Barwon Water

# Annual Water Outlook

1 December 2025

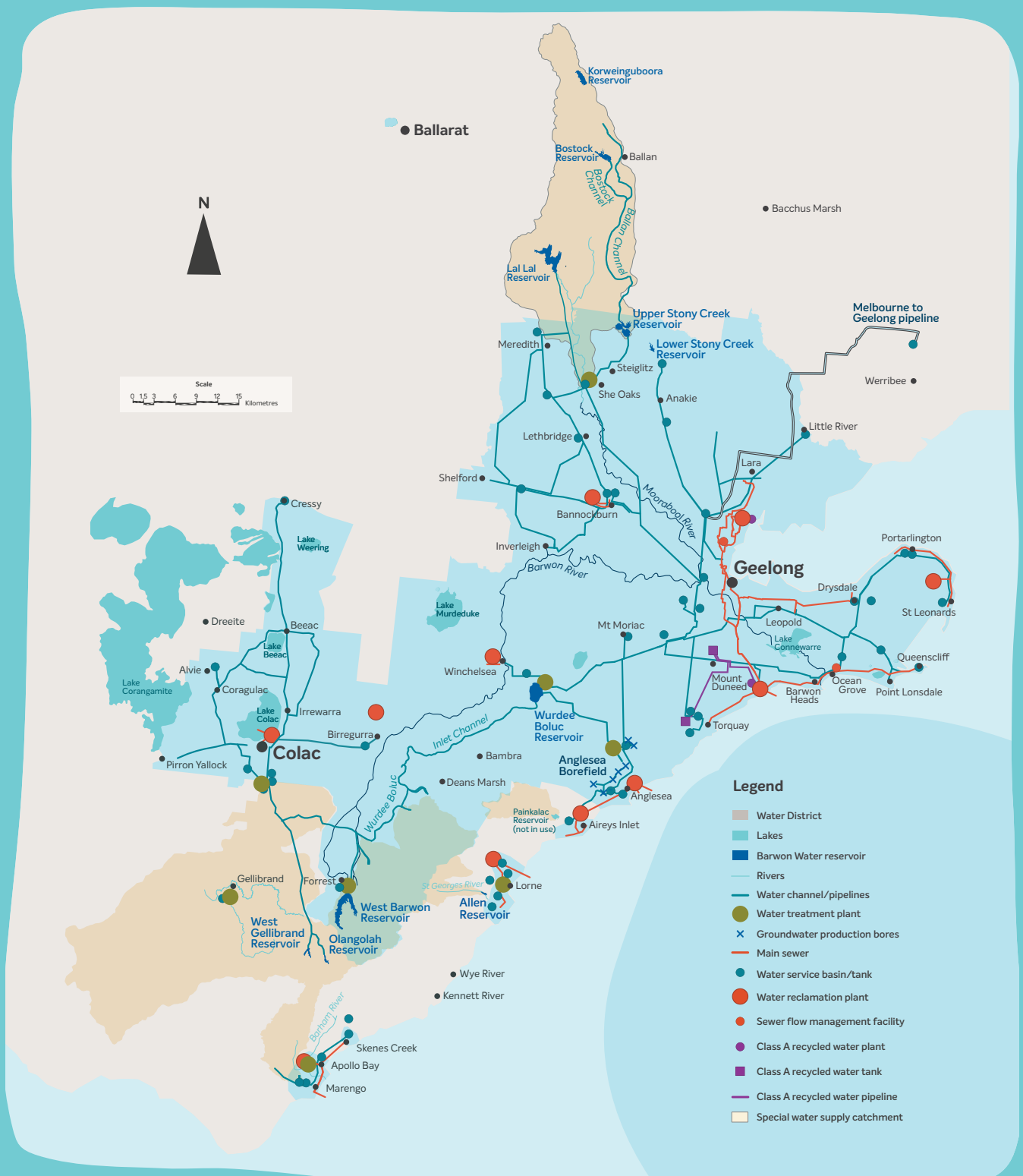
# Acknowledgement of Country

Barwon Water proudly acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we work and live and pay our respects to their Elders past and present.

Barwon Water acknowledges that the lands and waters of Eastern Maar and Wadawurrung were never ceded. We are committed to strong relationships with Traditional Owners and First Nations' organisations, businesses and networks within our region and appreciate walking together.

We commit to a future of healing and reconciliation that requires Truth-Telling and authenticity. Water is fundamental to life, and we continue to learn much from Traditional Owners, who have sustainably managed Country for tens of thousands of years. We recognise the importance of walking together to embed Eastern Maar, Wadawurrung and broader First Nations' ways of Being, Knowing and Doing across all we do.

# Barwon Water service & key infrastructure



# Planning for the future

**The Annual Water Outlook (AWO) is published each year, as mandated by the Drought Preparedness Plans, within the Urban Water Strategy.**

The AWO provides our customers, community and stakeholders with a two-year forward look at how our water supply systems may respond under different climate conditions. The AWO provides important information about how storages in each of our water supply systems are tracking, while providing a forward look as to how our storages may perform under future climate scenarios.

This will help us track actions committed in our Urban Water Strategy 2022: Water for our Future, which will help us to progress towards a 'secure water future where our rivers flow, our foods grow, and our impact is low'.

# Contents

# Summary

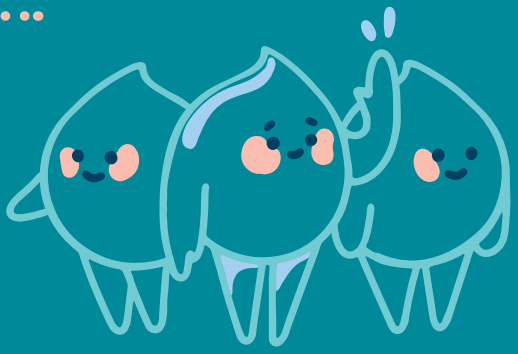
## Current snapshot

Geelong storage **47%**

Over **90%** Colac, Lorne & Apollo Bay

## Increasing demand

Our population increased by **+ 7,000**



**585,000** people will be calling our region home by **2050**

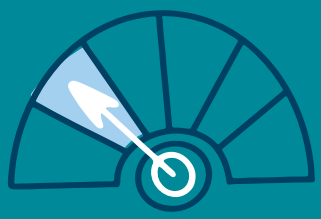
## How we're planning for the future

We now have access to **22,000ML** through the Melbourne > Geelong pipline

Saving **1,000ML** over 5 years through **Sustainable Water Use Program**

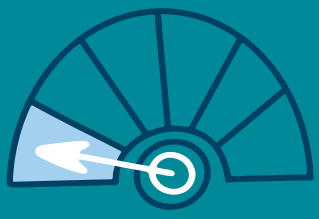
**Engaging** with the communities of Lorne and Apollo Bay to identify preferred long-term water security options

