

Southern Rural Water

Merrimu Reservoir Recreational Area Management Plan DRAFT

June 2025



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Acknowledgement to Country

Southern Rural Water acknowledges and recognises Aboriginal people as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land and waters on which we work and live and we respect their deep and ongoing connection to Country.

We commit to foster mutual understanding and respect, to build trust and to develop meaningful working relationships with the Traditional Owner groups and Aboriginal communities across our region.

We will work with Traditional Owners to understand their priorities and objectives and learn how we can help them to achieve their goals. This will enable us to better consider the values and needs of these important stakeholders in our decision-making and actions.

The rivers, waterways and deep water that support life and communities across our region have been doing so for millennia, for thousands of generations of First Nations peoples. Aboriginal culture remains deeply tied to this timeline and to Country, which includes land, air and water.

Their long history reminds us that when we consider the challenges we face now with a changing climate, the Gunaikurnai, Bunurong, Wurundjeri, Wadawurrung, Eastern Maar, Gunditjmara peoples, and the many other First Nations peoples still seeking formal recognition across our region, have lived through extreme climate change for tens of thousands of years.

As we play our part in managing this precious resource for customers and communities, we know that we have much to learn. We will continue to seek ways to build mutual understanding and respect as we work with Traditional Owner groups across our region to honour their knowledge and ongoing connection.

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About Southern Rural Water

Southern Rural Water (SRW) is proud to be the lifeblood of the agricultural economy of southern Victoria. With assets valued at \$2.1 billion, our irrigation districts deliver water from catchment to farm gate. As regulators of surface and groundwater, we provide fair, equitable and sustainable access to water resources. Our services support farmers to generate high quality, fresh and local produce, much of which ends up on tables across the globe ready to be enjoyed by consumers.

We supply water to irrigators, power generators, urban water corporations and we work with the Victorian Environmental Water Holder alongside Catchment Management Authorities and Melbourne Water to manage the release of environmental flows.

We service an area of 88,000 square kilometres, stretching from the South Australian to the New South Wales border and from the Great Dividing Range to the Victorian coastline.

We operate seven major dams, eight diversion weirs, three irrigation districts and manage take and use licences for waterways, licences relating to catchment dams and farm dam registration.

We recognise the important role we play as stewards of water resources, ensuring that we manage them sustainably for the long term.

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Introduction

The purpose of this Merrimu Reservoir Recreational Area Management Plan (**‘the plan’**) is to provide clear guidelines for managing recreational activities at Merrimu Reservoir while minimising impacts on water quality, the environment, and SRW assets and operations.

The plan provides a comprehensive and practical framework for SRW to manage recreational activities at Merrimu Reservoir in a way that protects the natural environment, maintains water quality, and supports the safe enjoyment by visitors.

Key values referenced in the development of the plan include:

- Environmental protection;
- Recreational opportunities;
- Cultural heritage;
- Economic benefits, and
- Community engagement.

The plan details permitted recreational activities, management objectives, designated set-aside areas to balance use and conservation, and highlights the variety of stakeholders involved in the management of Merrimu Reservoir. Further, the plan references the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action’s (DEECA) guidance materials to ensure sustainable use and the protection of water resources.

Recreational Area Management Plans (RAMPs)

The *Water (Recreational Area) Regulations 2023* (**‘the Regulations’**) apply to approximately 40 water storages across Victoria. These storages have been determined as recreational areas by the Minister for Water in accordance with section 122ZA of the *Water Act 1989*.

The Regulations provide for the control, management and use of recreational areas, as well as provide for infringement offences and penalties. These infringement penalties were not available in the superseded Recreational Area Model By-law 2012. The Regulations came into operation on 19 August 2023, replacing SRW’s Recreational Area By-law.

A key feature of the Regulations is the requirement for Water Corporations to develop management plans for recreational areas under their management. These plans support the control, management and use of recreational areas and provide for the ability to identify infringement offences and penalties.

