Drought community consultation

Factsheet

What we heard from drought-affected communities

In October and November 2019, the NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment held a third series of meetings with communities in drought-affected river systems.

The purpose of these meetings was to hear community views on how remaining, limited water supplies should be managed, and to provide advice on current water availability and water resource outlooks.

The meetings were held in all the major inland NSW river valleys. Details of locations and groups represented at each meeting can be found in Table 11 at the end of this document.

This document details what we heard from communities and summarises the issues raised in each of these public meetings.

Key information provided at the meetings

The meetings were run by an independent facilitator and the following information was provided:

- The department gave an outline of the NSW drought policy position and information on groundwater and the assistance available to rural communities and farmers.
- The department also spoke about the water resource assessment and allocation process in the Murray and Murrumbidgee valleys.
- WaterNSW provided an overview of drought conditions across the state, and outlined specific river valley drought management measures
- The Department of Primary Industries—Fisheries detailed actions being taken for native fish management during the drought in the Namoi, Gwydir and Border Rivers Valleys

Copies of or links to all the presentations are available on the department's website at industry.nsw.gov.au/water/allocations-availability/droughts-floods/update/information-sessions

More community drought meetings planned

Further meetings are planned for early 2020 to update the community on resource availability and outline any further measures that we may need to implement.

Further information

For regular email updates, subscribe to the monthly newsletter and/or water allocation statements at industry.nsw.gov.au/media/subscribe

For regular email updates from WaterNSW, subscribe to the weekly drought update, water availability report and/or other notifications at waternsw.com.au/customer-service/news/subscribe

Common issues raised

Table 1 gives a summary of the common issues raised at most meetings. It also lists the responses or follow-up.

Table 1. Summary of common issues

Issue	Response
Opportunities to control carp populations during the current drought	The National Carp Control Plan is scheduled for release in December 2019 and will provide advice about broad-scale carp control, including the carp virus. However, carp congregate when they breed during flood events. This may be a more effective time to allow the virus to spread than during droughts, when populations may be disconnected.
How to find groundwater	The department does not provide assistance in finding and accessing groundwater on your property. However, information on groundwater monitoring bores and data from drillers is available from the All Groundwater Map on the WaterNSW website at realtimedata.waternsw.com.au The map provides information on yields and water levels from bores on nearby properties. Local water drillers also have good knowledge of where to drill for groundwater in an area. Alternatively, you may need to engage a private hydrogeologist. WaterNSW has engaged consultants to undertake groundwater catchment overviews. The aim of the project is to convert technical data into useful information for local water users and the general public. Based on available data, the project will also investigate potential groundwater resource opportunities in a catchment. This work is starting in the Peel valley.
Lengthy processing time for groundwater applications	Many applications need to be assessed by a hydrogeologist to ensure new users do not impact existing users. Given the drought, the number of applications has increased significantly. Additional hydrogeologists have been employed to work on the application backlog and we are working on reducing the application processing time for permanent trades and new production bores. WaterNSW is developing an application tracker that will be made available via its website.

Issue	Response
The priority of new high security allocations versus general security carryover water	There are a number of factors we consider when allocating water between different uses and subcategories of water access licences. Under section 58 of the NSW *Water Management Act 2000*, high security licences have a higher priority than general security licences when sharing water. However, water sharing plans require that provision must be made for water held in accounts when setting high security allocations. If high security allocations are less than the usual 95–100%, then general security carryover must be restricted at a greater rate, consistent with the priorities under the Act. A fact sheet has been developed to explain the general principles and considerations. Visit www.industry.nsw.gov.au and search for 'imposing restrictions on carryover water in regulated rivers'.
General security carryover is already in the dam the year before when it was first allocated—so it should be still available? Do we get it back if access is suspended during drought?	We make allocations based on predicted minimum inflows. The carryover isn't all sitting in the dam when the allocation is made. If the minimum inflows don't arrive, there may be a shortfall in the volumes required to meet high priority requirements and carryover water. This has occurred this year in some valleys because inflows are well below previous lowest minimums. If access to carryover water is suspended, the water in accounts is placed in a drought sub-account (effectively 'frozen'). This allocation will be returned to active accounts once water availability improves.
Early warning of potential allocation reductions	We're providing as much information to water users as early as possible through the water allocation statements for the regulated rivers By mid-March 2020, after the summer peak demand period, the focus will be on 1 July allocations we will give indications through the Water Allocation Statements of the likelihood of allocations and allocation reductions. Irrigator behaviour over the next few months will impact on next year's allocations and the availability of carryover from 1 July.

