

connectionsproject

Approval Conditions compliance report

Third Reedy Lake bypass project,
EPBC 2016/7760

April 2024

Document control

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Contents

1.	Background.....	1
2.	Project Update	1
3.	Assessment of Compliance	2
4.	Conclusion	2

Appendix A - EPBC Approval 2016/7760 Assessment of Compliance Table

1. Background

Approval to proceed with the Third Reedy Lake Bypass Project was provided by the Commonwealth Government, subject to conditions, after assessment in accordance with the Environment Effects Act 1978 and Bilateral Agreement 2014 (Ref 2016R03 and EPBC 2016/7760).

Implementation of the action commenced on 24 January 2019.

Condition 8 of the EPBC approval requires:

8. *Within three months of every 12 month anniversary of the commencement of the action, the approval holder must publish a report on their website addressing compliance with the conditions of this approval over the previous 12 months, including implementation of any management plans. Non-compliance with any of the conditions of this approval must be reported to the **Department** at the same time as the compliance report is published. Unless otherwise agreed to in writing by the **Minister**, this condition applies for the life of the approval.*

This Approval Conditions compliance report covers the period 23 January 2023 to 22 January 2024.

2. Project Update

In March 2019 the GMW Connections Project successfully completed construction of works to achieve water savings associated with the Third Reedy Lake Bypass Project. This work saw the construction of a bypass channel and associated infrastructure around Third Reedy Lake to remove the Lake from the irrigation distribution network and reinstate a more natural watering regime to enhance environmental values. One small piece of work (rehabilitation of the inlet regulator) remains to be undertaken.

As part of the approvals, a requirement of the EPBC Act 1999 conditions is the preparation of an Operational Environmental Management Plan (OEMP). The OEMP was prepared, and approved by the Secretary of the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) on 6 March 2019.

The OEMP provides the operational arrangements required to minimise impacts to the Kerang Wetlands Ramsar Site and to the three fish species listed in the conditions of approval. Furthermore, the OEMP also provides the operational arrangements required to maximise the likelihood of restoring Third Reedy Lake and achieving the longer-term management goal:

“Achieve projected water savings whilst providing a watering regime that restores Third Reedy Lake to a deep freshwater marsh wetland type (dominated by Intermittent Swampy Woodland (EVC 813)) able to support recruitment of River Red Gums and promoting a diverse and extensive range of habitat suitable for a variety of waterbirds”.

In 2023 the Approval Conditions Compliance Report noted that rehabilitation works at the lake were interrupted after widespread flooding in the whole of the Murray River system in October 2022, which necessitated the removal of the earthen block that was installed upstream of the inlet regulator to prevent inflows into Third Reedy Lake. In April-May 2023 earthen blocks were installed on both the upstream and downstream sides of the inlet regulator to allow the lake to dry and prevent any further inflows. It also allowed the inspection of the regulator to facilitate design of the upgrade. The lake slowly drew down

through 2023, and although not completely dry by February 2024, rehabilitation work, planting of red gum seedlings, was able to recommence in December 2023.

Also in December 2023, a further fish survey was undertaken, to establish fish number and possible contingency plans as the lake dried. The survey did not find any large bodied native species, such as Golden perch or Murray cod, and concluded that if these species were present, they were likely to be in small numbers only.

The conclusion of the survey was that “The progression of the drying phase of the lake is likely to see increased bird feeding behaviour. The majority of the fish detected in the current survey were small and likely to be preyed upon and it is unlikely that there will be any large fish cleanup or salvage required as a result of the lake drying”. Large numbers of birds have been observed feeding at the lake as it has dried through the summer of 2023/24. This and the fact that no dead fish have been observed, supports the conclusion of the survey.

The lake is expected to be almost completely dry by the end of April 2024 and rehabilitation planting will then be extended across the entire lake.

The final construction activity, the upgrade of the inlet regulator, which was delayed by the October 2022 flood event, will be completed in 2024. The design includes a screen to stop large-bodied fish from entering when environmental water is supplied to Third Reedy. This is expected to ensure that the drying phase which follows, will not see large bodied fish stranded and dying as the water recedes. Evidence from the 2023/24 drying, after an uncontrolled fill of flood water, supports this theory.

