ENVIRONMENTAL FLOWS ON THE GLENELG FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What are environmental flows?

Environmental flows are the flows that are released under a water entitlement to improve the health of our rivers and wetlands. In the Glenelg River, they are released of water from Rocklands Reservoir and Moora Moora Reservoir to improve the health of the Glenelg River and the plants and animals that live there. Environmental flows also provide a connected river for communities along the waterway to support the socio-economic values of the river and the communities.

Glenelg Hopkins CMA also manages the compensation flow entitlement. This entitlement is for landholders along the river to access stock and domestic water entitlements.

How is water shared in the Glenelg River?

Water is allocated to the Wimmera and Glenelg Rivers Environmental Entitlement 2010 by GWMWater in accordance with Schedule 2 (Water Allocation Rules to the entitlement) of the entitlement, the Storage Management Rules and the Wimmera-Mallee System Headworks Annual Operating Plan of the day.

The river entitlement product has the same reliability as entitlements for stock and domestic water managed by Wannon Water, Coliban Water and Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water. This means that the environmental entitlement receives new allocation relative to the available water in storage and new inflows to storage at the same rate as these other products.

Who uses water from the Glenelg River system?

Water held in Rocklands Reservoir is primarily used to supply Wannon Water towns and environmental demands for the Glenelg River. The Glenelg River Compensation Flow entitlement can also be called on to supply stock and domestic water downstream of Rocklands Reservoir.

GWMWater routinely transfers water to Taylors Lake to support demands from the Wimmera system. Additionally, GWMWater has other customers tied to Rocklands Reservoir.

Who makes the decisions about environmental flows?

The amount of water that can be released for environmental flows is determined by the Victorian Environmental Water Holder, in consultation with the Glenelg Hopkins and Wimmera CMAs. Amounts of water are determined annually through the VEWH's Seasonal Watering Plan, released on 1 July each year. Glenelg Hopkins CMA works with Glenelg River Environmental Water Community Advisory Group (GREWAG) to ensure community views are reflected in the planning. The CMA also plans and manages the day-to-day delivery of flows. *You can read the* annual Seasonal Watering plan *on the VEWH website at www.vewh.gov.au.*

Who manages Rocklands Reservoir?

Rocklands Reservoir is managed by GWMWater as the Storage Manager. The annual operating plans for the reservoir are outlined on the Storage Manager website (*Annual Operating Plans - Storage Manager*).

Why do we need environmental flows now, when we didn't in the past?

Rocklands Reservoir has more than halved the flows in the Glenelg River since it was constructed, which has had a major impact on its health. Environmental flows from Rocklands Reservoir into the Glenelg River give a proportion of this lost water back to the river, improving the health of the river and the plants and animals that live there.

When did environmental flows on the Glenelg start?
The first deliveries of water for the environment in the Glenelg River were made in 2011-12. Environmental flows are carefully planned to target/protect the essential needs of the rivers plants and animals. During the Millennium Drought, the Glenelg River was in a poor condition, with much of the upper reaches reduced to shallow, saline pools. In 2009, it was decided water savings created by the replacement of the inefficient channel system with the Wimmera-Mallee Pipeline would be used to establish environmental flows in the Glenelg River. A total of 85% of the water savings from the Wimmera-Mallee Pipeline project was committed to the environmental entitlement shared between the Wimmera and Glenelg systems.

Where does the water come from for environmental flows?
Water that is released into the Glenelg River is stored in Rocklands Reservoir specifically for the purpose of environmental flows. This water was made available for the environment following the opening of the Wimmera-Mallee Pipeline which created significant water savings. A percentage of these savings has been made available since 2009. Releasing water for the environment is made through a number of outlets along the Glenelg River including at the dam wall and at the 5 mile and 12 mile outlets along the waterway and via Moora Moora Reservoir, depending on the targeted outcomes for essential needs of the river's plants and animals and state of the waterway at the time of release.

How much water is released into the Glenelg River as environmental flows every year?
Every year the Victorian Environmental Water Holder (VEWH) authorises the Glenelg Hopkins CMA to deliver a certain amount of water into the Glenelg River as environmental flows. The amount of water authorised for releases depends on seasonal conditions, water availability (i.e. allocation to the entitlement by GWMWater), and the health of the river as determined by ongoing scientific monitoring. As the year progresses, the Glenelg Hopkins CMA releases this water according to seasonal and waterway conditions and the requirements of plants and animals living in and along the river, together with community and landholder needs.

The amount of environmental flows released from Rocklands Reservoir to the Glenelg River since 2009 has varied. In dry years it has been as little as 3000 megalitres (ML), and following a series of wet years as much as 31,000 megalitres has been released in a year. The seasonal conditions are taken into account each year when water is released. Reducing water loss though evaporation is also taken into consideration, as the total amount of water lost to evaporation from Rocklands is significant due to its large surface area. For example: GWMWater calculated that in December 2025 alone, around 5000ML of water evaporated from Rocklands.

See Glenelg River Environmental Flow release table below.