## Restrictions likelihood



**RARE**

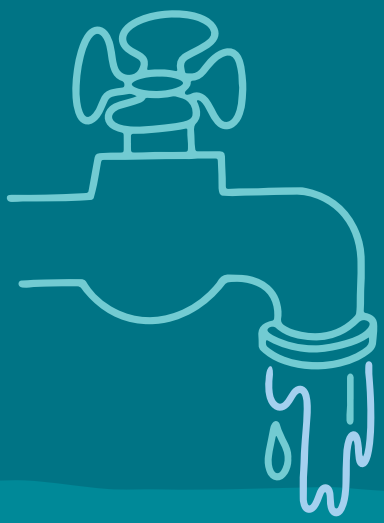
Geelong, Lorne & Apollo Bay



**VERY RARE**

Colac & Gellibrand

## Small water saving steps at home can make a big difference.



## Less reliable inflows

Moorabool inflows have declined by

**50%**

**since 1997**

West Barwon Reservoir inflows have declined by

**29%**

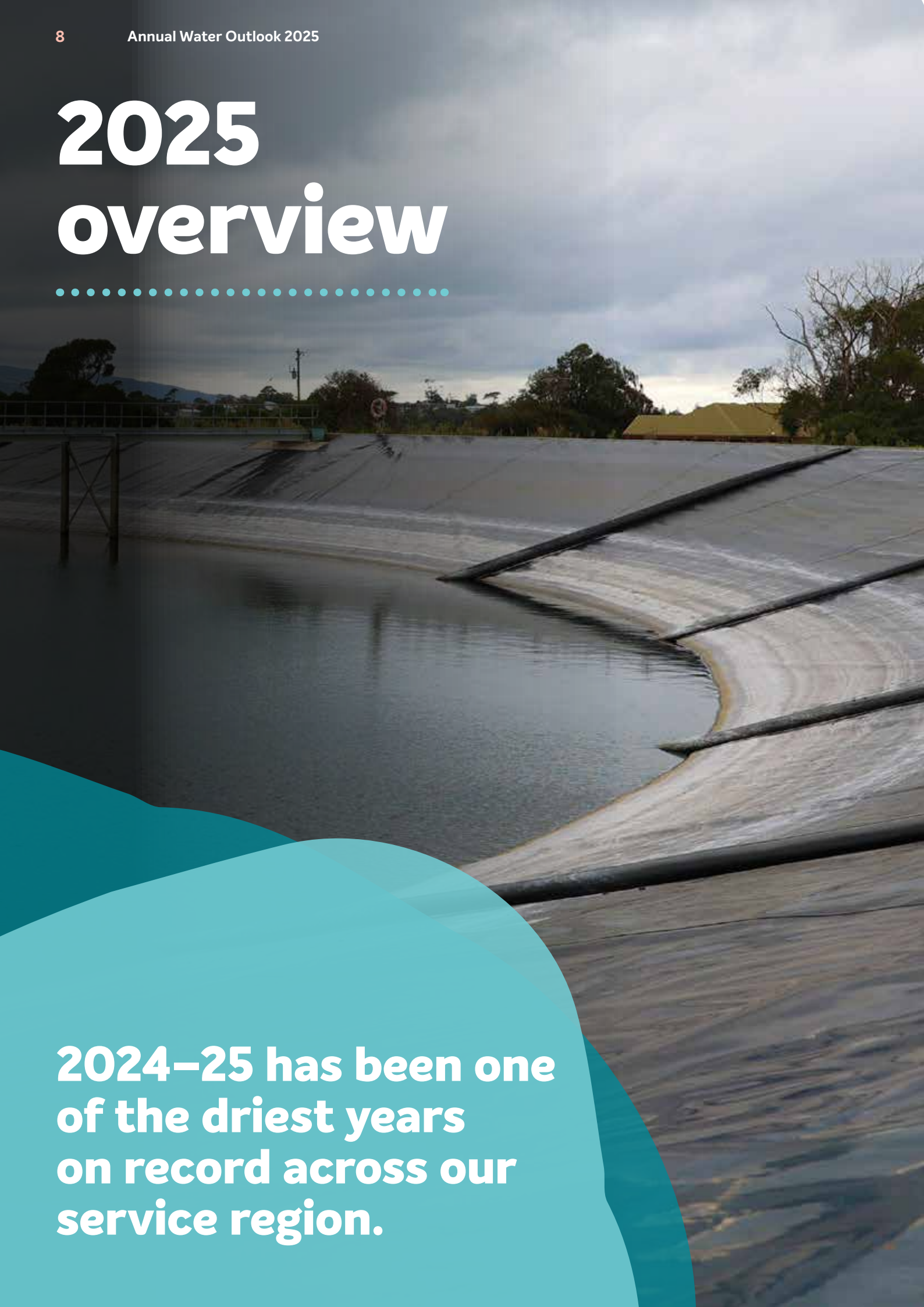
**since 1997**

**Our region is growing, and more people need to share our water.**

**The permanent water saving rules are simple, common-sense rules to make sure we all use water wisely.**

**While storage levels are currently stable, they can drop rapidly. With our growing population and increasingly variable climate, Barwon Water is continuing to plan for new water sources.**

# 2025 overview



**2024–25 has been one of the driest years on record across our service region.**

In the Barwon catchment, our West Barwon Reservoir received just 8,226 ML of inflows, 14% less than 2006 – the worst year of the Millennium Drought. Meanwhile, Apollo Bay experienced its driest start to autumn in over 100 years, resulting in 16 weeks of water restrictions being applied in Apollo Bay, Marengo and Skenes Creek.

Over the 2024–25 period, our population grew by approximately 7,200 people, a 1.9% increase, while total water demand across our service region reached 42,862 megalitres, up 2.5% compared to last year. This increase in demand coincided with our Geelong, Golden Plains, Bellarine and Surf Coast system, our Colac system and our Apollo Bay system experiencing continued dry conditions.

## Geelong System

Our Geelong system began 2025 with storages at 54%, declining to 35% by the end of August due to below average rainfall over autumn and winter. This coincides with inflows at the West Barwon reservoir being the lowest on record in 95 years, highlighting the severity of the current dry period. This means we finished winter with Geelong's lowest storage levels since August 2008, during the Millennium Drought. Our Geelong system storage is currently at 47.7%.

During dry conditions, we rely heavily on the Melbourne-Geelong Pipeline (MGP), which provides us with access to water from Melbourne. We've recently completed upgrades to the MGP, which means we are now able to access more water from Melbourne. This upgrade has increased our transfer capacity from 16,000 to 22,000 megalitres per year. We can now meet over 60% of the Geelong system's peak demand through the MGP alone.

In response to the extreme dry conditions, the Anglesea borefield was also re-started in August and is now supplying around 13 megalitres per day to the Geelong system .

To reduce demand on our potable supply network, we have continued to invest in recycled water and demand reduction initiatives. We remain ahead of our water saving target, with more than half a billion litres of water saved.

## Colac and Coastal Systems

After a very dry year in our Colac and coastal water supply systems, we have seen good recovery in catchments and storages. After storages fell to 49% in June, Colac's storages are now back above 95%. The Colac system was supplemented with flows from the Barwon system to ensure Colac avoided water restrictions over this period.

The Lorne water supply system remained relatively healthy throughout the year, with rain at the right times maintaining storage levels above 90% throughout the year.

Apollo Bay, Marengo, and Skenes Creek faced severe water shortages, prompting water restrictions to be introduced in April 2025. These measures included limits on garden watering, pool filling, and non-essential water use to protect dwindling storages, which had dropped to just 25.6%. Typical winter rainfall over July, community efforts and conservation initiatives meant that restrictions were lifted on 1 August 2025. Apollo Bay storage levels are currently above 90%.

# Drought preparedness and permanent water saving rules

Drought Preparedness Plans are in place across all of our supply systems, to ensure that Barwon Water will always be able to supply enough water to meet essential human needs, even during extreme events that lead to water shortages. Each supply system has tailored short-term actions that can be implemented during dry conditions to maintain water supplies. These actions include increased awareness and targeted water efficiency campaigns, engagement with large users about water conservation, education on Permanent Water Saving Rules and storage level updates and forecasts through the Annual Water Outlook. System specific short-term actions may also include things like water restrictions, accessing additional supply from a variety of sources and water carting to supplement storages.

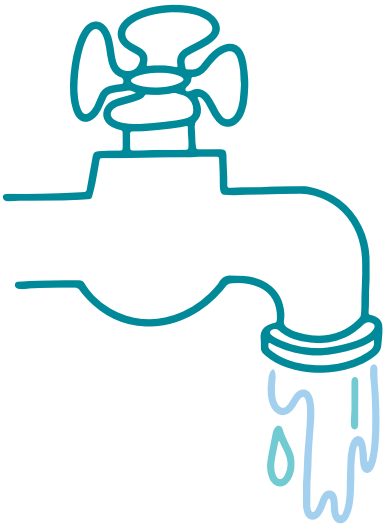
## These Permanent Water Saving Rules are in place across the state every day of the year.

The rules are:

- Always water your garden using a leak-free hose with a trigger nozzle.
- Sprinklers and drippers can only be used before 10am and after 6pm.
- Don't hose concrete, paths or driveways - use a broom instead.
- Fountains and water features must recirculate water.

Head to www.barwonwater.vic.gov.au/water-and-waste/permanent-water-saving-rules for a refresher on the full range of rules.

# Our climate is getting hotter and drier



**Over recent decades, Victoria has seen a pronounced shift towards warmer temperatures and drier conditions, adding to the state's natural climate variability.**

Looking ahead, we anticipate that rainfall patterns will be less predictable, impacting river flows and the ecosystems that rely on them. As a result, our traditional water sources – those that depend on regular rain – are expected to become less reliable.

Periods of dry conditions have become increasingly persistent across our region.

