

Outcomes from the public exhibition of the plan

The NSW Government has agreed to develop water resource plans as part of the implementation of the Murray–Darling Basin Plan 2012.

Water resource plans demonstrate how the Basin states of NSW, the ACT, Queensland and Victoria coordinate their water management with the federal government's Basin Plan, including how the sustainable diversion limits set in the Basin Plan will be met.

As part of the planning process, the draft Gwydir Surface Water Resource Plan, and proposed amendments to the existing water sharing plans, were publically exhibited from 18 October 2018 to 29 November 2018.

We held public meetings in Bingara on the 31 October 2018 with 11 attendees, and in Moree on the 1 November 2018 with 9 attendees.

The proposed amendments for the inclusion of active management of environmental water in the Gwydir unregulated water sharing plan was publically exhibited from the 26 September 2019 to 29 October 2019.

We held a public meeting in Moree on the 8 October 2019 with 21 attendees.

Stakeholders provided valuable feedback that helped us develop the final versions of water resource plan and water sharing plans. This factsheet outlines the main changes since public exhibition.

Submissions

We received a total of 15 submissions on the draft Gwydir Surface Water Resource Plan and associated documents, with 40 separate issues for consideration. We received a total of 10 submissions for consideration on the active management of environmental water in the Gwydir unregulated water sharing plan.

How submissions were considered

The NSW Government examined the nature of the issues raised, or suggestions made in the submission, and considered them in relation to the:

- scope of water resource planning
- principles outlined in the Basin Plan and their consistency with the plan's requirements
- principles set by the NSW Government for water resource planning and any statutory, technical or administrative constraints.
- principles and objectives for active management

In particular, we considered the following questions for each issue or suggestion:

- Is it likely to have an impact on water availability or how water is distributed to access licences of different categories or within a category, and if so, how?
- Is it likely to result in a net reduction in planned environmental water?
- Can current statutory mechanisms enable the change, or is legislative change required?
- Is it consistent with current policy settings, and if not, is development of robust alternative policies feasible within the timeframe to develop the water resource plan?
- Are there additional costs for the NSW Government?

- Is it cost neutral for NSW water licence holders and if not, what is the cost implication?
- Does it relate to water charges, costs, operational activities or licensing matters outside of the scope of the water resource plan?
- Are there existing programs/processes or other departments addressing the issue?
- Is its full investigation feasible within the timeframe of developing the water resource plan?
- Does it set a precedent for other water resource plans?

Changes since public consultation

- the water resource plan, water sharing plan and supporting documents have been aligned to ensure consistency between the documents, in particular licensed entitlements
- a fact sheet will be prepared to accompany the remade regulated water sharing plan and amended unregulated water sharing plan in mid 2020 that provides information on the principles applied to ensuring compliance with the long-term annual average extraction limits and sustainable diversion limits

General changes to the water sharing plans

- The water resource plan and water sharing plan have been amended to ensure consistency with the new NSW Non-Urban Water Metering Framework that commenced on 1 December 2018. The NSW Government has committed to a new framework to improve the standard and coverage of non-urban water meters under its December 2017 Water Reform Action Plan. The new framework includes the NSW Non-Urban Water Metering Policy, the metering-related provisions of the *Water Management (General) Regulation 2018* and the *Water Management Act 2000*
- the water sharing plan objectives were revised to address comments raised in submissions and to better align with strategies and performance indicators. This included removal of the references to the Long Term Water Plans in the notes to the plan objectives
- specific licence provisions for floodplain harvesting have been removed and will be added back in after further consultation and when floodplain harvesting licences are ready to be issued
- provisions relating to sustainable diversion limit compliance have been amended to clarify that the compliance process will follow the requirements of the Basin Plan
- provisions relating to the implementation of the NSW Floodplain Harvesting Policy have been removed and will only be included once floodplain harvesting licences are ready to be issued.
- An amendment clause relating to the access licence dealing rules has been added to provide for the conversion of the regulated river (high security) access licences to unregulated access licences where the regulated system is connected to and downstream of the unregulated system. Further stakeholder engagement will be undertaken to review options prior to development of the dealing rules if they are required.