YEAR	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
TOTAL ML released	4,219.0	20,876.5	10,207.0	15,448.5	2,969.9	2,765.2	19,194.7
YEAR	**2018-19**	**2019-20**	**2020-21**	**2021-22**	**2022-23**	**2023-24**	**2024-25**
TOTAL ML released	15,087.0	11,470.7	21,692.0	15,087.0	11,470.7	21,692.0	13,405.8

How do you decide when to release water?
In deciding when to release environmental flows Glenelg Hopkins CMA considers many factors including: the needs of plants, animals and communities in and along the river, recent natural flows, water quality, long range weather forecasts and people using the river and their needs. As well as reviewing the scientific information on the river, we contact landholders in the upper reaches of the river to discuss their observations of the condition of the river. We consider all this information to determine how the river is faring and help us decide the best time to release environmental water for the best outcome.

Do the carp screens at Rocklands really work?
Absolutely. Carp screens are placed over the outlet from Rocklands Reservoir into the Glenelg River. The carp screens are fitted with mesh that is small enough to prevent carp and their eggs passing through into the Glenelg River from Rocklands Reservoir as part of environmental water releases. The screens are netted for fish twice a week, with all native fish returned to the reservoir while carp are culled.

How are you monitoring carp in the river?
The Glenelg Hopkins CMA undertakes annual carp control in the Glenelg River using electrofishing techniques and partners with community fishing groups to support carp fishing events to further reduce carp numbers in the river.

Why do you let water go in summer? Shouldn't the river be dry over summer?
The Glenelg River has changed considerably over the past 100 years. Waterholes in the upper Glenelg are much shallower, the flow has decreased making the river dry for longer, and the river has become saltier. As a result, waterholes are no longer deep or fresh enough to sustain fish populations through summer and farmers were finding it too salty for stock use. Summer water releases add oxygen-rich water to the river and reduce salinity, improving water quality for both fish and farmers.

What are passing flows? Why are they needed?
Passing flows are a proportion of winter inflows to Rocklands released into the Glenelg River between July and the end of November. Passing flows aim to give the upper parts of the Glenelg River some of the higher winter flows they miss out on, as there are limited inflows from tributaries in the upper sections of the river. All flows from Rocklands into the Glenelg River, including passing flows, are ceased during flood periods.

Why is there so much cumbungi in the river? Is this due to environmental flows?
No, cumbungi took hold in the Glenelg River during the Millennium Drought when flows were low. Now established in the waterway, the cumbungi is difficult to remove without significant waterway disturbance.

Why don't you just let Rocklands fill up first?
In 2014, GWMWater changed the maximum operating level of Rocklands to 85% of full capacity, as filling the reservoir beyond that point dramatically increases evaporation rates. When reservoir levels are quoted as a percentage full, this is a percentage of the maximum operating level, not the full physical capacity. (i.e. levels listed at 100% is the reservoir being physically at 85% of capacity). Since the new operating level was established, Rocklands has never reached its physical capacity. Additionally, some water that flows into the upper Glenelg River is diverted down the Moora channel before it gets to Rocklands. This diverted water eventually ends up in GWMWater's lower headworks storages to fulfill requirements of other entitlements.

Why do you let water go during wet times?

The natural flow of our rivers in southern Australia is higher in winter and lower in summer. Before Rocklands Reservoir was built, annual high winter flows occurred naturally every winter throughout the river. Now that much of the water that would have gone down the Glenelg is held in Rocklands Reservoir, some of this water is released so plants and animals can experience some of the high flows they require for their life cycle. This lack of winter flow is particularly an issue in the upper part of the river directly downstream of Rocklands Reservoir as it doesn't have the tributaries supplying winter flows that the lower catchment has. Since the introduction of environmental flows, allocations have not allowed specific winter releases. Winter flows have been dictated by seasonal conditions, and in very wet years, flows were released in spring to replicate the naturally higher flows the river would have had.

Why not save water releases for dry times?

The reality is evaporation rates are so high from Rocklands that much of the water left in Rocklands will be lost to evaporation. For instance, in December 2025 alone, around 5000ML of water evaporated from Rocklands; and, in January 2026, GWMWater calculated 13.27 gigalitres (13,270 ML) of net evaporation was calculated from all headworks storages. Much more water is lost from Rocklands due to evaporation than is taken for environmental flows. Given this, careful consideration is made to balancing water use and water savings to ensure water can be used effectively and efficiently.

How can you look after the river if you don't actually live on the river?

Our staff managing environmental flows are regularly visiting the waterway to see first-hand the river's health. They are highly experienced ecologists who have worked on the Glenelg River for many years and live locally within the Glenelg Hopkins catchment. Data about the river's flow and water quality is continuously transmitted to staff which gives them an overview of how the river is going at different sites along the river, and staff make regular field visits to understand how this looks on the ground. CMA staff have regular contact with landholders and communities along the river and the Glenelg Hopkins CMA Glenelg River Environmental Water Advisory Group (GREWAG) has seven community representatives who assist the CMA in decisions around how best to manage water releases.

How can I have my say on environmental water?

The Glenelg Hopkins CMA is always keen to hear feedback from people living on the river about what aspects of environmental flow are working well, but also as to how environmental flows management can be improved. Community members can provide their feedback by emailing: ghcma@ghcma.vic.gov.au .

