

## Protecting our waterways is everyone's responsibility

Protecting the environment, including our waterways (rivers and streams), is a responsibility shared by government, industry, businesses, communities and individuals. Landholders, in particular, have a responsibility to manage their activities to avoid polluting waterways.

### What can landholders do?

Prevent stock access to waterways by:

- fencing off waterways
- providing stock with an alternative drinking water supply
- providing adequate shade in grazing paddocks.

### Why prevent stock access to waterways?

Preventing stock access to waterways is an integral part of good land management. It helps protect:

- the health of our waterways
- our drinking water supplies
- the land and vegetation adjacent to waterways.

### Poor quality drinking water can affect public health as well as stock health.



*The condition of the adjacent land and vegetation has a great influence on river health and water quality.*

Photo courtesy of West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority

### Need more information?

Your local water corporation, Landcare group or catchment management authority can provide further information and advice. Financial assistance may be available for fencing, the creation and maintenance of vegetated land alongside watercourses, and off-stream watering points.

For contact details, refer to your local telephone directory, or:

- for your local water corporation or catchment management authority visit [www.ourwater.vic.gov.au/governance/](http://www.ourwater.vic.gov.au/governance/) or call the Department of Sustainability and Environment's customer service centre on **136 186**.
- for your local landcare group, visit [www.landcarevic.net.au/](http://www.landcarevic.net.au/) or call your catchment management authority.

For more information on the benefits of fencing off rivers and maintaining riverbank vegetation, refer to the Department of Sustainability and Environment's pamphlet '*Managing river banks for better farms and rivers*', available from [www.dse.vic.gov.au](http://www.dse.vic.gov.au) or the customer service centre on **136 186**.

To find out if a natural waterway on your property is sourced for town drinking water, contact your local water corporation.

For further information on public health impacts of stock accessing waterways contact the Department of Health on **1300 761 874**.

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Cover photo: Leanne Wells.

# Protect our waters, protect our health

Highlighting the importance of preventing stock access to natural waterways



## What happens when stock have access to waterways?

Stock accessing natural waterways affect the **adjacent environment** by depleting vegetation and increasing the risk of erosion.

Stock accessing natural waterways affect **river health** and **water quality** by introducing:

- **pathogens** from stock faeces, causing an increased risk of disease
- **nutrients** from stock faeces and urine, causing an increased risk of blue-green algal blooms
- **sediments** from erosion and the disturbance of stream banks, which harms aquatic life and clogs streams.

Better water quality at the source means that water treatment is likely to be more effective and less chemicals are needed.

**Before:** An example of poor land management practice causing depletion of land, natural vegetation and water quality.



**After:** The same waterway after good land management practices have been implemented.



Photos courtesy of West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority

## Why protect vegetation alongside waterways?

Healthy vegetation on riverbanks is important to protect the health of the adjoining waterways.

Vegetation slows the overland movement of run-off water and acts as a filter or buffer to trap sediments, nutrients and other contaminants.

The roots of vegetation alongside waterways reinforce the soil, thereby preventing erosion.

These factors improve water quality so that:

- water pumped from the waterway to stock watering troughs will be of better quality, which is better for stock
- water diverted to drinking water supplies will need less treatment and carry a lower risk of causing outbreaks of disease in humans.

Planned management of land adjacent to natural waterways is an essential practice of sustainable property management.

### What are the benefits?

Preventing stock access to waterways by **fencing off rivers and streams** and **maintaining riverbank vegetation** can yield numerous benefits, including:

- healthier waterways
- improved water quality
- decreased erosion
- retention of soil nutrients
- decreased algal growth
- reduced risk of stock injury and loss
- provision of windbreaks and shelter
- improved biodiversity and healthier ecosystems
- Healthier, better looking and therefore more valuable land.

## How can stock in waterways affect public health?

**Pathogens in drinking water pose a serious risk to human health.**

Drinking water for many towns in Victoria is sourced from natural waterways. If this source becomes contaminated, the safety of our drinking water supplies can be affected.

Farm animal waste (faeces) contains disease-causing microorganisms (pathogens). Calf faeces in particular, contains higher quantities of pathogens. If they contaminate our drinking water these pathogens can cause serious outbreaks of disease.

- Drinking contaminated water affects the health of people and animals.
- Stock, particularly calves, should be kept out of waterways.
- The actions of landholders can have a significant impact on the drinking water supply of downstream communities.



Photo: Leanne Wells



Photo: Julie Eichner