



Rationing in the Loddon Valley Irrigation Area

Closing the loop

A summary of customer feedback on the 2024-25 Loddon Valley Irrigation Area rationing event.

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Acknowledgement of Country

Goulburn-Murray Water (GMW) acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and pays respect to their Elders past, present and emerging. We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the proud representatives of the world's oldest, living culture.

We acknowledge the insight, contributions and value Traditional Owner communities add to the management of the lands and waters. We recognise the rich cultural connections Traditional Owners have across our region.

Rationing recap

On 5 March 2025, GMW started rationing water deliveries in Boort, Dingee and Calivil in the Loddon Valley Irrigation Area – something that hasn't happened in over 15 years.

The rationing came off the back of two very wet years – so there was plenty of water available – but the dry spring and autumn of the 2024/25 irrigation season created strong demand that peaked through March and April.

As the demand for water put pressure on the network's capacity, customers started to experience long delays when placing orders. To ensure everyone could still access water at this critical time of the season, we decided the fairest and most equitable solution was to ration irrigation deliveries. This involved limiting how much water customers could use based on their delivery share.

Rationing was in place for almost two months. We know it caused concern and frustration for our customers. We worked hard to support and communicate regularly with our customers about their options during this period but recognise there is always room for improvement. We thank them for their patience and suggestions.

Our irrigation network infrastructure and operating environment have changed significantly since the last time rationing was needed. It's been a learning experience for both GMW and our customers.

As a result, we are reviewing our policies and procedures, which includes seeking feedback from all affected customers.

This document summarises the feedback we received from 33 customers who completed an online survey during May and June 2025. As rationing may happen again, this feedback will provide valuable guidance on future management options.

Timeline

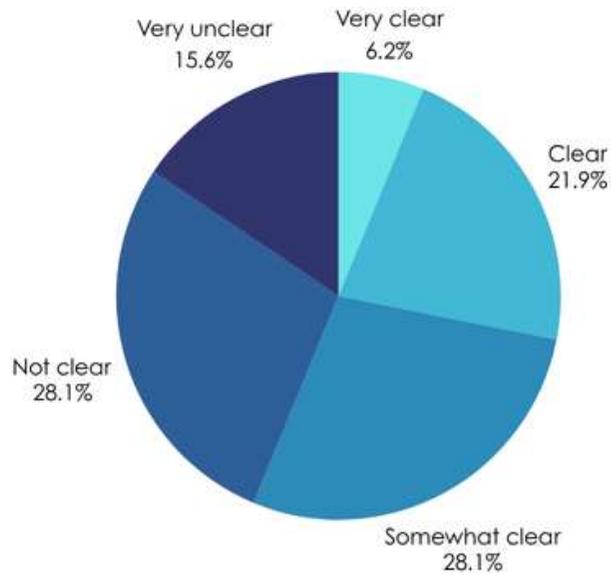


Customer survey results

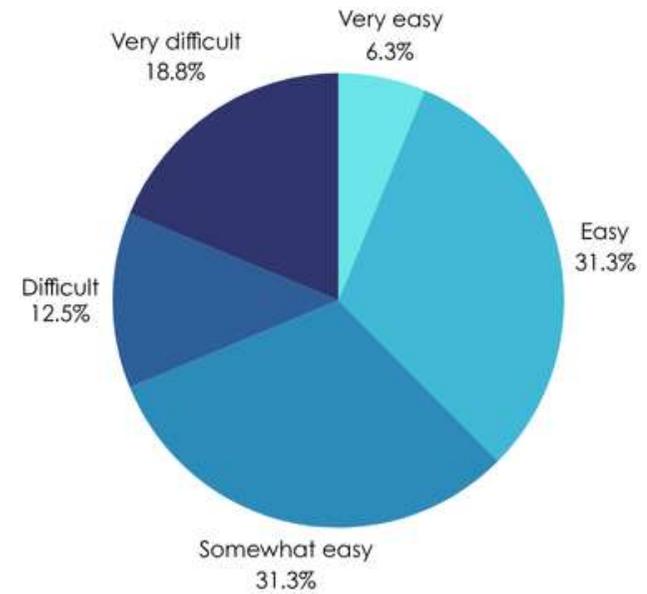
We conducted a customer survey from 22 May to 6 June 2025.