3. Assessment of Compliance

The table in Appendix A lists all conditions associated with EPBC Approval 2016/7760 and assesses compliance against these conditions.

4. Conclusion

It is concluded that all relevant conditions have been complied with.

APPENDIX A

EPBC APPROVAL 2016/7760 ASSESSMENT OF COMPLIANCE TABLE

Condition	Compliance evidence	Assessment of compliance
<p>1. To minimise adverse impacts to the Kerang Lakes Ramsar Site, the approval holder must ensure that the construction environmental management plan for the proposed action:</p>	<p>The construction environmental management plan (EMP) was prepared.</p> <p>The Connections Project prepared an Addendum to its existing approved EMP which addressed Condition 1 of the approval. The EMP is approved by the Secretary of the Victorian Department of Environment, Water, Land and Planning. The Addendum covers items specific to the Third Reedy Lakes Bypass Project including Matters of National Environmental Significance.</p> <p>The EMP and the Third Reedy Addendum are on the Goulburn- Murray Water Connections Project web page: https://www.g-mwater.com.au/policy-and-projects/connectionsproject (under 'Resources')</p>	<p>Compliant</p>
<p>i. Includes a commitment to implementation of measures to identify any matters of national environmental significance within the project area during construction. Any matters of national environmental significance that were not identified in the Environment Report must be reported to the Department within 14 days of their identification.</p>	<p>Commitment to implement measures to identify any matters of national environmental significance within the project area during construction are included in the existing EMP and Addendum.</p> <p>No additional matters of national environmental significance have been identified.</p>	<p>Compliant</p>

Condition	Compliance evidence	Assessment of compliance
<p>ii. Includes contingency measures to minimise impacts to matters of national environmental significance identified within the project area during construction and, when the contingency measures are implemented, evaluate and report their effectiveness to the Department within three months of implementation.</p>	<p>Contingency measures to minimise impacts to matters of national environmental significance identified within the project area during construction are included in the existing GMW Connections Environmental Management Plan (EMP) and the Addendum prepared for the Third Reedy Lake bypass project.</p> <p>The Addendum documents specify contingency measures to minimise impacts to (previously known) MNES within the works area including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Terrestrial Fauna ▸ Arboreal Fauna & Birds ▸ Bird Nests/Breeding ▸ Flora ▸ Aquatic fauna <p>No additional matters of national environmental significance were identified during construction. Major construction works were completed in March 2019. The final construction activity, the upgrade of the inlet regulator, which was delayed by the October 2022 flood event, will be completed in 2024.</p> <p>No contingency measures have been implemented.</p>	<p>Compliant</p>
<p>iii. Includes a commitment to implementation of weed management measures in accordance with best practice techniques.</p>	<p>A commitment to implement weed management measures is included in the existing EMP and the Addendum.</p> <p>The Addendum documents specify measures required to address weed identification, noxious weeds, weed disturbance, traffic movement, vehicle clean-down and soil sourcing and movement.</p>	<p>Compliant</p>
<p>iv. The approval holder must provide the Department an electronic copy of the draft construction environmental management plan for comment prior to seeking approval of the plan from the relevant state authority.</p>	<p>The draft construction environmental management plan was submitted to the Department for comment on 27 July 2018.</p> <p>Comments were received from the Department on 27 September 2018.</p> <p>This condition was complied with in 2018 and is no longer relevant.</p>	<p>Not relevant</p>

