental water from the Murray River

onto the floodplain and another to relocate irrigators off Camerons Creek and onto the National Channel (Figure 5).

The proposal also includes a fishway on Camerons Creek to enable

The proposal also includes a fishway on Camerons Creek to enable fish passage into areas with healthy fish habitat to feed and breed in Camerons Creek and gain access back to the Murray River.

Refer to Appendix 1 for a more detailed map.



Figure 5: Gunbower concept map

4. Engagement approach

We need a mix of consultation methods to effectively engage with the spectrum of stakeholders interested in the ER process for these two projects.

The project will promote all engagement activities and provide up-to-date information about the process, so that stakeholders and communities can easily and meaningfully have their say.

A **stakeholder** refers to an individual, group or organisation with a stake or interest in the outcome of a decision. Stakeholders may also have the ability to influence the decision given their role or position.

Community, for the purpose of this project, refers to a group of people that has something in common such as identity, behaviours, interests or values. A community often share a sense of place in a given geographical area (e.g. a country, city, town or neighbourhood) or in virtual space through communication platforms.

This Plan acknowledges that groups or individuals may fall across all categories.

IAP2 Spectrum

We will use the [International Association for Public Participation – IAP2 International spectrum](#) to guide how the community and stakeholders will be engaged during the project planning and approval process. The IAP2 Spectrum is an internationally recognised tool for planning public participation in major projects.

The IAP2 Spectrum will allow us to tailor our approach depending on the different stakeholder groups and their needs. While the full spectrum goes from Inform to Empower, the ER consultation is focused on the first three engagement categories listed in Table 1.

Table 1: IAP2 Spectrum (inform to involve only)

	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE
Goal	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.
Promise	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision. We will see your feedback on draft proposals.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.

Consultation and engagement principles

We are committed to meaningful, inclusive and transparent engagement at all times. Our work is informed by the engagement principles in the best practice guidelines in the Victorian Government's Public Engagement Framework (see Table 2).

Our approach also aligns with the Community Engagement and Partnerships Framework for Victoria's Catchment Management Authorities, and reflects the intent of the principles to be applied in environmental watering outlined in the Murray–Darling Basin Plan, specifically Principle 7, which states that environmental watering should be undertaken with regard to the view of the local communities and persons materially affected by the management of environmental water.

Table 2: Engagement principles

Principles	
Meaningful	Meaningful communication and engagement involves clearly articulating the purpose and objectives, as well as developing a shared understanding of the negotiables and non-negotiables.
Inclusive	Communication and engagement must be inclusive and accessible, both in terms of language and design/delivery. This is a proactive approach to considering and overcoming barriers to understanding and engagement. Asking an individual or group in how they would like to participate and designing the process accordingly demonstrates respect.
Transparent	This means sharing information about the project, its background and rationale. It also means explaining why elements are non-negotiable (cannot be influenced), and why other elements are negotiable (can be influenced) from the outset.
Informed	This principle is particularly relevant to communication. Stakeholders need to receive relevant, tailored and timely information about the projects. They also need to understand their role in the decision-making process, where this is relevant. Community members need to be informed of the opportunities to take part in engagement. They need to understand how their contributions will be considered.
Accountable	This involves addressing concerns/requests; discussing how stakeholder input has affected/or did not affect a decision. This is known as 'closing the loop'.
Valuable	Value is delivered through the appropriate and efficient use of resources. Value also includes building social licence with the community and reducing financial and reputational risks to government. Value also applies to participants and their time – community members should always be treated respectfully.

5. Stakeholder identification

We have many stakeholder groups with diverse needs and interests as listed in Table 3. Our engagement approach will be tailored to each group based on the IAP2 categorisation in Table 1.

We recognise that stakeholder relationships are dynamic, and interest and involvement can ebb and flow across project stages. Our stakeholder list may also expand over the course of the ER and PSA process as awareness grows and to reflect the evolving issues landscape.

The six VMFRP partners work together to deliver these projects and meet monthly through a Project Control Group. Since the projects started in 2010, a stakeholder consultation database has been developed and now contains more than 600 contacts across all VMFRP sites. Engagement specialists across all project partners organisations were involved in the stakeholder analysis.

Guttrum and Benwell forests are predominantly State Forest managed by DEECA, with the exception of the land abutting the Murray River (Murray River Reserve) which is managed by Parks Victoria. The Guttrum–Benwell Restoration Project is located mostly in Gannawarra Shire, with a small portion of works associated with two pump stations (inlet pipes only) and two drop structures extending into New South Wales (NSW).

The Gunbower National Park Floodplain Restoration Project is located predominantly within Gunbower National Park, which forms part of the broader Gunbower Forest on the mid-Murray floodplain of northern Victoria. The project is located in both the Gannawarra Shire and Campaspe Shire local government areas, with a small portion of works associated with one pump station (inlet pipes only) and two drop structures extending into NSW.

The regional environmental water manager for these areas is the North Central Catchment Management Authority and the regional water corporation is Goulburn-Murray Water.

The main stakeholder groups and their needs and interests are listed in Table 3. A more detailed list of stakeholders is included in Appendix 2.

Table 3: VMFRP stakeholder groups

IAP2 engagement approach	Group	Needs and interests
Involve	Traditional Owners	Ongoing connection to Country and protection of cultural heritage and values. Environmental impacts and benefits. Basin Plan implementation. Involvement of Traditional Owners in decision-making roles.
	Australian Government	Delivering the Murray–Darling Basin Plan, which includes the Victorian floodplain restoration projects. Environmental impacts and benefits (EPBC approvals).
	State government	Cultural heritage, environmental impacts (ER), planning approvals. Alignment with NSW watering schedules.
	Local government	Planning scheme amendments, construction impacts, environmental impacts and benefits, tourism impacts and opportunities.
	Aboriginal community/groups	Ongoing connection to Country and protection of cultural heritage and values.