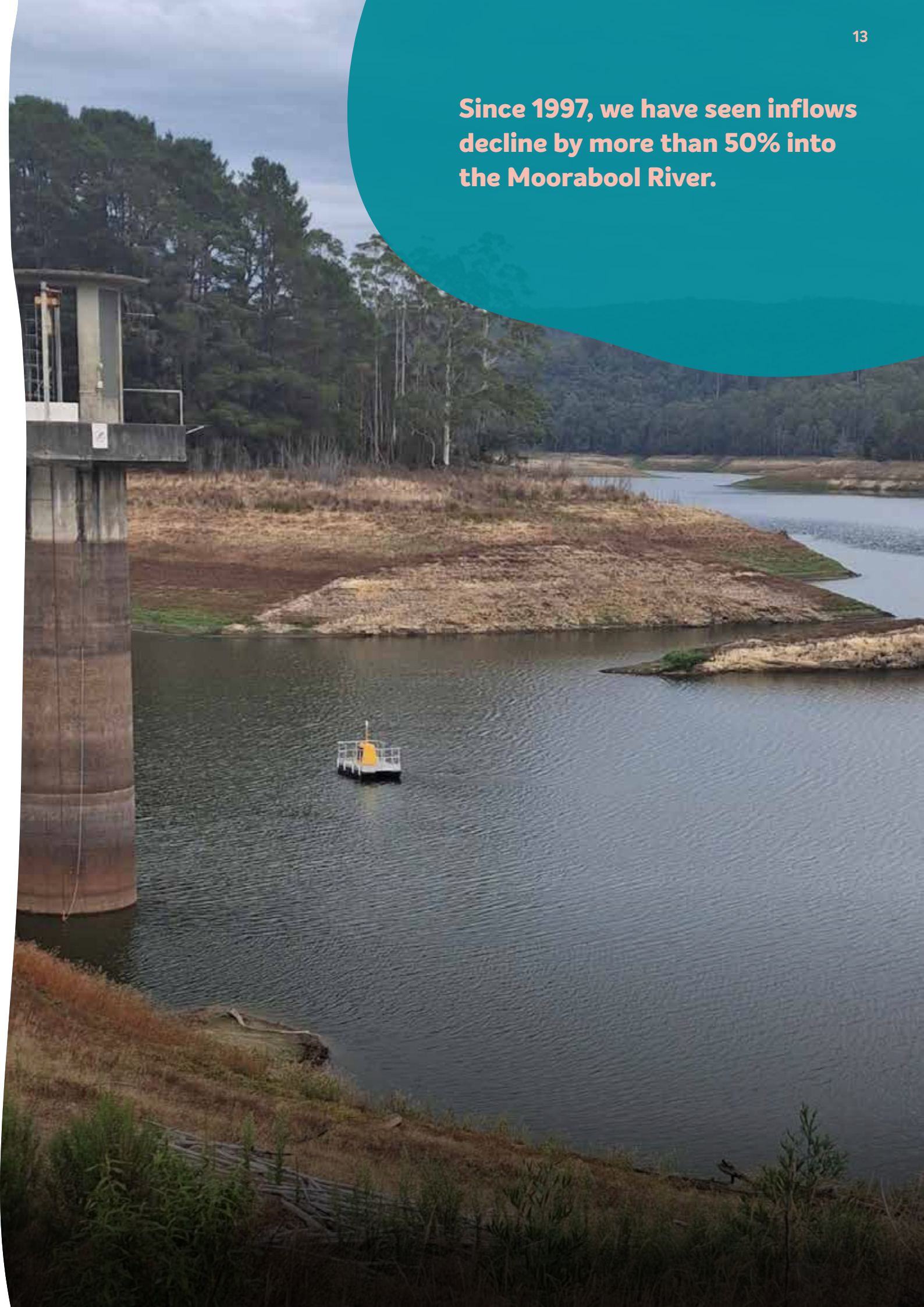
This year, we have seen the continuation of below-average rainfall across the majority of our region.

Victoria's climate will continue to be variable, with wet years and dry years, but these will be set against a background drying trend. A warmer future and with projections of declining water availability, we can expect more frequent and severe droughts in the coming decades, as well as an increase in extreme rainfall events.

As such, Barwon Water's Urban Water Strategy 2022: Water For Our Future Strategy proposes a transition towards greater use of manufactured water, such as desalinated water and fit-for-purpose recycled water and stormwater.

More information on the observed changes and longer-term future climate and water projections can be found at www.water.vic.gov.au/our-programs/climate-change-and-victorias-water-sector/hydrology-and-climate-science-research/victorian-water-and-climate-initiative

**29 %**
**decrease**
in average annual inflows at West Barwon Reservoir since 1997.



**Since 1997, we have seen inflows decline by more than 50% into the Moorabool River.**

# Geelong: The fastest growing region in Australia

## Over the past year, Geelong's annual water demand increased by 1,000 megalitres

**This year, the Greater Geelong region has officially become the fastest-growing regional area in Australia, capturing 9.3% of all internal migration and overtaking the Sunshine Coast.**

The Victorian Government has set ambitious housing targets, planning to deliver 128,600 new homes by 2050 – the largest allocation for any regional city in Victoria. This means that the permanent population of our region will increase to over 585,000 – that's an increase of over 200,000 people.

Over the past year, Geelong's annual water demand increased by 1,000 megalitres, primarily due to extended dry conditions driving increasing outdoor water usage and population growth of approximately 7,200 people.

## Water security plan

This year, the Victorian Government released the Victorian Water Security Plan. This plan details the process to investigate a range of potential significant augmentation options for Melbourne, Geelong and grid connected communities. Given it can take a decade to deliver initiatives of this scale, the plan has been developed to advance these investigations.

Over two years of conversations with our customers, more than 600 ideas were put on the table for our 2022 Urban Water Strategy: Water for our Future. This led to community support for measures that secure the water for our future from a range of sources. As such, the plan will consider 'all options' including additional desalination, recycled water, integrated water management and continued efficiency.

A water security taskforce has been established by the Minister for Water, with the findings of further detailed investigation to be reported to the Minister before March 2027. The Water Security Plan will be updated annually and published alongside the Annual Water Outlook each December.

Planning to deliver

**128,600**

new homes by 2050

# The year ahead

Our climate is influenced by a range of climate drivers, including the El Nino-Southern Oscillation, Indian Ocean Dipole and Southern Annular Mode. The Bureau of Meteorology (BoM) El Nino-Southern Oscillation outlook is currently negative, meaning 'La Nina Watch' is in place, with an increased likelihood of slightly above average rainfall projected for our region over the coming three months.

Geelong's local storages are at 47.7% (at 26 November 2025) following a poor autumn, winter and spring harvesting season. In response, we have increased transfer of water from the Greater Melbourne Yarra-Thomson system. The MGP will continue to supply water well into 2026 until local storages increase above 75%.

We expect water restrictions to be rare for the Geelong system (<4%), and rare for the Lorne and Apollo Bay systems (<4%), while restrictions are considered very rare (<1%) for the Colac and Gellibrand systems over the next two years, even under worst climatic conditions.

# How we're planning for the future

## Our 2022 Urban Water Strategy:

Water for our Future sets out how we will respond to the many challenges facing our water supplies, both now and in coming decades.

The strategy has a 50-year outlook and is updated every five years, enabling us to adapt our planning to whatever conditions emerge.

Progress updates on the effectiveness of these actions can be found in the following system outlooks.