For further information on the *Water (Recreational Area) Regulations 2023* visit:

<https://www.water.vic.gov.au/our-programs/recreational-values-of-victorias-water/recreational-area-regulations>

In addition to the Regulations, SRW manages the recreational use of this storage in accordance with the:

- *Water Act 1989*;
- *Marine Safety Act 2010*; and
- *Safe Drinking Water Act 2003*.

The plan serves as a guiding document for SRW, local communities, and stakeholders in managing recreational activities at Merrimu Reservoir.

It provides clear guidelines and actions to enable the sustainable use of the Merrimu Reservoir recreational area while protecting its natural and cultural values.

It is intended to be a living document, to be reviewed and updated when appropriate based on the monitoring of recreational activities and in consultation with key stakeholders.

About Merrimu Reservoir

Merrimu Reservoir is situated on Pyrites Creek at Coimadai in the Shire of Moorabool, approximately 10 km northeast of Bacchus Marsh and 50 km from Melbourne, Victoria. The reservoir serves as a critical component of the Werribee Basin water supply system, providing drinking water to Melton and Bacchus Marsh, and irrigation water to the Werribee Irrigation District.

The reservoir was constructed in three stages between 1969 and 1986, culminating in a total storage capacity of approximately 32,000 megalitres (ML). To supplement its storage capacity, two small diversion weirs and two tunnels from neighbouring catchments were built, forming the three main stages of Merrimu Reservoir's construction.

Merrimu Reservoir is managed by SRW and is part of the integrated irrigation system comprising Pykes Creek Reservoir, Melton Reservoir, and Merrimu Reservoir. These storages collectively supply water from both the Werribee and Lerderderg River systems to the Werribee Irrigation District.

While Merrimu Reservoir is primarily a closed catchment area, it offers a quiet recreational space for visitors. The Merrimu recreational area is open daily from 8:30 AM to 4:30 PM and features picnic facilities for day visitors.

Merrimu reservoir is a closed catchment and reservoir, where no water based activities are permitted and visitors are not permitted on the land surrounding the reservoir. Similarly, SRW prohibits fires within all of its recreational areas at all times.

Objectives of the Plan

The objectives of this management plan for recreational areas at Merrimu Reservoir are to:

- Protect the land, services and facilities in the area;
- Protect and maintain water quality in waterways in the area;
- Conserve and preserve flora, fauna and habitat in the area, including the biodiversity of that flora, fauna and habitat;
- Protect the health and safety of visitors to the area;
- Promote the enjoyment and recreation of visitors to the area;
- Protect and promote Aboriginal cultural heritage and Aboriginal intangible heritage in the area;
- Protect and promote any other heritage features in the area;
- Facilitate the participation of Traditional Owner groups in the management of the area, including in accordance with any agreements under the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010* that apply to the area;
- Ensure that the area is managed and used in a way that respects and upholds the rights and aspirations of Traditional Owner groups who have a connection to the area.

SRW adopts in full the objectives specified within Regulation 7 of the *Water (Recreational Area) Regulations 2023*.

Traditional Owner Rights and Participation

This plan has been developed in full recognition and support of Traditional Owner rights to self-determination. It welcomes input outside western frameworks, respecting the time and decision-making processes of the Traditional Owners of the land encompassing the Merrimu Reservoir, being the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people. To minimise pressures surrounding cultural load, a review of the plans can be initiated by the Registered Aboriginal Party (RAP) groups at any time under the Regulations.

Water corporations are subject to agreements under the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010* and the *Native Title Act 1993*. This includes commitment to work in partnership with relevant Traditional Owner groups. The Regulations provide for the incorporation of policy and legal frameworks that recognise Traditional Owners' rights recognised under these Acts.

Section in progress – to be completed following completion of traditional owner involvement in the development of the plan (Unearthed Heritage input required).

Consultation

Section in progress – to be completed following completion of traditional owner involvement in the development of the plan (Unearthed Heritage input required).

Location

Merrimu Reservoir

Merrimu Reservoir is located on Pyrites Creek, a tributary of the Werribee River, 10kms north-east of Bacchus Marsh and approximately 50kms from Melbourne.

Figure 1 below illustrates the broad locational context of Merrimu Reservoir.

