

Yanco Stakeholder Advisory Group Meeting 19, 13 July 2022 – Independent facilitator’s update

The Yanco Stakeholder Advisory Group (YSAG) met in Morundah on the 13 July 2022, for the group’s 19th meeting, to discuss progress on the Yanco Creek Modernisation Project ([Attachment A](#)). The project team, comprising Water Infrastructure NSW and the 3Rivers Partnership (GHD and Jacobs), informed the YSAG that the draft concept designs and environmental approvals have progressed.

Since the last update, significant work has been undertaken on the draft concept designs for proposed new infrastructure. These have been influenced by the design focus group (DFG), made up of a range of technical experts, including local advice from Yanco Creek and Tributaries Advisory Council (YACTAC), and WaterNSW as the future asset owner and operator. The DFG has influenced the following revisions to the concept designs:

- provision of additional gates on the re-regulation weirs to improve flow management and fish passage,
- improved access arrangements at the environmental water regulators, such as trafficability of the structures,
- additional requirements of new small structures, such as trafficable culverts,
- greater standardisation of designs for the four re-regulation weirs, wherever possible, to create efficiencies for construction, and future operations and maintenance requirements.

Following discussion with Australian Government and NSW approval agencies, the planning approval pathway for Hartwood, Piccaninny, Wanganella and Caroonboon environmental water regulators in the Billabong Creek, has changed from a review of environmental factors (REF) to an environmental impact statement (EIS). This represents a more detailed requirement under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* to assess cumulative effects. This will add an additional 6 to 9 months to the project timeline. Other parts of the project will continue to be assessed under a REF, as previously planned.

The YSAG reiterated their concerns regarding how future operations and maintenance costs of the project will be shared. It was discussed that it would be preferable for these costs to be spread across the Murrumbidgee Valley consistent with current Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) water pricing determinations. WaterNSW committed to responding to this question in further detail at the next meeting.

A draft of the new proposed Yanco Creek System Operations Plan was circulated. The YSAG was broadly happy with progress on the plan and endorsed the document for circulation to the broader community for feedback. The YSAG also endorsed the development of a summary of the Plan in preparation for the next round of face-to-face community information sessions in the week commencing Monday 5 September.

Member appointments to YSAG have been extended by 2 years through to June 2024. The group discussed the operations of YSAG and agreed that it was a positive forum for influencing and ensuring local involvement in the project. Given the positive progress and current stage of the project, the YSAG agreed to continuing meeting regularly, as-needed.

The YSAG also received an update of the Better Bidgee and Reconnecting River Country programs. The YSAG is next due to meet for a site inspection tour of proposed infrastructure sites in August, in conjunction with the Yanco Technical Advisory Group.

Norm McAllister, YSAG Independent Facilitator

Attachment A – Yanco Creek Modernisation Project – project activities

Part	Purpose
1. Environmental water efficiency	Works and measures to provide more efficient delivery of environmental water at three high environmental value locations – Upper Yanco Wetlands (1a), Wanganella Swamp (1b), Lower Forest Anabranche environmental pumps (1c)
2. Billabong Creek environmental water regulators	Upgrade ageing fixed crest weirs with new automated infrastructure to improve irrigation and environmental water delivery. Construct modern environmental water regulators and fish ladders at up to four locations - Locations: Hartwood regulator (2a), Piccaninny regulator (2b), Wanganella regulator (2c), Caroonboon regulator (2d)
3. Mundoora / Wilsons Anabranche improvements	Investigate and improve environmental water delivery arrangements at the Yanco Creek / Mundoora / Wilsons Anabranche area.
4. Forest Creek return flows via Piccaninny Creek	Replace the existing Piccaninny Creek Offtake with a new fit-for-purpose regulator (including flow measurement) and access arrangements to reduce unplanned flows in regulated section of the Forest Creek at Warriston Weir.
5. Improved flow measurement	To provide new and/or improved flow measurement throughout the Yanco Creek System to provide Water NSW river operators with additional and more timely information to assist them operate the system more efficiently.
6. Review of irrigation escapes flows	Review the use of existing Murray Irrigation Limited (MIL) and Coleambally Irrigation Co-operative Limited (CICL) escapes in a way that best provides a balance between technical, social, environmental, cultural and economic impacts.
7. Improved use of technology	Improved delivery of irrigation and environmental water using technology to improve the operational efficiency of the Yanco Creek System, including integration with the WaterNSW Computer Aided River Model (CARM)
8. Improved riparian management	Improved riparian management consistent with the project objectives to enhance, refine and/or support the other seven parts of the preferred option. This may include for example removing flow constraints, improving fish passage (i.e weir removal, fish ladders), installing fish screens on pumps, improving fish habitat (i.e re-snagging), fencing and alternative stock watering along priority sections of the system.