

Goulburn-Murray Water Connections Project — Expert Review Panel

17 July 2013

The Hon. Peter Ryan
Minister for Water
121 Exhibition Street
GPO Box 4509
Melbourne Victoria 3001

Dear Minister

ADVICE ON WATER CHANGE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK VERSION 3

The Expert Review Panel (ERP)¹ of the Goulburn-Murray Water Connections Project (GCP) (previously Northern Victoria Irrigation Renewal Project) has been charged with the responsibility of providing advice to the GCP, the Minister for Water, and the Secretary of the Department of Environmental and Primary Industries 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 GCP.

The Water Change Management Framework (WCMF) is prepared in response to Condition 3 of the decision of the Minister for Planning that an EES is not required for the GCP. This advice refers to the third version of the WCMF (henceforth referred to as the WCMF Version 3) dated May 2013. The ERP provided advice on previous WCMF versions on 11 August 2009 and 31 May 2010. We are pleased now to place on record our advice on the WCMF Version 3.

The WCMF Version 3 is a refinement of the preceding version rather than any change of principle or practice: whereas WCMF Version 2 approached the operation of the GCP as a matter for the future, WCMF Version 3 was informed by experience in executing the modernisation program. For example, the preparation of a number of Environmental Watering Plans has successfully tested the guidelines provided in the WCMF. Some of the changes are simply updates, such as on perspectives, departmental names and completion of projects. Also, WCMF Version 3 follows the end of extreme drought conditions that had prevailed since before the inception of the GCP.

Notable refinements developed in the WCMF Version 3 include:

- o An update of the requirements under Condition 3 of the decision of the Minister for Planning - that an EES is not required for the GCP - to accommodate additional

¹ The ERP consists of Jane Roberts and Terry Hillman; independent consultants experienced in the relationships between hydrology and ecology, and in evaluating the ecological consequences of changing hydrology.

referrals that were accepted on the 25 July 2011 (Table 10, WCMF Version 3)

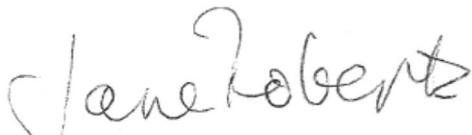
- o Further clarification of the protocols for assessing the requirement for mitigating water to be supplied (Section 9.1.1)
- o Rationalisation of arrangements for the provision of infrastructure to deliver mitigation water and other environmental water and for the volumetric measurement of mitigation water (Section 9.4.4)
- o Clarification of the roles and responsibilities of the Victorian Environmental Water Holder in the management and review of mitigation measures (Section 12.3, Table 14)
- o Rationalisation of the sharing of capital, operating, and maintenance costs for infrastructure that has been entered on the Environmental Infrastructure Register (Section 16) through the development of a set of guiding principles as foreshadowed in WCMF Version 2.

The above refinements encapsulate learning from GCP experience as the project is rolled out as well as adaptation to ongoing development of management structures. The ERP believes that the WCMF Version 3 is strengthened by these refinements and that it continues to provide a useful and sound operational structure within which the modernisation program can proceed without significant detriment to the aquatic ecosystems of the region. The ERP further notes that the WCMF Version 3 is a living document, representing an adaptive management framework that can support future monitoring and learning to further refine water resource management at the large, multi-agency, scale.

It is the opinion of the ERP that the WCMF Version 3 maintains the principles developed in previous versions and incorporates refinements reflecting developments and learnings from the intervening period, and therefore warrants approval.

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 the GCP has responsibility.

Yours Sincerely,



JANE ROBERTS



TERRY HILLMAN

Copy To:

Secretary of the Department of Environment and Primary Industries

Project Director G-MW Connections Project