Issue	Response
Making information available to water users on water releases and a breakup of who holds what water in storage, i.e. greater transparency	WaterNSW has developed a water insights portal to make information more accessible to the public. Information is now available for most regulated river valleys from waternsw.com.au/waterinsights/water-insights WaterNSW is working on providing more regular updates on what water is being released and is currently working with the Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) on making live data available for the Murray. Information is also available through WaterNSW's weekly Water Availability Updates and the department's Water Allocation Statements.
Will the resource assessment process for water allocations change as a result of the current drought?	The department normally assumes a minimum level of inflows based on the drought of record at the time the first water sharing plan was made—mostly 2004 for the regulated rivers. Inflows under this current drought, particularly in the north and north-west, are significantly lower in some valleys than these previous droughts of record. The impact of the current drought is being assessed and will be reviewed once the drought has broken and all the data is available. This criteria effectively sets the balance between allocating water for productive use versus retaining water for security during extended dry periods. Regional water strategies are planning for 20 years ahead and are considering policy issues—including what drought of record is used.
Conveyance/transmission water should be considered as environmental water	Conveyance water is required to run the system. Running the system achieves some environmental benefits. Similarly, many of the planned environmental rules in the water sharing plans assist with providing water to run the river system, such as end-of-system flow rules. However, this water was already assumed to be providing benefit in the baseline Basin Plan modelling, and further water recovery (2,750 gigalitres per year) was required.

Issue	Response
How much floodplain harvesting has occurred and how is it being managed?	There hasn't been any floodplain harvesting since 2016. Floodplain harvesting is the last substantial capture of water to be licensed in the Basin. Bringing floodplain harvesting into the licensing system will improve accounting and compliance of water use in NSW. To improve stakeholder confidence, the department together with the MDBA, commissioned an independent review of the implementation of the NSW Floodplain Harvesting Policy. The review report confirms NSW is on the right track. The findings supported the progress to date, but make some important recommendations, which the NSW Water Minister has accepted. The department has released a detailed action plan that responds to the final peer review report. During September 2019, government experts and independent peer reviewers delivered public information sessions on the floodplain harvesting action plan. Sessions were held across NSW and via webinar. Further consultation is planned for 2020, with the intent to bring floodplain harvesting into the regulatory framework by the end of 2021. For more information, visit industry.nsw.gov.au/water/plans-programs/healthy-floodplains-project

Specific Issues Raised

The tables in this section discuss issues raised that were specific to particular river systems.

Table 2. Specific issues for Wilcannia (Barwon–Darling)

Issue	Response
Carry-over restrictions in the Barwon–Darling	When temporary restrictions are made, it is done across licence categories, with the aim of providing more water for higher priority needs along the river.
Cotton farmers being large water users	Cotton farmers are also struggling because of a lack of rain and inflows into the system.
Licence holders still accumulating water into their accounts while temporary restrictions are in place	In drought, licence holders on unregulated rivers are mainly limited by flow triggers rather than allocations.
Water being allocated if it cannot be used, suggesting that the river has a water debt to users that could never be repaid	Allocations are unlikely to be 'repaid', however this is not the main way that access in an unregulated river is managed. The accumulation of allocations is an indication of the very dry conditions in the Barwon–Darling river system for many years.
Salt interception operation on the Barwon–Darling, noting that hydraulic action won't keep the salt out	The upper Darling salt interception scheme reduces salinity by pumping out salty groundwater from a series of bores before it reaches the river. However, given the extended dry period, salty water has accumulated in the river between Bourke and Louth.
Difficulties accessing information on flow rates specific to Wilcannia from WaterNSW, noting this has been raised at several meetings over the past four years	There are multiple ways to access and organise the real-time flow data. The daily river reports order the rivers from upstream to downstream. Alternatively, the gauge number can be searched (425008 for Wilcannia) on the top of the left panel. A favourite water monitoring gauge site can be bookmarked (top right of the page) for quick access in the future.