Changes to Gwydir Regulated Water Sharing Plan

- the proposed very wet period of 300,000 megalitres rule was revised and relocated to supplementary water events and the management of residual water. This now provides the option to direct supplementary water event volume not required for extraction as well as the environment's share of supplementary water event volume away from the Gwydir

wetlands for a specified time period. Consultation between the Environmental Water Advisory Group and the NSW Environmental Water Manager is required to ensure this action will not be detrimental to the Gwydir wetlands

- the third definition/component of PEW 'water remaining after water has been taken under basic landholder rights and access licences, in accordance with the rules in Parts 7 and 9' has been removed to reduce potential ambiguity.
- In the economic objectives for the plan has been updated. The targeted objective is now to maintain and where possible to improve access to water 'up to the long-term average sustainable diversion limit' for agriculture, surface water-dependant businesses and landholders has been updated. An amendment provision has been included to facilitate total extractions reaching the long-term average annual extraction or long-term average sustainable diversion limit in the case that the total extractions are significantly less than those over the long term
- Minor wording changes to improve clarity and reduce ambiguity

Changes to Gwydir Unregulated Water Sharing Plan

- the definition of Active Environmental Water has been revised to include only 1) held environmental water from an upstream water source, 2) water requiring protection under Clause 40 of the Plan. This change provides greater clarity on the environmental water to be protected from extraction and minimises the risk of unintended impacts on unregulated river access licence reliability.
- access rules for the Lower Gingham Watercourse Management Zone have been amended to ensure rules could be implemented as intended and to address variability in channel morphology at the gauge.
- Minor wording changes to improve clarity and reduce ambiguity

Outcomes of preliminary MDBA review

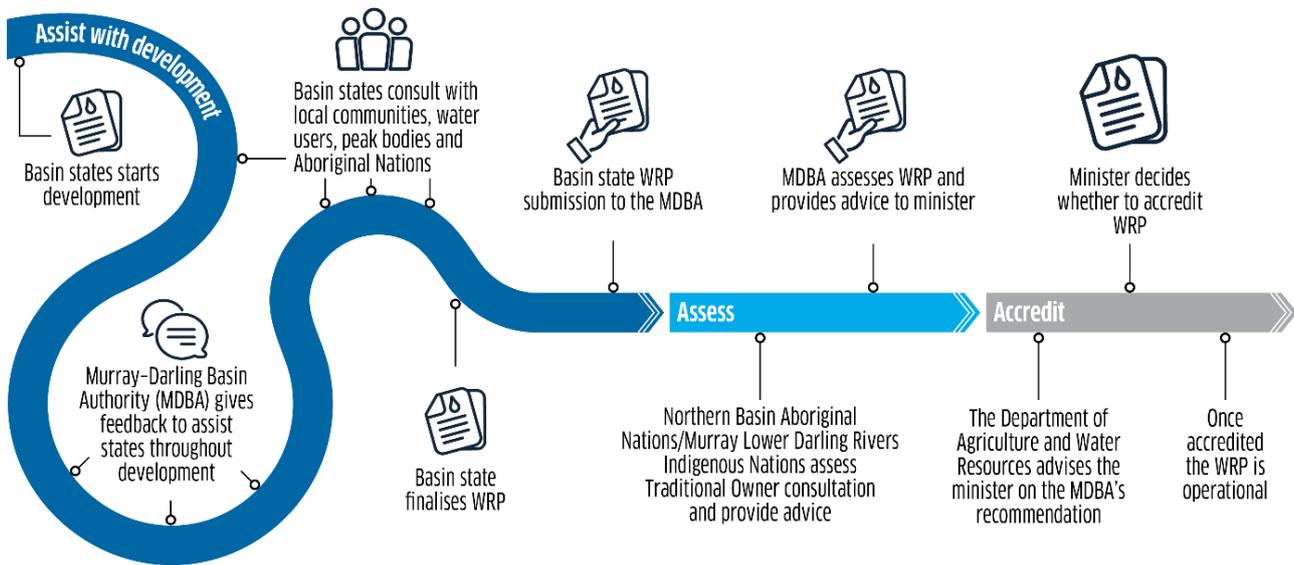
The Murray–Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) assesses the draft water resource plans as part of the plan development. The assessment informs the federal minister's decision on whether to accredit the water resource plan.

While the official assessment won't happen until we formally submit the water resource plan to the MDBA, the MDBA has undertaken a preliminary review of the public exhibition version of the plan. This early feedback has been valuable for informing additional changes to the documents, primarily the water resource plan, water quality management plan and risk assessment. Changes generally relate to clarifying and justifying matters to ensure Basin Plan requirements are met.

Following the official assessment by the MDBA, the federal minister responsible for water will review the plan and determine whether it meets the Basin Plan objectives and can be accredited.

Once accredited, the final Gwydir Surface Water Resource Plan is uploaded to the MDBA's website. The draft plans can be found on the MDBA's website

Figure 1. Water resource plan accreditation process



More information

The draft Gwydir Surface Water Resource Plan and fact sheets are available from the department's 'website at (www.water.nsw.gov.au)

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