

Water leadership in the climate crisis

The problem

Southern Victoria's rivers are in trouble. Long term extraction of water for cities and agriculture has damaged their health and now climate change is taking away their water. Rivers have already lost up to 20% of their flows and are predicted to lose much more in future as the planet warms. Iconic species that call rivers home such as platypus and river blackfish are disappearing from our landscapes, creeks stop flowing more often than they used to, and water quality is on a downward slide. Rivers that work the hardest to supply water for human needs are suffering the most.



The solution

Crisis situations call for strong leadership by governments. Difficult and courageous decisions must be made to end our reliance on rivers and aquifers to meet increasing demand for water from a growing population. We must reduce the volume of water we take or our rivers will pay the price.

We call on the next Victorian government to show leadership by:

- **Examining every option for returning water to rivers** across southern Victoria to protect their health. We must acknowledge that we take too much water from our rivers and aquifers and review the way water is allocated for use. This includes the setting of caps on extraction, how licences for agricultural use and bulk entitlements for cities are determined, and how water take is measured and monitored. No option for water recovery should be off the table.
- **Examining every option for increasing water supply** from sources other than rivers and aquifers. We have to become smarter about how we use water and move to integrated management that includes the use of recycled water and stormwater in business as usual. That means setting standards for recycled water quality so that it is safe to use for all purposes and developing precinct scale plans for capturing stormwater. Every option, from large-scale augmentation to local showerhead exchanges, must be on the table for full and transparent assessment.
- **Responding with urgency by setting clear goals and timelines for returning water to rivers and for increasing urban supply.** We are facing an urgent situation, with Melbourne experiencing a potential deficit in supply as early as 2023 and our rivers facing potential tipping points into new degraded states from which they cannot recover. The situation calls for urgent, clear and transparent decision making in the public interest.

The Concerned Waterways Alliance is a network of community groups from across southern Victoria from Gippsland to the Otways, united in our desire to see our rivers functioning as they should, as whole living entities, resilient and flourishing in the face of climate change.

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