

Victorian Rural Drainage Strategy

Summary



Aboriginal acknowledgement

The Victorian Government proudly acknowledges Victoria's Aboriginal community and their rich culture, and pays respect to their Elders past and present.

We acknowledge Aboriginal people as Australia's first peoples and as the Traditional Owners and custodians of the land and water on which we rely. We recognise and value the ongoing contribution of Aboriginal people and communities to Victorian life, and how this enriches us. We embrace the spirit of reconciliation, working towards equality of outcomes and ensuring an equal voice for Aboriginal Victorians.

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Summary

In 2016, the Victorian Government identified degraded rural drainage systems in dryland agricultural regions as a key issue requiring investigation and review. After a two-year consultation and review process, a comprehensive new approach for the remediation and future management of dryland rural drainage systems has been detailed in this final report of the Victorian Rural Drainage Strategy.

The Victorian Rural Drainage Strategy sets out new rules, protocols and support mechanisms to enable landholders and government agencies to overcome past barriers to the repair and management of degraded rural drainage systems. Under the new approach, landholders will be empowered and supported to make choices about how they want to manage dryland rural drainage through a series of actions and policies that will:

- Clarify the roles, responsibilities and obligations for landholders and government agencies to manage dryland rural drainage
- Rebuild the capability of landholders and government agencies to manage dryland rural drainage to support agricultural productivity
- Simplify previously complex and confusing regulations and approval processes, and in doing so clarify obligations on landholders to protect and enhance their local environment and to respect the cultural values of Aboriginal Victorians when conducting future drainage works
- Manage priority waterways affected by rural drainage to provide cultural and environmental benefits.





Government agencies will work together to support landholders who choose to manage dryland rural drainage (Figure 1). The Victorian Rural Drainage Strategy acknowledges the challenges faced in the past by landholders, councils, catchment management authorities and other government agencies seeking to manage the unique and complex arrangements for rural drainage. The strategy provides clear directions and processes for management of rural drainage at the local level, with defined roles for landholders and government agencies – including those such as VicRoads and VicTrack where their infrastructure intersects or interacts with rural drainage.

Under the new arrangements, councils will provide the point of contact for landholders and catchment management authorities will have a key role to help landholders who are looking for administrative support to develop Dryland Rural Drainage Management Plans. These written agreements will consider legal requirements, including environmental and cultural approvals, needed to support the ongoing management and maintenance of rural drainage systems. Once agreements are in place, landholders will be able to pay for the assistance of councils to support the ongoing administration of the agreements.

In areas of the state where catchment management authorities have been involved in providing drainage services or can support the responsible stakeholders to address specific local issues, 11 pilot studies have been launched to investigate future management arrangements (Figure 2). Some of the pilot projects are aimed primarily at increasing the capability of landholders and other stakeholders to manage dryland rural drainage; other projects have a primary focus on restoring environmental and Aboriginal cultural values. The lessons learned from all the projects will be shared and used to update a drainage resource kit being developed as a part of this strategy.

Landholders and government agencies with an interest in rural drainage will be guided by the drainage resource kit. The kit will help to build the capability of landholders to make choices about how they manage dryland rural drainage and give government agencies the tools to support their choices. The kit will include:

- An overview of the ways landholders can manage rural drainage and the support available to them
- A technical tool to help landholders consider the likely costs and benefits of investing in improved rural drainage
- Information about landholders' obligations to obtain approvals for drainage works
- Guidance on the development of a Dryland Rural Drainage Management Plan that will help simplify the approvals process
- Guidance for landholders seeking the best value for money from drainage works, while also seeking to minimise the possible impacts of drainage works
- Options for dispute resolution.



A photograph of two men standing in a wetland area. The man on the left is wearing a black beanie, a dark jacket, and green waders. The man on the right is wearing a dark cap, a blue shirt, a high-visibility yellow vest, and khaki pants with black rubber boots. They are both looking towards each other. The background shows a body of water with green vegetation. A large teal triangle is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing the text.

In the words of traditional owner Possum Clark-Ugle, "Before Europeans arrived, southwest Victoria was the 'Kakadu' of the south, with thousands of wetlands supporting a rich variety of animals, birds and plants that our ancestors used in a sustainable and respectful way"

The strategy includes comprehensive provisions designed to protect and improve environmental values. Where approval processes are simplified, this will be done in ways that protect environmental values of waterways. Similarly, the strategy outlines the obligations for landholders and agencies to consider the environmental impacts of rural drainage. And the strategy makes it clear where it is unlikely that approval for works will be granted, or where extra information is likely to be required before approval is granted to undertake drainage works.

