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Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development,
Communications and the Arts.
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To whom it may concern,

RE: SUBMISSION INTO DRAFT NATIONAL URBAN POLICY

The Resilient Cities and Towns Branch of the Water and Catchments Group of the Victorian Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) welcomes the partnership approach of the Australian Government and the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft National Urban Policy.

As a branch, Resilient Cities and Towns delivers policy and programs related to enhancing urban water management, including the efficient use of potable water, management and use of stormwater and recycled water, the protection of urban waterways, and influencing and enabling cross-agency integrated water management for whole-of-community outcomes. This program of works contributes to the wider goals of the Water and Catchments Group of the DEECA: that Victoria has safe and sustainable water resources that meet future urban, rural, and environmental needs. As such we have reviewed the draft National Urban Policy in the context of driving the best outcomes and alignment to urban water policy within the State of Victoria.

We present two key recommendations essential for strengthening the draft National Urban Policy, along with supporting recommendations that address specific areas of the draft policy, and which collectively aim to support this submission's key recommendations.

Key Recommendations

1. Explicitly recognise the fundamental role of water.

Water is a cornerstone of sustainable urban settlements, influencing every aspect of urban life, from health and wellbeing to economic prosperity and environmental resilience. We recommend that the draft National Urban Policy is amended to explicitly recognise the essential role of water management and urban waterways in achieving its stated goals and objectives. We recommend that the draft policy expands to specifically encompass the place, role and value of waterways and water resources within the urban context.

Explicitly recognising water in the National Urban Policy ensures it aligns with national frameworks such as the National Water Initiative as it is renewed as well as to international commitments. This integration promotes coherent and coordinated policymaking, enhancing the effectiveness of water management strategies across different levels of government. This recommendation also aligns with international positions, with the United Nations recently highlighting that water is a critical enabler for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and for the health and prosperity of people and the planet.

2. Include and promote urban waterway, integrated water management and water efficiency initiatives.

We recommend expanding the draft National Urban Policy to explicitly include collaboration and investment opportunities with state, territory and local governments in urban waterway, Integrated

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Water Management (IWM) and water efficiency initiatives, in recognition of the fundamental role of water in the urban context. These water management approaches are recognised in both international and local policies as key strategies which are essential for creating resilient, sustainable, and liveable urban settlements. These approaches are essential to achieving the healthy green and blue spaces in our urban areas that the draft policy astutely nominates as a focus area.

- Urban waterways play a crucial role in maintaining ecological balance, supporting biodiversity, and providing recreational spaces that enhance community wellbeing. By including specific initiatives for urban waterway protection and restoration, the policy can ensure healthier environments and improved quality of life for urban residents.
- IWM is a coordinated approach that brings together various stakeholders, disciplines, and sectors to address complex water-related challenges holistically through coordinated action, aiming to ensure equitable access, sustainable use, and resilience in the face of changing conditions and uncertainties. IWM presents an opportunity to enhance liveability, sustainability, and cultural values in urban environments through collaborative management and planning across the entire water cycle.
- Water efficiency is a crucial component of sustainability. It enhances affordability, builds resilience to climate risks, and, by reducing hot water usage, contributes to net zero targets, sector decarbonisation, and the transition to a circular economy. Sustainable water use is vital for ensuring the long-term viability of urban areas.

Victoria has well-developed prioritised action plans for urban waterways and integrated water management developed in partnership with state and local government and Traditional Owner Groups which would benefit from the partnership approach with the Australian Government. These actions are investment ready, with many time-critical opportunities and place-based initiatives that are linked with the rapid urban development underway in the state. These action plans include:

- [Burndap Birrarung burndap umarkoo \(The Yarra Strategic Plan\)](#)
- [Waterways of the West Action Plan](#)
- [The Rivers of the Barwon \(Barre Warre Yulluk\) Action Plan](#)
- IWM Action Plans
 - [Dandenong Catchment](#)
 - [Maribyrnong Catchment](#)
 - [Werribee Catchment](#)
 - [Western Port Catchment](#)
 - [Yarra Catchment](#)
- Regional IWM Strategic Direction Statement (SDS)
 - [Barwon Catchment IWM Management Plan](#)
 - [Central Highlands Catchment SDS](#)
 - [Coliban Catchment SDS](#)
 - [East Gippsland Catchment SDS](#)
 - [Gippsland Catchment SDS](#)
 - [Goulburn Broken Catchment SDS](#)
 - [Great South Coast Catchment SDS](#)
 - [North East Catchment SDS](#)
 - [Wimmera Catchment SDS](#)

DEECA encourages the National Urban Policy to acknowledge the importance of urban waterways, water efficiency and collaborative management and planning for the whole of water cycle to ensure

Australia's urban growth is resilient and meets the needs of communities, economies, and the environment.

Supporting Recommendations

Feedback on National Urban Policy Goals

The five goals (liveability, equitable, productive, sustainable, and resilient) are supported. There is opportunity in this section to expand on the role of water within the 'factors that can determine...' listings, i.e. the highlighting the importance of secure and affordable water services to meeting productivity, liveability and equity goals.

Feedback on the National Urban Policy Objectives

Objective 1: No-one and no place left behind

This objective is supported. Consider inclusion in the discussion that amenity-focused urban water policy/planning and IWM can help address the need for accessible active open space to support health, recreation, social cohesion, and inclusion. IWM can enable opportunities to improve the resilience of sporting infrastructure through innovative collaborations between water authorities and facilities managers, for example by supplying water for irrigation from alternative sources (storm water, recycled water or rainwater). This future-proofs green infrastructure under a drying climate or drought and consequently ensures long-term participation opportunities and equitable access to these assets. Investment in supporting infrastructure should include alternative water networks to support green assets.