During this period, roughly 9% of the rationed customer base (33 out of around 380) shared their insights. Below are the results to the scored survey questions.

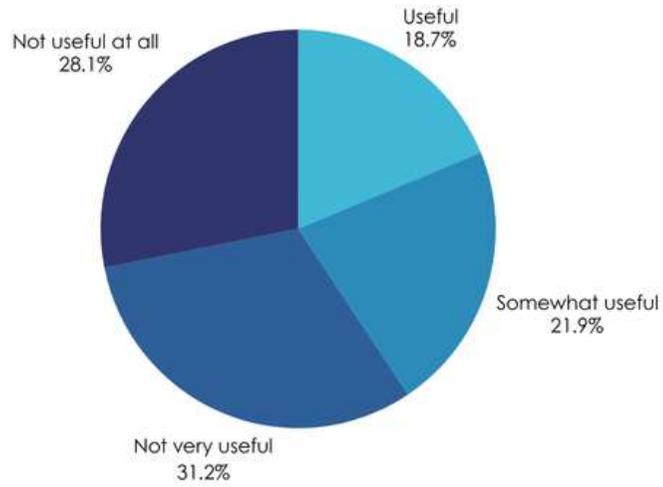
How clear was the rationing process and its implications for you?



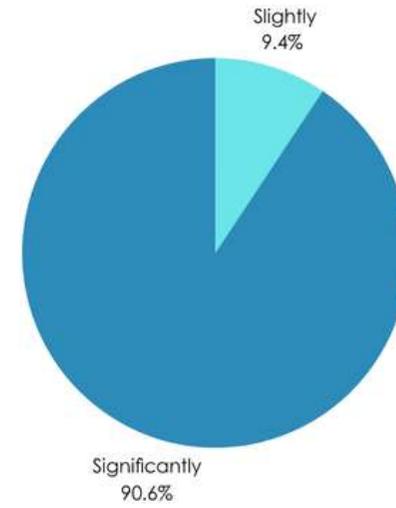
How easy did you find our communication to understand?



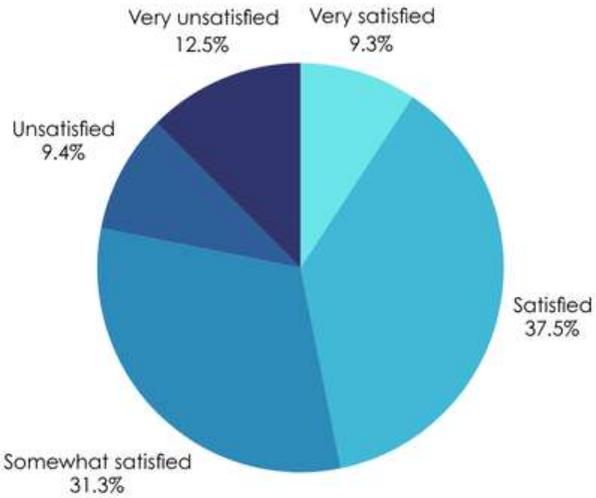
How useful did you find the rationing information on our website?



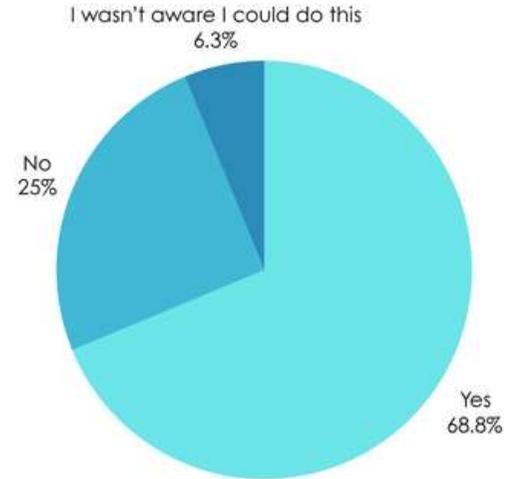
How much did you have to change your irrigation activities during the ration period?