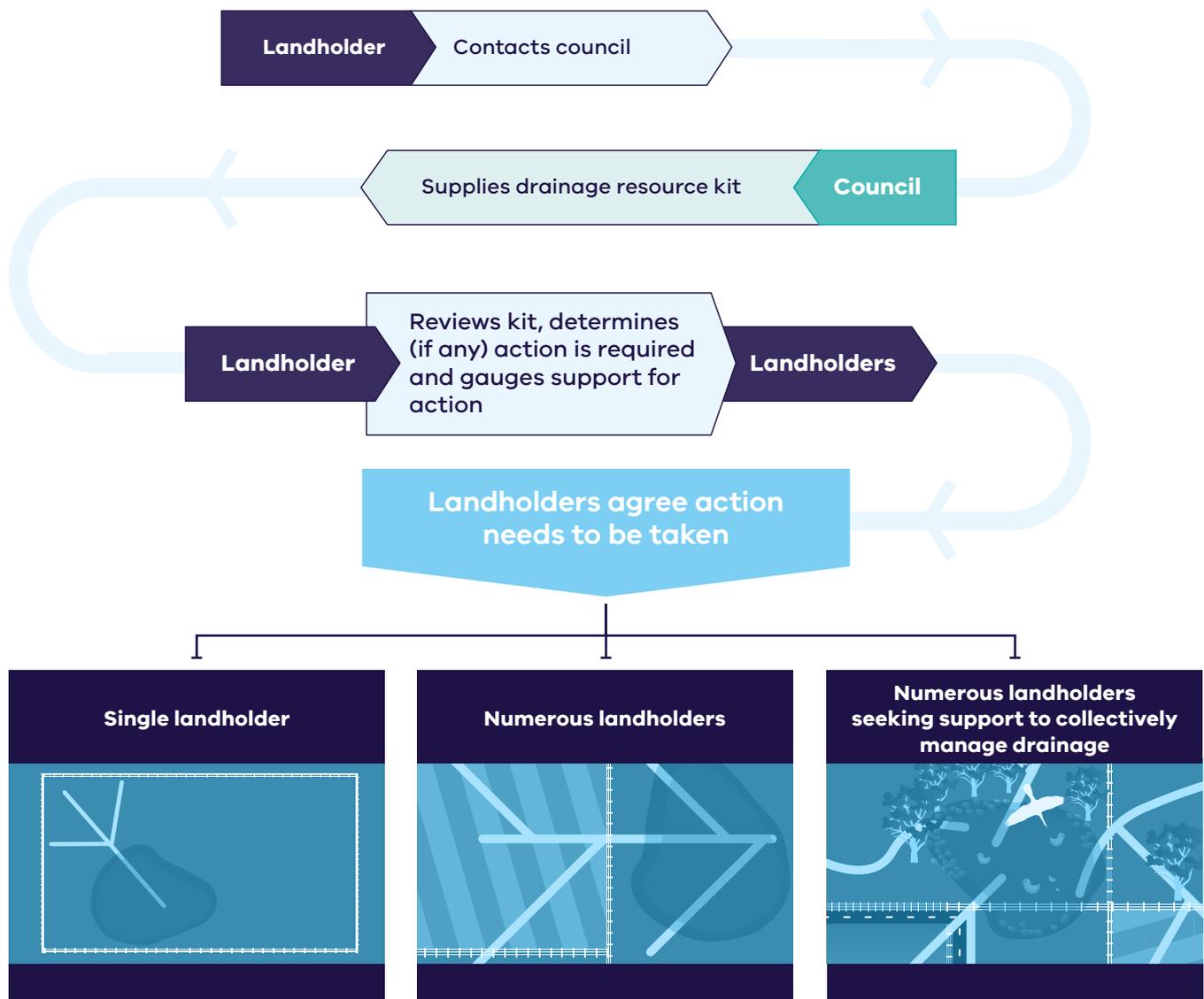
Implementing contemporary arrangements for rural drainage also means looking for opportunities to improve the management of priority waterways most affected by rural drainage, particularly where drainage services are no longer required by landholders.

The strategy recognises the values Traditional Owners and Aboriginal Victorians place on their traditional lands and waters, and the effects of drainage on these values. Building on previous successes, the strategy supports opportunities for landholders and agencies to collaborate with Traditional Owners to manage rural drainage. It outlines arrangements to give due consideration to Aboriginal cultural heritage in the context of rural drainage, recognising the value of wetlands in supporting Aboriginal values that previously existed.

The strategy sets out how the contemporary arrangements for dryland rural drainage will be implemented, and identifies on-the-ground changes that will be used to measure the success of its delivery.



Figure 1 Pathways to manage rural drainage



Landowners will be encouraged to enter into formal agreements to preserve management arrangement and reduce disputes.

Individuals or groups of landholders can manage their rural drainage independently, with guidance from the drainage resource kit. If a group of landholders wishes to establish a formal drainage committee, they will be eligible for administrative support and guidance from agencies if:

1. The need to manage the drainage system has the support of landholders who benefit from the drainage system – that is, those landholders whose land is inundated or waterlogged less often than it would be without dryland rural drainage
2. The landholders benefiting from the drainage system agree to pay for the maintenance and administrative costs of the system
3. The benefiting landholders are willing to participate in a formally constituted local drainage management committee
4. The formally constituted drainage committee holds appropriate insurance.

