



Best Practice

Managing and implementing activities in ways that are designed to achieve agreed and beneficial environmental outcomes and performance targets.

Biodiversity

The variety of life forms that exist in an area and the ecosystems of which they form part.

Catchment

An area of land that drains naturally to its lowest point.

Catchment assets

The term “catchment assets” is used in this RCS to describe broad categories of natural resources in this region, specifically the ‘water’, ‘land’, ‘biodiversity’ and ‘people and organisations’.

Community

The people of the Port Phillip and Western Port region as individuals and collectively in a variety of organisations (including community groups, businesses, governments and their agencies, and non-government organisations).

Ecological footprint

A concept that defines a theoretical area of land (hectares per person) needed to provide products for human consumption (including energy) as well as that required for waste disposal.

Integrated catchment management

The management of all the components of catchment assets and their inter-relationships in a cooperative and coordinated manner.

Region

The geographic area covered by this RCS, specifically being:

- the Werribee, Maribyrnong, Yarra, Dandenong and Western Port catchments
- Port Phillip Bay and Western Port
- the associated coast and near-shore marine areas.

Risk assessment

Identification of what is causing catchment assets and their values to be at risk, and the quantitative and/or qualitative assessment of the likelihood and consequences of a deterioration of catchment assets.

Sustainability

The ability of a catchment asset, and the values it provides, to be sustained for the long term.

Triple bottom line

The concept of using a range of economic, environmental and social parameters together to measure outcomes or performance.

1. OVERVIEW The scope and contents of the RCS

1.1 The region

The Port Phillip and Western Port region is a spectacular, diverse, productive, vibrant, valuable and exciting place.

It includes Port Phillip Bay, Western Port and their ocean frontages, French and Phillip Islands and the rivers and streams of five catchments that flow to these bays, as shown in Figure 1. It contains metropolitan Melbourne, a thriving international city that is home to more than two-thirds of Victoria’s population. It is the hub of much of the State’s commercial, industrial and transport infrastructure, an important rural and agricultural region and a centre of social and cultural interaction.

The activities, livelihoods and lifestyles of the region’s 3.4 million urban and rural residents, and of the visitors who generate an important tourism industry, depend on the sustainable use of its land and water, the health of its fauna and flora and the habitats they live in. These are our “catchment assets”. While many of these assets are in good condition and well managed, the health of some others is at serious risk, as is their sustainability.

◆ Chapter 2 provides more information about the history and current condition of the catchment assets of this region.



1.2 The challenges and opportunities

Achieving sustainability and protecting our catchment assets is a major challenge for our society.

If the region is to be healthy, attractive and prosperous it must be characterised by increasing production, development and the associated economic benefits. To aid our progress towards this aim, we need to explore new technologies and apply them and increase awareness and adoption by our communities.

However, this production and development needs to be in sympathy with our environment. We must acknowledge that there are real limits and consequences to the way we use and manage our catchment assets. We have to understand that there are critical thresholds, or points at which the assets will be irreparably damaged, and we must ensure that we do not reach these thresholds.

Because the region is so densely populated and complex, in catchment management terms it presents some unique issues and opportunities. Among the greatest threats are the changes, pressures and impacts that come with population growth, urban and agricultural development. Port Phillip Bay will not cope with growing inputs of water-borne nutrients, particularly nitrogen. Western Port's health is severely affected by the inflow of increased sedimentation caused by unsustainable land use. The

Achieving good catchment management requires everyone to consider the downstream impacts of their activities.

Werribee and Maribyrnong Rivers are under pressure from high levels of water harvesting. Natural habitats on the coastal plains and the Mornington Peninsula face degradation and local extinction unless weed invasions are reversed and fragmentation of habitat arrested.

Achieving good catchment management requires everyone to consider the downstream impacts of their activities – figuratively and literally – and to find solutions where these cause problems. This is vital. We need to find less damaging ways of producing what we want and need, or the Port Phillip and Western Port region will face major economic, social and environmental costs.

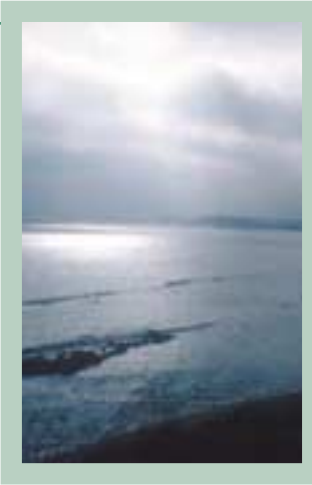
We all have a responsibility and an opportunity to be good stewards of our catchment assets. As we produce goods and services and modify landscapes to meet our economic and social needs, we must ensure that we respect environmental limits, avoid environmental damage and prevent environmental costs being transferred to others or into the public domain. For every activity, there are ways to minimise damage and make the most of environmental values. This is the path to sustainability.

