

Monitoring Victoria's Water Resources

Tabled 25 May 2016

This presentation provides an overview of the Victorian Auditor-General's report, *Monitoring Victoria's Water Resources*.

Background

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Our way of life, the diversity of our aquatic and marine ecosystems and the success of many of our industries, including fisheries and tourism, rely heavily on high environmental water quality.

Long-term monitoring of water quality is critical to understanding the condition and health of Victoria's natural waterways and bays, and to the early detection of and response to emerging problems.

It is also critical to assessing the effectiveness of policies and programs to improve water quality, and the state's significant investment in the health of waterways and bays.

Background

Programs and approaches to long-term water quality monitoring have evolved significantly since their inception in Victoria in the early 1970s.



Source: North East Catchment Management Authority.

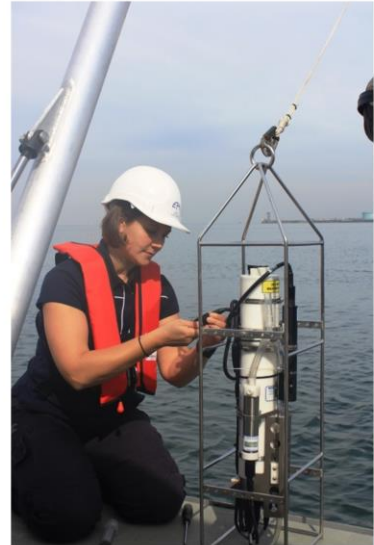


Photo courtesy of EPA.

Programs and approaches to long-term water quality monitoring have evolved significantly since their inception in Victoria in the early 1970s, and it is now more than 30 years since the first steps were taken to establish a systematic and coordinated approach to monitoring the state's water resources.

What we looked at

We examined:

- actions arising from the Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning's (DELWP) 2015 internal audit
- efficiency and effectiveness of long-term monitoring by Melbourne Water (MW) and the Environment Protection Authority Victoria (EPA) in the Port Phillip and Western Port region.

Port Phillip and Western Port catchment region



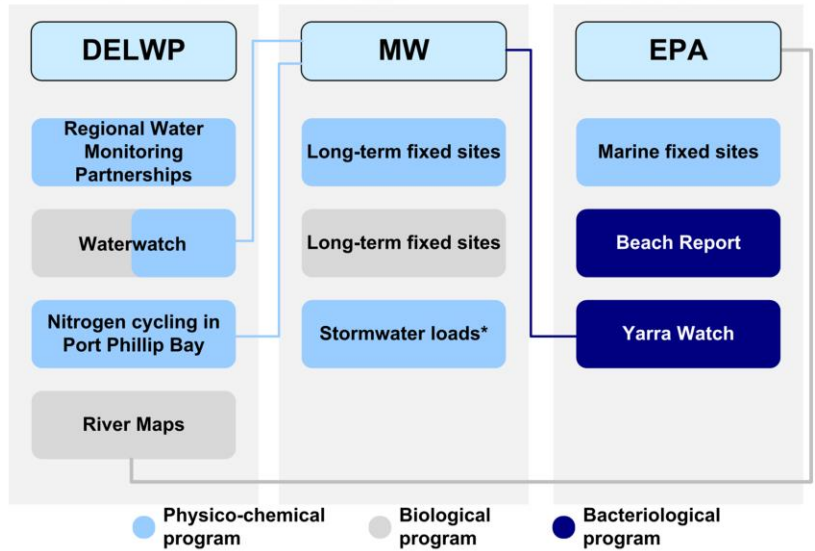
Source: www.ppwcma.vic.gov.au

This audit looked at the Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning's actions to address the problems its 2015 internal audit of its water quality monitoring network had identified.

It also assessed the efficiency and effectiveness of long-term water quality monitoring by Melbourne Water and the Environment Protection Authority Victoria (EPA) in the Port Phillip and Western Port region, because this was not examined as part of the department's internal audit.

