



### What is the Sunday Creek Reconfiguration Project?

The Sunday Creek Reconfiguration Project (the Project) will provide a more water efficient and cost-effective irrigation system by delivering water directly to Sunday Creek. Currently, irrigation water is delivered from the Murray River via Lake Moodemere. Approximately 40% of water intended for use by irrigators is lost to seepage and evaporation before it is extracted. This project will reduce these water losses, improve water security for the future, and better support the ecological values of the lake. Key design features of the Project include:

- A new purpose built 36ML/day electric pump station to extract allocated water from the Murray River
- A direct pipeline to transfer water from the pump station to Sunday Creek
- A new embankment at Hells Gate, allowing Sunday Creek and Lake Moodemere to operate independently of each other
- Decommissioning the old irrigator's pump station on the Murray River
- Replacement of the existing Lake Moodemere regulator on the Murray River

A range of measures are also proposed to enhance the social and recreational values of Lake Moodemere, such as picnic tables, seating, and signage. These measures will be developed in consultation with the local community and recreational users of the lake.

### What are the benefits of the Project?

#### **A more reliable, efficient, and cost-effective irrigation supply**

By providing water directly to Sunday Creek, the Project provides greater security of future water supply for irrigation. Completion of the Project will ensure that the water that is currently being lost in transit through Lake Moodemere, which is over 40% of the volume supplied, is saved.

#### **Improved ecological outcomes**

The water level in the lake is currently maintained at an artificially high level due to supporting irrigation water supply. By supplying irrigation water directly to Sunday Creek, the water levels in Lake Moodemere will be returned to a more natural regime. This will allow the ecosystem diversity of the Lake Moodemere wetland complex to be restored. The changes will enhance the ecological outcomes and conditions for populations of native fish, turtles, frogs, wetland birds, their habitats, and water-dependent vegetation.

#### **Regional economic growth and sustainability**

The Project is anticipated to facilitate growth in the area by between 10% to 30%. Rutherglen is one of Victoria's main wine-producing regions, with approximately 70% of the region's total grape crush coming from wineries that draw irrigation water from Sunday Creek. Increased water security provides economic stability for local producers and an opportunity for these irrigators to grow their operations, which will have a flow-on benefit to people and businesses in the local area.

### Who is delivering and funding the Project?

The Project is a \$4 million project funded in equal proportions by the Victorian and Australian governments through the National Water Grid Authority's Connections Grid Small Projects Fund.



## Sunday Creek Reconfiguration Project

### What is the timeline for the Project?

#### Late 2021

The Project team will undertake initial project design and planning activities.

#### Early to mid-2022

The Project team will work with user groups and the community via a Stakeholder Consultative Committee to help guide the project towards construction, including the design of community facilities that will be funded at Lake Moodemere as part of the Project.

Environmental and cultural heritage investigations will be undertaken.

#### Mid to late 2022

Environmental and planning approvals will be sought.

#### Late 2022

Construction is planned to start in late 2022, with works to be operational by the middle of 2023.

### How will the project impact Lake Moodemere?

Currently, water levels in Lake Moodemere are kept artificially high by irrigation water transiting from the Murray River to Sunday Creek via the lake. This process results in significant water losses. The Project proposes to deliver irrigation water directly from the Murray River to Sunday Creek, allowing the lake to return to its natural operating state independent of Sunday Creek.

The artificially consistent water levels also impact the lake's natural biodiversity, particularly in the wetland complex. Under current arrangements, up to 30 hectares of wetland marshes to the north of the lake are inundated with water for prolonged periods, at unseasonal times. This has created an altered water regime where sustained flooding of the wetlands occurs during the irrigation season (generally September to April) rather than in the winter and spring months, which would occur naturally. Returning the lake to a more natural operating state will increase habitat diversity by ensuring a mix of deep water, shallow water, and mudflat habitats are present simultaneously, dependent on the seasonal conditions. This is expected to retain and enhance populations of native fish, create more favourable conditions for threatened turtle species, improve the viability of frog populations, restore wetland bird habitats, increase habitat availability for water-dependent Ecological Vegetation Classes, and enhance the diversity and condition of existing vegetation communities.

### Will recreational users of Lake Moodemere be affected?

Key stakeholders, including recreational users of Lake Moodemere, were consulted with as part of the independent socio-economic assessment. The feedback received through the consultation showed the strong recreational, environmental and cultural value of Lake Moodemere to a range of users.

A range of recreational activities have evolved around the high-water levels in Lake Moodemere. This has been made possible because irrigation water has been supporting an artificially high water level, which impacts on the lake's biodiversity values.

While water levels will fluctuate once the lake is returned to its natural state, the Project is



committed to supporting the ongoing community use of Lake Moodemere. As part of this commitment, the Project's proposed operating rules involve topping up water levels in the lake by the end of December in time for the annual January regatta.

Further consultation will be undertaken with lake users, the local community and land managers to ensure the Project's impact on recreational users is considered. Those who use the area for bushwalking, bird watching, and picnicking are expected to benefit from the proposed community facilities to be funded as part of the Project. Suggestions for these facilities include picnic tables, signage, and a fishing platform to enable access to deeper waters for fishing. These facilities will be determined in collaboration with lake users and the local community via a Stakeholder Consultative Committee. Indigo Shire Council, North East Catchment Management Authority and Parks Victoria will also be involved in this committee to ensure the facilities are consistent with local planning and land management objectives. Early consultation has indicated that reinstating the hydraulic diversity of the lake will benefit bushwalkers, bird watchers, and picnickers.