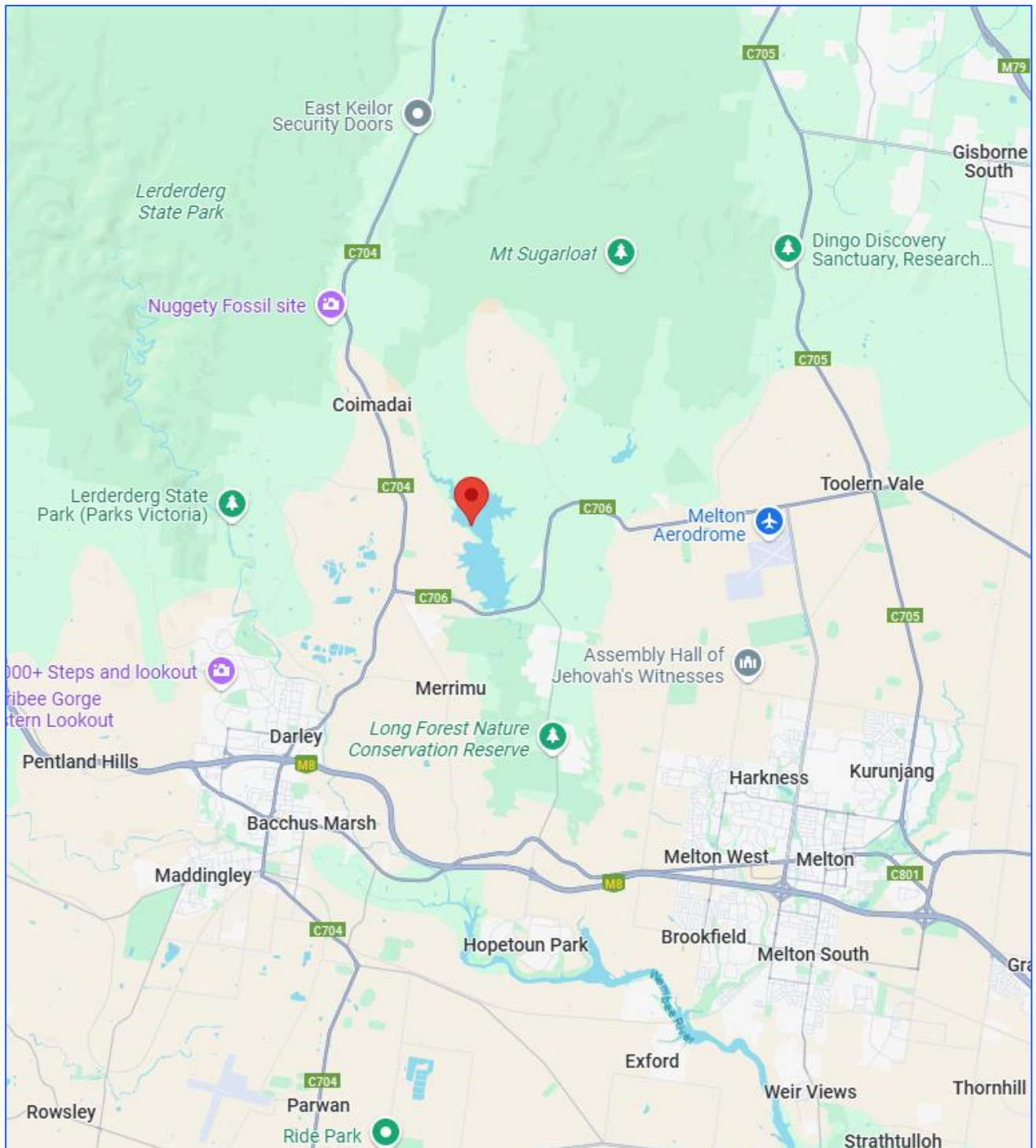


Figure 1: Merrimu Reservoir Location Map. Source: Google Maps

Merrimu Reservoir Recreational Facilities Area

The Lake Merrimu recreational area is a fenced and gated park located to the south-west of the reservoir. The fenced area is approximately 3.35 hectares (ha) in area and includes:

- A ring-road with at-grade, unmarked car parking.
- A World War 1 Memorial hut with plaques and a stone monument.
- Amenities block.