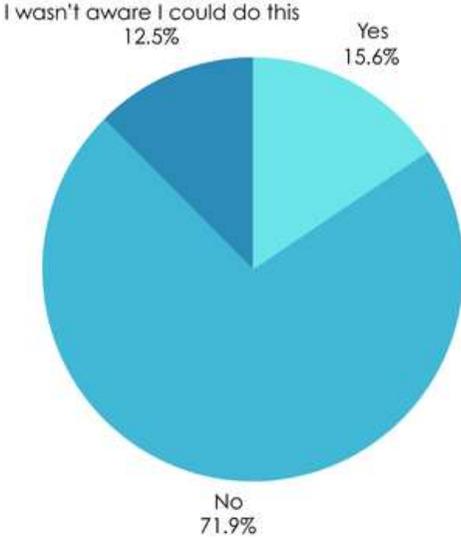
How satisfied were you with the support provided by our team during the rationing event?



Did you vary or transfer delivery share during the rationing period?



Did you participate in the option to access water from the Loddon system?



What we heard from our customers

From the survey responses, we identified several key themes:

1. Communication clarity

- Some customers found our communication and information around rationing confusing or unclear – particularly regarding locations, timelines, rationing cycles, delivery share rules, and Loddon System water access eligibility.
- Several respondents said information changed frequently, and they struggled to get consistent answers from staff.
- A few respondents appreciated direct contact with staff, which helped their understanding of the process.

2. Website usefulness

- Many respondents described the rationing webpage as difficult to navigate or not useful.
- Some didn't use the website at all, preferring to speak with staff or rely on word-of-mouth in the community.
- Suggestions included making the site more user-friendly, with clearer instructions and real-time updates.

3. Irrigation impact

- Nearly all respondents reported significant disruption to their irrigation schedules.
- Reported impacts included crop yield, increased costs, stress and uncertainty due to inability to plan effectively.

4. Support satisfaction

- We received mixed feedback on customer support:
 - some praised individual staff members for being helpful and responsive
 - others felt frustrated by bureaucracy and a lack of transparency.

5. Delivery share management

- Customers needing to transfer or vary delivery shares to manage watering found this to be a significant inconvenience. Many found the process confusing and inefficient.
- Several questioned why shares couldn't be managed at the whole-farm level rather than by outlet.
- Some appreciated that fees were waived during the period.

6. Suggestions for improvement

- **Upgrade infrastructure:** Improve channels (e.g. increase their size) and regulators to help avoid future rationing.

- **Increase transparency:** Provide clear explanations about why rationing occurred and what's being done to prevent it.
- **Simplify processes:** Suggestions included using spreadsheets to manage rationing, automating delivery share transfers, and more flexibility in water ordering.
- **Address equity concerns:** Some felt smaller farms or specific regions were unfairly affected.

How we are responding - future rationing events

We are committed to acting on your feedback where possible. These are the actions we will take ahead of future rationing events:

- **Simplifying communication:** We will use clearer language, more visual aids, and provide updates through multiple channels.
- **Website improvement:** The rationing webpage is being updated to make it easier to navigate and more relevant to your needs.
- **Providing educational information:** We'll share clearer explanations about how the rationing process works.
- **Offering detailed examples:** Our information will use examples, like how rationing cycles work and the timing for placing orders.
- **Clarifying rationing locations:** We'll clearly define where rationing applies, including which irrigation areas and towns are affected and use visual aids such as maps to present this information.
- **Enhancing support:** More direct contact options will be made available to explain processes and answer questions. This may include opening customer service centres for additional hours and providing one-on-one customer service options.
- **Promoting available options:** We'll better communicate the tools and choices available to you during rationing periods, and we'll increase the frequency of updates.
- **Improving delivery share management:** We're exploring several changes to make the process easier. These include:
 - A long-term review to determine whether rationing should be applied at the outlet or property level. This investigation won't be finished before the start of the 2025/26 irrigation season.
 - Developing a simplified transfer/variation form.
 - Offering to provide customers with their Water Register Delivery Share Copy of Record at the start of a rationing period, which notes their delivery share and service point information.
 - Offering a pre-filled form service, where customers can contact us to share details about their needs and receive a completed form for signing.
- **Loddon System water access:** We will review access to tagged allocation accounts, which allow water use from other systems such as the Loddon, and we will update information on Inter-Valley Trade and supplement use.