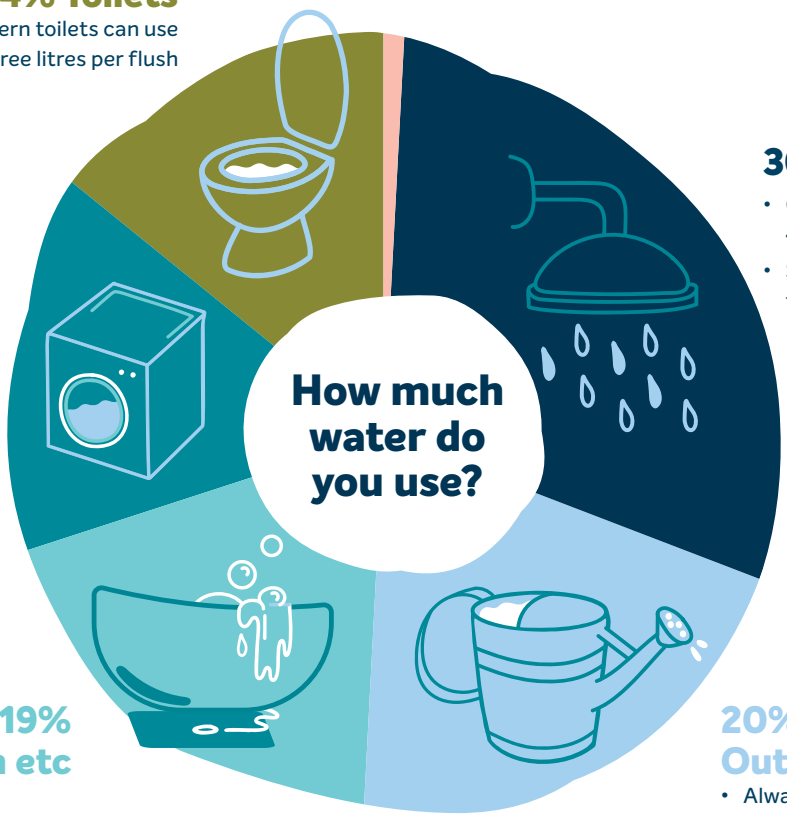
For further information, our Urban Water Strategy can be found at www.barwonwater.vic.gov.au/water-and-waste/water-for-our-future

The stategy has a **50 year outlook** and is updated every five years

# Small water saving steps at home can make a big difference.

## Make every drop count

**Our region is growing, and more people need to share our water. Our community recognises water is a precious resource and shouldn't be wasted. The permanent water saving rules (PWSR) are a set of simple, common-sense rules to make sure we all use water wisely.**




### 14% Toilets

- Modern toilets can use just three litres per flush

### 1% Dishwasher

### 30% Shower

- Cut your shower time to 4 minutes
- Swap your old showerhead for a more efficient model.

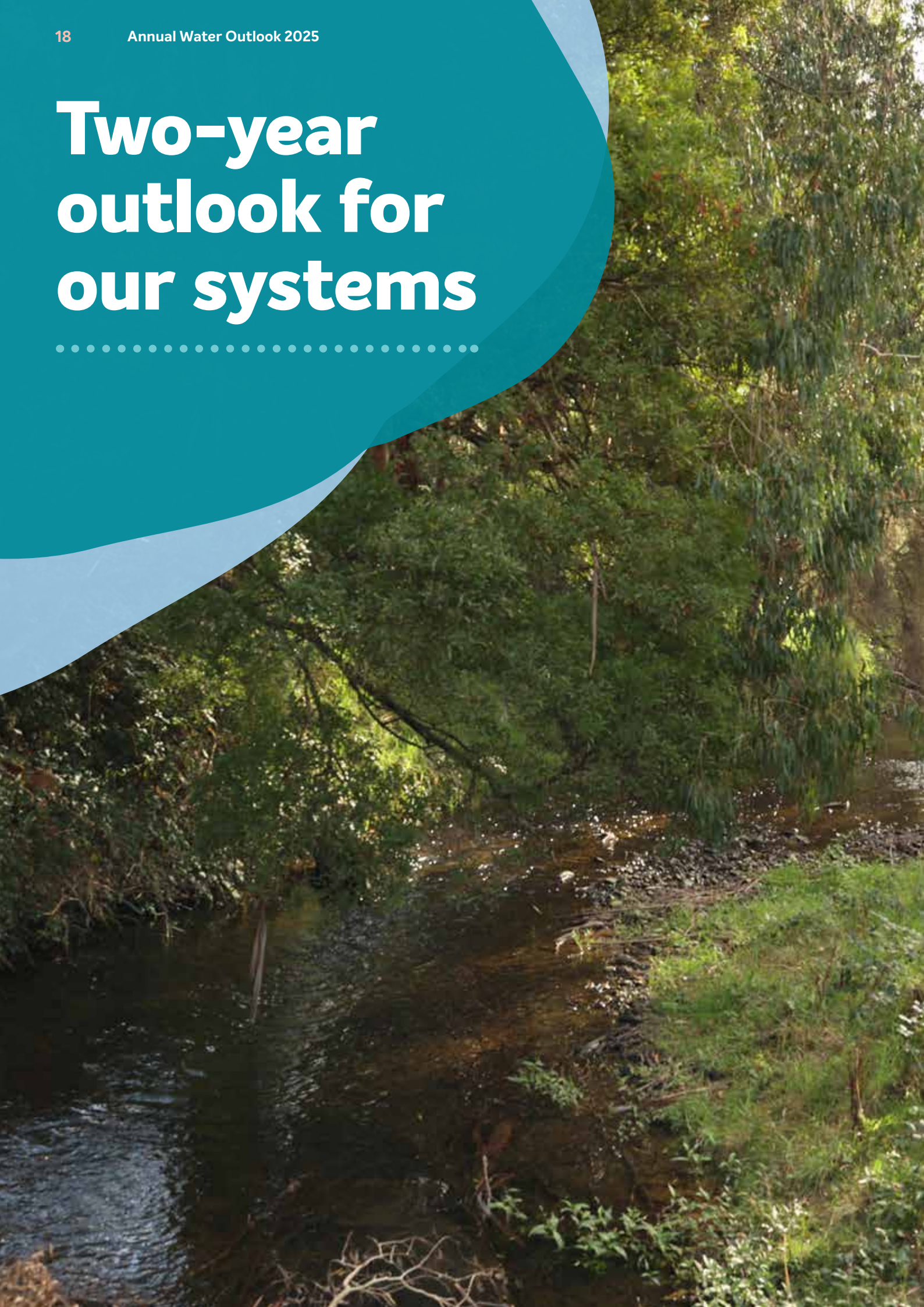
### 16% Washing machine

### 19% Taps, bath etc

### 20% Outside

- Always water early in the morning or late in the evening to minimise evaporation loss.

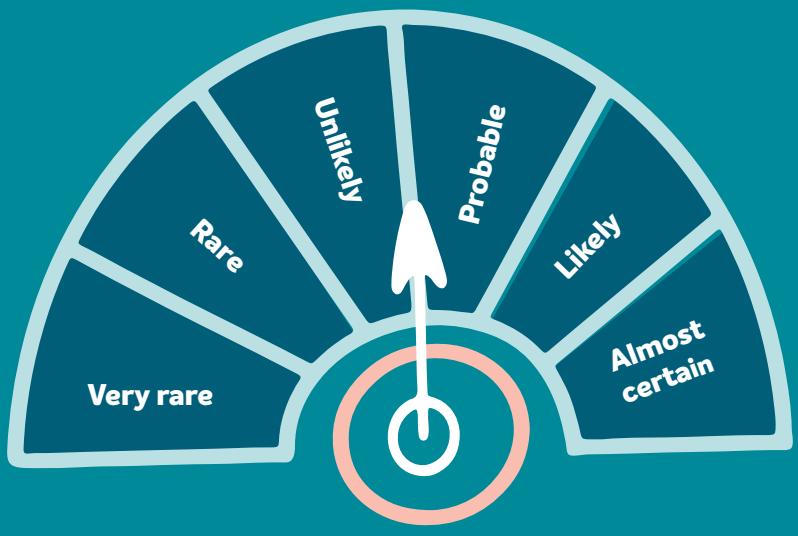
# Two-year outlook for our systems



# Restrictions likelihood explained

The outlook for each of our water supply systems indicates the likelihood of water restrictions being applied within the next two years.

The scale of likely water restrictions ranges from very rare to almost certain, as shown here.