- Two covered seating areas.
- Four uncovered seating areas.
- Two barbeques.
- Children's playground including swings, slide, and monkey bars.

The water body (Merrimu Reservoir) is a closed catchment and reservoir with entry and all water activities prohibited.

Figure 2 illustrates the Merrimu Reservoir Recreational Facilities Area, being the only area permitted for public access.



Figure 2: Merrimu Reservoir Recreational Facilities Area (Only Area Permitted to the Public) Source: Google Maps

Facilities Available

Facilities available at Merrimu Reservoir are summarised below in Figure 3.



Figure 3: Available Facilities

Recreational Activities

Public recreational areas managed by SRW are popular places for visitors to connect with the natural environment, and to undertake a variety of recreational activities. SRW places the highest priority on safety at the storages we manage.

Prohibited activities generally pose a risk to water quality, the environment, cultural heritage and to public safety. Any activity that is not specifically listed in this Section should be considered as prohibited, unless permission is explicitly granted by SRW. All activities must be generally in accordance with the *Water (Recreational Area) Regulations 2023*.

Visitors must follow all instructions indicated on any official signage in and around the recreational areas. The removal, replacement, damaging or harm to any native flora or fauna, or any cultural heritage is prohibited.

Table 1 below summarises the activities permitted and prohibited, including any applicable conditions, at Merrimu Reservoir.

Table 1: Permitted or Prohibited Activities

Activity	Permitted (✓) or Prohibited (X)	Conditions / Notes
Dog walking	✓	Dogs must be on a lead and owners must keep them under control at all times. Any waste must be cleaned.
Picnic and barbequing	✓	Permitted in / on designated BBQ facilities only. No open fire BBQs are to be lit in SRW public recreation areas.
Organised events	✓	You are welcome to enjoy our recreational facilities with your family and friends through organised events. You must have written permission to hold any organised event. To obtain permission, please review Appendix A – Event Application Guideline (December 2024) and email all required information to srw@srw.com.au
Fishing, boating and water activities	X	Visitors are not permitted on the land surrounding Merrimu Reservoir outside of the designated day recreation area. All water activities are prohibited.
Camping / caravanning	X	There are no designated camping areas.
Campfires / open fires	X	As part of its commitment to adopting the best practice environmental measures, SRW prohibits fires at its recreation areas at all times.
Other animals	X	Bringing other animals to SRW public recreation areas is prohibited, unless permitted to do so by SRW.
Sound producing devices	X	Operating a sound producing device is prohibited unless permitted to do so by SRW.
Drone flights	X	Permits may be able to be obtained. Please contact SRW for more information. If permission is granted, drone safety rules must be adhered to. For more information visit: https://www.casa.gov.au/
Bathing / washing	X	To maintain water quality, cleaning agents such as soap, shampoo, conditioner, toothpaste or detergent must not to be used.
4WD and trailbikes	X	Vehicles and trail bikes are only allowed on public roads. All vehicles must be roadworthy, registered and users must be licensed. Road rules must be obeyed at all times.
Hunting	X	There are no designated areas for hunting.
Prospecting, fossicking or digging	X	The removal of rocks, material or vegetation is prohibited within SRW public recreation areas.
Access Outside Hours	X	Access outside of the hours of 8:30am to 4:30pm (daily), is prohibited.
Leave rubbish	X	All rubbish must be taken and disposed off-site.

Undertake any dangerous activity including (but not limited to) abseiling, parafling, shooting, archery, wind-surfing or the like	X	Activities that may endanger participants, visitors, the general public or the environment are not permitted at any SRW recreation areas.
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For more information on recreational activities and facilities, please observe all signs and directions at SRW's storages and visit SRW website at: <https://www.srw.com.au/recreation/locations/merrimu-reservoir>

Set Aside Areas

To accommodate the diverse range of recreational activities that occur at Merrimu Reservoir, SRW may use 'set aside areas' to enable flexible or tailored management of the area, or part of an area, under the Regulations while ensuring the health, safety and enjoyment of visitors.

