

# *Water in the Australian Curriculum: History*

This PDF is  
interactive. Click on  
underlined words  
and sentences to be  
directed to online  
resources.

## 1. BACKGROUND

---

The release of the Australian Curriculum: History for Foundation-Year 10 (F-10) and the Senior Secondary years provided an excellent opportunity for water agencies to promote student and teacher understanding about how water has shaped civilisations and how civilisations have used and impacted on water resources throughout history. Lessons from the past can inform sustainable water management in Australia today and into the future.

This short paper addresses the following questions:

1. What is the rationale that underpins the history curriculum? What clues does the history curriculum provide about the kinds of activities and teaching approaches it favours?
2. What opportunities exist for supporting schools to integrate water in the teaching and learning of history from Foundation to Year 12?
3. Which resources are already aligned or nearly aligned to the Australian Curriculum: History?
4. Where are the gaps in the current online water-related curriculum resources?

## 2. RATIONALE AND TEACHING APPROACH

---

The Australian Curriculum defines history as 'a disciplined process of inquiry into the past that develops students' curiosity and imagination. Awareness of history is an essential characteristic of any society, and historical knowledge is fundamental to understanding ourselves and others'. History helps students understand how the world works and what their role is and can be in the world. It 'promotes debate and encourages thinking about human values' (see footnote 1 on next page) and thus equips students for the world in which they live.

The intent of the Australian Curriculum: History is to build active and informed citizens who can develop opinions based on evidence, articulate and defend those opinions, and alter them in the face of new knowledge. In this way,

students build a sophisticated understanding of the broad patterns of history and of the role played by individuals and communities within those patterns of change and continuity.

The curriculum supports teachers in their efforts to target the distinct nature and developmental levels of their learners. It provides content, concepts and skills appropriate to the level of the students and supports connections across time, culture, ideas and students' personal experiences.

The curriculum seeks to develop students' understanding and use of historical concepts such as evidence, continuity and change, cause and effect, perspectives, empathy, significance and contestability. Teaching approaches are intended to be diverse and engaging; they are inquiry-based and include experimentation, role-play, imaginative inquiry and field visits.

In 2015, changes were made to the Australian Curriculum: F – 10 in response to the 2014 Review of the Australian Curriculum—particularly to the Humanities learning area. These changes are reflected in the v8.2 F-10 Curriculum and references to specific content descriptions in this report have been updated. The Australian Curriculum review addressed concerns about the volume of material expected to be covered in the primary years by replacing Geography, History, Civics and Citizenship and Business subjects with a single Foundation – Years 6/7 Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS) learning area. The information provided below has been updated to using the v8.2 Australian Curriculum for the HASS learning area Years F–6/7 and the History subject for Years 7–10.

Following the 2014 review, time was provided to allow schools in each state and territory to transition to the new version of the Australian Curriculum. Contact information for state-based implementation of the Australian Curriculum can be found on the Australian Curriculum website.

The Australian Curriculum: 7–10 History is organised into two interrelated strands: Historical Knowledge and Understanding and Historical Skills. The Historical Skills strand promotes skills used in the process of historical inquiry: chronology, terms and concepts; historical questions and research; the analysis and use of sources; perspectives and interpretations; explanation and communication. The two strands are intended to be integrated with the Historical Knowledge and Understanding strand providing the contexts through which relevant historical skills are developed. From Years 7 to 10 the curriculum structure also includes an overview of the historical period and depth studies. The overview is designed to introduce the broad content and contexts for study. The depth studies provide scope for the development of historical knowledge, understanding and skills. The curriculum provides opportunities for the content to be taught using specific local contexts.

The curriculum structure for the HASS learning area from Foundation to Year 6/7 includes a description of the content focus and key inquiry questions.

The senior secondary history curriculum consists of two courses: Ancient History and Modern History. These courses offer more opportunities for specialisation in learning through electives. In Ancient History, students study the key institutions, structures and features of ancient societies and develop a broader and deeper comprehension of the origins, impact and legacy of ideas, beliefs and values of the ancient world (see footnote 2).

