

National Water Week supplement - Story # 2 from the North East CMA

Rivers also suffering during the drought

Over the last year, North East Victoria has endured record drought conditions, record dry inflows, critical water shortages and raging bushfires.

While these conditions are part of the Australian climate, they have followed each other in quick succession and placed enormous pressure on individuals, communities and the natural resources in our Region”, said North East Catchment Management Authority (CMA) Chief Executive, John Riddiford.

As the caretaker of river health in the Region, the North East CMA is concerned about the impact of the ongoing drought on the Region’s waterways.

“ Sequential years of low rainfall have really impacted on the condition of our water supplies. When a river deteriorates because it is flow stressed, so does the quality and supply of water for our homes, farms and businesses.”

Modifications to flow have the potential to bring about dire impacts such as fish kills, algal blooms and increases in salinity.

Diversions of water have altered the hydrology of many North East Rivers, such as the Kiewa and Ovens which now have much longer periods of low flow events.

“Whilst low flows are a natural part of the flow regime, increasing their frequency and extending their length causes stress on the rivers and the communities that rely on them,” said Mr Riddiford.

In response to the ongoing dry conditions across the Region, the North East CMA has developed a Dry Inflow Contingency Plan.

This Plan identifies the priority aquatic ecological values that will be threatened by low inflows and outlines strategies to reduce threats to these. The Plan will help to ensure river health outcomes are achieved despite continuing drought conditions.

Mr Riddiford reiterated the importance of flows to river systems such as the Ovens and Kiewa and upper Murray.

“There is an inextricable link between the ecological health of our river systems and the quality and supply of water for consumptive, agricultural and economic use.”

“These are extremely difficult times and we recognise there are multiple demands on water,” said Mr Riddiford.

“ The rivers of the North East require careful management to maintain their environmental values and economic function. Their health is integral to the future success of this region.”

BREAK OUT BOX

Environmental FLOWS – what are they ?

Environmental flows aim to supply water for the environmental needs of the river to ensure it continues to be healthy.

The timing, volume and quality of environmental flows are all critical aspects and, like the natural flow of rivers, different combinations will provide a different range of benefits for each ecosystem.

Environmental flows ensure that key chemical, geomorphological, and ecological processes necessary for healthy river ecosystems can function.

And/or

The North East Region supplies 38% of total surface water for the Murray-Darling Basin, despite forming only 2% of the total land area. This water resource is critical for agribusiness, industry, town water supply and environmental flows for rivers in the region

Photo caption (Matt O'Connell and surveyor on the Kiewa)

The North East CMA is working with landholders, scientists and water authorities on a study to determine the environmental water requirements for the Kiewa and Ovens River systems.

A revised Water Management Plan for each River will be developed with the intent of creating a balanced and sustainable sharing of available water between all stakeholders in the catchment, including, the environment, licenced diverters, and non-consumptive water users (recreation and aesthetics).