IAP2 engagement approach	Group	Needs and interests
	Landholders – directly affected (need landholder agreements)*	Access to property during construction and/or operation, or impact of water on property during operation. Land dealings, consumptive water use/access, construction impacts – traffic, dust, noise. Environmental impacts and benefits.
Consult	Landholders – adjacent and other (no landholder agreement needed)*	Consumptive water use/access, construction impacts – traffic, dust, noise. Environmental impacts and benefits.
	Research community and natural resource management practitioners	Floodplain health, biodiversity and use of environmental water, environmental impacts and benefits, Basin Plan implementation, preserving cultural heritage.
	Consumptive water users	Consumptive water use/access, environmental impacts and benefits, environmental water allocation.
	Recreational groups	Access to parks and river during construction and operation, visual impact of infrastructure on landscape, preservation of the landscape and ongoing tourism opportunities.
	Environmental groups	Impacts and benefits at project sites including ecological, flora and fauna, surface water, groundwater and hydrology and landscape. Basin Plan implementation.
	Commercial users of parks and waterways	Access to parks and river during construction and operation, visitor experience and tourism. Preservation of the landscape.
	Peak bodies	Economic, tourism and recreation benefits.
Inform	Local businesses	Economic, tourism and recreation benefits.
	Forest visitors / seasonal communities	Access to forests and river during construction and operation. Visitor experience and access to amenities. Preservation of forest landscapes.
	Local residents	Project benefits and impacts on local communities, access to forests and river during construction and operation.
	Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities	Project benefits and impacts on local communities.
	Media	Across issues that interest the local community.

* Directly affected landholders are landholders that will experience impacts on their land during construction and/or operation. These landholders will need agreements, e.g. tenure for access, borrow pits, inundation and flood easements. Adjacent landholders may be affected due to proximity to the works, but it will not directly impact their land and no landholder agreement is required.

Technical Reference Group

DEECA has convened an interagency Technical Reference Group (TRG) to advise the proponent and the department, as appropriate, on scoping and adequacy of the ER studies during the preparation of the ER, as well as coordination with statutory approval processes. TRG representatives are supported by internal experts on specific aspects of the ER studies.

The TRG has been set up to cover the environment assessment process at multiple VMFRP sites, with the following members:

- DTP – Impact Assessment (chair)
- DEECA – PEA
- Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water
- Earth Resources Regulation
- Department of Transport and Planning
- First People – State Relations (formerly known as Aboriginal Victoria)
- Heritage Victoria
- Relevant Registered Aboriginal Parties
- Relevant Local Councils
- Relevant Catchment Management Authorities
- Parks Victoria
- Lower Murray Water
- Goulburn-Murray Water
- Environment Protection Authority

Stakeholder advisory group

In January 2021, the VMFRP sought expressions of interest from interested community members, forest user groups, Traditional Owners, and industry representatives to participate in two separate stakeholder advisory groups for the Guttrum–Benwell and Gunbower Floodplain Restoration Projects.

Expressions of Interest closed in March 2021 and a diverse group of individuals with a range of different interests in the project sites were invited to become members of the two groups.

Stakeholder advisory group members receive information from VMFRP, are consulted on project objectives and designs, and provide valuable feedback to the VMFRP on various aspects of project delivery, particularly in the communications and engagement space and give a diverse local perspective on the project.

Working with Traditional Owners

The Guttrum–Benwell and Gunbower floodplain restoration projects are located in areas of Aboriginal cultural heritage sensitivity. Traditional Owners have cultural and spiritual connections to the land, surrounding waters and the plants and animals that live on the floodplains. As part of their culture, their health is intrinsically linked to a healthy landscape.

The ER will include an assessment of cultural heritage, and separate to the ER process, a Cultural Heritage Management Plan is being prepared for each site, as required under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*. These plans assess the potential impact of projects on Aboriginal cultural heritage, and outline measures to be taken before, during and after construction to protect Aboriginal cultural heritage.

The VMFRP is directly engaging with local Traditional Owner groups via face-to-face meetings and site visits in order to:

- ensure each Traditional Owner group understands exactly what is proposed for each site, and to address any concerns prior to the designs being finalised
- better understand the broader Traditional Owner values and aspirations for each site and how the VMFRP can support these through both the project design and the ongoing operations
- determine exactly how each Traditional Owner group would like to be engaged throughout the process
- develop Cultural Heritage Management Plans for each site
- explore how to incorporate Traditional Owner knowledge and science into the environmental assessment process.

The VMFRP will ensure Traditional Owners receive adequate time, appropriate engagement and are able to have meaningful interactions to ensure free, prior and informed consent relating to the project where appropriate.

VMFRP partners have existing relationships with Traditional Owners through their existing work on Country. Where possible, VMFRP will coordinate across the six partners to integrate environmental assessment conversations into their current engagement activities, to avoid consultation fatigue.

6. Consultation to date

North Central Catchment Management Authority started working with key stakeholders and interested community groups to develop the concept for the Guttrum–Benwell State Forest and the Gunbower National Park floodplain restoration projects as early as 2010.

Business cases for what were then known as the nine Sustainable Diversion Limits (SDL) projects were submitted to the Murray–Darling Basin Authority in late 2014.

Following state and commonwealth approval of the business cases, the VMFRP was proposed as a business model in 2017–18 and engagement began under this model in 2019.

VMFRP communication and engagement activities conducted before the ER process have included:

- more than 200 face-to-face briefing sessions, meetings, presentations, onsite visits and consultations, engaging more than 500 people, which is reflective of the wide range of project stakeholders
- fact sheets, media releases, electronic communication (website, emails, newsletters), brochures and correspondence.

Table 4 outlines the key project milestones with stakeholder engagement to date highlighted.

Table 4: VMFRP project milestones and consultation to date

Year	Milestone	Activity
2010	Scope out projects	Mallee CMA and North Central CMA start early planning with support from DELWP.
2013	Basin Plan water-saving projects	Victoria is invited to put forward a package of environmental water projects to be implemented as SDL projects under the Murray–Darling Basin Plan.
2014	Develop SDL business cases	SDL business cases developed after extensive consultation with community, Traditional Owners and other stakeholders.
Engagement activities during development of the business cases included briefing sessions, meetings, presentations and field visits, fact sheets, media releases, on-Country visits with Traditional Owners, electronic communication (website, emails, newsletters), brochures and correspondence.		
2017–18	Propose delivery model	Victorian Government prepared a delivery strategy for the nine sites outlining governance, delivery and asset ownership arrangements and proposes to form the VMFRP to deliver works under a partnership model.
2018	Projects incorporated into Basin Plan	36 projects, including the nine VMFRP sites, are incorporated into the Basin Plan.
2019	Form VMFRP	Australian and Victorian governments announced that the nine projects will be delivered as a program of works under the VMFRP. Initial funding of \$29 million provided to start detailed design of the nine projects.
2019–20	Prepare for environmental referrals	VMFRP continued to develop the projects, including preliminary Cultural Heritage Management Plans, fieldwork, engagement, scientific studies and baseline monitoring to prepare for environmental referrals process.
Engagement recommenced in 2019 after funding was received to start the project and has been ongoing since then. Engagement activities to date have included face-to-face engagement, site visits, information sessions, meetings, phone calls, presentations and project briefings. COVID-19		