---

1 © Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) 2010 to present, unless otherwise indicated. This material was downloaded from the Australian Curriculum website (<http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/humanities-and-social-sciences/history/rationale>) (accessed 28 July 2016) and was not modified. The material is licensed under CC BY 4.0. Version updates are tracked on the Curriculum version history page of the Australian Curriculum website. ACARA does not endorse any product that uses the Australian Curriculum or make any representations as to the quality of such products. Any product that uses material published on this website should not be taken to be affiliated with ACARA or have the sponsorship or approval of ACARA. It is up to each person to make their own assessment of the product, taking into account matters including, but not limited to, the version number and the degree to which the materials align with the content descriptions (where relevant). Where there is a claim of alignment, it is important to check that the materials align with the content descriptions (endorsed by all education Ministers), not the elaborations (examples provided by ACARA).

2 Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) <<http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/SeniorSecondary/humanities-and-social-sciences/ancient-history/structure-of-ancient-history>> Accessed 28 July 2016

The Ancient History curriculum enables students to study life in early civilisations based on the analysis and interpretation of physical and written remains. The ancient period, as defined in this curriculum, extends from the development of early human communities to the end of late antiquity AD 650, with a particular focus on the ancient societies of Europe, the Near East and Asia.

In Modern History, students explore the many forces, including structures, values, systems, innovations, disputes, world orders and world views from the past that shaped today's world. The Modern History curriculum enables students to study those forces in order to provide them with a more thorough understanding of the world in which they live. The focus of this curriculum is primarily on the 20th century, but it refers to formative changes from the 18th century onwards. The Modern History curriculum encourages and enables students to make connections with the world today and their part in it.

In Ancient History and Modern History, students must study four units usually over two years. The last two units are more challenging than the first two. State authorities are responsible for the final structure of the courses, for integrating Australian Curriculum content and achievement into those courses and for assessment and certification.

The content descriptions in the curriculum prescribe what the teachers are expected to teach and what the students are expected to learn about. The elaborations provided in the F-10 curriculum are intended to illustrate and exemplify the content descriptions only. They are not part of the curriculum.

The Australian Curriculum identifies seven general capabilities that—together with curriculum content and the cross-curriculum priorities—will help students live successfully in the twenty-first century. They are:

- Literacy
- Numeracy
- Information and communication technology (ICT) capability
- Critical and creative thinking
- Personal and social capability
- Ethical understanding
- Intercultural understanding.

Where resources are developed to support the Australian Curriculum: History, it would be useful to be explicit about how those resources assist teachers to teach these general capabilities.

In the Australian Curriculum: History, the cross-curriculum priorities areas can be addressed in the following ways:

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures:**

Students can examine historical perspectives from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander viewpoints and learn about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples prior to colonisation by the British; they can consider the impacts of contact on resources including water.



**Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia:**

Students can explore the diversity of Asian cultures, beliefs and environments and the historical development of those cultures including their water management practices.

**Sustainability:**

Through the lens of sustainability, students can refine their world views, particularly in relation to judgments about past social and economic systems and the use of water resources. This priority invites students to consider the impact of humans on their local and regional environments, and how environments— particularly the availability of water resources—shaped society.

Students can develop understanding of the changes in environments over time, the role played by individuals and communities in protecting environments, the emergence of farming and settled communities, the development of the Industrial Revolution and the growth of population, the overuse of natural resources (including water) and the rise of environmental movements. It's important to note that this priority is also intended to be futures-oriented. Students can learn how to create a more ecologically and socially just world through informed action.

### 3. WATER-RELATED TOPICS AND OPPORTUNITIES IN YEAR LEVELS

---

Opportunities for supporting teachers to incorporate a focus on water topics can be found in the content descriptions and the depth studies in Australian Curriculum: History from Year 1 to 12.

**AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM: HISTORY F-10**

The content descriptions most relevant to the teaching of water in F-6/7 HASS and 7-10 History are listed in the Appendix. There are opportunities to incorporate water-related topics in all year levels except Foundation and Year 6.

In Year 1, students are introduced to similarities between the past and the present. They explore changes over time in relation to their daily lives and those of their parents and grandparents. Here, they could consider different leisure activities linked to water in creeks, rivers or dams for instance.

This investigation of similarities and differences continues into Year 2, where students also study the impacts of technology on the way people live. Year 2 also looks at local history: they consider remains of the past and why they should be preserved. Students study a significant person, building, site or part of the natural environment in the local community and what it reveals about the past. This site could be a local waterway or water management feature (e.g. dam, water treatment plant).

Students also investigate and compare changes in features from the past and present. For instance, they could also compare the use of historical water-related artefacts such as hand-pumps or chamber pots with current methods of water supply or sanitation.

As they get older, the investigations become broader. The Year 3 curriculum asks them to consider the importance of Country and Place to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This provides an opportunity to consider the role of water in the way of life of these peoples.

Year 4 takes the students out into the world. It introduces world history including European exploration and the early settlement of Australia. They consider the cultural and environmental impacts of exploration on existing societies. They examine the connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to sea, water, land and sky.

Students in Year 5 consider 19th century Australian history. They look at daily life and the factors that influenced patterns of development. Access to water for drinking, farming or grazing influenced the development of the colony. Students look at the expansion of farming and the impacts of drought. Students also consider how people changed the environment.

Year 7 students explore key features of ancient societies of the period approximately 60 000 BC (BCE) - c.650 AD (CE) and could consider how ancient societies sourced, used and disposed of water in their daily lives and work in some of the depth studies.

In the Year 7 depth studies students can explore the significant beliefs, values and practices of a range of societies including Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Indian, Chinese and very early Australian societies. They can consider how rivers influenced the development of these ancient civilisations such as:

- River Nile in Egypt
- River Tiber in Rome
- Yellow River in China
- Fertile river plains in India.

They can also investigate how water was used and managed in everyday life.

The Year 8 curriculum provides study of history from the end of the ancient period to the beginning of the modern period, c.650 – 1750 AD (CE). Among other topics, students learn about the transformation of the Roman world and key features of the medieval world.

In the three Year 8 depth studies, students explore electives that could include aspects of daily water use and water management in:

1. The Western and Islamic worlds, e.g. Medieval Europe
2. The Asia-Pacific world, e.g. the achievements of the Khmer civilisation including their water management systems, the reasons for its decline and possible factors such as overuse of water, neglect of public works and effects of climate change.

Year 9 students study the making of the modern world from 1750 – 1918. They can explore the impacts of the Industrial Revolution on living conditions, including within Australia. For instance, how people accessed water for domestic and industrial purposes and managed their wastewater.

In the Year 9 depth study 'Making a better world', students could research water-related aspects of the Industrial Revolution in greater detail such as:

- the technological innovations that arose in to address water supply and sanitation issues at that time
- how people managed their water in everyday life
- the short and long term environmental impacts on catchments and water resources.

In the Year 9 depth study 'Australia and Asia—Making a nation', students could investigate:

- the impact of gold mining in the 1900s on settlement patterns, water resources and the environment
- the experiences of the Europeans and the Chinese in mining areas accessing water at this time
- the living conditions (water supply and sanitation) in Australia around the turn of the twentieth century.

Year 10 students focus on the development of Australia's social, cultural, economic and political models and identities in the modern world from 1918 to the present. Opportunities for incorporating a focus on water are found in developments in technology, public health, longevity and standard of living during the twentieth century.

In the Year 10 depth study 'The globalising world—The environment movement (1960s – present)', students could study of the intensification of environmental effects on water resources as a result of population increase, urbanisation and increasing industrial production. Students could also learn about the growing concern for the environment and the concept of sustainability. This includes the significant events and campaigns that contributed to popular awareness of environmental issues such as the campaign to prevent the damming of Australia's Gordon River.

