



## ENVIRONMENTAL FLOWS ON THE GLENELG FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **What are environmental flows?**

Environmental flows are planned releases of water that help keep rivers and wetlands healthy. In the Glenelg River, they are releases of water from Rocklands Reservoir and Moora Moora Reservoir the health of the Glenelg River and the plants and animals that live there. A healthy river also supports communities and landholders who live along the waterway.

### **How is water allocated to the Glenelg River?**

Water is allocated to the Wimmera and Glenelg Rivers Environmental Entitlement (2010) by the storage manager (GWM Water) in accordance with *Schedule 2 (Water Allocation Rules to the entitlement)* by the storage manager following clear rules set out in the entitlement and system operating plans.

The environmental entitlement has the same level of reliability as water entitlements held by Wannon Water, Coliban Water, and Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water (GWMWater). This means that when water becomes available, the environmental entitlement receives allocations at the same rate as these other water users.

These rules explain the quantity of water that can be allocated based on how much water is available in storage and how much new water flows into the system.

### **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. Releasing water for the environment is made through several outlets along the Glenelg River including at the dam wall and at the 5-mile and 12-mile outlets along the Toolondo channel. Releases can also be made from Moora Moora Reservoir into the Glenelg River upstream of Rocklands.

### **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?**

Since Rocklands Reservoir was built in the 1950s, the amount of water flowing down the Glenelg River has more than halved. This reduction has had a significant impact on the health of the river and its ecosystems. Environmental flows released from Rocklands Reservoir return some of this lost water to the river. These flows help improve river health and support the plants and animals that depend on the Glenelg River.

### **When did environmental flows on the Glenelg start?**

The first environmental water deliveries under the current entitlement began in 2011–12. Since then, environmental flows have been carefully planned to meet the essential water needs of plants and animals that rely on river flows to survive.

During the Millennium Drought, the Glenelg River was in very poor condition, with parts of the upper river reduced to shallow, salty pools. To help address this, a decision was made in 2009 to use water savings from the replacement of the old, inefficient channel system with the Wimmera–Mallee Pipeline to support environmental flows in the Glenelg River.

**As part of this decision, 85% of the water savings from the Wimmera–Mallee Pipeline project was committed to a shared environmental entitlement for the Wimmera and Glenelg river systems.**



### 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 the 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 \[www.vewh.gov.au\]\(http://www.vewh.gov.au\)](#).*

### Who uses water from the Glenelg River system?

Rocklands Reservoir is the largest storage in the Wimmera-Glenelg system and supports the entire headworks supply. It can hold up to 296,000 megalitres of water (1 megalitre equals one million litres). Uniquely, water stored in Rocklands Reservoir can be used to supply all entitlement holders across the system. GMMWater also transfers water from Rocklands Reservoir to Taylors Lake to help meet water demands in the Wimmera system. In addition, there are other customers who receive their water directly from Rocklands Reservoir.

Much of water is used to supply towns serviced by Wannon Water, as well as to meet environmental water needs for the Glenelg River, and the Glenelg River compensation flow.

Water is also routinely transferred out of the Glenelg River upstream of Rocklands Reservoir via the Moora channel. This water supports users and demands in the Wimmera system.

**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 GMMWater), and the health of the river as determined by ongoing 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 water 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 21,000 megalitres has been released in a year. The seasonal conditions are considered each year when water is released. Reducing water loss through 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: GMMWater calculated that in December 2025 alone, around 5000ML of water evaporated from Rocklands.

See Glenelg River environmental water releases since 2018 in table below (note: this is only water from the environmental water entitlement and does not include passing flows or compensation flow).

YEAR	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
TOTAL ML released	17,179.6	12,292.1	11,693.7	15,087.0	11,470.7	21,692.0	13,405.8

**How do you decide when to release water?**

When deciding when to release environmental water, Glenelg Hopkins CMA considers a range of factors.

These include:

- the needs of plants, animals, and communities along the river,
- recent natural river flows, water quality, long-term weather forecasts, and
- Contacting local landholders to understand how people are using the river.
- Scientific information about the river is also used

All this information is brought together to understand how the river is coping and to help decide the best time to release environmental water for the greatest benefit.

**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 inflows to Rocklands, between June and the end of November, that are released into back into the Glenelg River. 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. The cumbungi is still growing on excess sand in the river caused by catchment erosion. Now established in the waterway, the cumbungi is difficult to remove without significant waterway disturbance. It currently serves to hold sand in place and allows the river to repair itself.

**Why don't you just let Rocklands fill up first?**

There is much less runoff flowing into storages than there used to be. Since the start of the Millennium Drought, inflows to storages around the Grampians have dropped by over half. The reasons for this decline are complex and not fully understood, but it is likely linked to climate change and changes in catchment conditions following the drought.

**Why have they changed what level is considered full at Rocklands?**

In 2014, GWMWater changed the maximum operating volume to 85% of Rocklands full capacity as filling beyond that point dramatically increases evaporation rates. When reservoir levels are quoted as a percentage full, this is a percentage of the maximum operating volume, not the full physical capacity.