Year	Milestone	Activity
restricted the format of some engagement activities during 2020. When social distancing restrictions prevented face-to-face engagement, engagement was done online and via phone.		
2020	Submit environmental referrals	Environmental referrals sent to Commonwealth and Victorian governments to get decisions on the assessment process.
2021 - 2026	Environment assessment process	ER preparation for East project sites began in 2021. This assessment continues after a pause between 2022 - 2024 and will include a public exhibition in due course.
2023 - 2024	EES Central and ER Central projects assessed	The central projects have received recommendations from the Minister for Planning's (Vic) and been approved with conditions under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act.
2024	Burra Creek removed from VMFRP	The Minister for Planning's (Vic) assessment of Burra Creek was received in January 2024. In keeping with the Ministers assessment, the Burra Creek project will not proceed as part of VMFRP in its current form.

If statutory decision-makers decide that the two projects can proceed, VMFRP will apply for funding to construct the sites.

Issues identification

Stakeholder engagement to date and preliminary technical investigations have helped the VMFRP to understand the existing conditions and key issues for consideration within the project area, as well as stakeholder and landholder concerns. This has helped the VMFRP to develop and refine the project design and alignment.

Table 5 lists the main project concerns raised to date by stakeholders and what the VMFRP is doing to resolve these issues. This list will be continually assessed as the project progresses so that issues can be addressed with the relevant stakeholder groups as needed.

Table 5 Issues identification and project response

What we've heard	What we're doing about it
Projects will take water away from irrigators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> VMFRP will work closely with landholders to communicate that projects will use existing environmental water entitlements and will protect farmers and irrigators, by improving the environment without the need for further water buybacks.
Access to forests and river during construction and operation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to parts of the forests will continue to be available during construction. All changes to public access during construction will be communicated to the public ahead of time. Disruption to public access to the forests during operation will be minimised where possible.
Environmental impacts and benefits and risk of negative environmental impacts such as blackwater and increased salinity, removal of native vegetation and impacts on flora and fauna	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> VMFRP is carrying out extensive research into the potential environmental impacts during construction and beyond, and how these impacts will be managed. This includes plans for each watering event and plans for monitoring, to reduce the likelihood of adverse environmental outcomes. VMFRP has expanded groundwater and salinity monitoring to better understand how trees use rainfall and flood flows New groundwater models have been developed to describe how surface and groundwater flows interact with floodplain vegetation.

What we've heard	What we're doing about it
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The community will have the opportunity to provide feedback on these studies as part of the ER process.
Governance structures do not allow for involvement of Traditional Owners in decision-making roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> VMFRP is working with Traditional Owners to establish relationships and facilitate meaningful opportunities for input into both project-specific decisions, and future operational decisions (e.g. influencing environmental water deliveries via seasonal watering plans).
Ongoing connection to Country and protection of cultural heritage and values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intensive engagement is under way with Traditional Owners to seek early input and understand landscape values and how the project can support and protect these. VMFRP is preparing Cultural Heritage Management Plans at all sites with input from Traditional Owners.
Project benefits and rationale need to be clearly communicated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing targeted communications materials which outline the project benefits and rationale and using various engagement methods to reach different stakeholder groups. Developing an Ecological Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting framework and program which will demonstrate progress towards achieving the benefits over time. Intensive engagement with the community and stakeholders. Aboriginal Waterway Assessments will be supported to help improve understanding of Traditional Owners' values of each site and how the projects could positively impact these.
Management of pest plants and animals, management of fire risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Listening to community concerns and relaying these to land managers to provide responses (note: these are existing issues; they are not issues created by the VMFRP projects). Engaging with communities via stakeholder advisory groups to listen to community concerns, inform them of land manager responsibilities, and discuss potential actions or mitigation strategies.

7. Engagement tools and schedule of activities

Successful coordination and integration of stakeholder and community engagement, planning and design is critical to the achievement of successful project outcomes. We will provide regular updates (e.g. Newsletters, emails and the website) on the outcomes of the engagement, including what feedback has been received and how this feedback has been considered in project planning, design and methodology.

A range of engagement tools and activities will be used to keep people informed about the ER investigations and highlight opportunities for involvement at each stage of the ER process. Feedback will be received in written and verbal form, via digital and traditional channels. All communications will be kept clear, concise and culturally appropriate.

Stakeholder communications will be strategically planned and combined to minimise the risk of consultation fatigue in the community.

Consultation during COVID-19

If faced with COVID-19 or similar public health order restrictions that prevent face-to-face engagement, all engagement will be delivered online and via phone using alternative methods such as those listed in Table 6.

Table 6: Consultation during COVID-19 restrictions

Face-to-face engagement method	Alternative option in the event of COVID-19 restrictions
Meetings	Phone calls and video meetings
Information sessions, briefings and presentations	Webinars and online meetings, newsletters, email updates
Site visits	Virtual site visits

Engagement tools

The following illustrates some of the communication and engagement tools and activities that will be used to keep people informed and provide meaningful opportunities or involvement.

Project website

The VMFRP website (www.vmfrp.com.au) provides a central hub of project information and is continually updated with project news. Written materials such as e-updates and printed communication materials and advertising will direct people to the website as a central project resource.

Community events

VMFRP representatives will attend key community events to promote the projects and get feedback on social values relating to the project sites.

Stakeholder advisory groups

Stakeholder advisory groups were set up for Guttrum–Benwell and Gunbower Floodplain Restoration Projects in early 2021. These groups have broad representation from local stakeholders and the community. Members provide feedback to the VMFRP on various aspects of project delivery and give a local perspective on the project.

