

Lorne Community Working Group

Terms of Reference

Acknowledgment of Country

We proudly acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land and waterways of Lorne, the Gadubanud Peoples of the Eastern Maar, the First Peoples of this land who have managed and cared for this place for tens of thousands of years and continue to do so. We pay our respects to their Elders, past, present and future.

We acknowledge Eastern Maar and the surrounding Country. We thank all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples for working with us on this project and sharing their wisdom and culture.

Lorne is a quintessential beachside town along the iconic Great Ocean Road. The coastal village is renowned for its beaches, a buzzing arts community and easy access to the Otways, making it a popular destination for locals and international tourists. When in Lorne, you're on the lands of the Eastern Maar People.

Lorne water security

Lorne's drinking water is sourced exclusively from the Allen Reservoir, an on-stream storage on the St George River. The St George River is located to the west of Lorne, with tributaries originating in the Otways and flowing out to sea via the St George River Estuary.

Barwon Water's bulk entitlement allows for 510 megalitres (ML)/year to be harvested, both from the St George River and Erskine River, without provision for environmental passing flows, as typically the reservoir spills all year round. However, with increasing summer demand, periods of no spills over the reservoir in summer are becoming more frequent as daily outflows are greater than daily inflows.

In summer, naturally low flows in the St George River mean we rely on water stored in Allen Reservoir harvested over the winter and spring to keep Lorne supplied.

The Erskine River has no storage facility, so the low flows in summer - which is when we need water the most to service Lorne's bustling tourist season - prevents us from sourcing water.

Short-term water security (less than two years)

Lorne's water supply is secure for the immediate future, with less than a five per cent chance of triggering water restrictions in the next two years. Storage levels in Allen Reservoir can drop quickly in a hot dry summer when inflow to the reservoir is minimal and when water demand is highest.

Long-term water security (more than two years)

Even though storage levels are healthy today, we are seeing a long-term shift towards a hotter, drier climate. Most climate models project a drier climate future for Victoria, with rivers in the Otways predicted to see up to a 50 per cent reduction in inflows by 2065¹.

Historically, Lorne's water supply system has demonstrated a high degree of security because of the reliability of rainfall and inflows in the catchment. Even during the Millennium Drought, which resulted in water restrictions across so much of Victoria, the catchment received sufficient rainfall to maintain unrestricted supply to the town.

However, conditions in the Otway Coast area over the summer of 2015-16 were unlike anything ever experienced before, with nowhere more severe than around Lorne. Although storages were

¹ DELWP, 2020. Guidelines for Assessing the Impact of Climate Change on Water Availability in Victoria. Final, November 2020, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, Victoria.

almost 100 per cent full heading into summer, by early 2016 the Allen Reservoir had dropped to its lowest level on record. Extremely dry catchments and rainfall 50 per cent below the 10-year average led to historically low inflows, while high summer demand contributed to the storage levels falling rapidly.

Stage 3 water restrictions were triggered and, for the first time, water was carted from the Geelong, Golden Plains, Bellarine and Surf Coast system to top up dwindling local supplies. These measures ensured supply was maintained until rainfall returned and rapidly restored levels in Allen Reservoir.

Climate change will mean less rainfall and more extreme events, such as bushfire, drought, floods and heatwaves. The combined effect will be less water available from traditional, rainfall-dependent sources, at the same time as human and environmental demand for water increases.

With a growing population, high tourism over the summer months and impacts from a changing climate, our current forecast indicates more frequent water restrictions may be required by 2027², if no action is taken. Over the next five years we will make upgrades to the Lorne water supply system, deferring the need for a major upgrade from 2027 to 2031³.

Lorne: Water, Your Say

Barwon Water is inviting the local community to be part of a sustainable and resilient future as part of its Lorne: Water, Your Say program.

As part of its Urban Water Strategy 2022: Water for our Future, Barwon Water recognised the need to engage with the Lorne community to discuss long-term water supply upgrade options so that we are ready to implement an upgrade when the time comes.

We are eager to understand the values and priorities of residents, businesses, community groups and regular visitors so that we continue delivering high quality, reliable water and sewerage services to support a thriving Lorne.

^{2 3} Under a high climate change and high population growth scenario

Lorne Community Working Group

Purpose of the community working group

Barwon Water is inviting local residents, businesses, community and environmental groups to join the community working group to provide input and feedback to shape a sustainable and resilient water future for Lorne.

The working group will explore a variety of topics including Lorne's water security challenges, recommend future water supply options, waterway and river health (St George River) and water efficiency to ensure community values and expectations are incorporated along the way.

The purpose of the Lorne community working group is to provide a regular, scheduled opportunity for dialogue between the community and Barwon Water, and to ensure community values and expectations are incorporated along the way.

The working group will share their valuable local knowledge and insight, as well as issues and concerns of the community that can be considered in a constructive way.

The community working group is expected to conclude at the end of 2025, at which point the Barwon Water project team will be able to recommend water supply options for Lorne to Barwon Water's Board for consideration.

Authority

The Lorne community working group is advisory in nature. As Barwon Water is accountable for the water security Lorne, any final decisions will remain the responsibility of Barwon Water.

Membership

The community working group will include up to 12 community members, consisting of nominated representatives from:

- Traditional Owners
- Residents and landowners
- Business and industry
- Environmental groups
- Community groups
- Farmers
- General community

Attributes sought

- ability to respect a range of views
- ability to work constructively and collaboratively as a group member
- ability to take a balanced view and have a pragmatic approach to solving issues
- an active interest in local environmental issues, and in the health and management of the land and waterways

- live in or close to Lorne – or spend a considerable amount of time visiting Lorne, and participating in Lorne community life
- strong community networks to ensure the views of the broader community are represented and / or be in a position to represent the views of a key stakeholder or user group

Responsibilities of members

- act in the best interests of the effective operation of the working group, including being respectful of the opinions, rights and responsibilities of other members
- ensure we are working in and providing a culturally safe space
- ability to commit to the working group for the required duration, be prepared to contribute during meetings and attend each meeting where practicable act in accordance with the Terms of Reference
- declare any conflict of interest
- share information and outcomes about the project with their representing groups while always refraining from disclosing confidential information.

Opportunities for new members

During the life of the reference group and at the discretion of the parties, the membership of the group may be expanded to include representation from any groups / sectors not represented in the original membership.

Role of Barwon Water

The role of Barwon Water will be to:

- act as a facilitator and provide the group with administrative support
- provide members with appropriate and relevant information so that working group members are accurately informed about Barwon Water projects in Lorne
- respond to members' requests for information that are relevant
- consider the community working group's recommendations for long-term water security.

Meetings – frequency and timing

Barwon Water will arrange meetings and provide administrative support. Meetings will be held online, face-to-face, or a mixture of both, subject to the group's preference.

The community working group will meet quarterly, and meetings will run for a maximum of two hours. Barwon Water will seek agreement from the group on any additional meetings, and members would be given at least two weeks' notice.

Meetings are expected to run until the end of 2025, in line with the life of the community working group.

Agendas

The agenda will be prepared by Barwon Water and circulated to members one week before each meeting. Agenda items will be given priority, but there will be opportunities to raise general business.

Minutes will be taken at each meeting and distributed to members within two weeks of a meeting taking place.

Contact details

Barwon Water Community Engagement team

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