Objective 2: All people belong and are welcome

This objective is supported. The Victorian Government's *Waterways of the West CALD Toolkit for Practitioners* is an award-winning initiative to foster engagement with culturally and linguistically diverse communities in Melbourne's west. It supports action at the local level to address barriers in knowledge and engagement with waterways, so that all members of the community feel welcome and have ownership over their local waterways. The Victorian urban waterway management program also identifies opportunities to preserve First Nations Cultural Heritage and protection of culturally important sites and landmarks.

Objective: Our urban areas are safe

This objective is supported. Approaches to management of urban waterways by the Victorian Government and waterway managers are emphasising the importance of community safety in approaches to prioritisation.

There is an opportunity to strengthen the discussion of this objective by noting that:

- There is a need to enhance the resilience of active and passive open space to climate extremes, which can be supported by IWM approaches to use water effectively in the urban landscape. IWM planning incorporates stormwater management practices and water-sensitive urban design (WSUD) into urban developments that manage flood risk – by reducing, reusing and recycling treated urban stormwater runoff. It achieves this through implementing WSUD assets that promote such things as infiltration (e.g. raingardens) and stormwater harvesting (e.g. retention ponds). These are multi-beneficial solutions that also serve to rehabilitate and protect urban waterways. IWM solutions can equally address urban heat challenges through the application of blue-green infrastructure that supports vegetation, tree canopy cover (e.g. passively irrigated street trees) and WSUD assets that keep water in the landscape (e.g.

constructed wetlands). These are shown to have significant impact on reducing urban heat, particularly when used in the replacement of grey infrastructure.

- Embedding amenity into urban waterway planning and management, opens up areas to increased visitation and recreation which improves the perception of safety within these spaces. Studies have shown cooler greener spaces and improved amenity can result in decreased antisocial behaviour.

Objective 4: Our urban areas are sustainable

This objective is supported. The Victorian Government is committed to the sustainability of urban waterways and aims to ensure both long-term the health of waterways and their connected ecosystems, as well as the ongoing availability of a safe and sustainable resource.

IWM can support biodiversity outcomes by using innovative water management solutions that deliver projects that improve habitat connectivity and the ecological health of waterways and riparian vegetation. Additionally, the cooling benefits of WSUD assets reduce urban heat island effect, providing critical shade and transpiration effects, and in turn, reduce energy consumption for climate control.

Sustainable human settlements make efficient use of existing water resources. Water efficiency reduces our reliance on energy intensive water supplies and reduces the need to construct new water supply augmentations. Reduced hot water use reduces energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions.

We recommend collaboration with state, territory and local governments to include the following water efficiency initiatives:

- Continue to improve the water efficiency of fixtures and appliances through Water Efficiency Labelling Standards (WELS) and national regulations.
- Investment in incentives for existing households and buildings to improve their energy **and water efficiency** and sustainability.

We support the proposed investment in sustainability initiatives including nature-based solutions, green spaces, green roofs and walls, wetlands and stormwater treatment and re-iterate the collaborative investment opportunities identified in this area in Victoria through the IWM and urban waterways programs. These opportunities include stormwater harvesting solutions that can provide water for urban cooling and greening as well as be essential to protect the health and amenity of urban waterways from the harmful impacts of additional runoff from urban areas.

Objective 5: Our urban environments and communities promote health and wellbeing

This objective is supported. There are proven public health benefits through improving the amenity and recreational value of green and blue spaces. The COVID-19 global pandemic raised numerous challenges and opportunities for the role, importance, use and design of green and blue spaces. Urban waterways, riparian corridors and adjacent parklands can connect people to nature and provide respite and a sense of escape within the heart of our towns and cities. Importantly these spaces are local and free enabling equity in access irrespective of socio-economic status, fostering a sense of community, belonging and connection with fellow residents.

An IWM approach can place the community at the centre of water-sensitive urban planning. This can directly enhance the resilience of active open space by implementing alternative water source irrigation which futureproofs the watering regime of sporting facilities in uncertain climate scenarios.

IWM also directly influences the integration of green-blue infrastructure into urban planning by offering water-sensitive solutions that enhance cooling and shading objectives to encourage active transport opportunities.

Objective 6: Our urban areas promote productivity

This objective is supported.

Regional Investment Framework:

Victoria's larger regional cities are already experiencing rapid population growth and urban expansion and this will continue in the years ahead. These cities and towns, as well as the smaller settlements, are also at an increased risk of exposure to harsher weather events like floods, droughts, bushfires and extreme heat weather. This combination of pressures presents time-sensitive opportunities to invest in place-based IWM planning that is locally driven and sensitive to social, environmental, economic and cultural values.

Investing in sustainability initiatives:

DEECA's IWM Program invests in projects across the state that incorporate the sustainability goals and objectives outlined in the National Urban Policy. Across Victoria, there is a growing number of projects that are using IWM approaches to deliver projects that meet community expectations around liveability, recreation, environment, resilience and Traditional Owner values. IWM is now the accepted method to deliver these projects given the inherent inclusivity and collaboration component to management and planning of water-related outcomes. The challenge for IWM now is to deliver these sustainable outcomes at scale. The National Urban Policy presents a significant opportunity to partner with the Australian Government to encourage investment in IWM planning and delivery at the regional, state and national levels.

Possible actions

- Explicitly encourage IWM and urban waterway management as the approach to address water-related challenges that are relevant to the National Urban Policy objectives articulated in this submission.
- Support collaboration and investment at all scales in IWM planning and delivery to ensure that water-related urban planning is responsive to the social, environmental, economic and cultural values of each city and town.

Thank you for your consideration of our feedback.

Yours sincerely,

Melinda Knapp

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Water and Catchments / Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action.