The Tarago River is an important river for many native plants and animals, including the Australian grayling, platypus and blackfish. In addition, provides a source of water for farmers in its lower reaches.

The Tarago river has its headwaters in the Tarago State Forest, it then winds its way downstream to join the Bunyip Main Drain and flows into Western Port Bay. The lower reaches were modified and straightened in the 19th century.

The upper reaches of the Tarago and Bunyip have high ecological value providing fantastic vegetation and habitat for water bugs supporting native fish such as Australian grayling and black fish. It is also home to the iconic platypus.

Tarago reservoir was built in 1968 to supply water to Westernport and Mornington Peninsula. The reservoir changed the pattern of river flows as the majority of water was stored for supply, instead of flowing downstream

In 2009, the Tarago River Environmental Entitlement was granted. This is a right to release water from the reservoir to help keep the Tarago river system healthy. This release of water is known as an environmental flow.

Melbourne Water work’s with the Victorian Environmental Water Holder to manage this environmental water. We only make small or medium sized releases, and will not create flood events.

So how do we know what water the animals and plants need to stay healthy?

For example we know that Blackfish reside in slow moving water among submerged logs and debris in forested areas. Low flows are required to maintain their favourite habitat - deep, shady pools.

The platypus is a unique aquatic animal that feeds in the water and relies on smaller flows to provide good habitat and food. We may make a release in the summer to improve water quality and habitat for water bugs which is a great food source for the platypus.

We monitor the flows in the river and if the flows do not occur naturally then a release from the reservoir may be made.

So how do we plan to use the water?

Melbourne Water plans and manages the use of environmental water working with the Victorian Environmental Water Holder,

The Victorian Environmental Water Holder (VEWH) holds and manages a set volume of environmental water that is used to improve the health of rivers and wetlands across the State, including the Tarago River.

We use social media, community bulletins and our webpage to communicate our releases.

The river still receives some natural flows; either when the reservoir spills, or from rainfall runoff downstream of the reservoir, but these natural flows are not enough.

We monitor flows and make releases to mimic a natural event.

The Tarago River is starting to return to good health and has improved since our first environmental release in 2011.

You can do your bit when you visit the Tarago. Enjoy and marvel at its range of plants and animals. Take your litter home and if you are lucky enough to see a platypus, please let us know.

Take your litter home and if you are lucky enough to see a platypus, please let us know via platypusspot.org