**Very rare <1%**

**Rare 1-4%**

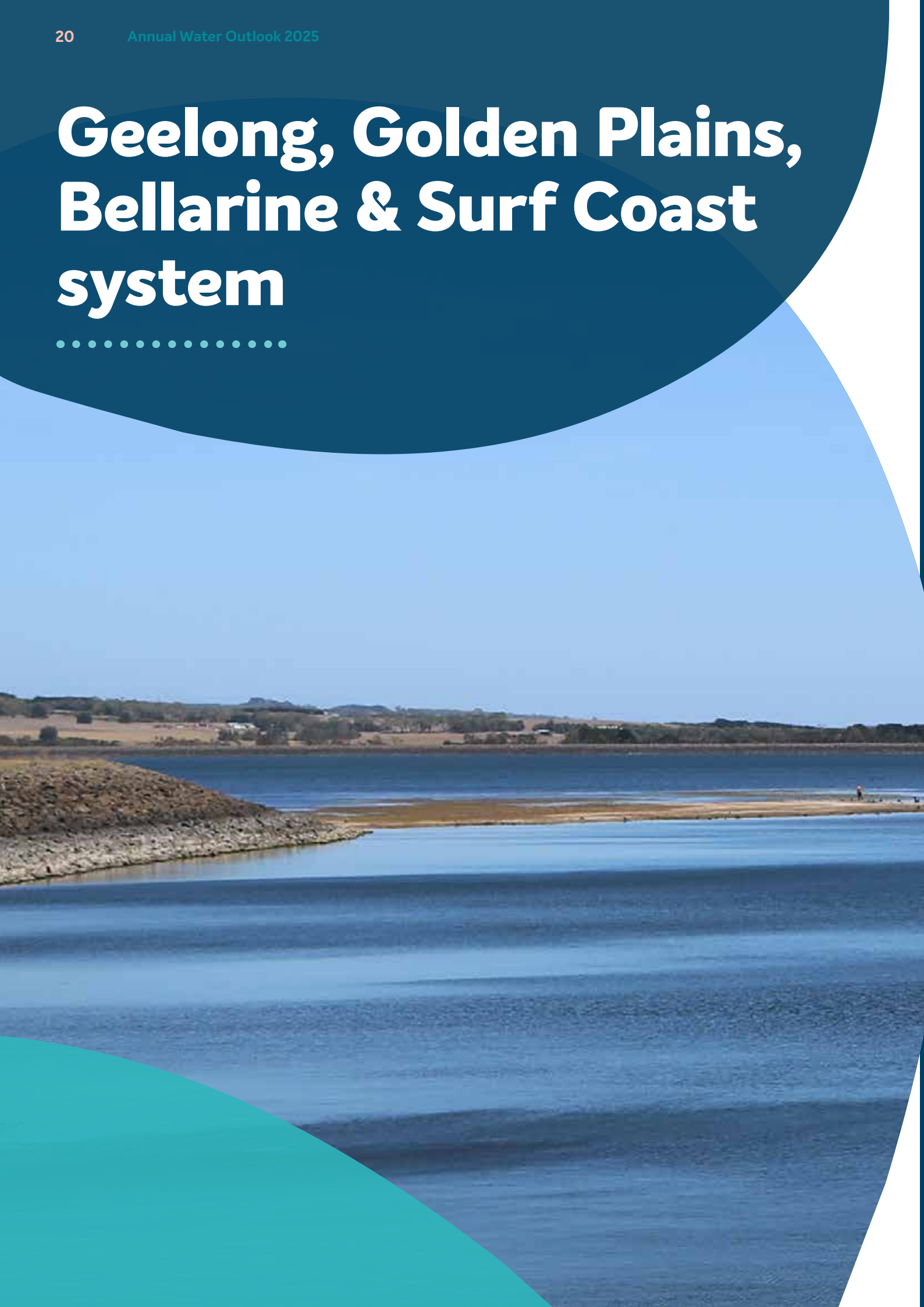
**Unlikely 5-19%**

**Probable 20-49%**

**Likely 50-79%**

**Almost certain 80-100%**

# Geelong, Golden Plains, Bellarine & Surf Coast system



# The Geelong, Golden Plains, Bellarine and Surf Coast system services more than 90% of our customers.

Drinking water is sourced from catchments on the upper Barwon and Moorabool rivers and an entitlement to take water from Melbourne's Yarra-Thomson catchment, via the MGP. We're currently drawing groundwater from the Anglesea Borefield to supplement surface water supplies. Anglesea Borefield is typically only utilised when local storages are low.

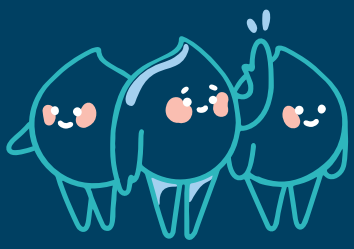
We also operate two Class A recycled water plants – the Northern Water Plant and the Black Rock Recycled Water Plant. Recycled water is used for non-drinking purposes, such as garden watering, and commercial, industry and agricultural uses.

## Current storage

**47.7%**

44,955 ML of 95,338 ML

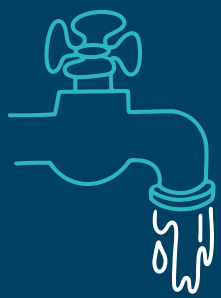
## Population



**363,261**

at July 2025

## Water demand



**38,241**

**million litres**

2024–25

## Restrictions likelihood

**RARE**

*as at 26 November 2025

# Storage outlook

The short-term storage outlook for the Geelong, Golden Plains, Bellarine and Surf Coast system shows that, under the worst climatic conditions, water restrictions may be required over the next two years (to December 2027).

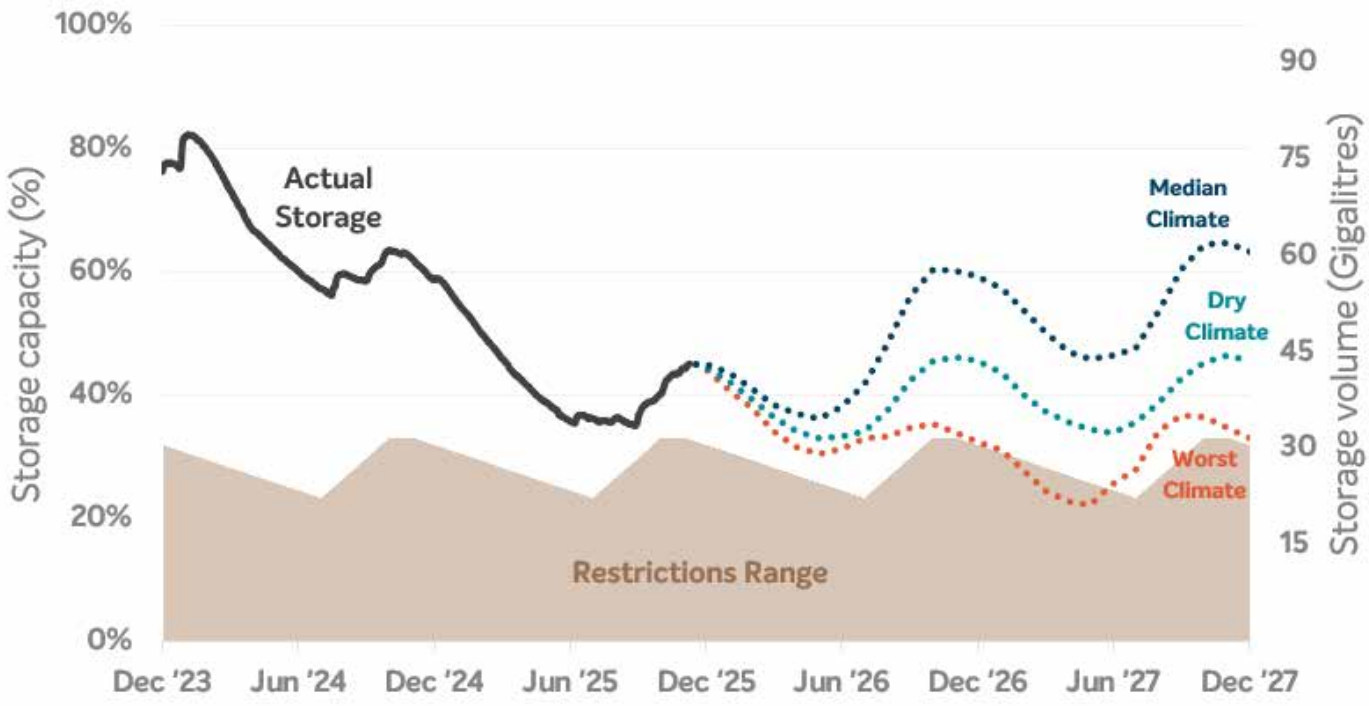



*Figure 1: Projected two-year water supply for the Geelong, Golden Plaisns and Surf Coast system.*