Those who use Lake Moodemere for water skiing may at times be affected by the variable water levels under the proposed operating rules of the Project. The lake will still be suitable for water skiing, but year-round access may be reduced. Consultation with these users is ongoing and the Project's aim is to find an outcome that has a minimum impact on use of the lake for water skiing while also achieving the overarching benefits of the Project.

### **What water savings are associated with the Project?**

The estimated water savings are estimated at approximately 400ML per year. These water savings will be achieved by reducing the volume of evaporation and seepage losses incurred through operation of the existing irrigation supply scheme to Sunday Creek. Victoria will work with stakeholders, including NSW in identifying the most appropriate use of water savings achieved by the project.

### **What community consultation has occurred/will occur?**

The Project concept has been in development for more than a decade and extensive consultation has occurred in this time. Several consultation groups have been formed to support the Project development and information from these groups helped to inform the Project proposal.

As part of the business case preparation in late 2020, targeted consultation occurred with local irrigators and recreational users of Lake Moodemere, including local rowing, water skiing, and fishing clubs, as well as with Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation, local interest groups, and bodies such as Marine Safety Victoria. The information provided during this consultation helped to shape the scope of the project and the proposed operating rules for the ongoing use of Lake Moodemere.

Now that the Project has been funded and entered the detailed design and delivery phase, further consultation will be undertaken with local irrigators, recreational users of Lake Moodemere, and the communities of Rutherglen, Wahgunyah, and Corowa via establishing a Stakeholder Consultative Committee. The Project team will also consult with broader community groups as needed. This engagement will look to build on the work done to date, and to look for opportunities to enhance cultural, environmental and community



outcomes from the project.

### How will Traditional Owners be involved?

Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation is the Registered Aboriginal Party for the Lake Moodemere Reserve.

Yorta Yorta peoples have a historic and contemporary connection to the site. The reserve was legally set aside for Aboriginal use in the late 1800s and early 1900s. The environmental outcomes generated by the Project provide the opportunity to enhance plant and animal species of cultural significance to the Traditional Owners. The Project also provides opportunities to celebrate and share the site's rich cultural history and to facilitate Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation's involvement in the ongoing management and rehabilitation of the site.

The Project team is committed to working closely with Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation throughout the project. The recently developed Goulburn-Murray Water Efficiencies Project Traditional Owner Participation Plan will guide Traditional Owner engagement and ensure that key principles, including self-determination, Traditional Owners as partners, whole of country approach, and respect for decision making processes are followed. This will ensure that Traditional Owner priorities are identified and implemented via a partnership, resulting in shared benefits.

### How can I have my say?

Nominations are currently open to community members for the Project's Stakeholder Consultative Committee. Additionally, further community information sessions are planned for 2022 where you can speak to members of the Project team directly. You can contact the Project team at any time via email at [wep@gmwater.com.au](mailto:wep@gmwater.com.au).

### What is the Stakeholder Consultative Committee?

The Stakeholder Consultative Committee provides input and advice to the Project team about community engagement and the community facilities to be funded as part of the Project.

The committee includes local irrigators, recreational users of Lake Moodemere, and members of the community.

The committee also includes representatives from Parks Victoria and Indigo Shire Council. This ensures the planned community facilities align with the council's recreation strategy, contribute to better recreational outcomes for the area, and align with existing land management strategies and responsibilities.

The committee held its first meeting in February 2022.

### When will Project construction commence?

The project is expected to start construction in late 2022 for delivery by June 2023. Prior to construction commencing, the Project will require environmental, planning, and cultural heritage approvals under Victorian, New South Wales and Commonwealth legislation.



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The Project team has formed a Regulatory Approvals Committee for the Project. The committee includes representatives from the agencies involved in these statutory approvals. The committee will ensure that the project is appropriately and robustly considered for approval and aim to support the efficient consideration and approval of the works.

It is intended that this Project will be referred under the *Environment Effects Act 1978 (Vic)* and the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (C'wlth)*, ensuring the highest level of environmental responsibility and accountability.

### Will local business be involved?

The Project team plans to engage local contractors and suppliers to deliver the works.

The Project team will explore local opportunities particularly for the design and delivery of the community facilities that are funded as part of the Project.

### How will the water levels in Lake Moodemere change?

The Project proposes to raise the water level in Lake Moodemere to approximately 1.6m at Chambers gauge from September to January each year. These operational arrangements take into account environmental needs and community uses of the Lake, such as continuing to support the annual rowing regatta. This will be done via the lake's regulator on the Murray River. The new pump station that will be delivered as part of the project also has the ability to pump water into the lake if needed.

At other times, the regulator is intended to be closed, allowing the lake to naturally draw down. This will occur from late January to early September. It is expected in this period that the lake water level will reduce to approximately 1.2-1.3m at Chambers gauge.

The lake levels will naturally be higher during flood events and corresponding high flows in the Murray River.

More information on the changes to the lake levels will be communicated throughout the development and delivery of this project.

### Were other options considered?

This project concept has been under development for more than a decade. As part of this development, water balance modelling was completed for more than five potential operational scenarios.

This proposal and its changes to the lake's water regime was selected as it provides the best balance of outcomes: reducing water losses, restoring the lake biodiversity, and continuing to support the local social and recreational uses of the reserve.