- Chapter 2 establishes a vision that takes up the challenge of ensuring sustainability of catchment assets so that the region is healthy, attractive and prosperous.

Other key roles and responsibilities of the CMA include:

- providing high quality and timely advice to Government on matters relating to catchment management and land protection
- increasing community awareness and understanding of the importance of land and water resources in the region and their sustainable use, conservation and rehabilitation
- reporting regularly on the condition and management of land and water resources in the region.

More information on the CMA can be found at <http://www.ppwcm.vic.gov.au>



1.4 The Regional Catchment Strategy

Outline

The Regional Catchment Strategy (RCS) describes our catchment assets and how they are interrelated. It indicates what needs to be done to manage and use the assets in a sustainable and integrated way, and outlines goals and priorities for the future.

It focuses on improving environmental and catchment management while recognising that, by helping resources to be managed more sustainably, it will contribute to society's present and future options for social and economic development. In this way, the RCS is much more than a geographic inventory of issues and proposed actions.

It has been developed around these key concepts:

- the people of Victoria have rich, complex and diverse relationships with the region's environment and catchment assets
- protecting key catchment assets and improving the way the region's natural systems are managed is fundamental to community wellbeing, now, in the future, and as community values change
- there is much to learn from past actions and experience in integrated catchment management in the region, and the RCS builds on this history
- through research and community involvement, we are getting better at understanding natural systems and how to work with them
- the social, economic and environmental outcomes of change are interrelated
- inspired and committed partnerships between community and governments are needed, because change will be achieved by people, their institutions and communities
- for success, the CMA and its partners will need to build purposeful partnerships between people and their organisations, including the professional, scientific and social disciplines, the wider community, and business interests involved in all aspects of catchment management.

The main focus of the RCS is management of land, water and biodiversity in the region, including the coastal and marine areas. To a lesser extent, it covers air and atmosphere, cultural heritage, planning and urban form, particularly where these relate to catchment management.

The RCS recognises that by drawing in large quantities of energy and materials and generating wastes, human activity in the region has significant impacts on this region and on others.

Accepting that the region's economic processes depend also on the catchment assets of other regions of Victoria, other parts of Australia, and other countries, the RCS particularly recognises the important interregional links and relationships between Melbourne and the rest of Victoria. Examples include the large quantities of goods and services that are traded into and out of the region, and the significant demands we make on the catchment assets of the Gippsland region, for instance, through the direct harvesting and transfer of water from the Thomson Dam and through reliance on large quantities of coal-fired electricity generated in the Latrobe Valley.

The RCS deals with catchments at a broad scale, demonstrating the connections between land, water and biodiversity with all the human and natural activities that occur here. It highlights these links, from the tops of mountain ranges and across forests, farms and suburbs, to the coasts, bays and inshore marine waters. It is designed to give us the total view of the region that is needed to best plan, manage and conserve the assets.

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The RCS also acts on our knowledge that the land, water and biodiversity of our catchments need to be managed together. It is a guide for the people and organisations of this region to work cooperatively and achieve integrated catchment management.



While the strategy has a stated life of five years, the RCS has been developed with a longer-term perspective in mind and will be revised regularly. Its implementation will be delivered through a range of issue-specific strategies and plans, such as the Regional River Health Strategy, as well as the annual Regional Catchment Investment Plan (RCIP).

- Chapter 3 provides more information on the regional, national and global context of the RCS, and the processes at work in the region, as a basis for setting regional priorities.

Purposes

The RCS provides a framework for effort, a funding guide, and a means of integrating policy. It offers a regional perspective and a way of engaging stakeholders.

A framework for focusing effort

The RCS is a guide to help focus, integrate, coordinate and monitor government and community effort on the important catchment management issues throughout the region.

It aims to ensure that projects are planned in a logical sequence and to deliver the best value for money and human resources, for the benefit of the whole region.

Investment plans for funding catchment programs

The RCS has been accredited by the Victorian and Australian governments to guide their investment in catchment management in the region. By establishing clear goals and targets, it provides the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) and other government funding programs with a consistent rationale and coordinated investment plan. This makes it a vital document for any organisation

seeking government support for programs in the region – including water authorities, councils, non-government organisations, private sector companies and volunteer community groups.

Integrated and coordinated policy, planning and program delivery

The RCS provides a common set of goals, priority actions and timetables so that everyone with an interest in the use of the region's land, water and biodiversity can work together.