Targeted meetings/workshops

Targeted meetings will be held with stakeholder groups requiring focused and tailored information such as special interest groups, consumer representatives and industry groups,

regulators and policymakers and Registered Aboriginal Parties/Traditional Owner Groups. These opportunities allow for targeted conversations on specific interests or issues with technical experts. Meetings and workshops can be held online or face-to-face (where possible), as required.

Online interactive sessions

Online sessions will be used to give the public project updates and share feedback with key members of the project team and with technical specialists.

Dedicated project email

A dedicated project email provides a direct contact point for stakeholders and the community to ask key questions and seek support to participate in the ER and PSA process.

Project e-news

Project e-news will be sent to anybody who subscribes via specific engagement sessions or the VMFRP website. Updates will be sent at regular intervals and key project milestones to keep people informed and highlight opportunities to get involved.

Printed communication materials

Printed materials such as project factsheets, letters and posters will be distributed to key locations and to directly affected landholders to raise awareness of the project and opportunities to be involved.

Media and advertising

We will work through key local media outlets, digital channels and social media to provide project updates and raise awareness of opportunities to participate in upcoming engagement. Media and advertising will also seek to investigate opportunities through existing community communication channels where appropriate.

Hard to reach

Consideration has been given to the following cultural and social factors that may impede the participation of some groups in consultation for the Guttrum–Benwell and Gunbower Floodplain Restoration Projects. We will use a range of communication approaches to help us communicate more broadly with these groups, as listed in Table 7.

Table 7: Hard-to-reach stakeholder approach

Lack of reach	Communication needs	Communication approach
Residents with no internet access	Access to information via non-web-based channels	Send mailouts and printouts to nearby landholders.
Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities	Needs to be determined through engagement with CALD community	Provide tailored information for CALD communities.
Casual forest users or visitors from out of the local area	Onsite information	Install signage in forests. Statewide environmental groups will be engaged and may send information onto members outside of the local area. Local tourist information centres will be kept informed of upcoming work.
Workers, such as agricultural workers, who may work outside of standard business hours or be constrained by seasonal activities	Need to access information outside of business hours	Promote online resources such as the VMFRP website as an 'always on' engagement mechanism.

Directly affected landholder engagement

In addition to the public and community stakeholder engagement methods outlined above, targeted one-on-one consultation with directly affected landholders will continue throughout all project phases, due to the need to negotiate landholder agreements. This engagement will focus on face-to-face methods and direct email and phone channels.

Schedule of activities

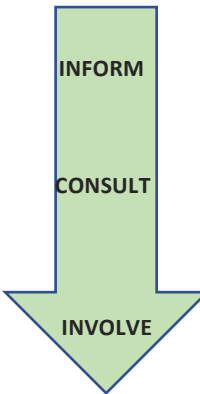
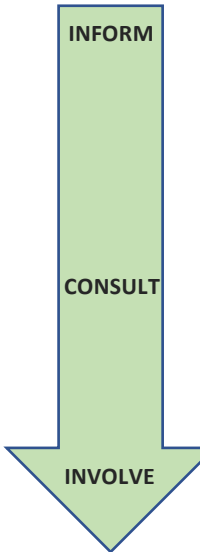
Table 8 lists the engagement and communication methods planned for each stage of the ER and PSA process based on the IAP2 Spectrum.

The schedule is focused primarily on the ER process, but it is worth recognising that considerable work has already gone into project planning and engaging with stakeholders and the community on these projects.

After the ER process, if projects are approved to go ahead, the VMFRP will develop and implement a separate communications and engagement plan for the construction phase of the project. The VMFRP will continue to work with all interested parties to inform them about proposed road, track or park facility closures in a timely and readily available manner to minimise disruption.

This plan is supported by an [addendum with a more detailed schedule of planned engagement activities](#).

Table 8: Engagement activities (high-level)

Project phase	Timing	Engagement purpose	Examples of planned activities	Engage level
PHASE I Scoping requirements Minister for Planning determines that an EES is not required and announces requirement for ER investigations	Early to mid-2021	Introduce the ER process to run alongside EES. Explain the role stakeholders and communities can play and project timelines (ongoing throughout the ER activity).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Publish preliminary project and ER information on vmfrp.com.au Send project updates to registered subscribers and project stakeholders (anyone can subscribe on the VMFRP website) (ongoing throughout ER process) Updates on social media and VMFRP website (ongoing throughout ER process) Email update to stakeholders listed at the 'consult' level Email and phone enquiries (ongoing throughout ER process) Onsite investigations and cultural heritage assessments (ongoing throughout ER process) Contact affected landholders to discuss projects and formal agreements Improve diversity of the Project Control Group through Aboriginal membership Seek expressions of interest for Stakeholder Advisory Groups 	
PHASE II Preparing the ER VMFRP prepares ER including detailed assessments in response to the requirements set out in the Minister's decision. The draft PSA is developed at the same time	2021 - 2025	Provide information on the project design, impact assessments, benefits, key design considerations, concepts, constraints and options being considered. Get community feedback to help further refine and shape the project design, inform measures to avoid, mitigate and manage impacts. Identify where consultation and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to update project website with ER information Signage at forests to inform visitors Letter drop to local businesses Posters and signage for local councils, MP offices, libraries and community notice boards Continue to produce and publish project materials – FAQ, videos, maps, factsheets, case studies Media requests/releases Stakeholder advisory group meetings Promote projects at community events Roadshow at community events to obtain community feedback Targeted stakeholder site visits and fieldtrips Briefings and information sessions Collect and collate feedback from engagement and events Prepare and share a report on benefits to communities of healthy floodplains Produce consultation report to show issues raised and how they were addressed by the project Develop monitoring and evaluation system Information sessions with environmental and technical specialists Work with local government on the draft PSA, local impacts and opportunities 	



Project phase	Timing	Engagement purpose	Examples of planned activities	Engage level
		engagement should be modified.		
PHASE III Public comment sought on ER and PSA Exhibit ER and draft PSA for public comment.	2026	Release the project design. Present and explain the ER and draft PSA. Explain the next steps in the approvals process.	Continue with activities planned for scope and preparation phase, plus: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Publish relevant ER and draft PSA documents online or provide links Roadshow at community events to obtain community feedback 	
PHASE III (cont.) Public hearing	2026	ER public hearing and submissions considered.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Help the community understand the opportunity for involvement at the public hearing and provide support as required for those wanting to make written / verbal submissions. Respond to public submissions at the hearing Prepare inquiry report 	
PHASE IV Minister for Planning's assessment	2026	Minister for Planning makes a formal assessment based on ER process to inform decision-makers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep stakeholders and community informed about assessment status and possible next steps via channels mentioned above such as e-news, website, social media and phone calls Announce final approval decision 	

8. Recording, monitoring and reporting

Capturing feedback and closing the loop

VMFRP has a feedback loop process in place to capture all feedback received and to direct it to the relevant section of the project for consideration. When the ER is published for public consultation, it will include a consultation report which summarises all the issues raised during the ER process and how the project proponent responded, enabling stakeholders to see how their feedback has been addressed.

