

Upper Barwon River - Water for the Environment – Dec 2021

Environmental releases and localised flooding

What is Water for the Environment?

The Upper Barwon River Environmental Entitlement 2018 is delivered by the Corangamite Catchment Management Authority (CCMA), on behalf of the Victorian Environmental Water Holder (VEWH), who own the water. The water is released in carefully timed flows to give a helping hand to native plants and animals, including fish, frogs and platypus. It also maintains water quality and improves native in-stream and riverside vegetation. A fact sheet has been produced by CCMA that can be shared with your friends, family and networks (see below or attached).

Water for the Environment Upper Barwon Fact Sheet

Please click for more information (or attached)



CCMA Fact Sheets -
Water for the Enviro

Passing Flows vs Environmental Releases

Passing flows and environmental releases are different things, but both help the environment. Passing flows are stream flows required to be passed through reservoirs and creek diversion weirs by Barwon Water as legislated in their Bulk Entitlement for the Upper Barwon System. Passing flows can be a set flow or they can be the natural flow in the waterway depending on the time of year. During summer, passing flows are typically the natural flow in the waterway. Passing flow rules have been in place for many years and Barwon Water is required to comply with all obligations and conditions specified in their Bulk Entitlements. 'Water for the Environment' is in addition to passing flows when required, and releases are based on scientific FLOWS studies which recommend targeted releases at different times of the year to support the ecology of the river. This may include some more base flow to connect habitat pools but also pulses of water (a 'fresh') to trigger fish migration or water vegetation higher up the bank.

What is the river's 'natural state'?

This can be a challenging term as we all have different ideas on what is 'natural'. For one person, the memory of certain species being present might be considered natural. For another, 'natural' may be the idea of a river system that is untouched by mankind.

Regardless of what we individually think the river system should be like, we need to consider these factors this summer:

- With a La Nina summer (above average rainfall), we might experience higher than normal natural flows in both the East and West branches of the Upper Barwon River
- The system has many man-made structures, including:
 - the West Barwon reservoir
 - Diversion weirs on East Barwon River, Callahans, Dewings, Mathews and Pennyroyal creeks
- Climate change is changing Victorian rivers and we will have to adapt to a 'new normal'.

Past and Present

The Upper Barwon River has received water for the environment since the summer of 2018/19 and will receive water this summer too.

Due to water for the environment being relatively new in the Upper Barwon River, we relied on eyes-on-the-ground in the first years of releases as there were no stream flow gauges on the East and West Barwon rivers downstream of Barwon Waters passing flow gauges. There was some unintended flooding out of the waterway with the first releases in 2019 and to a lesser extent 2021 (west branch) and 2020 (east branch) due to weed infestations. Subsequent releases have been reduced in volume to avoid flooding until weed infestations are addressed. We also now have the new East and West Barwon stream flow gauges, which were installed earlier this year by Barwon Water. Anyone can access the live water data via the Waterway Management Information System (WMIS). More on this below.

Please note that 'Water for the Environment' does not intentionally go overbank. If there is a major rain event or the reservoir starts spilling, 'Water for the Environment' releases are stopped. Flooding may still occur as a result of natural rainfall.

Environmental Release Alterations for this summer

Barwon Water are carrying out willow removal works along the East branch of the Upper Barwon River during December-April. This means the following can occur:

- East branch:
 - Topping up natural flows to 0.5 ML/d (if required) to mimic low flows (base flows)
 - The possibility to release 1 or 2 freshes (pulses of water) during/after removal works.
- West branch:
 - Releasing continuous low flows (base flows) of 6 ML/d (on top of passing flows) to trigger particular environmental responses

If you Notice Flooding

In the first instance, please visit WMIS ([Water Measurement Information System](#)). Click on Surface Water Sites > Barwon Basin > 233254 (East Branch) or 233255 (West Branch) and these will show you how much water is going past the gauge. Please note: the East Branch gauge is currently offline. I will notify you when this changes.

In the near future you will be able to visit the Corangamite Catchment Management Authority's website which has an interactive map of the Upper Barwon River which includes data on river flows, current and planned releases and other water parameters, link: [Environmental Flows - Corangamite Catchment Management Authority \(ccma.vic.gov.au\)](#). If you click on the gauge symbol it will show if any 'Water for the Environment' is being released. This information is from WMIS. I will send an update when this is functional.

Eyes on the Ground

Aside from the gauges, I rely on eyes-on-the-ground. If you have noticed flooding **and** an environmental release is occurring, please contact Hayley Vinden on Hayley.vinden@ccma.vic.gov.au or 0477 719 146

Notifications

If you'd like to subscribe for notifications of environmental releases or become part of the Upper Barwon Surface Water Advisory Group then please visit the CCMA website and click on the 'Stay Updated' button at the bottom of the page, or fill in the application form [Water For The Environment - Corangamite Catchment Management Authority \(ccma.vic.gov.au\)](#).

Upcoming social media campaign

In the new year, we will be running a series of Water for the Environment social media posts. Once these have been published, they will be all saved to our website.

If you have any questions, then please feel free to contact me.

Regards,

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cared for by thriving communities*