How can I find out about Rocklands Reservoirs water levels?

Although Glenelg Hopkins CMA does play a role in deciding when and how much water to release into the Glenelg River, Rocklands Reservoir is managed by GWMWater. See their website www.storagemanager.com.au for details of Rocklands water levels.

How can I make sure I know when environmental flows are happening?

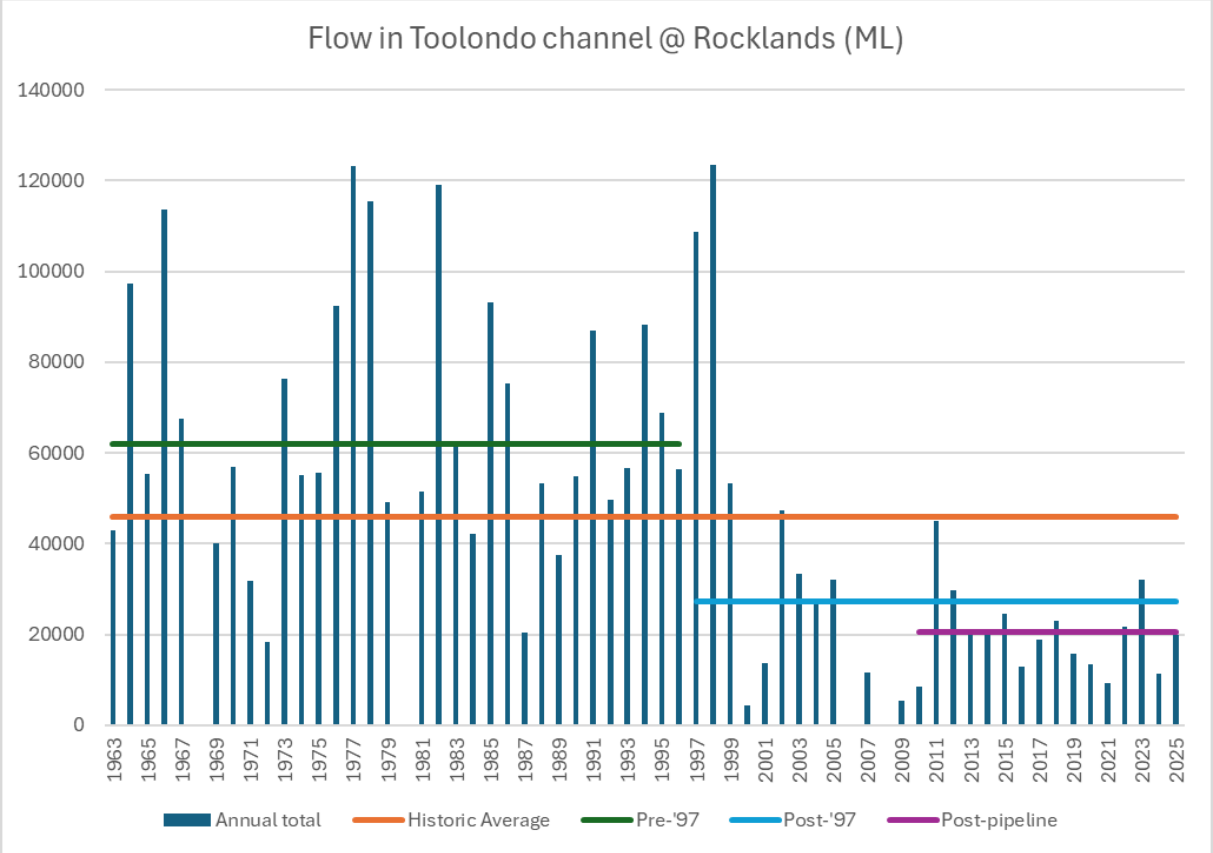
Glenelg Hopkins CMA offers a SMS alert service, which sends text messages to tell you when environmental flows are happening, flow rates and when the flow is likely to reach your section of the river. You can subscribe to this service by emailing ghcma@ghcma.vic.gov.au

What are the benefits of environmental flows?

Monitoring by scientists from Glenelg Hopkins CMA has shown river health to improve significantly since the commencement of environmental water flows in 2009. Environmental flows improve water quality, reduce salinity, increase connectivity in the river allowing for fish migration, help native plants regenerate in the river and on the river banks and trigger fish breeding events. Improved health of the river benefits everyone that uses the river: the animals and plant that live there, farmers accessing the river for stock and domestic purposes and people using the river for recreational activities such as fishing, swimming or canoeing.

Are environmental Flows are the reason Rocklands doesn't fill up?

Due to the water savings from the Wimmera-Mallee Pipeline demand for water from Rocklands has reduced. The figure below shows annual flow into the Toolondo Channel which is used to transfer water out of Rocklands and deliver the bulk of environmental flows.



How do I find out more?

Find more resources on environmental flows:

- at our website www.ghcma.vic.gov.au
- at the Victorian Environmental Water Holder website www.vewh.vic.gov.au

To find out more about Rocklands Reservoir visit www.storagemanager.com.au