Condition	Compliance evidence	Assessment of compliance
<p>v. Is provided to the Department within 14 days following approval by the relevant state authority.</p>	<p>The Secretary of the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning approved the addendum on the 20th of December 2018. The EMP Addendum was provided to the Department on 3 January 2019. (note that the existing EMP was already approved by the Secretary of the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning) This condition was complied with in 2019 and is no longer relevant.</p>	<p><i>Not relevant</i></p>
<p>2. To minimise adverse impacts to the Kerang Lakes Ramsar Site, the approval holder must ensure that the operational environmental management plan for the proposed action:</p>	<p>The operational environmental management plan (OEMP) was prepared. Section 6.1 specifically addressed Conditions 2i, 2ii, 2iii. The OEMP is available on the Goulburn- Murray Water Connections Project web page: https://www.g-mwater.com.au/policy-and-projects/connectionsproject (under 'Resources')</p>	<p><i>Compliant</i></p>
<p>i. Includes a commitment to monitoring of water quality, with trigger levels for the implementation of contingency measures in the event of increased salinity, reduced dissolved oxygen and increased acidity.</p>	<p>OEMP Section 3.9 and Section 5 provided details of the adaptive management approach to managing a range threats and associated risks, including salinity, and outlined the monitoring and contingency measures (i.e. management response risk). The trigger levels, monitoring and contingency measures to specific items identified in the Approvals Conditions 2i are summarised in Table 6-1. The issues described in Table 6-1 did not arise when they lake dried at the end of summer 2022. The lake refilled as a result of widespread flooding in the Murray system in October 2023, but monitoring will continue.</p>	<p><i>Compliant</i></p>
<p>ii. Where contingency measures are implemented, the approval holder must evaluate and report their effectiveness to the Department, including commitments to adaptive management measures if the contingency measures are determined not to be effective, within three months of implementing the contingency measures.</p>	<p>The OEMP commits GMW to evaluating and reporting on the effectiveness of contingency measures if triggers levels are exceeded within three months of implementing the contingency measures. The report will include commitments to adaptive management measures (e.g. through investigations and review of contingency measures) if the currently identified contingency measures were determined not to be effective. No relevant contingency measures have been required to be implemented.</p>	<p><i>Compliant</i></p>

Condition	Compliance evidence	Assessment of compliance
<p>iii. Includes a commitment to monitoring and adaptive management of invasive flora and fauna species to prevent any increase in their presence within the Project area.</p>	<p>The OEMP (Section 5) provided details of the adaptive management approach to managing invasive species; monitoring and contingency measures (management response) are summarised in Table 6 2. For all potential invasive flora and fauna species, the approval holder will review effectiveness of contingency measures if implemented and through adaptive management refine contingency measures if they are determined not to be effective.</p> <p>No relevant adaptive management measures have been required to be implemented.</p>	<p>Compliant</p>
<p>iv. The approval holder must provide the Department an electronic copy of the draft operational environmental management plan for comment prior to seeking approval of the plan from the relevant state authority.</p>	<p>A copy of the draft OEMP was submitted to the Director of Post Approvals at the Department of Environment and Energy (DoEE) on 2 January 2019. The DoEE has reviewed the draft and their comments have been addressed and the plan finalised.</p> <p>This Condition was complied with in 2019. It is no longer relevant.</p>	<p>Not relevant</p>
<p>v. Is provided to the Department within 14 days following approval by the relevant state authority.</p>	<p>The Operational Environmental Management Plan (OEMP) was approved by the State Secretary of the Department of Environment Land Water & Planning on 6 March 2019.</p> <p>This approval occurred before the 'operation of the modernised works' being the bypass channel of Third Reedy Lake and associated works.</p> <p>The Department was notified of the DELWP Secretary's approval on 27 March 2019. This was within 14 days of the receipt of the Secretary's letter by the Connections Project.</p> <p>This Condition was complied with in 2019. It is no longer relevant.</p>	<p>Not relevant</p>
<p>3. To minimise adverse impacts to the Flathead galaxias, Murray hardyhead and Silver perch the approval holder must:</p>		
<p>i. Monitor fish exit from Third Reedy Lake during exit flows before the regulator is closed or until the water level drops to a level such that the lake is not connected to the bypass.</p>	<p>A fish exit strategy was prepared. This specifically addressed fish monitoring requirements during exit flows.</p> <p>A number of fish monitoring surveys were conducted during the initial drawdown, drying phases and in response to subsequent flooding of the lake. A Fish monitoring report detailing the findings of these surveys was provided to the DCCEEW on 30 November 2023.</p>	<p>Compliant</p>