When reservoir levels are reported as a percentage full, they refer to this maximum operating volume, not the reservoir's full physical size. For example, a level listed as 100% means the reservoir is physically about 85% full. Since this operating rule was introduced, Rocklands Reservoir has not reached 100% of its new operating capacity.

**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?**

We do save water releases, but it's a balancing act. The reality is, evaporation rates are high over summer and a lot of water in storages will be lost to the atmosphere. 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. More water is lost from Rocklands due to evaporation than is used for environmental flows in the Glenelg. Given this, decisions must carefully balance water use and water savings. This helps ensure that available water is used as effectively and efficiently as possible to support environmental, community, and consumptive needs over multiple years.

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

There has been a lot of science over the last 10 to 20 years around releasing water for the environment to help us determine what flows need to be provided to keep the river healthy and maintain plant and animal populations in the river. Our staff managing environmental flows are regularly visiting the waterway to see first-hand the river's health. Data about the river's flow and water quality is continuously transmitted to staff via the Waterway Measurement Information System, which gives them an overview of how the river is going at different sites along the river. 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 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 flows 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](mailto: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.storage manager.com.au](http://www.storage manager.com.au) for details of Rocklands water levels.

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

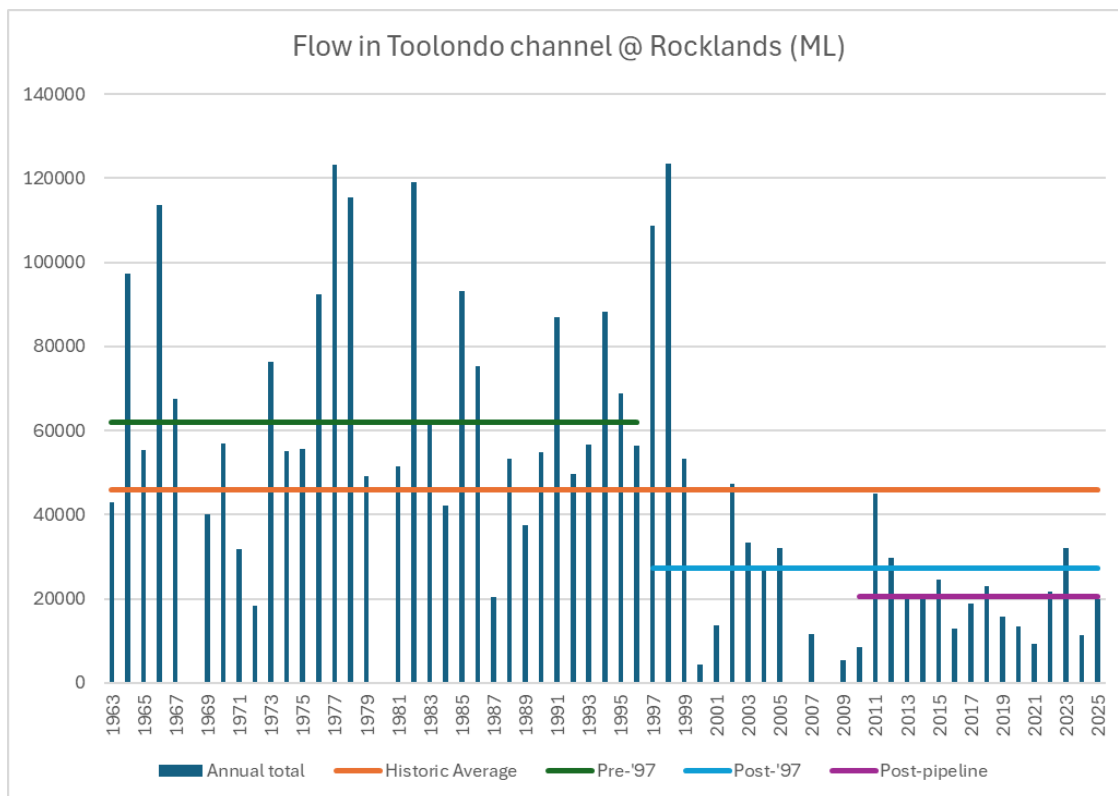
Glenelg Hopkins CMA offers an SMS alert service, which sends text messages to tell you when environmental flows are happening, flow rates and when the flow is likely to reach your section of the river. You can subscribe to this service by emailing [ghcma@ghcma.vic.gov.au](mailto:ghcma@ghcma.vic.gov.au)

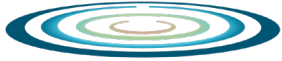
**What are the benefits of environmental flows?**

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 riverbanks 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 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 (this data doesn't account for water released from the wall, so there would be slightly higher usage than indicated below). The purple line below indicates the average water releases to the channel since environmental water began. The orange line is the historic average which is the average of all years on record. The green and blue lines represent changes since the millennium drought.





**How do I find out more?**

Find more resources on environmental flows:

- at our website [www.ghcma.vic.gov.au](http://www.ghcma.vic.gov.au)
- at the Victorian Environmental Water Holder website

[www.vewh.vic.gov.au](http://www.vewh.vic.gov.au)

- To find out more about Rocklands Reservoir visit

[www.storagemanager.com.au](http://www.storagemanager.com.au)

- To see river levels and streamflow visit [WMIS](#)