

Media Release

The Hon Lisa Neville MP

Minister for Police

Minister for Water



Friday, 25 February 2022

SUCCESSFUL CONNECTIONS PROJECT DELIVERS EXTRA WATER

The largest irrigation modernisation project in Australian history – the Connections Project - has exceeded its water recovery target of 429 gigalitres by four gigalitres.

Minister for Water Lisa Neville announced all water committed through the project in the Goulburn Murray Irrigation District (GMID) – for irrigators, the environment and the Melbourne retail water corporations – can now be delivered – with Traditional Owners to also benefit.

In October 2021, irrigators received 77 gigalitres as part of the irrigation water share distribution and 279 gigalitres were recovered for the environment – avoiding the need for buy backs under the Murray Darling Basin Plan. Melbourne water retailers will also now receive their full 75 gigalitres as part of the original agreement.

The remaining two gigalitres will be distributed equally to the original partners in the project – irrigators, the environment – represented by the Victorian Environmental Water Holder (VEWH) – and Melbourne retailers.

Both the VEWH and the Melbourne retailers have agreed their additional water will be set aside for Traditional Owners in northern Victoria – a total of 1.36 gigalitres.

This is the first time that Traditional Owners in northern Victoria will receive a water entitlement as part of the Government’s commitment to Aboriginal values and aspirations for water. How that water is distributed will be determined by the Traditional Owner groups.

The Andrews Labor Government will work with irrigators on distributing the benefits of irrigators’ additional 681 megalitre share, with the expectation that proceeds from the sale of the water will be distributed to delivery shareholders.

Connections has delivered great outcomes – improved irrigation service delivery, regional job opportunities, upskilled local contractors, and a modernised irrigation system that cut water losses and built resilience to climate change. The final audit has now been completed – confirming the water savings target has been exceeded.

The Minister for Water expects that allocations against the 75 gigalitres of long term annual average water held by the Melbourne retailers in northern Victoria will continue to be made available on the northern water market – making more water available and keeping downward pressure on prices.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Water Lisa Neville

“The success of the Connections Project means additional water recovery above the 429 GL target will deliver economic benefits to irrigators and return water to Traditional Owners in northern Victoria.”

“The project has modernised irrigation infrastructure saving water, creating jobs, supporting the long-term productivity of our irrigators and building the region’s resilience to climate change.”

“I remain committed to no more buy backs of water under the Basin Plan and this project has been crucial in avoiding that and meeting our Basin Plan targets.”

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