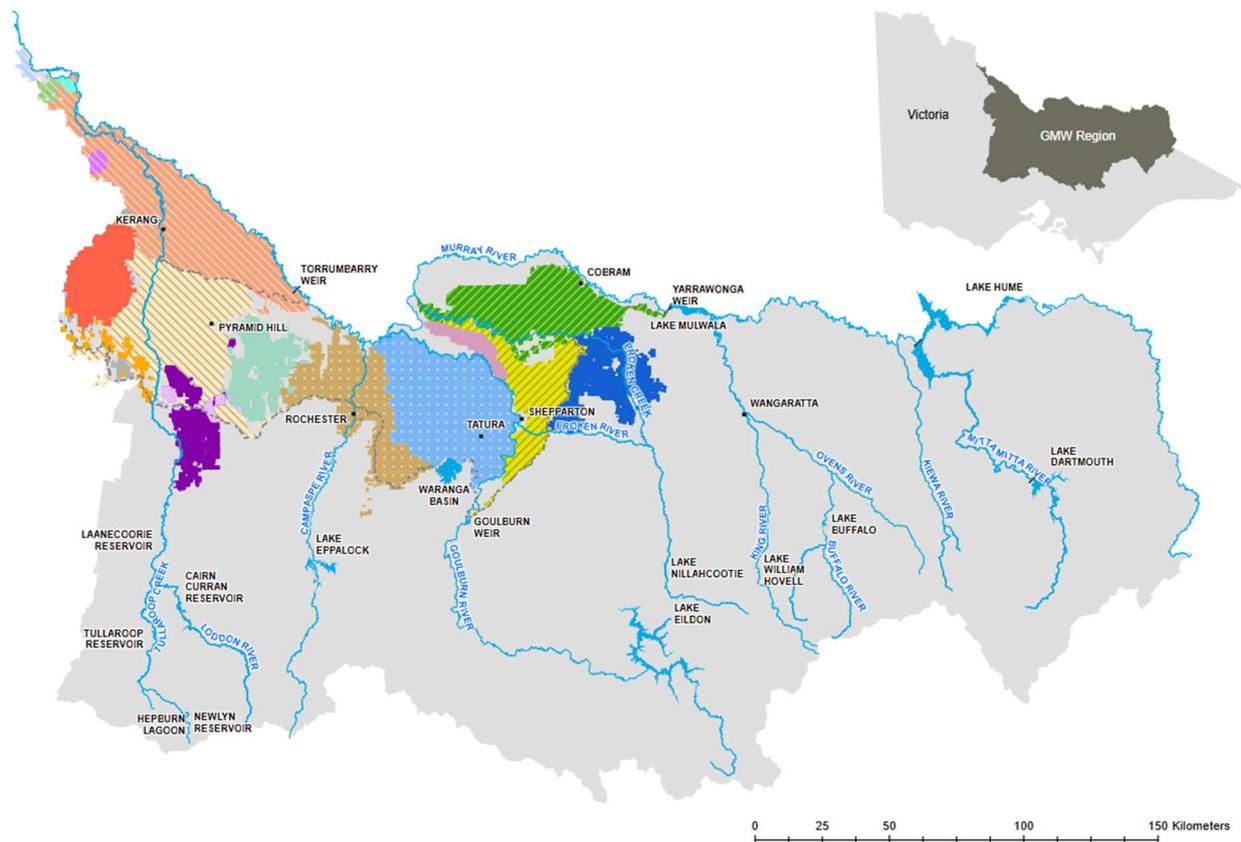
Supplementary information

Some of the feedback we received suggests there may have been misunderstandings or areas where additional information would be helpful. The section below addresses some of the key themes.

Theme: Irrigation area name

In 2011, the Pyramid-Boort Irrigation Area was renamed the Loddon Valley Irrigation Area.

This name change was recommended by community members to acknowledge a new, modernised era for irrigation in the area.



Zone	Districts
West	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> East Loddon East Loddon North Loddon Valley Mitiamo Normanville Nyah Torrumbarry Tresco Tyntynder West Loddon Woorinen
Central	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central Goulburn Rochester-Campaspe
East	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Loch Garry Murray Valley Shepparton Tungamah

Theme: System restrictions

Flow rates at regulator PH.971, regulator PH.710 and the Serpentine Creek syphon were the main limits on water delivery during the rationing. These points are east of the Loddon River. The available flow at these points, combined with limited water availability from the Loddon water system, meant that these points were operating at full capacity. However, this also led to some channels west of the Loddon River running below capacity.