Stakeholder management database

VMFRP will maintain a stakeholder management database for the life of the project to retain information relevant to the development of the project. The stakeholder management database, Consultation Manager (CM), will also record enquiries, feedback and complaints raised and details of the relevant response/resolution. CM will be used to record all external communications and stakeholder engagement activities.

Complaints

VMFRP has established a Complaints Register which is being maintained throughout the life of the Project. The Complaints Register provides a structure for lodging and managing all information in relation to complaints. The VMFRP will register and endeavour to acknowledge it as a complaint within 48 hours of receiving it and provide a timeframe for the follow-up and close-out of any investigation (within 5 business days where possible).

Complaints will be carefully distinguished from adverse project feedback from the community or key stakeholders, or comments given during difficult discussions with owners and occupiers of land – all of which will be recorded in the stakeholder management database and actioned as appropriate.

A complaint may relate to the quality of an action taken, decision made or service provided by VMFRP or its contractors or a delay or failure in providing a service, taking an action or making a decision by VMFRP or its contractors.

Media enquiries

All media enquiries are directed to the VMFRP Communications Team responsible for handling media enquiries on behalf of the project.

Personal information

VMFRP is committed to handling and protecting personal information in accordance with Australian Privacy Principles set out in the *Commonwealth Privacy Act 1988*. Information collected in discussions with landholders will solely be used by VMFRP and its representatives for project purposes.

All other information gathered during the project will be archived securely in accordance with Australian Privacy Principles set out in the *Commonwealth Privacy Act 1988*.

Measuring engagement

The VMFRP has an engagement evaluation process which will monitor the effectiveness of our engagement approach over time against the key performance indicators listed in Table 9.

We will use this information to progressively improve our consultation activities.

Table 9: Evaluating our approach

Objective	How we will measure
Inform stakeholders, Traditional Owners and local communities about the proposed project and program of ER studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number/rate of website visits • Information sent out by letter and email • Number of participants at events and participant feedback • Signage installed in forests • Number of media articles and interviews • Number of posters in community areas • Number of email and phone discussions
Encourage participation and providing opportunities for local communities, Traditional Owners and stakeholders to be involved in the ER process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website visits and downloads of information documents • Interactions with social media • Number of participants at events and participant feedback • Feedback from TRG • Number of adverts and media interaction • Number of field trips • Number of meetings/workshops/briefings • Number of working groups • Surveys
Communicate in a timely, clear, accessible and easily understandable manner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of methods used to distribute communications • Tracking of deliverables against the Consultation Plan
Show how community and stakeholder concerns have been considered in the project and ER development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring issues/complaints recorded through stakeholder interactions • Demonstrated consideration of community and stakeholder input in project development/decision-making • Final consultation report • Feedback on how community and stakeholder input was used

9. More information

To learn more about the VMFRP and upcoming consultation activities, visit vmfrp.com.au

To find out more about the Guttrum–Benwell and Gunbower ER process and to read the Minister’s decision and original referral documents, visit:

www.planning.vic.gov.au/environment-assessment/browse-projects/projects/gunbower-guttrum-benwell.

DEECA’s planning website has also lots of information on the [EES process](#) and lists [current EES projects](#) including the other VMFRP projects.

Table 10 lists the VMFRP’s contact information.

Table 10: Project contact information

Proponent	Lower Murray Urban and Rural Water Corporation
Project name	Victorian Murray Floodplain Restoration Project (VMFRP)
Office location	PO Box 1438, Mildura VIC 3502
Website	www.vmfrp.com.au
Email	Info@vmfrp.vic.gov.au
Follow us	facebook.com/VMFRP/ instagram.com/vmfrp/ youtube.com/channel/

Get involved

Email info@vmfrp.vic.gov.au to register your interest in the EES and ER consultation process.