Regulation 14 (3) specifies that an Authority may 'set aside' any area for any activity not otherwise specified in the Regulations as permitted, restricted or prohibited. This occurs if the Authority considers this is necessary and consistent with the management plan for a recreational area, including its objectives and procedures.

Publishing a Determination of a Set Aside Area

A determination of a set aside area will be published on the SRW website and there will also be signs and notices placed on-site to demarcate the area, as far as practicable.

It is an offence not to comply with the conditions of determinations in set aside areas. If SRW revokes or amends a set aside area, any previous sign or notice that has been displayed under the Regulations must be removed or amended to reflect the revocation or amendment.

Signage for Set Aside Areas

Signs or notices will:

- Be displayed in a manner that is likely to be seen by any person affected by the determination;
- Indicate the area that is temporarily closed or set aside by the determination; and
- Where applicable, state the activities that are prohibited, restricted or permitted by the determination and any conditions specified in the determination.

Merrimu Reservoir Set Aside Areas

Merrimu Reservoir is a closed catchment where:

- Access to the public is prohibited on areas outside the Merrimu Reservoir Facilities Area (as defined above in Figure 2); and
- All water activities are prohibited (as indicated in Table 1 of this plan).

For more details about prohibited actions or activities, please refer to Table 1 of this plan.

Prohibited Areas

The water body (Merrimu Reservoir) is a closed catchment and reservoir, and all water activities are prohibited.

The public is only permitted in the Merrimu Reservoir Recreational Facilities Area, as defined in Figure 2 of this plan.

Temporary Closures

Temporary closures of SRW recreational areas may occur on occasion as outlined in the Regulations.

A temporary closure will generally and primarily occur to:

- Support the safe management of events such as floods and fires;
- Allow for operational or maintenance works to take place;
- Manage amenities and access during periods of low water levels;
- Manage safety during periods of high water levels;
- Rationalise maintenance requirements during times of low visitation; and
- Manage safety during water quality events such as algal blooms.

In the event of an immediate temporary closure, SRW will:

- Publish the determination of a temporary closure on the SRW website and promote it through social media; and
- Where possible, display signs or notices on-site providing details of the temporary closure determination.

Any temporary closures will be communicated with impacted parties by SRW as soon as practicable, in accordance with the Regulations.

Events and Permits

Events

From time to time, people may wish to hold events at our recreational facilities including festivals, birthday parties and weddings. We cannot close our recreational facilities for private events, and you cannot book sites.

You must have permission to hold any organised entertainment, rally, boating event or regatta, festival, public meeting, training class or demonstration, wedding or similar ceremony, or private functions for 30 or more people.

To obtain permission to hold an event, please review **Appendix A of this plan (Event Application Guideline – December 2024)** and email all required information to SRW at srw@srw.com.au.

Permits

Under the Regulations, water corporations may issue permits to provide for the effective, proactive and appropriate management of activities within recreational areas. The permit system outlined in the Regulations provides a framework where a person can apply to enter and use a recreational area, or an area within a recreational area, for a specified purpose and for a specified period.

Permits can be provided for the following activities under the Regulations:

- Enter the recreational area at a time when it is closed for public access (r.23(2));
- Access to a temporarily closed recreational area (r.29(2));
- Remain in a prohibited access area (requires express permission) (r.36(1));
- Remain in a restricted access area (requires express permission) (r.36(2)(b));
- Possess or use a restricted item in a recreational area (r.38(5));