# Short-term actions

| Action | Status |
|---|---|
| GG1 Extend the reach of the Melbourne-Geelong Pipeline so that it can supply growing demand for residential, business, industry and agriculture in Geelong, Bellarine and the Surf Coast, and allow for water to be returned to the Moorabool River for Traditional Owner cultural values and environmental needs.<br>*Access to up to 22GL/year from the water grid.* | **Complete** |
| GG2 Put more recycled water to productive use | **On track** |
| GG3 Continue to investigate and increase our readiness to implement long-term actions, to help inform our 2027 Urban Water Strategy.<br>*Barwon Water continues to support State Government initiatives to increase future water security.* | **Ongoing** |
| GG4 Work with customers to save water through our sustainable water use program.<br>*Barwon Water is committed to saving 1,000 ML over 5 years. This year, we have saved 600 ML through the Sustainable Water Use Program, cumulatively.* | **Ongoing** |
| GG5 Expand our use of smart technology to help reduce costs and save water across our networks and in our homes and businesse.<br>*289 smart meters installed across the Geelong system, with 27,000 to be installed in total by Barwon Water by 2027. We have also commenced the Hydraloop trial, an innovative Victorian first which recycles greywater to reduce potable demand. We are also rolling out digital meters across the region to help large customers monitor usage in real time, detect leaks early, and improve water efficiency.* | **On track** |
| GG6 Maintain efforts to continually optimise our system, so that we can make best use of available water resources and entitlements. | **Ongoing** |
| GG7 Start delivery of the integrated water management plan for the new Northern and Western Geelong Growth Areas, including construction of a 'purple pipe' network to supply Class A recycled water.<br>*Ongoing engagement with the City of Greater Geelong to advocate for the objectives of the Growth Areas Integrated Water Management Plan. Concept design for dual pipe infrastructure underway, to enable the supply of recycled water when the Advanced Water Recycled Facility is constructed in the mid-2030s.* | **On track** |
| GG8 Work with the City of Greater Geelong, Golden Plains Shire, Surf Coast Shire and Borough of Queenscliffe to progress localised integrated water management opportunities | **Ongoing** |
| GG9 Support improved flows and waterway health on the Barwon River by undertaking complementary river rehabilitation works<br>*Barwon Water's partnerships with Corangamite Catchment Management Authority (CCMA) and Landcare groups are delivering long-term catchment improvements through joint initiatives like river restoration, weed and pest control, and community engagement, supporting waterway health and drinking water quality across priority areas.* | **Ongoing** |
| GG10 Investigate the feasibility of a large-scale alternative water grid to distribute recycled water and stormwater for beneficial uses to boost water supply for agriculture and primary industries. | **Complete** |

# Colac system

## Colac's water supply is sourced from the West Gellibrand and Olangolah Reservoirs, which are located in the Gellibrand River catchment in the Otway Ranges.

During dry periods or unplanned system outages, we can draw water from the Geelong, Golden Plains, Bellarine and Surf Coast system via a pipeline connection.

### Current storage

**99.3%**

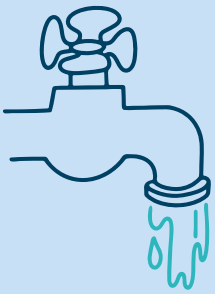
2,612 ML of 2,631 ML

### Population

**15,182**

at July 2025

### Water demand

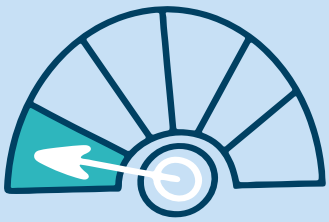


**3,843**

**million litres**

2024–25

### Restrictions likelihood



**VERY RARE**

*as at 26 November 2025

# Storage outlook

Colac enjoys great water security, thanks to its supplies being supplemented by the Geelong system. The short-term storage outlook for the Colac system shows that, even under the worst climatic conditions, water restrictions will not be necessary for the next two years (to December 2027).

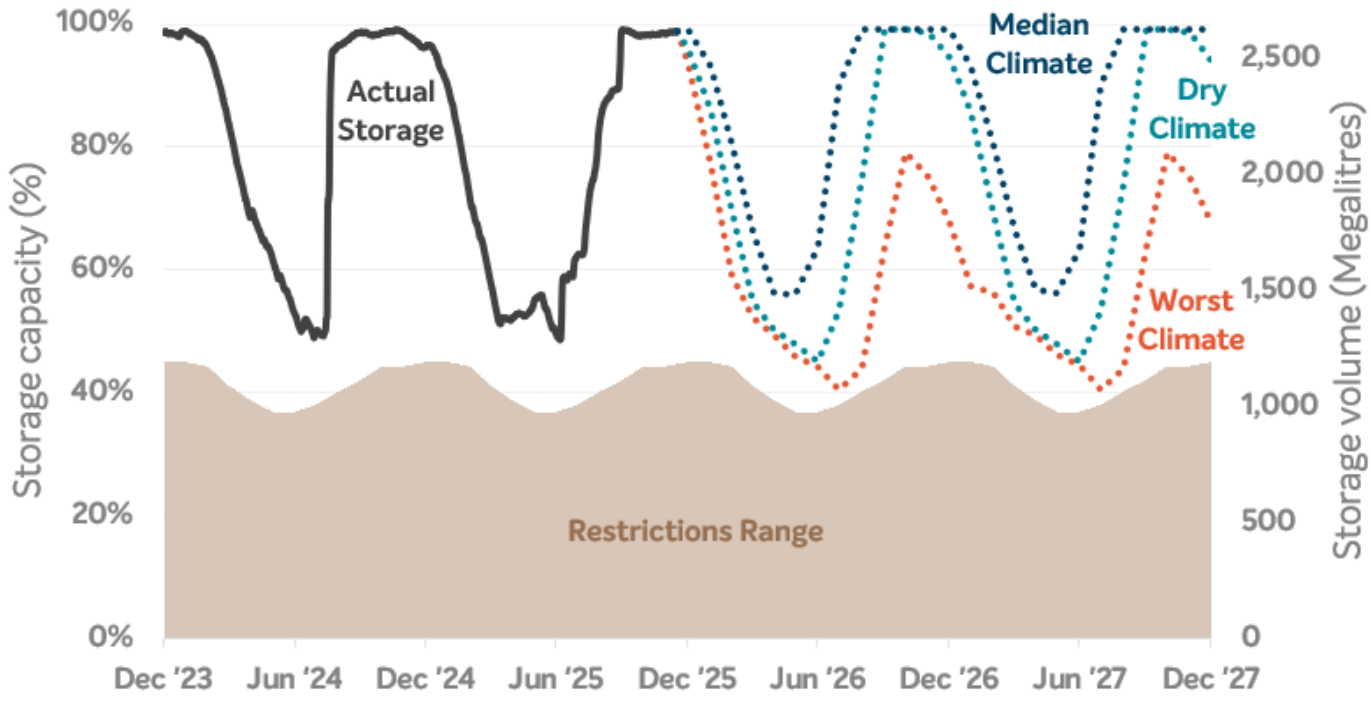



*Figure 2: Projected two-year water supply for the Colac system.*

# Short-term actions

| Action | Status |
|---|---|
| C1 Work with customers to help them use water more efficiently<br>*As part of our WaterSmart Business program, we have worked with businesses in Colac to install 26 data loggers to identify things like leaking toilets and cisterns. We have also upgraded showerheads at the Colac recreation reserve and improved water efficiency at the Colac saleyards.* | **Ongoing** |
| C2 Build a new underground pipeline to connect Birregurra to the Colac system.<br>*Construction of Birregurra pipeline completed September 2024.* | **Complete** |
| C3 Work with Colac Otway Shire to progress localised integrated water management opportunities. | **Ongoing** |

# Lorne system

**The Lorne water supply system is a standalone system, which means it relies solely on water sourced from the Allen Reservoir (located on the St George River). Water is treated before being supplied to customers.**

### Current storage

**100%**

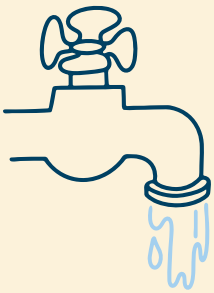
215 ML of 215 ML

### Population

**2,004**

at July 2025

### Water demand

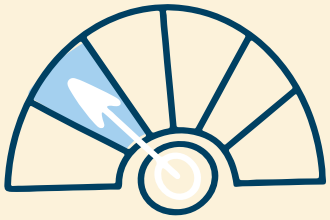


**369**

**million litres**

2024–25

### Restrictions likelihood



**RARE**

*as at 26 November 2024

# Storage outlook

## The Allen Reservoir typically fills over the winter period due to good rainfall and streamflow.

During the summer period, the system can be vulnerable to conditions outside a 'normal' climate range. Additionally, Lorne experiences an influx of visitors in summer, which temporarily increases the town's population up to tenfold. As such, water restrictions may be required if rainfall is low, or if demand is much greater than expected.

