

Media Release

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Irrigation renewal means healthier rivers, wetlands and soils

Environmental impact assessments indicate irrigation renewal works across northern Victoria will improve the health of rivers, wetlands and soils through more natural seasonal flows, specific watering plans and reduced salinity.

The Northern Victoria Irrigation Renewal Project (NVIRP) has lodged details of its assessments and proposed environmental management system with the Minister for Planning, Justin Madden.

“These referral documents explain how the potential environmental impacts of modernising the irrigation system will be managed,” NVIRP’s CEO Murray Smith said.

“The documents indicate that the project’s environmental impacts will be overwhelmingly positive.

“Wetlands that receive incidental spillage from outfalls will instead have environmental watering plans providing a more reliable supply that closely resembles natural wetting and drying patterns.

“Our assessments also show that a modernised irrigation system will likely mean more natural flow patterns in the region’s rivers, with slightly lower flows in summer and slightly higher winter flows.”

Mr Smith said leakage and seepage from channels and irrigation practices associated with the current system had also contributed to increased soil salinity in northern Victoria.

“Modernisation will reduce seepage, thereby helping to lower high water tables and reduce salinity and waterlogging, both of which threaten remnant native vegetation as well as the future of farming.”

Mr Smith said with 175 gigalitres, or 40 per cent, of water savings set aside for the environment, northern Victoria’s rivers, wetlands and soils were among the project’s main beneficiaries.

“This project has very exciting benefits for the health of northern Victoria’s rivers, wetlands, soils and native flora and fauna – benefits that ultimately flow on to the Murray River,” he added

The Department of Sustainability and Environment and local Catchment Management Authorities, are key partners in managing the project’s environmental impacts.

The Planning Minister will now decide if an Environmental Effects Statement is required for the irrigation modernisation under the Victorian *Environmental Effects Act 1978*.

The referral documentation and supporting technical reports can be viewed on www.dpcd.vic.gov.au/planning/ees.

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