

Goulburn - Murray Water Connections Project— Expert Review Panel

17 July 2013

The Hon. Peter Walsh
Minister for Water
121 Exhibition Street
GPO Box 4509
Melbourne Victoria 3001

Dear Minister

ADVICE ON ENVIRONMENTAL WATERING PLAN – PIG SWAMP

The Expert Review Panel (ERP)¹ of the Goulburn-Murray Water Connections Project (GCP) (previously known as the Northern Victoria Irrigation Renewal Project) has been charged with the responsibility of providing advice to GCP, the Minister for Water, and the Secretary of the Department of Environment and Primary Industries in relation to the relevant conditions in the decision of the Minister for Planning that an Environmental Effects Statement (EES) is not required for the GCP. Condition 5 of the decision states that Environmental Watering Plans are required for 'at risk' waterways and wetlands before operation of the relevant GCP work commences. The program of work for the GCP includes the decommissioning of part of the Straight Cut Canal which, in the past, delivered water to Pig Swamp – part of the Gunbower Forest Ramsar site. An Environmental Watering Plan (EWP) has been prepared in response to the commitment to ensuring no net impacts on high environmental values resulting from the GCP and in accordance with guidelines set out in the Water Change Management Framework.

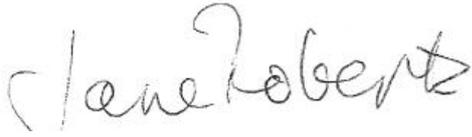
The Pig Swamp EWP follows similar plans for three waterways and eight wetlands which were the subject of our recommendations of 31 May 2010. The Pig Swamp EWP recommends a watering regime, and the infrastructural and governance arrangements for its provision, as part of an adaptive management framework. The ERP believes that the assessment of the requirements for interim mitigation water is transparent and well reasoned, and that the proposed sourcing of mitigation water and the calculation of the mitigation water commitments as set out in the EWP is clearly consistent with the intent and detail of the guidance in the WCMF. It is therefore the advice of the ERP that the Pig Swamp EWP has been thoroughly prepared consistent with the WCMF, provides a sound and reliable base for implementation, and warrants being approved. We note that investigations into the future management of other wetlands associated with Gunbower Creek, currently

¹ The ERP consists of Jane Roberts and Terry Hillman; independent consultants experienced in the relationships between hydrology and ecology, and in evaluating the ecological consequences of changing hydrology.

being carried out on behalf of the GCP, may necessitate minor revisions to this EWP in the future. These will be reviewed by ERP if, and when, required.

The ERP is pleased to have had the opportunity to provide this advice in the interests of progressing the environmentally responsible operation of the modernised irrigation system for which the GCP has responsibility.

Yours Sincerely,



JANE ROBERTS



TERRY HILLMAN

Copy To:

Secretary of the Department of Environment and Primary Industries

Project Director G-MW Connections Project