It aims to fulfil the purposes of a number of related Acts, including the Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994, Environment Protection Act 1970, Water Act 1989, Planning and Environment Act 1987 and Coastal Management Act 1995. It provides objectives and a region-wide context for scientific assessment and planning.

A regional perspective

By viewing problems and solutions from a whole-of-catchment perspective, the RCS shows how local and regional projects can complement each other and create the maximum benefit.

Engagement of stakeholders

The guidance provided by the RCS is for everyone; individual landholders, governments and their agencies at all levels, non-government organisations, agriculture, industry, businesses and cultural groups, as well as the region's 38 local councils and around 500 volunteer community groups.

All these sectors of the regional community have a stake in how we manage catchment assets. Many have helped with the development of this RCS. Their input and commitment has been vital in shaping its objectives and priorities, and continuation of the relationships established in this way is now vital for its successful implementation.

- Chapter 3 provides more information on the purposes and scope of the RCS and the key stakeholders and partnerships that will be important in its implementation.

Ensuring sustainability at a regional level

The RCS presents a systematic and logical way of translating nationally and internationally accepted principles of sustainability into regional goals, targets and actions. It does so in four stages:

1. Defining principles of sustainability and identifying the region's catchment assets.
2. Drawing up an asset-risk analysis that looks at the values of the assets and the threats to those values, in order to determine the most important risks that need to be managed.
3. Developing sustainability objectives that address the risks and meet the overall principles of sustainability.
4. Defining targets and actions to achieve the objectives.

- Chapter 4 further explains the flow of logic adopted in the RCS to guide its analysis and define priority actions. Chapter 4 also explains the asset-risk analysis method that has been used.

Goals, objectives, targets and actions

These steps are undertaken for the catchment assets of:

- Water resources (Chapter 5),
- Land (Chapter 6) and
- Biodiversity (Chapter 7).

The same approach is also used to describe:

- the People and Organisations of the region (Chapter 8) which are the key influence on catchment assets.

The goals, objectives, targets and actions are summarised in table form at the end of each chapter.

Monitoring, evaluation and reporting

It is vital that we understand the effectiveness of actions as well as the changes in catchment condition. This enables us to adapt our actions with improved knowledge and also to be accountable for investment in the region.

- Chapter 9 outlines the key steps to be taken in developing a robust monitoring, evaluation and reporting framework

Implementation

The RCS sets 97 actions to be implemented. Some are existing actions that need to continue, while others are new initiatives. The actions must be assessed to determine their relative priority. This assessment is based on achievability, cost and the level of environmental, economic and social benefits that will be realised by each action.

- Chapter 10 outlines a methodology that will be used to assess the priority of actions and implementation arrangements.



Linkages across the RCS and regional contributions to national targets

The RCS covers numerous topics and issues and includes actions that are relevant to a large number of stakeholder groups and organisations.

The RCS also sets targets for this region that contribute to the national framework for natural resource management.

- Chapter 11 shows how the RCS targets fit within and contribute to the national framework and broadens this approach to summarise objectives, targets and actions that are relevant to various other key topics and organisations.

Consultation and development

This RCS builds on the first RCS developed in 1997 and underlines the fact that we are continuing to learn how the region's ecosystems work and how to work with them.

The consultation process has been extensive. A multi-organisation RCS Steering Committee was set up, intimately involving key people and organisations in all aspects of the consulting, planning and writing from the initial stages of the RCS through to the final production. Three stages of consultation were undertaken, including the publication of two discussion papers prior to a draft RCS. This built a solid understanding by stakeholders and communities of the scope,

issues, targets and actions of the RCS. The discussion papers were in an easy-to-understand style, designed so people could provide comments easily. Around 1,500 printed copies of each document were distributed and all feedback was analysed and considered in the development of the next stage.

The draft RCS was itself the subject of an extensive community consultation process. Four local government workshops, nine community forums, and numerous individual meetings and discussions were held with government organisations, industry sectors and community interest groups, including the Indigenous community. In addition to the feedback gathered in these meetings and discussions, over 70 written submissions were received regarding the draft. The draft was improved substantially as a result of the advice and comments received. As an example, the information, targets and actions regarding the region's marine assets have been amended extensively in the Estuaries, Bays and Seas section and in the Biodiversity chapter.

The RCS emphasises the need for ongoing attention to processes of consultation, education, research, monitoring and evaluation.

- Chapter 12 explains the renewal of the RCS, including the community consultation process and examples of the way the consultation influenced the structure and content of this RCS.

