

Northern Victoria Irrigation Renewal Project – Expert Review Panel

May 31, 2010

The Hon. Tim Holding
Minister for Water
121 Exhibition Street
GPO Box 4509
Melbourne Victoria 3001

Dear Minister

ADVICE ON WATER CHANGE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK VERSION 2 AND ENVIRONMENTAL WATERING PLANS

The Minister for Environment and Climate Change endorsed the Northern Victoria Irrigation Renewal Project (NVIRP) Expert Review Panel (ERP) and charged it with the responsibility to provide advice to NVIRP, the Minister for Water, and the Secretary of the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) in relation to the relevant conditions in the decision of the Minister for Planning that an Environmental Effects Statement (EES) is not required for the NVIRP. The ERP is Denis Flett (Chair), Jane Roberts and Terry Hillman and all are independent consultants experienced in the ecological relationships to hydrology, and the consequences of hydrological changes.

This advice is on the amended Water Change Management Framework and on eleven Environmental Watering Plans (EWP) in response to Conditions 3 and 5 of the decision of the Minister for Planning that an EES is not required for the NVIRP. The amended WCMF is henceforth referred to as the WCMF Version 2.

The ERP wrote to you on 11th August 2009 providing advice on the Water Change Management Framework, the Johnson Swamp EWP and interim EWPs for Lake Elizabeth, Lake Murphy and sections of the Campaspe and Loddon Rivers. The Water Change Management Framework has now been amended and EWPs developed for those wetlands and waterways for which an interim EWP were developed last year. Environmental Watering Plans have also been developed for six additional wetlands; McDonalds Swamp, Lake Leaghur, Lake Yando, Little Lake Boort, Lake Meran, Round Lake, and one additional waterway; Broken Creek.

With all documentation which is currently required now in place, we are pleased to place on record our advice on the WCMF Version 2 and eleven EWPs that have been prepared ahead of the planned operation of NVIRP modernisation works in the 2010–2011 irrigation season. The documented advice is summarised within this letter. Detailed advice is provided within enclosed standalone documents for the WCMF Version 2 and for the eleven EWPs.

As mentioned in the ERP's previous advice to you of August 11 2009, the documents referred to ERP were assessed from a perspective which takes account of the factors beyond the responsibility of NVIRP which have changed and are changing the hydrologic connections

between wetlands and waterways and the irrigation system, as well as associated management of environmental water.

Concluding advice on WCMF Version 2

On the 11th of August 2009, the ERP advised that it considered the WCMF and associated documents an "excellent first step" in ensuring that the NVIRP remains environmentally benign. The amendments in the WCMF Version 2 have strengthened the framework and in particular the guidance it provides for the development of waterway and wetland EWPs.

The ERP believes that the WCMF Version 2 and in particular its improved guidance in relation to the development of EWPs are appropriate to help meet the requirement to protect aquatic and riparian values through management of water allocations and flows within the modified GMID system as specified by the Minister for Planning (referral 2009-01).

It is the advice of the ERP that the WCMF Version 2 incorporates several strengthening amendments which are necessary and sound and warrant the WCMF Version 2 being approved.

Concluding advice on EWPs

Three waterway EWPs and eight wetland EWPs were developed in the first half of 2010. Interim mitigation water has been assessed as required for one waterway, the Loddon River, and for seven wetlands, Lake Elizabeth, Lake Leaghur, Lake Meran, Lake Murphy, Little Lake Bort, McDonald Swamp, and Round Lake.

The ERP believes that the assessments of the requirements for interim mitigation water are transparent and well reasoned and that the proposed sourcing of mitigation water and the calculations of the mitigation water commitments as set out in the EWPs are clearly consistent with the intent and detail of the guidance in the WCMF Version 2.

It is the advice of the ERP that all eleven EWPs have been thoroughly prepared consistent with the WCMF Version 2, provide a sound and reliable base for implementation, and warrant being approved.

Summary

The preparation of the WCMF Version 2 and the eleven EWPs has been an iterative process involving research, regional stakeholder consultation, technical analysis, policy development and negotiation between agencies. The ERP commends NVIRP, North Central Catchment Management Authority (NCCMA) and Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority (GBCMA) and their consultants, and DSE for the amount of work completed in the short time available to them.

It is the advice of the ERP that the WCMF Version 2 and the eleven EWPs that have been prepared by NVIRP are acceptable and warrant your approval.

The ERP understands that, apart from any need which arises from the adaptive management approach inherent within the WCMF Version 2, only three more documents are yet to be developed and referred to the ERP for advice. The three documents, as set out in Figure 8 of the WCMF Version 2, are the *Regional Environmental Assessment Report*, the *Groundwater Assessment Report* and the *Murray Goulburn Environmental Assessment Report*. It is anticipated

that advice on these will be submitted to the Secretary DSE before the indicative time requirements outlined in the WCMF Version 2.

The ERP is pleased to have had the opportunity to provide this advice in the interests of progressing the environmentally responsible operation of the modernised irrigation system for which NVIRP has responsibility.

Yours Sincerely,



Denis Flett

Chair

Northern Victoria Irrigation Renewal Project Expert Review Panel

Copy To:

Greg Wilson, Secretary of the Department of Sustainability & Environment

Murray Smith, Chief Executive Officer of the Northern Victoria Irrigation Renewal Project