Theme: Channel maintenance and preventative measures

Over the past two years, GMW has undertaken regular maintenance work on parts of the Waranga Western Channel. This work helps restore flow rates, which means there's less chance of needing to limit how much water people can use - even when there's high demand in Bort.

More work is happening in our 2025 Winter Works program, which will further assist flow rates.

During winter 2025, GMW is dewatering more channels than it has in over 10 years. This will show us where more repairs or upgrades may be needed in the future.

Theme: Farming practices and network limitations

As a referral authority for land use planning, we assess the impact that applications for certain land use and development proposals may have on surface and ground water quality, as well as our assets and infrastructure. However, we don't have the authority to influence or guide on-farm practice changes e.g. shifts from dairy farm to cropping.

While modernisation of GMW's water delivery infrastructure means water is used more efficiently, it didn't increase the capacity of the Goulburn Murray Irrigation District's (GMID) delivery system.

Investment to increase the system's capacity is possible, but it comes at a cost to customers. We'd need to work out a fair way to share the cost among all customers, especially given how unpredictable the frequency of rationing events can be.

Unfortunately, we can't eliminate the potential need for rationing. When demand for water exceeds the physical capacity of the delivery network, rationing will be required to equitably share the available capacity.

Theme: WaterLINE system

During the rationing event, our WaterLINE system prevented customers from placing certain orders or making changes that didn't meet the rationing rules. These restrictions were switched on to ensure all affected customers followed the same rules and to help us apply our rationing procedures correctly.

Theme: Delivery share changes

Delivery share changes generally require a channel capacity assessment to ensure that the extra volume is available in the system - even outside of a rationing event. This means that approval is never guaranteed, and if other customers take up the channel capacity, it may be impossible to make the change.

Theme: Loddon water access

Customers in the rationed area of the Loddon Valley Irrigation Area are part of the Goulburn system. After confirming it would not affect access for other impacted customers, we allowed use of Loddon (trading zone 5A) water by customers with tagged accounts.

While water from the Loddon River went to customers located to the west of the river, customers between regulator PH.710 and the Loddon Weir could also receive zone 5A water. This was possible because of water accounting between the Goulburn and Loddon systems.

With Loddon water supplying some customers, there was less demand being met by the Goulburn system through the Waranga Western Channel. Keeping the Waranga Western Channel at capacity helped maximise the amount of water available for customers who were rationed. Accounting for the two supply sources allows customers east of the Loddon River to receive deliveries from tagged allocation accounts linked to zone 5A.

Working examples

If a Loddon Valley customer east of the Loddon River ordered 10 ML from their Loddon account (i.e. sourcing zone 5A water), this would be met from water in the Waranga Western Channel. This would mean the flow passing into the Loddon Weir pool would be 10 ML lower than if they couldn't access this water. To offset this, GMW would deliver 10 ML to the Loddon Weir pool from the Loddon storages (i.e. the volume available to meet orders west of the Loddon River would remain the same).

If a Loddon Valley customer west of the Loddon River ordered 10 ML from their Loddon account (i.e. sourcing zone 5A water), GMW would deliver 10 ML to the Loddon Weir pool from the Loddon storages to meet this order. This would mean an additional 10 ML could be delivered in Loddon Valley by this Loddon system water source being utilised.

Theme: Rationing preparations

We monitor demand throughout the irrigation season. We know that spring and autumn are now the heaviest periods of demand for much of the GMID and prepare accordingly.

Historical deliveries help our planning, as does current season use, water availability and weather. We try to anticipate likely peaks and timing of high demand and manage supplementary water availability to help meet orders.

Where we see a threat of demand outstripping capacity, we will alert customers – like we did in December 2024.

Update your details

To make sure we can reach you quickly and easily if there's an emergency, a service issue, or something important you need to know, it's important that we have your current contact details.

You can update your details by calling us on 1800 013 357 or by filling out the [online form on our website](#).

Next steps

Your feedback will guide ongoing improvements to our systems and planning processes. From here, we'll use what we've learned - and consult with West GMID Customer Committee members - to shape the way forward and keep refining our approach.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to share your insights, whether it was by completing the customer survey or providing feedback during the rationing event. Your input is extremely valuable and sincerely appreciated.