

# stream news

A bulletin for  
**Melbourne Water**  
diverters



Melbourne Water is owned by the Victorian Government. We manage Melbourne's water supply catchments, remove and treat most of Melbourne's sewage, and manage rivers and creeks and major drainage systems throughout the Port Phillip and Westernport region.



## Yarra Catchment Hit Hard by Drought

Victoria remains in the strong grip of what is recognised as one of our worst drought periods in history. Indicative of this was the Spring streamflows into our major reservoirs at just 19% of the long term average and 40% lower than the previous recorded lowest year of 1982.

The lack of streamflow into our reservoirs is being reflected in the rest of our catchments also. All of the major catchments other than the Little Yarra River and Watts River are currently on either a pumping ban or restrictions. As at the **23rd January 2007** the pumping status was as follows:

### Catchments with Pumping Bans in place.

Diamond Creek	Don River	Hoddles Creek
Little Yarra River	Maribyrnong River	Olinda Creek
Pauls Creek	Plenty River	Steels/Dixons Creek

### Catchments with Pumping Restrictions in place.

Yarra River	Woori Yallock Creek
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With the summer months still ahead of us it is clear that there will simply be insufficient water to go around this year. Licence holders will need to make tough decisions but even those with some access to water should be planning on substantially less crop area under the current dry conditions.

Combined with the forecast for more dry weather ahead it is likely that bans will remain in place for a substantial period of time across most catchments. Licence holders on banned catchments who do not hold water in storage should cease irrigation from streams immediately.

Those licence holders relying on on-stream dams for their irrigation are reminded that they must pass *all* streamflows during periods of pumping bans and must therefore draw down their storage volumes in order to demonstrate

compliance. Licence holders whose dams remain full while irrigation continues cannot demonstrate compliance with the ban on taking from streamflow.

Melbourne Water wishes to remind people once more that they must check the status of restrictions or bans on their waterway before taking any water. Melbourne Water will be conducting random inspections across the summer period to ensure compliance.

## Licence Renewal

Melbourne Water wishes to thank licence holders for the great response received to our licence renewal request back in June. In response to our letter over 90% of licence holders replied within the requested due date.

The different format was adopted this year as strictly speaking under the legislation a licence holder can only apply to renew their licence prior to it expiring. As licences are issued on an annual basis this means that a renewal request is required each year.

The request for the licensee signature and date to be posted or faxed back to Melbourne Water was considered the simplest way to meet these requirements.

A number of people indicated to us that they always want to renew their licence and requested that Melbourne Water simply continue to renew them unless otherwise advised. While appreciating this position and the fact that nearly all licence holders will want to renew / retain their licence from one year to the next, Melbourne Water cannot under the Water Act make this assumption and automatically renew licences. The onus is on the licence holder to reapply.

On average around 15 licences per annum fail to be renewed by the licence holder. This occurs despite several stages of follow up by Melbourne Water with the licence holder.

The process will be adopted again around June next year when licences are due for renewal.

## Pricing News Update

No doubt licence holders have noticed the rising costs of their diversion licences from year to year.

As published in prior editions of Stream News these increases are largely attributable to a number of water reforms that have occurred in recent years including the installation of meters, management of dams and closer attention being paid to managing the limited water resource during drought conditions.

While in percentage terms the increases have been reasonably large, in monetary terms the increase are generally small and Melbourne Water has attempted to keep diversion prices as low as possible.

Funds collected are used to cover a range of facets to the diversions business including:

- Staff & vehicles
- Metering purchase, installation and maintenance (Around 600 meters)
- Stream gauging stations for monitoring flows (29 sites)
- Bulk entitlement costs and administration
- Information and newsletters
- Billings and accounts
- Compliance and inspections

Diversions staff remain available to all licence holders for advice, general assistance and support on water issues and are happy to visit licence holders as requested.

Melbourne Water will endeavour to control future price increases but it is expected that prices will continue to rise as state wide water reforms continue and we seek to better manage what is a limited and valuable resource.

For an average user of 20ML the total cost of their licence per ML is \$18. Compared to reticulated water at over \$800 per ML and petrol prices at \$1.3 million per ML it is fair to say that licence prices remain cheap.

## Environmental Flows for the Yarra River (main stem)

As highlighted elsewhere in the newsletter, most waterways in the Yarra basin are presently on pumping bans. Bans will be introduced on the Yarra River itself if flows fall below 150 ML/day at Yering.

This ban level is based on agreements with the EPA established in 1998. The science of environmental flows has come a long way since then and a new scientific study of the Yarra River, completed in 2005, recommends new environmental flows at Yering of 200 ML/day in summer and 350 ML/day in winter. In most years these flows are easily achieved, however in drought years the frequency of bans being introduced will increase for users on the Yarra River.

The Victorian Government has adopted these recommendations, and set conditions on urban water entitlements to ensure the environmental flows are met. These new rules will come into effect in 2007, making it a legal requirement for the urban water authorities (Yarra Valley Water, South East Water and City West Water) to meet these new environmental flows. Diversion licence holders will also be affected by this change as the trigger levels for the introduction of bans will need to be increased to a level above 200ML/d in order to protect these flows.

The drought response plan for private diverters needs to be updated so that the private diverters and urban water authorities are managed by the same rules. This will affect licence holders who take water directly from the Yarra River (main stem). Melbourne Water will talk further with affected

licence holders to work out how the changes will be made over the coming months. Licence holders on major tributaries of the Yarra will still be managed under stream flow management plan rules.

## Drought Response Plan and Licence Conditions Review

The Melbourne Water Drought Response Plan for Licensed Water Users is the document that outlines licence holders' access to water under the varying streamflow conditions. It sets out the trigger points within each major catchment for the introduction of pumping restrictions or bans and outlines restriction conditions for different licence types. The Plan has been in operation now for three years and is currently under review along with the standard licence conditions contained on the back of every licence.

A lot of the changes are aimed at simply making the document easier to read and understand but significantly the major changes include:

- Conditions on licences to include the trigger flow levels at which the licensee must cease taking water.
- Direct reference to the Drought Response Plan in licence conditions.
- An increase in the ban environmental flow trigger for the Yarra River from the current 150ML/d to 220ML/d to reflect changes made to the Yarra Bulk Entitlement which was recently gazetted.
- Revised conditions for dam owners to access water under restriction or ban periods.

Melbourne Water welcomes any suggestions or amendments to the current Drought Response Plan and licence conditions from licence holders. Copies of the draft plan and conditions can be obtained by telephoning Melbourne Water on 9784 6373. Submissions can be forwarded to Diversions Management Team, Melbourne Water, PO Box 67, Yarra Glen, Vic, 3775 by **28 February 2007**.



Steels Creek Flow Gauge Yarra Glen January 2007

## Want More Information?

Please contact Steve Hosking, Phil Biasi or Tim Donovan on telephone (03) 9784 6373 or 131 722 or e-mail to [diversions@melbournewater.com.au](mailto:diversions@melbournewater.com.au) for further information.