While the likelihood of water restrictions being applied to the Lorne system has been rated as 'rare', restrictions may be required should worst-case climate and/or high demand scenarios eventuate.

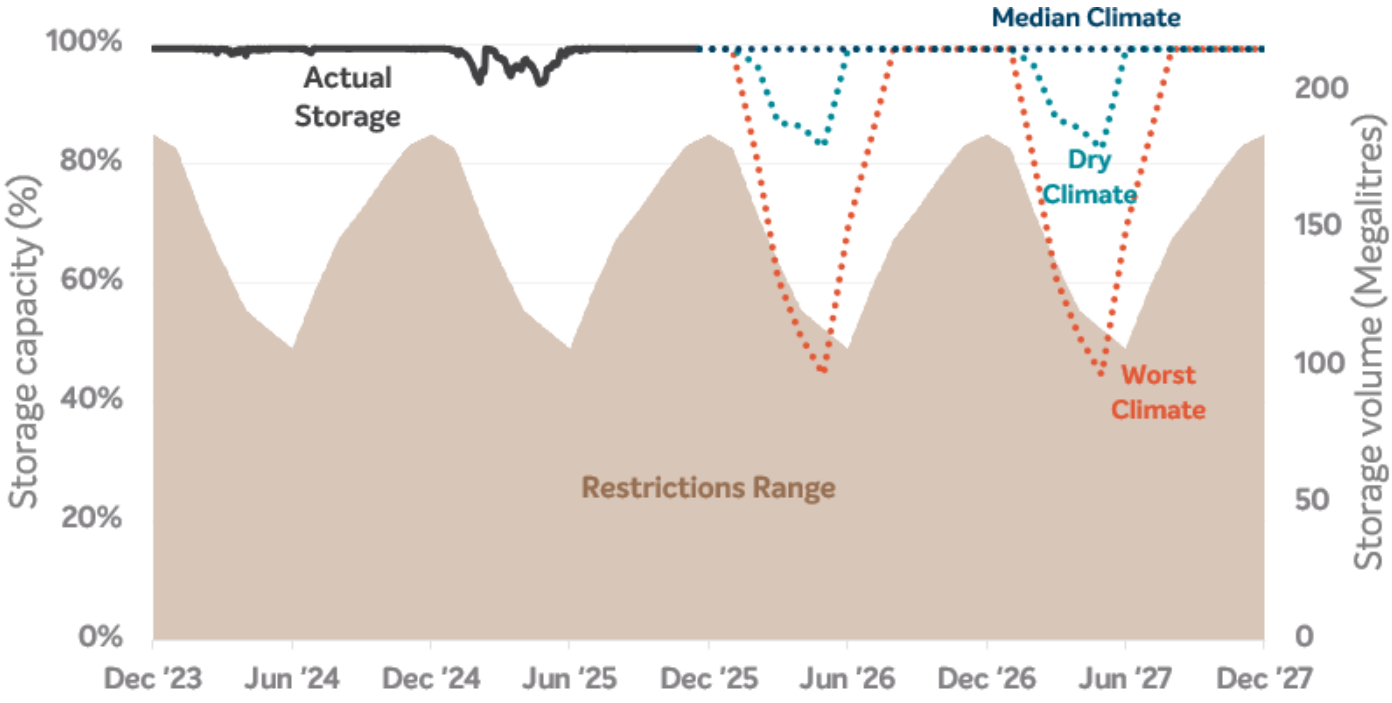



*Figure 3: Projected two-year water supply for the Lorne system.*

# Short-term actions

**While the existing Lorne system will continue to meet demand in the short-term, we will need to act within the next decade to maintain a reliable supply of water over the longer term.**

**As such, we are working on minor upgrades to make the best use of our current water supply system. We are also currently in the process of identifying a preferred portfolio of options to ensure a sustainable and resilient water future for Lorne.**

**For more information: https://www.yoursay.barwonwater.vic.gov.au/lorne-hub**

| Action | Status |
|---|---|
| L1 Engage with the Lorne community to help identify a preferred long-term option, so we can continue planning and be ready to implement when required<br>*Community Working Group established in September 2023, with ten meetings held. The CWG has provided insight into their preferences for options. Barwon Water is now in the process of undertaking detailed technical analysis, which will help inform Barwon Water's planning and decision making.*<br>*Next year, we will be rolling out the commencement of Smart Meters across our residential and commercial customer base. The installation of 2,700 Smart Meters will help to identify things like leaking toilets and cisterns to save water across the supply system.* | **On track** |
| L2 Pursue greater efficiency at our water treatment plant | **On track** |
| L3 Explore potential water treatment upgrades to maximise the efficient use of water in storage<br>*If the full benefit of being able to access 13ML of previously untreatable water through the effective treatment of manganese is realised, an additional three years of water security will be gained. A three-year water quality monitoring program is currently underway at Allen Reservoir to build confidence in management of this issue.* | **On track** |
| L4 Work with customers to help them use water smarter<br>Partnered with Lorne College under the Schools Water Efficiency Program to help save drinking water. This partnership will contribute to our regional goal of saving 100ML by 2028. | **Ongoing** |
| L5 Work with Surf Coast Shire to progress localised integrated water management opportunities and support uptake of alternative water sources, where efficient. | **Ongoing** |

# Apollo Bay system

**The communities of Apollo Bay, Skenes Creek and Marengo rely solely on the Barham River for water supply. Water is harvested from the river during high-flow periods, largely during winter and spring, and is stored in two basins – Marengo Basin (125 ML) and Apollo Bay Basin (276 ML) – before it is treated and supplied to customers.**

### Current storage

**97.5%**

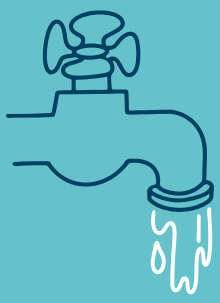
386 ML of 401 ML

### Population

**2,544**

at July 2025

### Water demand

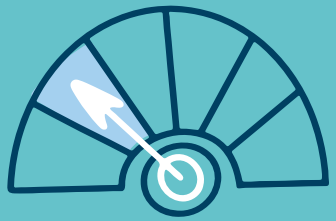


**394**

**million litres**

2024–25

### Restrictions likelihood



**RARE**

*as at 26 November 2025

# Storage outlook

## Apollo Bay storages typically fill completely over the winter period, due to good rainfall and streamflow.

However, the system can be vulnerable to conditions outside a 'normal' range during summer, such as low rainfall or greater than expected demand.

While the likelihood of water restrictions being required for the Apollo Bay system has been rated as 'rare', restrictions may be required should worst-case climate and/or high demand scenarios eventuate.