Table 3. Specific issues for Menindee (lower Darling)

Issue	Response
Clarification about volume and timing of flows from Warrego. Concerns that no flows have made it to Menindee and that Queensland is taking too much water, and NSW has to do something about it	Natural flows in the Warrego river have been passed through to the Darling river to the full extent that the infrastructure has allowed. The Toorale Water Infrastructure project aims to achieve greater flexibility to pass more water to the Darling River in certain circumstances. Updates on this project are available from environment.nsw.gov.au/topics/water/water-for-the-environment/planning-and-reporting/toorale-water-infrastructure-project The NSW Government's water management framework only applies within NSW, but we are working constructively with the Queensland Government and the MDBA to improve cross-border arrangements, particularly to identify and protect environmental water and management during very low flows.
Roles of National Parks and Wildlife Services and the Commonwealth Government when it comes to releasing environmental water.	The two main managers of water for the environment in NSW are the Environment, Energy and Science division of NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment, and the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder. For further information, visit our Environmental Water Hub at industry.nsw.gov.au/water/environmental-water-hub/water-for-the-environment

Table 4. Specific issues for Condobolin (Lachlan)

Issue	Response
Transparency and timeliness of further water restrictions	When the public meeting was held on 29 October 2019, water delivery in the Lachlan regulated river could be guaranteed until July 2020. With further conservation measures, this could be extended to October 2020 under a worse-case, zero-inflow scenario. Consultation with water users groups on possible restrictions is ongoing. We will provide advice and outlooks through WaterNSW and the department's Water Allocation Statements.
Unfair impacts of cutting back on general security allocations, when some have already used all of their allocations	We are consulting with all stakeholders to understand the impacts of operational efficiencies.
Will creeks and/or sections of rivers be cut?	We are looking at all options to prolong water supplies, and this is one of the options being considered. Consultation on this will continue.
Environmental flows should be kept in creeks—they have been too high and are a waste of water	The last environmental flow was a normal delivery. We are in communication with the Commonwealth Government about these flows, considering issues such as holding water, spring pulses and what can be done to keep the river in good health.

Issue	Response
Completion of the Wyangala Dam raising project	The project should be completed in 4–5 years. The dam-raising will improve water security in Wyangala Dam and mitigate floods. Increasing the wall by 10 metres will increase the capacity of the dam by 50%.
Draining of dams until they are empty	As at 29 October 2019, Wyangala was 18.5% of full supply. Reserves will continue to be used until it is at 1%. We are conducting community consultation to understand the impacts of conservation measures, and are working with the community to decide when/ if flows in sections of the river should cease.
Dam levels at which irrigation will be stopped	Dam levels are not the only determinant of ceasing irrigation. Other considerations include time of year and the amount of water left in accounts, and threats to critical human needs.
Environmental flows being lost to groundwater, and people with bores getting more water	Losses are monitored daily and there have been no increases in losses for the Lachlan. All groundwater licences in the Lachlan have been allocated and people cannot take more water than their allocation.

Table 5. Specific issues for Dubbo (Macquarie)

Issue	Response
Consideration of exceeding sustainable diversion limits (SDLs) that set groundwater allocations	SDLs are set to ensure that a groundwater source is not compromised. Extractions are monitored against the long-term average extraction limit, and if extractions continue to exceed this limit over a three- or five-year rolling average (depending on the rules in the water sharing plan), we may announce reduced allocations for general users such as irrigators. An information sheet on reducing groundwater allocations is available at industry.nsw.gov.au/water/allocations-availability/droughts-floods/drought-update/drought-information We may consider allowing extractions to exceed the long-term extraction limit for a longer period if critical needs cannot be met and groundwater is the only option. Long-term impacts will need to be reviewed.
Can local farmers pool resources to share a community bore?	Providing the landholders' properties all overlay the same aquifer they can access a common bore for basic landholder rights purposes. Under basic landholder rights, the water can only be used for domestic purposes and grazing stock water, not for irrigation or intensive livestock purposes.
Day Zero for Dubbo	Day Zero is when there is no surface water available. We have been working with Dubbo Council since last year to plan for this time to ensure groundwater supplies are available before this date. There will be heavy restrictions, as the goal is to conserve supplies for critical human needs. All options for conserving water until that time are being considered.

