

Renewed Surface Water Management Program: Environmental outcomes

The Shepparton Irrigation Region (SIR) is located in central northern Victoria and covers around 500,000 hectares of agricultural floodplains. The region contains several internationally recognised environmentally significant wetlands and substantial areas of vegetation.

Extensive clearing of native open woodlands and the development of intensive irrigation in the SIR have altered natural hydrological balances across the region. Increased soil moisture due to irrigation results in higher run-off volumes during rainfall events.

This run-off overwhelms natural drainage systems and can inundate significant areas of farmland and native vegetation for long periods. Ponded water recharges the local watertable, which can cause saline water to rise closer to the surface.

This can lead to cause salinity impacts on agricultural and native plants as saline groundwater comes into contact with their roots.

The SIR Surface Water Management Program aims to remove run-off from irrigated land to reduce

waterlogging and salinisation impacts, whilst enhancing wetland and native vegetation values. Surface Water Management Systems (SWMS) are designed to restore natural hydrological regimes where possible.

This may be achieved by diverting drainage water into wetlands for periodic inundation or protecting native vegetation communities from prolonged inundation by diverting run-off through the regional drainage system.

The renewed Surface Water Management Program is committed to an environmental outcome of maintaining to at least the current base levels and if possible enhancing, the environmental values of native vegetation, streams, wetlands, flora and fauna.

The SIR Drainage Working group has reiterated the current program's commitment to this outcome by endorsing the policy of 'avoid, minimise, offset' for native vegetation removal, and provision of localised offsets in excess of planning requirements where removal of native vegetation is unavoidable.

Native Vegetation protected with drainage



The SWMS shown here protects a remnant Grey Box stand from water inundation, despite being surrounded by irrigated farmland. Drainage from prolonged inundation will help restore the ecological balance and protect important habitats

Site without drainage



This area of vegetation is suffering as a result of being inundated with water for long periods of time. The survival of many native plants is compromised if their root systems are water logged for long periods.