### **SENIOR SECONDARY HISTORY CURRICULUM**

The Ancient History (see footnote 3 on next page) and Modern History (see footnote 4 on next page) senior secondary curricula require comprehensive work programs that teachers and students will find challenging to complete. Any water-focused resources developed for these subject areas must be targeted to the specific requirements of the curricula.

## Ancient History

Some opportunities for water-related curriculum activities exist in the Ancient History curriculum. Unit 1 'Investigating the Ancient World' asks students to study an ancient site, event or change, individual or group. A range of options is provided, including an option for an alternative ancient site that has been the subject of controversy.

In Unit 2, students investigate how people lived in two societies in the ancient world. They investigate the chronological and geographical context, social structure, political institutions, economic activities, and one of a list of features that includes technology and engineering. Examples of ancient societies with significant water technologies include:

- Bronze Age Greece: Minoans or Mycenaeans, 2000-1100 BC
- Assyria, 721-612 BC
- Rome, 753-264 BC
- Rome, 264-133 BC

If students focus on the technology and engineering feature, they can explore topics including:

- the technological feats in construction materials and methods related to water infrastructure
- their impact on the household and economic life
- the use of technology in ancient times to access water resources and control the environment
- the impact of water innovations on social, economic and political development and their legacy.

Unit 3 asks students to examine 'People, Power and Authority'. They research one ancient society. Again, location is important: students investigate the geographical context of their society. For example, if they choose Egypt, they consider the importance of the Nile River and agriculture at the beginning of the New Kingdom.

## Modern History

Water-related topics or issues appear in three of the four units Modern History students are required to study. In Unit 1 'Understanding the Modern World', students may choose two topics with at least one topic from a pre-set list. They could, for instance, study the significance of water supply and sanitation in the Industrial Revolution in Britain in the 1890s for living conditions, urbanisation and for the environment.

In Unit 2 'Movements for Change in the 20th century', students investigate two significant movements that led to change in society, including people's attitudes and circumstances. One of the two topics can include an alternative significant movement for change such as environmental sustainability.

Although Unit 4 'The Modern World since 1945' makes no explicit mention of water or environment, it asks students to examine some significant and distinctive features of the modern world, including world order and international relations, conflict, and the implications of globalisation with the ever-increasing mobility of people, the growth of the global economy and overall rise in living standards. Within the study of 'A Globalised World' is an opportunity to explore the impacts on environment (including water), and in the study of 'Movements of People' students could examine the influence of the environment (e.g. water shortages) on those movements.

---

3 Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) Senior Secondary Curriculum: Ancient History <<http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/SeniorSecondary/humanities-and-social-sciences/ancient-history/RationaleAims>> Accessed 31 July 2016

4 Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) Senior Secondary Curriculum: Modern History <<http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/SeniorSecondary/humanities-and-social-sciences/modern-history/RationaleAims>> Accessed 31 July 2016

## 4. EXISTING RESOURCES — SCIENCE F-10

---

While many resources exist to support the teaching and learning of History from Foundation to Year 10, very few make explicit links between water-related issues and the Australian Curriculum: History. The existing aligned resources are videos on the ABC Splash web site which were identified in the curriculum audit. One of the ABC Splash videos tells the story of the Snowy Mountains Scheme in 1949 and the European migrants that worked on that project. Interestingly, this video addresses an additional Year 10 history content description i.e. 'the impact of changing government policies on Australia's migration patterns, including abolition of the White Australia Policy, Populate or Perish'. (ACDSEH145). This demonstrates that specific water topics may align to history content descriptions other than those water-related descriptions listed in the appendix.

In the Senior Secondary Australian Curriculum: History, no resources were found that aligned water-related issues to the curriculum.

