

Media Release

The Hon Richard Wynne MP
Minister for Planning
Minister for Housing
Acting Minister for Water



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INTERIM TRADE AND OPERATING RULES FOR GOULBURN RIVER

The Andrews Labor Government has announced new trade and operating rules for the Goulburn River that will protect irrigators' ability to trade the water they need while improving the health of the river.

Acting Water Minister Richard Wynne said the rules will protect the river from prolonged high flows over summer and autumn, while ensuring traded water can be delivered without increasing risks to Murray water users.

The interim trade rule for 2021-22 and extension of interim operating arrangements for another 12 months were set following extensive community consultation, which is summarised in the Closing the Loop report.

The interim trade rule will mean trade is capped after December 15 this year – with the inter-valley trade account run down by the end of the season, which is critical to support the following year's trade for irrigators.

The rules are designed to deliver inter-valley trade in a smarter, more environmentally sustainable pattern while not increasing risk to Lower Murray irrigators and providing more certainty at the start of each irrigation season.

The operating rules will allow similar flows in the Goulburn of about 40 gigalitres a month – but using short releases of higher flows between longer low flow periods over summer and autumn.

This coming year base flows averaging 1,100 ML per day will be trialled, which are lower than recent years. Higher releases of water in early summer and autumn will also be tested. These more variable flows will allow vegetation to become established and helping to reduce erosion and protect riparian habitat.

During consultation, stakeholders were united on the need for the Government to make the interim restrictions on tagged water use permanent ahead of their expiry at the end of November 2021. This will be implemented to keep a level playing field for all types of trade and to prevent tagged water being used to get around trade limits.

As part of this, the current exemption for the Lower Broken Creek will continue due to the special circumstances there - while a long term rule is developed in consultation with the community in coming months.

Funding of \$2.7 million was provided in this year's Budget to monitor the health of the river over the next three years to help inform long-term improvements to operating rules. The outcomes of the monitoring and the effects of the new rules during this interim year will be made public and inform a decision on long term rules.

The Closing the Loop report can be found at engage.vic.gov.au/goulburn-murray-trade-rule-review

Quotes attributable to Acting Minister for Water Richard Wynne

"We listened to the extensive feedback from communities and now we want to trial interim rules for a further season so we get the best outcome for the lower Goulburn River while not disadvantaging irrigators.

"This year's interim operating rules will allow about the same amount of water to be delivered over summer and autumn as the last two years but importantly with greater variability of flows.

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