Well-planned programs lacking coordination

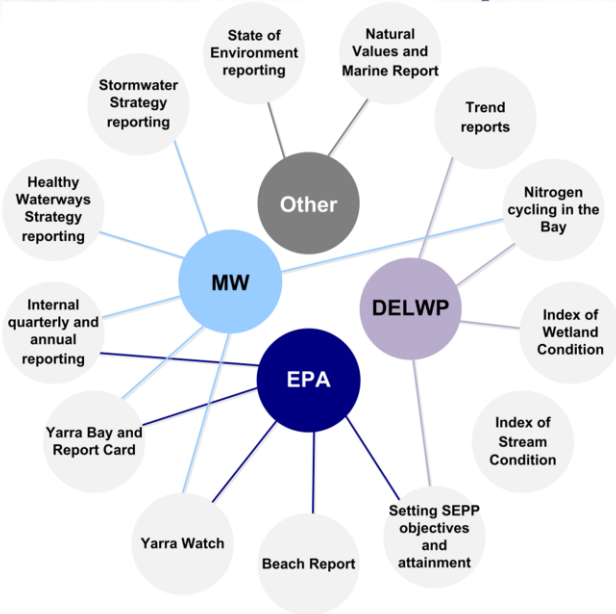
- Programs are well planned and implemented in the Port Phillip and Western Port region.
- However, they operate in isolation rather than as an organised and coordinated network.



Note: Lines indicate program coordinated between two agencies.

We found that, although individual long-term programs are generally well planned and implemented in the Port Phillip and Western Port region, they operate in isolation rather than as an organised and coordinated network of programs designed to collectively meet statewide policy objectives.

Unclear roles, responsibilities and aims



Unclear monitoring and reporting roles and responsibilities.

A lead agency would ensure a formalised cooperative approach to program planning, data use, reporting and evaluation.

Monitoring and reporting roles and responsibilities and the aims of individual monitoring programs are not always clear. The link between these programs and policy objectives and targets is unclear.

This is mainly a result of past poor coordination between the three responsible agencies, and no lead agency being assigned to ensure a formalised cooperative approach to program planning, data use, reporting and evaluation across the region, as in the other nine catchment regions where the department has this role.

Understanding long-term trends in water quality

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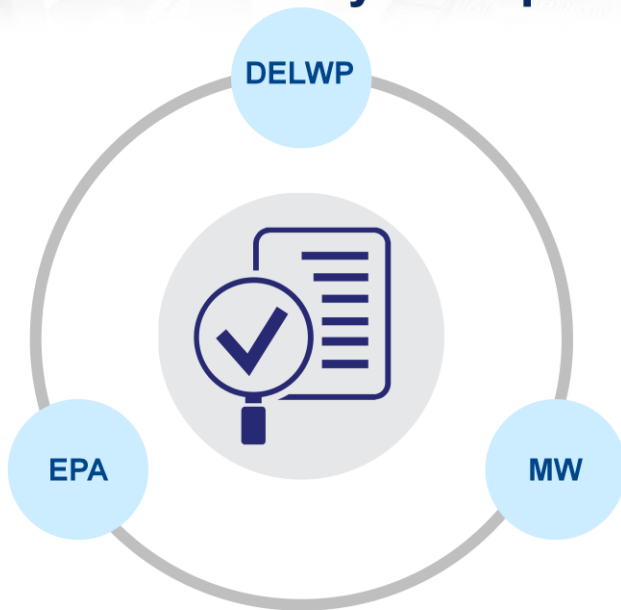
Agencies cannot currently assure government and the community that programs improve long-term water quality effectively and efficiently.

The key risk associated with this approach is that agencies cannot currently provide assurance to government or the community that the current set of monitoring programs, and the use and reporting of their data, provides a comprehensive view of the long-term trends in the quality of our waterways and bays.

It also reduces assurance that key policy initiatives and waterway works improve long-term water quality effectively and efficiently.

Work underway to improve long-term monitoring

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Agencies have:

- agreed about the main barriers to effective long-term water quality monitoring
- developed a joint agency action plan.

Encouragingly, the audited agencies have already, individually and collectively, taken a range of actions that will address the problems identified and improve long-term water quality monitoring throughout the state.

During this audit, the department EPA and Melbourne Water engaged with VAGO and each other constructively and positively.

This led to early agreement about the main barriers to effective long-term water quality monitoring and the development of a joint agency action plan that, when put into effect, will address the recommendations made in this audit.

This has already improved coordination and collaboration among the agencies, which have shown a strong commitment to improving programs in all of the state's catchment regions.

Recommendations

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1. Improve governance:



- Cross-agency committee
- Overarching monitoring, evaluation and reporting framework
- Effective, efficient data sharing
- Review of data collection processes
- Explore feasibility of a publicly accessible report card



2. Implement actions from DELWP internal audit



3. Review time frames for Environmental Assessment Reform program

We made three recommendations aimed at improving governance, ensuring that actions are implemented from the department's internal audit, and that time frames are reviewed for the implementation of the Environmental Assessment Reform program.

For further information, please view the full report on
our website: www.audit.vic.gov.au

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