## 5. GAPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

---

### GAPS

Opportunities for supporting History teachers with resources abound because very few resources exist that align water-related issues with the Australian Curriculum: History. Key water topics were mapped against the content descriptions in Years 1-10. Gaps include:

- a comparison of how students, their parents and their grandparents used water in their daily lives when they were children e.g. how they used water in their leisure time (Year 1)
- an investigation of a water-related building, site or waterway in the local community and what it reveals about the past. Students could explore the impact of changing water technologies on how people live (Year 2)
- the importance of a waterway or lake to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples who belong to a local area (Year 3)
- the ways Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples are connected to waterways and the implications for their daily lives (Year 4)
- how the availability of water influenced early European settlement and patterns of development and the daily lives of the inhabitants (Year 5)
- how European settlement altered waterways and the environment (Year 5)
- the impact of droughts on the development of a colony (Year 5)
- how ancient Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Chinese, and Indian societies used water (Year 7)
- how the rivers in ancient societies influenced the civilisation that developed there (Year 7)
- the role of water management in the rise of the Khmer civilisation and theories of the decline of Angkor e.g. the overuse of water resources, neglect of public works as a result of ongoing war, and the effects of climate change (Year 8)
- how people's use of water changed in the Industrial Revolution (Year 9)
- the role of water management and technological innovations in the industrialisation of Britain and Australia (Year 9)
- the short and long-term impacts of the Industrial Revolution on the environment (Year 9)
- the impacts on waterways and water resources in the twentieth century as a result of population increase, urbanisation and increasing industrial production (Year 10)
- significant events and campaigns that contributed to popular awareness of environmental issues, such as the campaign to prevent the damming of Australia's Gordon River (Year 10).

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Several recommendations emerge from this investigation. Relevant online resources about water in history exist in great numbers but are not yet aligned to the Australian Curriculum. If a relevant resource is available, a metadata record can be written that provides the explicit links to the Australian Curriculum: History. These resources would then be accessible to teachers via Scootle and the National Digital Resource Learning Network database.

Alternatively, a number of existing curriculum resources can be combined in a teacher guide that helps teachers meet the specific Australian Curriculum requirements. Resource development must support the new teaching and learning modes in schools, for example the use of on-line resources and digital technologies.

In each year level, students receive a historical overview of the period they are studying. The opportunity exists to develop overviews of water in history. These could be broad or period-specific. The resources could include a brief history of water supply and sanitation, posters, videos and animations and be collated in an education kit.

It would be valuable to provide professional development for teachers in partnership with the History Teachers' Association of Australia. It is important to provide opportunities for teachers to learn via different modes. Combining both face-to-face and internet-based professional learning approaches accommodates the different learning needs, capacities, availability and remote locations of some teachers. The teacher training could be based on the education kit of history curriculum resources identified or developed by the project.

It would be interesting to run a national competition in which Year 7 to 10 History students develop of a short video resource about water-related topics.

At the National Museum of Australia, the Australian component of the Water exhibition— 'Australia's water story'—includes objects from the Museum's National Historical Collection which examine the use of water over time and the challenges of variable supply and demand. Currently, the information in the exhibition is limited. An opportunity exists to work collaboratively with the National Museum of Australia to develop a more comprehensive display.

## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

### Short term

- Write metadata records for existing curriculum resources suitable for Australian Curriculum: History
- Write teacher guides which combine existing high quality history lesson activities to meet the specific requirements of Australian Curriculum: History content descriptions.

### Longer term

- Develop an education kit of curriculum resources to provide curriculum resources about water in history in the Australian Curriculum: History.
- Develop and present teacher professional development modules based on the education kit to support teachers interested in incorporating water-related history topics in their teaching
- Conduct a national competition for Years 7 to 10 students to create a short video about a water-related history topic
- Liaise with the National Museum of Australia to enhance their resources for the 'Australia's water story' exhibit.

---

The *Appendix: Water topics in Australian Curriculum: Human and Social Sciences (History) Foundation to Year 10* can be downloaded [here](#).



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](#).