Appendix 1: Detailed maps

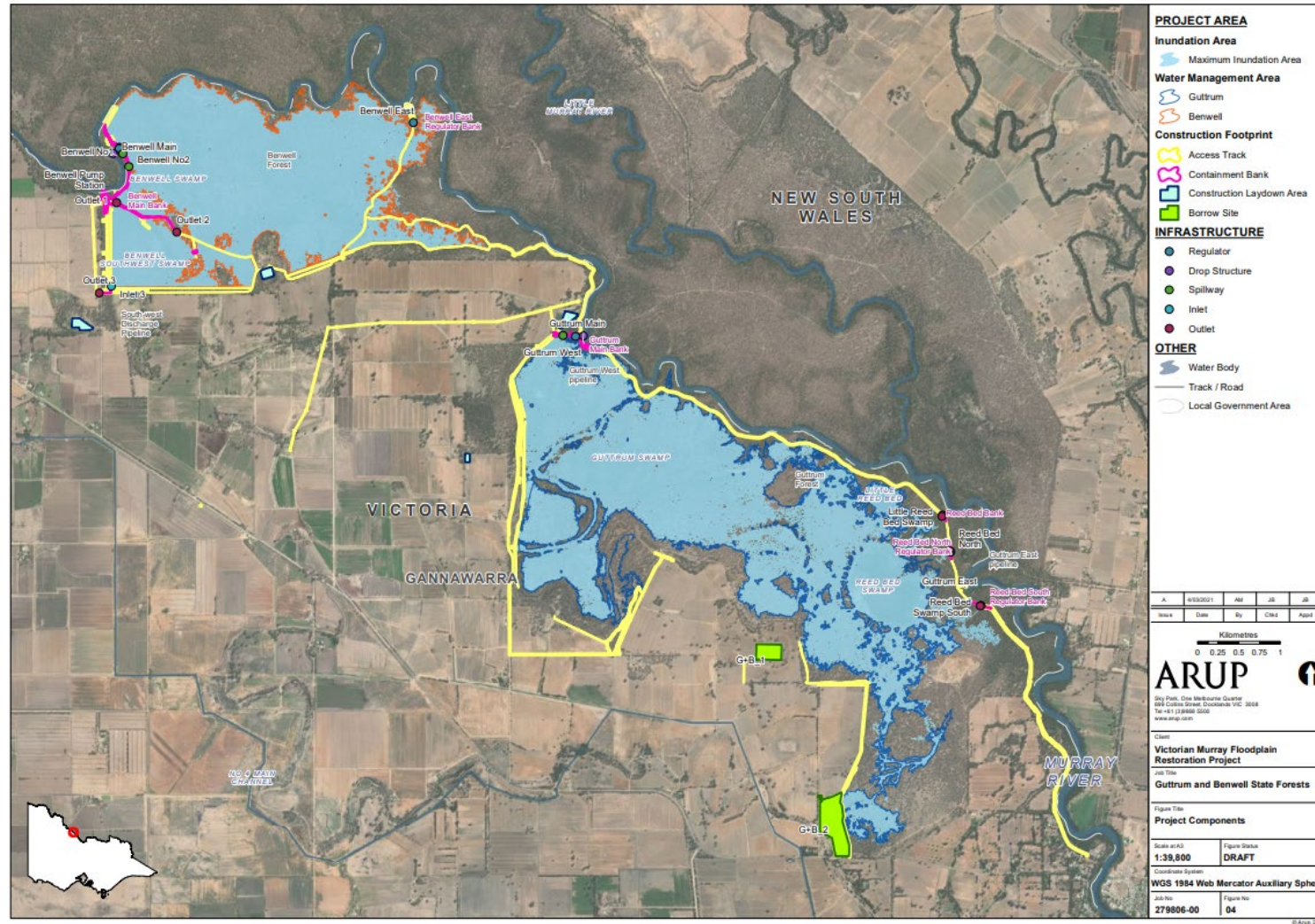


Figure 6: Project area and planned work at Guttrum-Benwell (Source: ARUP)

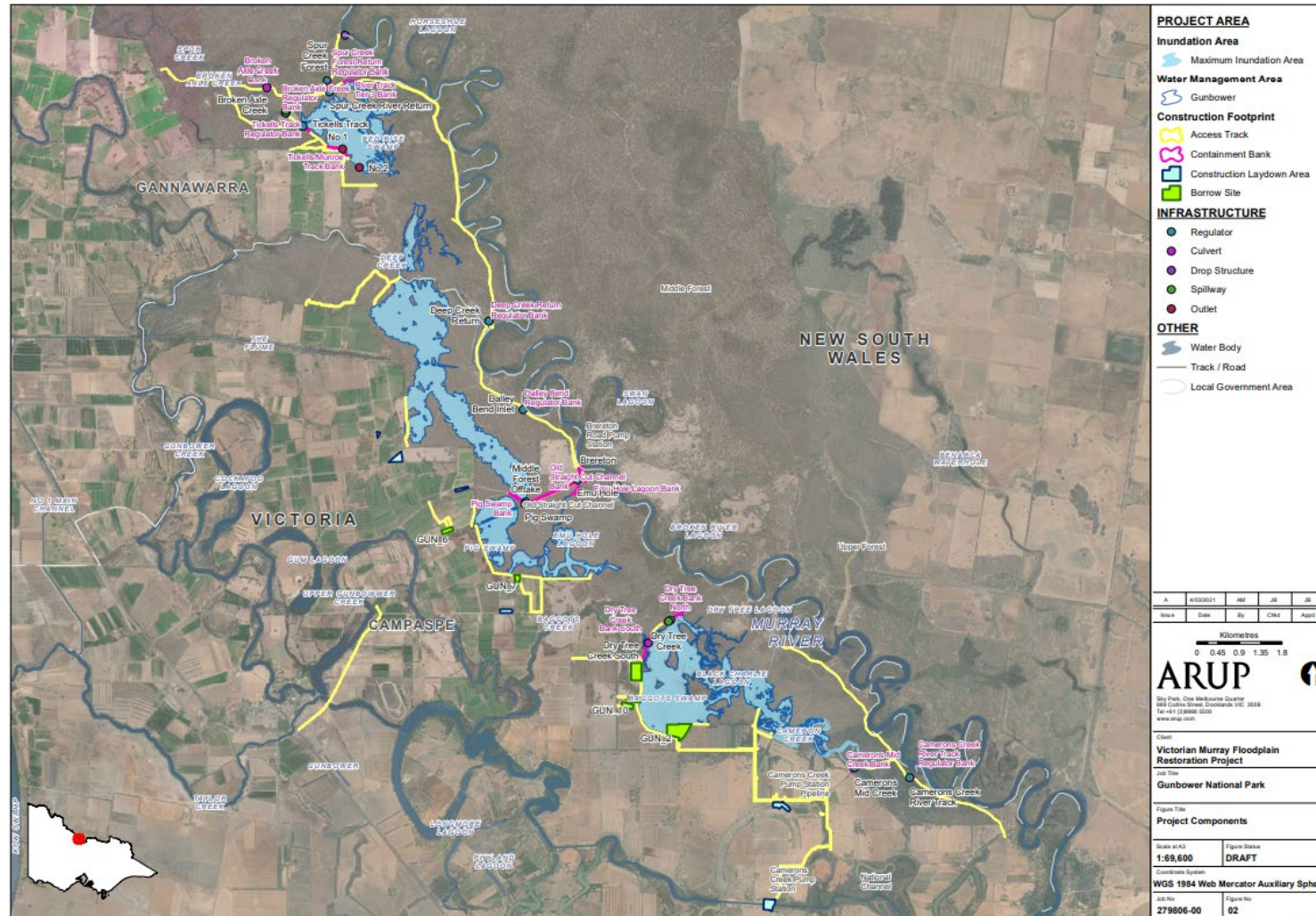


Figure 7: Project area and planned work at Gunbower (Source: ARUP)

Appendix 2: Detailed list of stakeholders

Table 11 provides a more detailed list of stakeholders. This list may be incomplete and more stakeholders will be added over the course of the ER and PSA process as awareness grows and to reflect the evolving issues landscape.

