

Plan Design Deliver

Savings come from reducing losses

Northern Victoria
Irrigation Renewal Project

NVIRP
waterforgrowth

Public Environment Report

The Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts determined on 6 November 2009, that NVIRP was a controlled action, which means that it needs to be assessed under the national environment law because it has the potential to impact on nationally protected matters. These matters are wetlands of international importance, nationally listed threatened species and communities, and listed migratory species.

The Public Environment Report is the method of assessment the department will use to assess the project. The department has determined this is an appropriate method of assessment for a project of such scale, importance and public interest. It raises the level of transparency and provides the public with an opportunity to make comment, but can still be completed in time for the project to start operating on schedule during the 2010 irrigation off-season, should it be approved.

Public submissions can be emailed to waterforgrowth@nvirp.com.au and close on February 17, 2010.

To view the PER guidelines, go to: www.environment.gov.au/epbc/notices/assessments/2009/5123/final-per-guidelines.pdf

NVIRP assisting with 4% exemption options

The recent community meetings held throughout the Goulburn Murray Irrigation District enabled landowners considering trading water shares in the Commonwealth Government environmental water purchase tenders, to discuss their options and suitability.

Victoria has maintained a 4% annual limit on permanent trade of water shares out of irrigation areas to ensure communities had time to adjust to the economic and social changes that occur following the permanent trade of irrigation water.

Recently the Victorian Government agreed to allow up to 300,000 megalitres to be sold for environmental purposes outside the 4% annual trade limit.

A set of criteria was established and at the meetings landowners were seeking answers concerning their eligibility to sell water following the newly announced exemption zones. These yellow and green zones were indicated in a letter they had received from NVIRP.

"Landowners in an eligible zone and wishing to participate in any Commonwealth buy-back must obtain an exemption to the 4% limit from NVIRP and an exemption will only be issued where the sale complements our modernisation program," Executive Manager Modernisation, David Kent said. The other option landowners have is to sell water within the 4% annual limit when that becomes available.

"Many landowners who attended these meetings were considering offering water entitlement for sale to the Commonwealth in the tender that closed last week and wanted to know

if they were in a zone where the 4% exemption rule could facilitate a sale.

"As I said at these meetings, I want to encourage landowners not to self-assess their own eligibility but to make contact with NVIRP and request an Application for an Eligibility Assessment even if they have already filed a Commonwealth tender application. NVIRP's Modernisation staff will visit your property and assess all your water delivery outlets and options to determine if you meet the criteria.

“Landowners in an eligible zone and wishing to participate in any Commonwealth buy-back must obtain an exemption to the 4% limit from NVIRP and an exemption will only be issued where the sale complements our modernisation program,”

"Over the 12 meetings I noticed some consistent questions recurring and I have included a question and answer page on our website www.nvirp.com.au (4% exemption information) or a hard copy can be mailed to you by phoning the Exemption Hotline on 1300 068 477.

"Although the first Commonwealth tender has closed there will be another in early March and also late April 2010. Landowners considering selling their water entitlement to the Murray Darling Basin Authority or Water for Rivers can also do so under the exemption criteria so I



David Kent

urge them to contact NVIRP to determine their eligibility," Mr Kent said.

The recent meetings conducted by David Kent and his staff were held in Cohuna, Kerang, Swan Hill, Boort, Pyramid Hill, Cobram, Numurkah, Shepparton, Tatura, Kyabram, Rochester and Lockington.

Key Questions

Is my property in the exempt zone?

The "exemption" map you were provided is indicative only. The only way that eligibility can be determined is by completing an application form and forwarding it to NVIRP. Our staff will then undertake an assessment of your property to see if it meets the exemption criteria. Depending on how complex the assessment is, this can take up to 15 working days once your fully completed application is received.

If I am in the exemption zone and I wish to sell water share what happens then?

Determining that you are in, or partially in, an exempt zone is only the first part of the process.

Once this has been determined the conditions that apply must be developed. The objective is to connect all properties back to the backbone over the life of NVIRP. The complexities involved in this will determine how quickly an Exemption Evidence Notice can be provided.

Why are there conditions imposed?

The State Government modified its policy on the 4% trade cap to facilitate the modernisation process. The exemption is conditional on the landowner agreeing to carry out actions which will complement the modernisation program by relocating or surrendering delivery shares.

You will need to work with the NVIRP to reconnect your property to the backbone to receive an improved, more cost effective service.

Alternatively you can surrender delivery shares in proportion to the exempted volume of water shares.

Why can't I be exempted if I am in the green zone and currently supplied by a backbone channel?

Exemptions are designed to direct Commonwealth purchases to areas that are unlikely to be connected to the backbone channels. Landowners in the non-exempt areas can sell water out of the district under the 4% limit. However, recently announced "On-Farm Irrigation Efficiency" program is anticipated to be another mechanism by which people in the non-exempt areas can sell water to be returned to the environment.

Decreasing infrastructure upkeep aids modernisation

A key element of the NVIRP Connections Program is to rationalise significant lengths of channel infrastructure, in order to ensure future affordability of the irrigation system servicing this region. Fewer channels mean less costs and less water losses, therefore providing a more viable irrigation system.

CEO of NVIRP Murray Smith said, more and more landowners are becoming aware of the value that can be created by consolidating adjacent properties.

"If significant lengths of channel are rationalised this generates funds for on-farm improvements or land acquisition.

"We are seeing this occur by amalgamating adjacent properties that are in the same ownership or, as is becoming more prevalent, purchasing the neighbouring property and consolidating the farm enterprise around the original home property.

"Many farmers are coming to us with innovative solutions as they understand the

benefits to them of this irrigation modernisation project.

"Acquiring an adjoining property and then rationalising the channel between the two properties can generate significant financial incentives and improve the whole viability of the enterprise and can enhance the farm business by consolidating around the home block.

"All GMID landowners are encouraged to consider how their farming operation can be improved and then explore the many opportunities that the NVIRP program provides. By working together, we can all ensure the irrigation system is not only world-class but affordable into the future for those who wish to continue irrigated farming," Mr Smith said.

NVIRP Modernisation Coordinators are based in Rochester 03 5484 0452, Kerang 03 5451 0115, Tatura 03 5824 5611, Cobram 03 5871 0133 and Pyramid Hill 03 5455 7100.

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Advice has been received from DEWHA that the successful delivery partners for the \$300m on-farm irrigation efficiency program will now be announced at the end of February.

Landowners considering if this program will integrate with their farming options can register their interest with the *Department of Primary Industries* at:

Cobram 03 5871 0600,
Echuca 03 5482 1922,
Kerang 03 5452 1266 or
Tatura 03 5833 5222.