

# Southwest Irrigation Development Guidelines

## FACT SHEET

### Buffer Zones for the Protection of Biodiversity



*This fact sheet outlines the buffer zone standards required to comply with the Southwest Irrigation Development Guidelines (the Guidelines) and provides an overview of the process. Buffer zones may be required to protect native vegetation from the impact of a new irrigation development.*

#### WHERE TO START

Contact Southern Rural Water (SRW) who will be able to advise on likely requirements and provide you with the relevant application forms.

You can also contact the Irrigation Development Coordinator (IDC) who can provide further information about the guidelines and connect you with contacts such as Agriculture Victoria irrigation extension staff and other agencies as required.

#### WHAT TO EXPECT

Buffer zones may be included as a condition on Take and Use licences. SRW and the IDC will provide further information and advice specific to your new irrigation development proposal.

##### What is a Buffer

A buffer is an area of land set aside between irrigation developments and retained native vegetation or other important environmental features to ensure water use and management practices do not impact upon biodiversity values.

The adoption of buffers also reduces potential impacts from:

- Spray drift

- Soil erosion and surface water movement
- Surface runoff quality (e.g., nutrients and suspended solids) into waterways
- Weed invasion
- Encroachment and damage caused by machinery.

Standard buffer widths are required between retained native vegetation and irrigation to reduce the impact on native vegetation and biodiversity values caused by irrigation induced groundwater movement.

The proposed buffers must be described in the Irrigation and Drainage Plan (IDP), which must accompany each irrigation development application.

Buffer areas must be included with the investigations or studies supporting the application. These may be independently reviewed by the licensing authority prior to approval of the final irrigation development application and conditions.

The proposed buffer will not be reviewed until the irrigation and drainage design has been completed as this will influence the buffer decision process.

#### WHAT VEGETATION IS PROTECTED?

Native roadside vegetation, vegetation corridors, remnant patches within a property, scattered vegetation and mapped wetlands are all protected and defined for consistent application of buffer requirements.

The IDC can provide more specific details about these definitions as part of a preliminary discussion about the proposed irrigation development. The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) (2017) Guidelines also provide detailed definitions.

[https://www.environment.vic.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0021/91146/Guidelines-for-the-removal,-destruction-or-lopping-of-native-vegetation,-2017.pdf](https://www.environment.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0021/91146/Guidelines-for-the-removal,-destruction-or-lopping-of-native-vegetation,-2017.pdf)



## Standard Native Vegetation Buffers

Buffer requirements are determined using a risk-based approach depending on two main factors:

- The assessed level of risk a proposed irrigation development is likely to have on native vegetation
- The value and condition of the native vegetation or waterway on which the proposed irrigation development is likely to impact.

The level of risk above can only be determined by obtaining data specific to the site, so in most instances conservative buffer distances are adopted. Standard buffers are shown in **Tables 1**.

Buffer distances should only be reduced where the applicant can demonstrate that biodiversity values will not be affected. This can be done by providing further evidence (e.g., the development is downslope of vegetation) and may require investigations or mitigating works.

Buffer distances are measured from the outer drip line (canopy edge) of the vegetation.

**Table 1: Standard vegetation buffers for irrigation developments**

| Environmental asset/value   | Standard buffer  |
|---|--|
| Land administered under the <i>National Parks Act 1975</i> and significant reserves under the <i>Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978</i> | Up to 200 metres or as advised by Parks Vic  |
| Waterways including mapped wetlands   | 30 metres (Clause 14.02)   |
| Any vegetation which meets the definition of native vegetation as per 52.17   | Tree Protection Zone (e.g., 12 x diameter at breast height at 1.3 m) up to 15 m maximum which will be determined by the responsible authority on a case-by-case basis. |

## HOW ARE BUFFERS MANAGED?

Buffers must be managed for the benefit of biodiversity in a farming system, which will include various management requirements (e.g., stock management, ecosystem services, species selection). Advice should be sought prior to approval of the new irrigation development where it includes buffers, to ensure long-term management. Responsible / referral authorities may specify conditions in any applicable planning permits.

Vegetated buffer:

- Vegetation must be established within 12 months of planting the adjoining irrigated crop, or as per conditions of any permit
- Species used in revegetation works must be based on the benchmark adjoining Ecological Vegetation Class species list for that area
- If livestock grazing is to remain a component of the development enterprise, stock proof fencing is to be erected to exclude livestock from any vegetated buffer area.

All buffers must be managed as follows:

- Buffers must not be used for works or development without the approval of the applicable Department or Responsible Authority
- Appropriate measures must be in place to maintain separation between irrigation activities and the buffer area and prevent encroachment.

## HOW ARE BUFFERS APPLIED TO PIVOT IRRIGATION?

Buffers are only required between retained native vegetation and irrigation. Buffer distances are calculated from the edge of the irrigation area.

Where a Take and Use licence is approved for pivot irrigation, a particular condition should be placed on the licence to the effect that "Pivot irrigation is approved for the land specified in the licence, other forms of irrigation systems must not be carried out on the land specified in the licence without the addition of particular conditions governing the use of such an irrigation system".

## FURTHER INFORMATION

An information kit containing related fact sheets is available at [www.ghcma.vic.gov.au](http://www.ghcma.vic.gov.au) and can be discussed further with the Irrigation Development Coordinator.

## ACCESSIBILITY

If you would like to receive this publication in an accessible format, please telephone GHCMA on (03) 5571 2526 or email [ghcma@ghcma.vic.gov.au](mailto:ghcma@ghcma.vic.gov.au).

If you are deaf, or have a hearing or speech impairment contact the **National Relay Service on 133 677** or [www.relayservice.gov.au](http://www.relayservice.gov.au)