- Behave in a manner that causes, or is likely to cause, a nuisance to any other person (requires express permission) (r.39(2)(b));
- Operate a sound producing device or any other equipment in a recreational area (r.41(4));
- Light or maintain a fire in a recreational area during a period in which there is no fire restriction in force for that area (requires express permission) (r.42(2)(d));
- Disturb, remove or cause any harm to fauna in a recreational area (requires express permission) (r.46(5)(b));
- Undertake timber harvesting operations (r.47(2)(b));
- Move, remove or cause damage to flora or other vegetation in a recreational area (requires express permission) (r.47(2)(c));
- Damage, destroy or remove a rock in a recreational area if the person has express permission to damage or destroy rocks in, or remove rocks from, a recreational area (requires express permission) (r.50(3));
- Dig into or remove the ground or ground cover from a recreational area, or bring any ground or ground cover into a recreational area (express permission) (r.51(3)(a));
- Bring an animal other than a dog, a horse or livestock into, or allow any such animal to enter and remain in, a recreational area (r.54(3));
- Allow an animal to enter and remain in a recreational area (under licence) (r.55(2)(a));
- Bring a dog into an area within a recreational area where dogs are prohibited (r.56(4));
- Bring a horse into, or allow a horse to enter and remain in, a recreational area (r.60(4));
- Bring livestock into, or allow livestock to enter and remain in, a recreational area (r.62(4));
- Erect or install a temporary or permanent structure in a recreational area (r.64(6));
- Enter, occupy or use a building or structure in a recreational area (r.65(3));
- Damage or destroy a temporary or permanent building or structure in a recreational area (r.66(4));
- Conduct an event in a recreational area (r.68(3)) (for example: entertainment, sporting or recreational event or show, rally, an organised boating event or regatta, a festival, tour, fete or public meeting, a demonstration, training class or other event, a wedding or celebration of civil union ceremony or event or a private function for 30 or more persons);
- Conduct a commercial activity in the recreational area (r.69(4));
- Make a commercial recording in the recreational area (film or audio, or radio broadcasts) (r.70(4));
- Soliciting money or collecting money, erecting a sign for the purpose of advertising, handing out or disseminating advertising, commercial or promotional material and delivering an address (r.71(6));
- Camp in the recreational area (r.74(4));
- Cause the vehicle, vessel or aircraft to enter the recreational area (requires express permission) (r.79(2)(b));
- Refuel a vehicle or vessel in the recreational area (requires express permission) (r.81(2)(d));
- Sink or scuttle a vessel, jetty or pontoon, or carry out the salvage of a sunken vessel, jetty or pontoon in a recreational area (r.90(3));

- Camp overnight on a vessel in the recreational area (requires express permission) (r.94);
- Launch or land an aircraft or a remotely piloted aircraft or deliver a thing by an aircraft or a remotely piloted aircraft in a recreational area (requires express permission) (r.95(4)(b)).

Please review the Regulations for details of each permit if/as applicable.

Please note using and developing land may require other permits under legislation other than the Regulations. Proponents are responsible for compliance with all of their statutory obligations.

Express Permission

In some cases, the Regulations permit activities via 'express permission'. Express permission can be granted by permit, lease or licence. Express permission can also include a contract or other agreement, or any other authorisation provided for under the *Water Act 1989*. This may include a written agreement.

Under the Regulations, permits must remain in the holder's possession while engaging in the permitted activity or accessing an area authorised by the permit and produce the permit for inspection if requested to do so.

Permits can be varied or cancelled by either the holder or water corporation, and the water corporation can cancel a permit immediately as outlined in Regulation 19.

Permits and set aside areas can be used together or separately – to provide broader, more proactive management of these activities within recreational areas.

Compliance and Enforcement

The *Water (Recreational Area) Regulations 2023* introduced the ability for SRW to issue Penalty Infringement Notices (PINs) for offences under the Regulations.

Water corporations can issue PINs to users undertaking activities that are in breach of the Regulations. These include activities that may risk land and water services, water quality, the environment, or the health, safety and enjoyment of other users within a recreational area.

Monitoring and Evaluation

This plan will be reviewed every 10 years, or sooner as needed, to assess its effectiveness and make any necessary adjustments. This review process will involve:

- Traditional Owner engagement and an open feedback process based on the principles of self-determination;
- Monitoring and Evaluation: Regularly monitoring the impact of recreational activities on the environment and water quality;
- Regulatory Compliance: Ensuring compliance with DEECA's guidelines and any other relevant regulations;
- Community Feedback: Gathering input from local residents, recreational users, local government authorities (LGA's), special interest groups and other key stakeholders.

Implementation Plan

Table 2 provides a summary of the measures to be implemented to meet the objectives of this management plan.