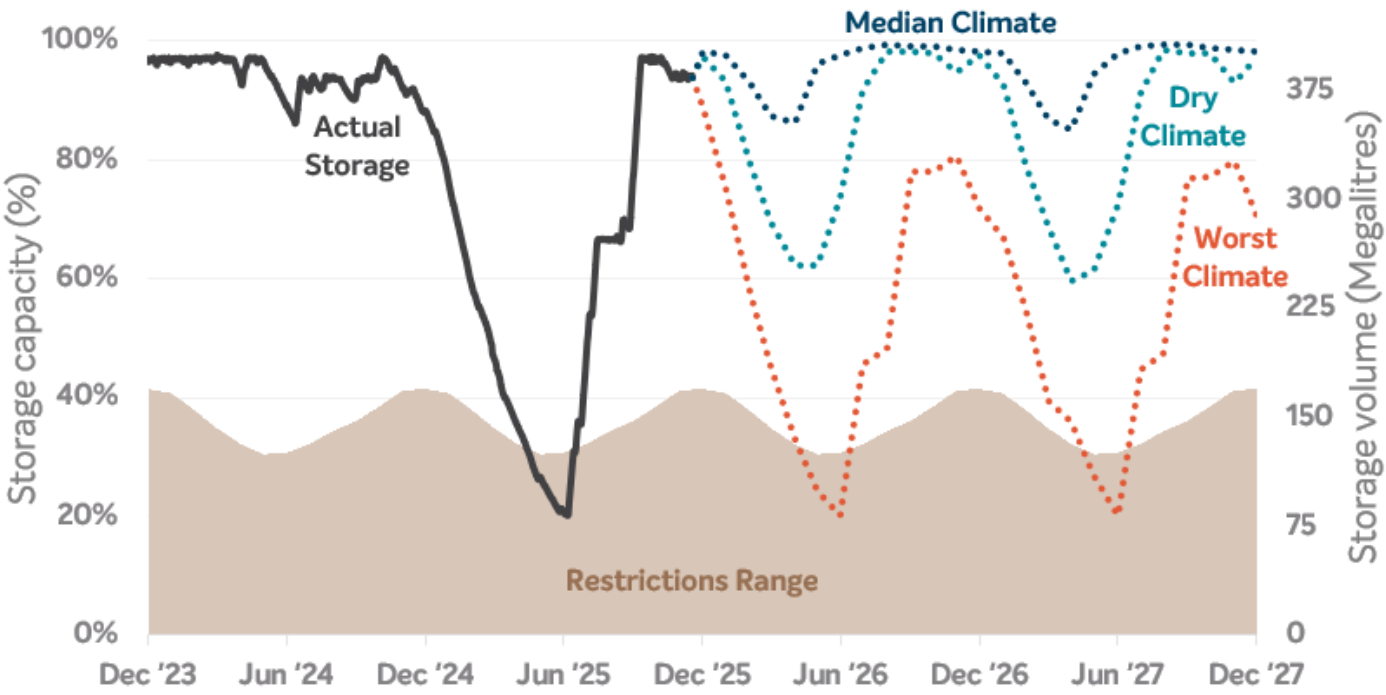



*Figure 4: Projected two-year water supply for the Apollo Bay system.*

# Short-term actions

**While the existing Apollo Bay system will continue to meet demand under normal conditions in the short-term, we will need to act within the next decade to maintain a reliable supply of water over the longer term.**

We are also currently in the process of identifying a preferred portfolio of options to ensure a sustainable and resilient water future for Apollo Bay. For more information: **https://www.yoursay.barwonwater.vic.gov.au/apollo-bay-hub**

| Action | Status |
|---|---|
| AB1 Engage with the Apollo Bay community about a preferred long-term option, as part of planning to be ready to implement it when required.<br>*Apollo Bay Water, Your Say program commenced March 2025. Community Working Group has been established, and six meetings have been held. Development of Values, Principles and Assessment Criteria has been achieved.* | **On track** |
| AB2 Upgrade our infrastructure to maximise efficient production and storage of water<br>*A spillway gate was installed to increase storage capacity of the Apollo Bay Basin by 26ML. This minor upgrade deferred the need for a major water supply augmentation by two years.* | **Complete** |
| AB3 Research use of modular floating covers to reduce evaporation losses.<br>*We are exploring this concept through our Apollo Bay: Water, Your Say program.* | **Complete** |
| AB4 Work with customers to help them use water smarter, such as digital meters to target leakage reduction, and minimise leakage across our network Integrated water management.<br>*We have installed 285 digital meters across the Apollo Bay supply system.* | **On track** |
| AB5 Work with Colac Otway Shire to progress localised integrated water management opportunities and support uptake of alternative water sources, where efficient.<br>*Barwon Water in partnership with the Apollo Bay Golf Club, constructed a new 1.1km pipeline, pumps and a storage tank to provide up to 10ML/year of recycled water for irrigation, reducing the reliance on precious drinking water. The Victorian Government provided $450,000 in funding under the Integrated Water Management Grants Program to deliver this project.* | **Ongoing** |

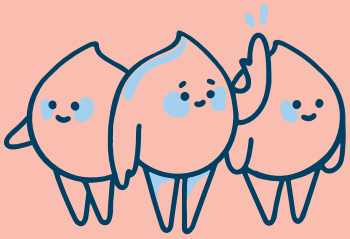
# Gellibrand system

**Gellibrand is located approximately 25 kilometres south of Colac and supplies less than 100 properties. Water is harvested from Lardner Creek and then pumped to the Gellibrand Water Treatment Plant prior to being supplied to customers.**

### Annual Entitlement

**60ML**

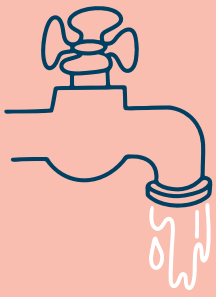
### Population



**73**

at July 2025

### Water demand

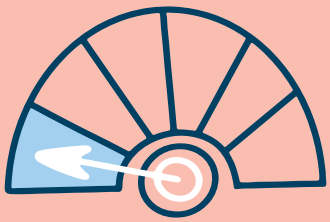


**18**

**million litres**

2024–25

### Restrictions likelihood



**VERY RARE**

*as at 26 November 2025

# Storage outlook

The short-term supply outlook shows that, even under the worst climatic conditions, water restrictions for the Gellibrand system will not be necessary in the next two years (to December 2027).

**Water is harvested directly from the river to service the Gellibrand township. The graph below shows that river flows are far in excess compared to demand.**

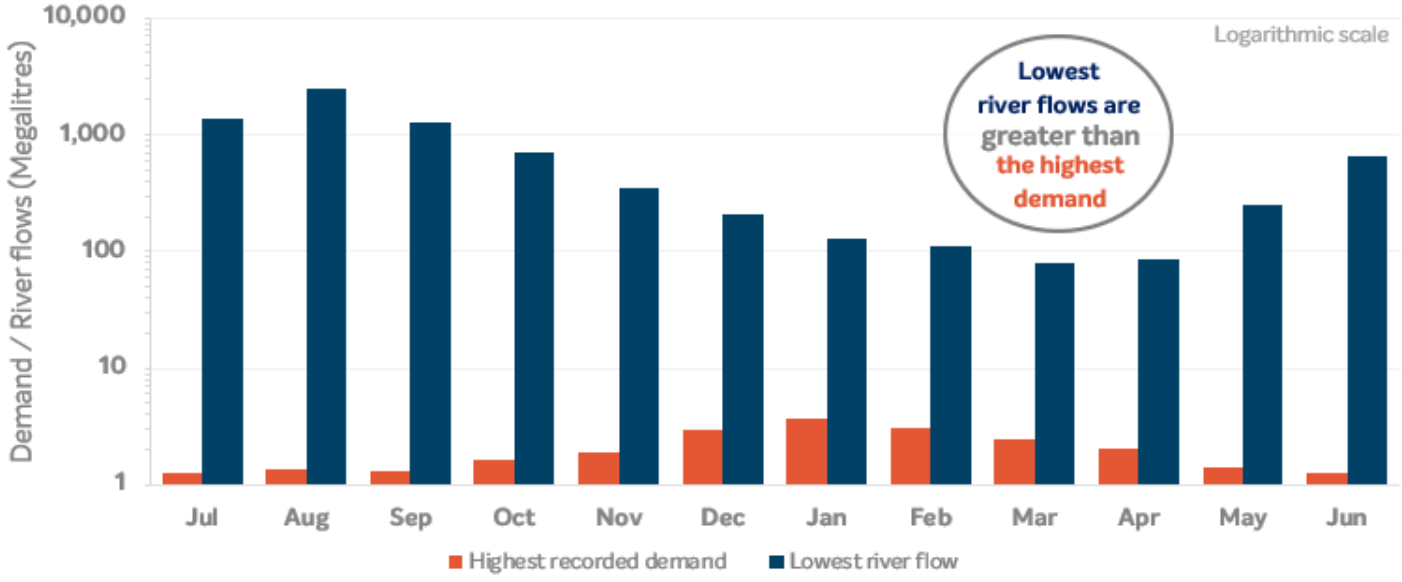



*Figure 5: Projected water supply for the Gellibrand system.*

# Short-term actions

**Our ongoing operational processes and monitoring of supply conditions will ensure water restrictions remain very rare for the Gellibrand water supply system. Recent upgrades to the Gellibrand Water Treatment Plant ensure that we will continue to provide a reliable service to Gellibrand.**

Barwon Water

**55-57 Ryrie Street**
**PO Box 659, Geelong Victoria 3220**
1300 656 007
info@barwonwater.vic.gov.au
**barwonwater.vic.gov.au**