Note: Some stakeholders may have more extensive portfolios or involvements in more than one organisation beyond relevance to VMFRP. The listing in Table 11 outlines each stakeholders' associations within the context of VMFRP relevance only.

Table 11: Detailed stakeholder list

Group	Stakeholder
Traditional Owners	Registered Aboriginal Party <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation Traditional Owner groups: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wamba Wemba (Guttrum-Benwell): whilst a RAP, Guttrum-Benwell forests aren't included in their RAP area Barapa Barapa (Guttrum-Benwell) Barapa Barapa (Gunbower) Yorta Yorta (Gunbower)
Australian Government	Minister for the Environment and Water: The Hon. Tanya Plibersek MP Federal MP for Farrer (NSW) – The Hon Sussan Ley MP Federal MP for Mallee (Vic.) – The Hon Anne Webster MP Federal MP for Nicholls (Vic.) – The Hon Sam Birrell MP Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water Murray-Darling Basin Authority Commonwealth Environmental Water Office
State Government	Minister for Water: The Hon. Gayle Tierney MLC Minister for Treaty and First Peoples: The Hon. Natalie Hutchins MP Minister for Planning: The Hon. Sonya Kilkenny MP Minister for Climate Action, Energy and Resources, and the State Electricity Commission: The Hon. Lily D'Ambrosio MP Minister for the Environment: The Hon. Steve Dimopoulos MP Victorian MP for Murray Plains – The Hon. Peter Walsh MP DEECA, Planning Group DEECA, Forest, Fire & Regions Group Victorian Environmental Water Holder Department of Transport and Planning Sports and Recreation Victoria Regional Development Victoria Invest Victoria Agriculture Victoria North Central Catchment Management Authority Parks Victoria Goulburn-Murray Water Heritage Victoria Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions Earth Resources Regulator, Resources Victoria Environmental Protection Authority First People – State Relations (formerly known as Aboriginal Victoria)



Group	Stakeholder
	<p>Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council First People – State Relations SA Water NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment Victorian Fisheries Authority Tourism Victoria Other prescribed Ministers under the <i>Planning and Environment Act 1987</i>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minister for Agriculture: The Hon. Ros Spence MP • Minister for Resources: The Hon. Lily D'Ambrosio MP
Local government	<p>Gannawarra Shire Council (Vic., Guttrum–Benwell and Gunbower) Campaspe Sire Council (Vic., Gunbower) Murray River Council (NSW, Guttrum–Benwell and Gunbower) Municipal Association of Victoria Murray River Group of Councils Murray Darling Association</p>
Aboriginal community/groups	<p>Elders groups Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations (MLDRIN)</p>
Landholders	<p>Includes directly affected and adjacent landholders. Directly affected landholders are landholders that will experience impacts on their land during construction and/or operation and require landholder agreements. Adjacent landholders may be affected due to proximity to the works, but it will not directly impact their land and no landholder agreement is required.</p>
Research community and natural resource management practitioners	<p>Arthur Rylah Institute for Environmental Research (ARI) CSIRO MDBA Charles Sturt University Research programs at universities</p>
Consumptive water users	<p>GMW Torrumbarry Water Services Committee</p>
Recreational groups	<p>Four Wheel Drive Victoria Cohuna 4x4 Camping Fishing and Outdoor Activities Barham Angling Club Murray Riverina Angling Association Leitchville Bunyips Sporting Club</p>
Environmental groups - local	<p>Murrabit Landcare Group Gunbower Landcare Group Myall Landcare Group</p>
Environmental groups - state	<p>Australian Conservation Foundation BirdLife Australia Environmental Defenders Office Environmental Justice Australia Environment Victoria Field Naturalists Club of Victoria Fishcare Victoria Inc – AAA Friends of the Earth Landcare Victoria</p>



Group	Stakeholder
	Nativefish Australia (Vic.) People and Parks Foundation Platypus Australia Victorian Apiarists Association Victorian Environmental Friends Network Victorian Field Naturalists Victorian National Parks Association Watershed Alliance Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists Wildlife Victoria
Commercial users of parks and waterways	Murray Offroad Adventures Houseboat Hirers Association Murray River Adventures Wetlander Cruises Spirit Cruises Wild Side Outdoors Murray River Adventure Cohuna Adventures
Local businesses	Businesses/ suppliers / contractors and trader groups Local water infrastructure manufacturers suppliers Local civil works contractors Local tree removal contractors Local revegetation contractors Local fencing contractors Local pest plant and animal management contractors Local concreters Local equipment hire companies Local environmental monitoring companies Local traffic management Local quarries Local catering businesses Local accommodation businesses Local pubs (e.g. Gunbower, Leitchville, Torrumbarry, Cohuna, Koondrook) Apiarists
Peak bodies	Almond Board of Australia Citrus Australia Dried Fruits Australia Field and Game Australia Irrigation Australia Murray Regional Tourism Board Murray Dairy National Irrigators Council Paddle Victoria Ski Racing Victoria Victorian Apiarists Association Victorian Farmers Federation VicWater