Condition	Compliance evidence	Assessment of compliance
ii. Within three months of the completion of monitoring, the approval holder must provide a written report to the Department of the fish exit monitoring results.	A Fish monitoring report detailing the findings of all surveys conducted at Third Reedy Lake was provided to the DCCEEW on 30 November 2023.	<i>Compliant</i>
iii. The written report must list any presence of and death or harm to the Flathead galaxias, Murray hardyhead and Silver perch. The report must list adaptive management measures that will be implemented to minimise further death or harm throughout future drying cycles.	No Flathead galaxias, Murray hardyhead or Silver perch were found in Third Reedy Lake	<i>Compliant</i>
iv. Following a report of death or harm to the Flathead galaxias, Murray hardyhead or Silver perch, subsequent reports must evaluate the success of adaptive management measures and, where measures were unsuccessful, propose further measures to minimise death or harm throughout future drying cycles.	No Flathead galaxias, Murray hardyhead or Silver perch were found or harmed.	<i>Compliant</i>
v. Continue the monitoring and reporting for the life of the approval unless permission to cease monitoring and reporting is provided in writing by the Minister.	Monitoring and reporting to date has been completed. Monitoring and reporting will occur as required over the life of the approval.	<i>Compliant</i>
4. Within 14 days following commencement of the action, the approval holder must advise the Department in writing of the actual date of commencement.	The action commenced on 24 January 2019 and the Department was notified by email on 30 January 2019 of the date of commencement. This condition was complied with in 2019 and is no longer relevant.	<i>Not relevant</i>

Condition	Compliance evidence	Assessment of compliance
<p>5. The approval holder must maintain accurate records substantiating all activities associated with or relevant to the conditions of approval and make them available upon request to the Department. Such records may be subject to audit by the Department or an independent auditor in accordance with section 458 of the EPBC Act, or used to verify compliance with the conditions of approval. Summaries of audits may be posted on the Department's website or publicised through general media.</p>	<p>Records of activities undertaken in association with the approval are maintained in the Goulburn-Murray Water document management system – Objective ECM.</p> <p>The Department has not requested that these records be made available.</p>	<p>Compliant</p>
<p>6. If the approval holder revises a management plan approved by the relevant state authority, as referred in Conditions 1 and 2, the revised management plan must be provided to the Department within 14 days following approval. Information confirming compliance of the new management plan with the requirements of Conditions 1 and 2 relevant to minimising impacts to the Kerang Lakes Ramsar Site must be provided with the revised management plan.</p>	<p>The approved management plan (Third Reedy Lake Operational Environmental Management Plan (OEMP)) has not been revised.</p>	<p>Compliant</p>
<p>7. Unless otherwise agreed to in writing by the Minister, the approval holder must publish all plans referred to in these conditions of approval on their website within one month of being approved by the relevant state authority.</p>	<p>The OEMP, EMP and Addendum are available on the Goulburn- Murray Water Connections Project web page: https://www.g-mwater.com.au/policy-and-projects/connectionsproject (under 'Resources')</p>	<p>Compliant</p>

Condition	Compliance evidence	Assessment of compliance
<p>8. Within three months of every 12 month anniversary of the commencement of the action, the approval holder must publish a report on their website addressing compliance with the conditions of this approval over the previous 12 months, including implementation of any management plans. Non-compliance with any of the conditions of this approval must be reported to the Department at the same time as the compliance report is published. Unless otherwise agreed to in writing by the Minister, this condition applies for the life of the approval.</p>	<p>This report has been prepared and posted on the Connections Project website by 23 April 2024 (ie 3 months from 23/1/2022).</p> <p>The report assesses compliance with conditions of approval over the past 12 months.</p> <p>There are no non-compliances with any of the conditions of the approval to report to the Department.</p>	<p><i>Compliant</i></p>
<p>9. Upon direction of the Minister, the approval holder must ensure that an independent audit of compliance with the conditions of approval is conducted and a report submitted to the Minister. The independent auditor must be approved by the Minister prior to the commencement of the audit. Audit criteria must be agreed to by the Minister and the audit report must address the criteria to the satisfaction of the Minister.</p>	<p>The Minister has made no direction.</p>	<p><i>Not relevant</i></p>
<p>10. If, at any time after three years from the date of this approval, the approval holder has not commenced the action, then the approval holder must not commence the action without the written agreement of the Minister.</p>	<p>The action has commenced.</p>	<p><i>Not relevant</i></p>