Table 2: Implementation Plan

Objective	Actions to Meet Objectives	Implementation Timeframe	Responsibility
Protect the land, services and facilities in the area	Maintenance of facilities in accordance with O&M Manuals	Ongoing	SRW
	Development of Recreational Area Future Service Approach (including Service Standards)	2025-2026	
Protect and maintain water quality in waterways in the area	Public access is prohibited outside the Merrimu Reservoir Facilities Area (as defined in Figure 2) via the implementation of set aside areas. This allows the public to enjoy the beauty of Lake Merrimu and surrounds whilst minimising the risk of directly impacting its water quality.	Ongoing	SRW
	All water activities are prohibited (as indicated in Table 1 of this plan) via public information signage. This allows the public to enjoy the beauty of Lake Merrimu and surrounds whilst minimising the risk of directly impacting its water quality.		
	Visitors to take rubbish and clean after dogs, as per Table 1 (Permitted and Prohibited Activities) via public information signage.		
Conserve and preserve flora, fauna and habitat in the area, including the biodiversity of that flora, fauna and habitat	Public access is prohibited outside the Merrimu Reservoir Facilities Area (as defined in Figure 2) via the implementation of set aside areas. This allows the public to enjoy the beauty of Lake Merrimu and surrounds whilst minimising the risk of directly impacting the flora and fauna assets of the area.	Ongoing	SRW

	Visitors are made aware of their responsibility to protect the environment and this is supported / reinforced via public information signage.		
Protect the health and safety of visitors to the area	Public access is prohibited outside the Merrimu Reservoir Facilities Area (as defined in Figure 2) via the implementation of set aside areas. This allows the public to enjoy the beauty of Lake Merrimu and surrounds whilst minimising health and public safety risks.	Ongoing	SRW
Promote the enjoyment and recreation of visitors to the area	Inform visitors of what area (Figure 2), facilities (Figure 3) and activities (Table 1) are available/permitted, encouraging their use and enjoyment via clearly visible public information signage.	Ongoing	SRW
Protect and promote Aboriginal cultural heritage and Aboriginal intangible heritage in the area	*To be completed following TO engagement*		
Protect and promote any other heritage features in the area	*To be completed following TO engagement*		
Facilitate the participation of Traditional Owner groups in the management of that area, including in accordance with any agreements under the <i>Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010</i> that apply to the area	*To be completed following TO engagement*		
Ensure that the area is managed and used in a way that respects and upholds the rights and aspirations of Traditional Owner groups who have a connection to the area	*To be completed following TO engagement*		

Appendix A – Event Application Guideline (December 2024)

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Appendix B - Future Development Aspirations

Below is an assessment of existing assets and improvement timeframes as well as development aspirations associated with this recreational area.

Table 3: Quality Assessment of Existing Assets & Maintenance Timeframes

Merrimu Reservoir Recreational Reserve							
Element	Presence	Current Condition			Urgency of Improvement		
		Poor	Adequate	Good	0 – 1 year	1 – 5 years	5 – 10 years
Amenities block / facilities	✓			✓			✓
Sealed car parking	✓			✓			✓
Play equipment	✓			✓		✓	✓
Vehicular gate / barrier	✓			✓			✓
Table/s	✓			✓			✓
Barbecue/s	✓			✓			✓
Boat ramp	X						
Trailer parking spaces	X						

Development Aspirations

- **Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED)** – Incorporate Initiatives such as landscaping re-design, the inclusion of transparent structures, re-positioning of tables, shelters and other area feature elements, increased signage, erection of protection fencing and promoting community art or murals;
- **Placing additional Signage and an Entry Statement** – To make the site more inviting to the public;
- **Potential Incorporation of Lake Merrimu** – With due consideration to public safety. It can include water activities such as swimming, fishing, boating, etc.

- **Play Equipment Upgrade** – If RAMP incorporates Lake Merrimu and water based activities, to potentially introduce nature-based or water-themed play spaces to attract and accommodate families with young children, improving the site’s family-friendly appeal.
- **Landmark Feature Placement** – To be focal and located at centre of the park;
- **Water drinking Facilities Installation** - To encourage hikers and cyclists to visit and use this Recreational Area.

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