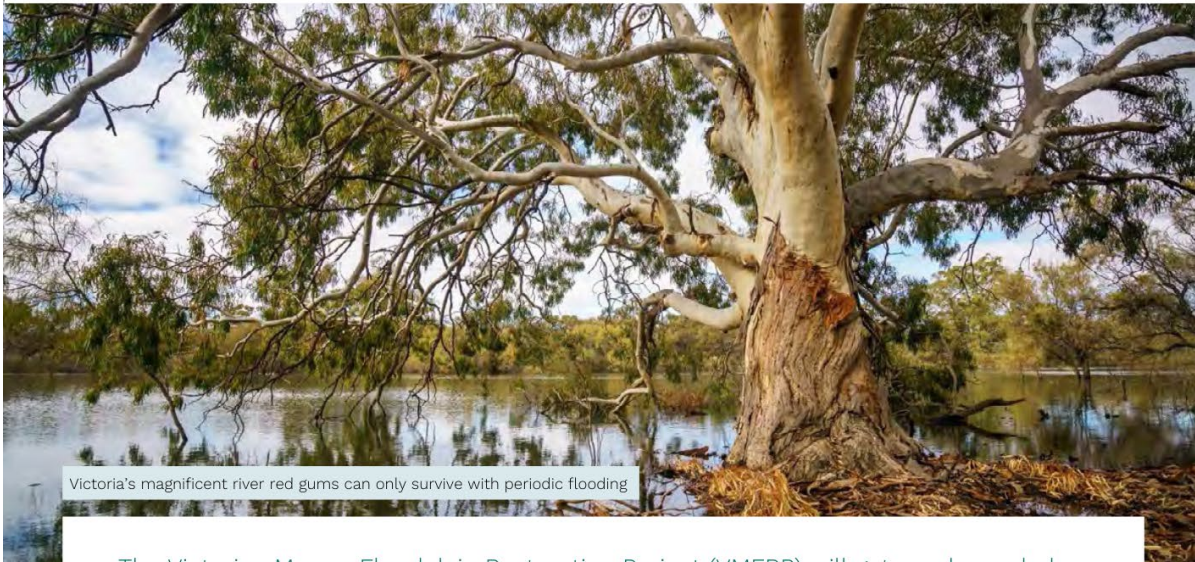


Group	Stakeholder
	VRFish
Forests visitors / seasonal communities / tourist information	Tourist information centres and local noticeboards Camp site users, etc.
Local residents (via local organisations)	Murrabit & District Lions Club Murrabit Advancement Association Barham Koondrook Lions Club Kerang Lions Club Kerang Rotary Club Murrabit Men's Shed Cohuna Men's Shed Scouts Cohuna and Kerang, Girl Guides Kerang Koondrook Development Committee Lions Club of Cohuna Leitchville Lions Club Cohuna Community Group Cohuna & District Progress Association Leitchville & District Progress Association U3A (University of the 3 rd Age Cohuna) Sporting Clubs (e.g. Football/Netball/Cricket/Bowling Club/Golf Club) Central Murray Environmental Floodplains Group
CALD communities	As required
Media	Media – local Gannawarra Times Koondrook Barham Bridge Bendigo Advertiser Swan Hill Guardian Riverine Herald Country News 3SH/Mixx FM Gannawarra Voice Cohuna The Channel Echo Koondrook-Barham Community Noticeboard Leitchville Community Media – statewide Weekly Times ABC Victoria WIN TV

Appendix 3: Project factsheet

The [project fact sheet can be downloaded from the VMFRP website](#).

Bringing Murray River floodplains back to life



Victoria's magnificent river red gums can only survive with periodic flooding

The Victorian Murray Floodplain Restoration Project (VMFRP) will get much needed water back onto high-value floodplains along the Murray River. Without this water, these iconic landscapes will continue to decline – along with the many native trees, animals and plants that depend on them.

Restoring the floodplains

The floodplains next to the Murray River have evolved to periodically receive water. Historically, the river would spill onto the floodplains as often as 8 out of every 10 years, creating rich, lush landscapes teeming with life.

As our towns, cities, agriculture and industries have grown over time, we have changed the way the river flows to suit our purposes by using weirs and dams.

While this has benefited regional communities and economies, water no longer flows naturally as it once did, and the Murray River can no longer water these floodplains often enough to keep them healthy.

The VMFRP will remove blockages that stop floodwater flowing into creeks and build infrastructure like flow regulators, channels and containment banks to water the floodplain and hold water there for longer.

This water will bring new life and help these identified ecologically significant floodplains to survive and cope with future dry conditions and drought, so they can continue to be enjoyed by future generations.



White-necked Heron



Healthy floodplains are teeming with life

Here are some of the species that will benefit from these floodplain restoration projects.

Healthier floodplains are good for:

Local communities and visitors

Healthy floodplains are beautiful places to visit and are great for recreation like boating, fishing and camping.

Traditional Owners

Traditional Owners have cultural, spiritual, and economic connections to land, water and resources through their relationship with Country, having managed land and water sustainably over thousands of generations.

Local wildlife

Lots of species rely on floodplains for food, habitat and breeding, from microscopic creatures to frogs, fish, birds, bats and other mammals.

Vegetation

Flooding brings vegetation back to life, creating habitat, foraging and food for floodplain creatures. Some flood dependent species like river red gums and black box trees rely on the bigger floods that used to happen every ten years. Animals like bats and birds nest in the hollows of these trees.

Local economies

Projects will bring substantial financial investment into the region, creating jobs and helping local economies.

Examples of infrastructure



We'll remove infrastructure that blocks the flow of water through the floodplain, like this small pipe blocking the creek in Nyah Park.



Regulators will help us to move water onto the floodplains and hold it there before opening the regulator to return water to the river. Regulators will include fishways to help native fish on their journey.





Knowing when to add water

These restoration projects will help return a more natural watering regime at the identified high-value floodplains. We will monitor how often natural flooding occurs and will release water in the years where the environment needs a 'top up' to keep it healthy. We will not release water every year unless the floodplain needs it.

The watering plans at each site will be flexible; each year and each watering event will be tailored depending on things such as the conditions of the floodplain, water availability, river flows and timing since the last flood or watering.

Similar projects have already been successfully implemented under The Living Murray program. Visit www.mdba.gov.au for more information on these sites.

Delivering the projects

Progress is ongoing in restoring key floodplain sites along the Murray River, with several projects now moving through critical approval stages.

The Central Sites are progressing toward construction, with The Belsar-Yungera, Hattah Lakes, and Nyah-Vinifera projects successfully passing major planning milestones, most recently with their Planning Scheme Amendments (PSAs) officially gazetted. With these frameworks in place, the VMFRP team is now working on readiness for construction, bringing the central floodplains and the dependant species that call those delicate ecosystems home, one step closer to the vital uplift in environmental outcomes they so desperately need.

The East and West sites are finalising environmental approvals by undertaking the Environment Report (ER) for the East sites and the Environment Effects Statement (EES) for the West sites. These assessments will provide a comprehensive review of potential impacts and benefits and once finalised, will be publicly exhibited to invite input from communities, Traditional Owners and stakeholders as part of the approval process.



If you have questions about any of these projects or want to join the community consultation, email us at info@vmfrp.vic.gov.au

vmfrp.com.au | March 2025