Strategy outcomes	What difference will the strategy make over the next three to five years?	What actions will be taken?	How will we know what has changed?
<p>Landholders understand the various ways they can manage dryland rural drainage</p>	<p>Landholders will take up opportunities for new arrangements to manage dryland rural drainage either individually or through collective agreements.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of a drainage resource kit to support landholders to make choices about how they manage dryland rural drainage 	<p>Data on the number of drainage groups that have been formalised and that have developed drainage management plans will be collected from catchment management authority and council annual reporting.</p>
<p>Cultural values, environmental values and water resources are protected</p>	<p>A significant number of dryland rural drainage areas will be managed for environmental or cultural values.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commencement of pilot projects to update drainage management arrangements (based on principles outlined in the strategy) in systems previously managed by catchment management authorities at Corangamite, North East, North Central and West Gippsland Catchment Management Authorities (see map overleaf) • Increased clarity to be provided for landholders about how to apply for works approvals and when they are required. • Partnerships developed with Registered Aboriginal Parties to raise awareness and clarify expectations for the management of Aboriginal cultural heritage in their respective areas • Commencement of pilot projects to consider Aboriginal aspirations relating to dryland rural drainage with Glenelg Hopkins and North Central Catchment Management Authorities 	<p>Data provided by relevant government agencies and Traditional Owner organisations will show which agreements include the protection of environmental and cultural values.</p>
<p>Revised arrangements for former drainage areas involving priority waterways result in cultural and environmental values being restored</p>	<p>The implementation of regional waterway management strategies includes on-the-ground works to improve management of dryland rural drainage.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update the guidelines for developing regional waterway management strategies to include previously modified drainage areas in the priority-setting framework. 	<p>Data provided by catchment management authorities in their annual reporting will show where on-the-ground works have been used to improve dryland rural drainage.</p>

Strategy outcomes	What difference will the strategy make over the next three to five years?	What actions will be taken?	How will we know what has changed?
<p>Relevant government agencies have clear roles and responsibilities, and are aware of opportunities to work in partnerships to support landholders managing dryland rural drainage</p>	<p>Staff from relevant government agencies will be clear about their roles and responsibilities, and agreements will be reached in reasonable timeframes. (Roles and responsibilities for all stakeholders are outlined in chapter 3 of the strategy)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commencement of pilot projects to update drainage management arrangements (based on principles outlined in the strategy) for systems previously managed by catchment management authorities through the delivery of pilot projects at North East, North Central and West Gippsland Catchment Management Authorities (see map overleaf) • Commencement of pilot projects to update drainage management arrangements (based on principles outlined in the strategy) for the Eumeralla and Nullawarre drainage areas with administrative support from government agencies (see map overleaf) 	<p>A Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning lead survey of staff from relevant government agencies will be conducted to learn how clear they are about their roles and responsibilities.</p>
<p>Government agencies work together with landholders to rebuild capability and support ongoing arrangements for dryland rural drainage management</p>	<p>Relevant government agencies will increasingly consider managing dryland rural drainage as an everyday part of their business. Some will also adopt formal process arrangements.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make information on options for dispute resolution clear and accessible to landholders • Provide guidance for landholders on the preparation of dryland rural drainage management plans • Use pilot projects to update drainage management arrangements (based on principles outlined in the strategy) for the Eumeralla and Nullawarre drainage areas with administrative support from government agencies (see map overleaf) 	<p>A Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning lead survey of relevant government agencies will be conducted to gauge how they are dealing with dryland rural drainage</p>

Photo credits

Page 4 Wetland in southwest Victoria - Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning

Page 5 Site inspections at Lake Condah - Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning

Page 6 Construction of Shepparton Drain BB/11P - Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority

Figure 2 Regional projects to deliver strategy outcomes



3

Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority – Upper Mid Broken Creek drainage management and environmental improvements



\$70,000

4

North East Catchment Management Authority – moving to contemporary drainage in the North East Region



\$270,000

5

West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority – Kilmany Park – Transition to contemporary drainage arrangements



\$120,000

6

West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority – Moe River Flats – Transition to contemporary drainage arrangements



\$140,000



1:3,200,000



Legend

 Historical large scale drainage systems

8

Eastern Maar/ Corangamite Catchment Management Authority - Voluntary Cultural Heritage Management Plan Pilot in the Woody Yalook and Lough Calvert



\$80,000

7

Dja Dja Wurrung/ North Central Catchment Management Authority/ Trust for Nature – Putting the swamp back into Long Swamp



DELWP - \$80,000 | CMA - \$30,000

