

Media Release

The Hon Lisa Neville MP

Minister for the Coordination of Environment, Land, Water, and Planning – COVID-19
Minister for Police and Emergency Services
Minister for Water



Saturday, 3 October 2020

DELIVERING FOR GOULBURN MURRAY IRRIGATORS

The Victorian Government is delivering the benefits from the Connections Project directly into the hands of farmers – fast-tracking the issue date of water shares and financial payments.

Minister for Water Lisa Neville has accepted the recommendations on how to deliver irrigators' share of water savings from the Connections project – getting more water to farmers faster, so they can plan their next season.

Following extensive consultation, irrigators in the Goulburn Murray Irrigation District will receive either water shares or financial benefit – based on the delivery share they hold.

Those with water shares will now have their entitlements issued in October 2021, before the peak irrigation season, along with any water allocations which would have accrued against these entitlements since July 2021.

The water savings will be available to irrigators as a mix of high and low reliability shares which will equate to 75 gigalitres of long term annual average yield.

Melbourne water retailers will receive their final share of the savings after irrigators. The interim distribution they have been receiving from the Connections project in recent years will continue to be available on the market.

Around half of all water users have a very small stake – less than .25 megalitres per day of a delivery share – which, when combined, add up to roughly two per cent of total volume.

To get maximum benefit from these smaller shares, these entitlements will be combined and users given a one-off payment as a credit to their water bills in early 2022.

This approach builds on the Irrigators' Share Consultative Committee proposal that underwent extensive community consultation in April. Minor changes were made to the initial proposal following sector feedback.

During the six week consultation, meetings were held with each of the water service committees, as well as several virtual town hall meetings with 100 participants. In addition, 4,000 people visited the website to read the proposal and there were over 200 surveys and submissions provided.

The overwhelming majority of feedback identified this method as the most practical, fair and sensible approach to distributing the irrigators' share and delivering on prior commitments.

The Connections Project is the biggest investment in irrigation infrastructure in Victoria's history securing the future of irrigated agriculture in the Goulburn Murray region and delivering significant benefits for irrigators, Melbourne's water corporations and the environment.

The Project is on-track to complete works in October 2020 and has already delivered on Victoria's Basin Plan obligations – avoiding further Commonwealth buybacks.

Delivery shareholders are encouraged to review and update their details as soon as possible to prepare for the issue of water shares. More information on how benefits will be distributed are available at: water.vic.gov.au/water-for-agriculture/irrigators-share-distribution

Quotes attributable to Minister for Water Lisa Neville

"We always said that the Connections Project would see more water handed directly to Goulburn Murray irrigators. This announcement gives everyone in the region the certainty they need to plan their next season."

"This is a significant step in delivering an upgraded and modernised Goulburn Murray Irrigation District. We're already seeing the promised benefits to the environment and urban water security, as well as irrigation supply."

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