Issue	Response
Impact of low flows on potable water quality	The risk of algal blooms increases as the weather gets hotter. Town water is treated, so drinking water quality is not an issue. For those extracting directly from regulated rivers, there will be financial support available for water carting.
Water-sensitive designs for cities and homes	The department is working with councils on initiatives such as water tanks and efficiency measures. We are also working on better ways to use water, including through recycling and stormwater harvesting.

Table 6. Specific issues for Moree (Gwydir)

Issue	Response
Technology to find groundwater	There are examples of councils using LIDAR ground-penetrating radar followed up by exploratory drilling to test the availability of groundwater resources. However, this is expensive and unlikely to be practical to identify groundwater on individual properties.
Access to tributary inflows	New inflows will be prioritised for critical needs first, before consideration is given to providing supplementary access. Critical needs include essential town water supplies, stock and domestic needs, and filling refuge pools to meet critical environmental needs. Temporary water restrictions are likely to be put in place to protect initial inflows for these purposes.
Gwydir contributions to downstream critical needs	The first consideration will be whether there are critical needs in the Gwydir valley, before consideration is given to downstream critical needs. The next consideration would be whether the flow event would provide connectivity to the lower system. Very small events may not achieve this connectivity. In a very large event, no restrictions will be necessary. For moderate events, it will be more difficult to manage equity for competing needs.

Table 7. Specific issues for Goondiwindi (Border Rivers)

Issue	Response
Consistency of water restrictions on towns and basic landholder rights users	The department is considering placing a temporary, state-wide 324 water restriction on the use of water for domestic purposes under basic landholder and domestic and stock licences.
Piping water from the coast for irrigation	Transferring water long distances is extremely expensive and studies in the past have found it is not economically feasible. However, all options are on the table. The department is preparing 20-year regional water strategies looking at a broad range of water needs and possible options.

Issue	Response
Raising Goondiwindi Weir	The NSW Government is giving consideration to raising Goondiwindi Weir among a number of infrastructure options to improve water security for towns.
Why did water flow over Boggabilla Weir in the recent bulk water transfer from Glenlyon Dam?	If conditions remain dry, WaterNSW will be unable to make further releases from Glenlyon Dam due to the low storage levels and the large volumes required to run the river downstream. When the bulk water transfer occurred in November 2019, WaterNSW wanted to make sure that the release successfully filled Boggabilla Weir. As a result, a small amount of water spilled over the weir, but this was considered to be a better outcome than not filling the weir pool.
Where can I get my water tested?	NSW Department of Primary Industries operates a water testing service for farmers and graziers, which can determine the suitability of their water for agricultural and domestic applications. For more information visit www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/about-us/services/laboratory-services/water-testing

Table 8. Specific issues for Narrabri (Namoi)

Issue	Response
Infrastructure options to improve water security	The NSW Government is developing regional water strategies, which will identify options to improve water security across NSW. All infrastructure options are being considered and the best solution will vary from valley to valley. For example, the best solution for the Border Rivers may be building a new Mole River Dam. In the Lachlan, it may involve raising Wyangala Dam, while on the Barwon-Darling, it may involve replacing existing fixed-crest weirs with regulated weirs. Elsewhere, pipelines may be the best solution. There is no single solution. Water security will involve a mixture of options.
Speculators raising price of water	Many water users trade water as a means of managing their business, which is what the water market was established to do. Farming has become an increasingly sophisticated business, and some irrigators have foregone using their water to grow crops in the past two years so that they could trade their water when the value was the highest. Prices now on the water market are similar to what they were during the Millennium Drought, which indicates high prices are a function mostly of the lack of water availability and high demand. The ACCC is currently looking into this issue and are due to release a report of their findings early in 2020.

Issue	Response
New locations for large dams on the Namoi	WaterNSW has prepared a 20-year infrastructure options study that looked at all infrastructure options for improving water security across NSW. This study did not recommend another large dam in the Namoi valley, but did identify some options to improve the efficiency and reliability of water delivery, such as a new weir and pipelines. A copy is available at waternsw.com.au/projects/infrastructure-studies/20-year-infrastructure-options-study In the Peel valley, a new Dungowan Dam has been identified as critical state-significant infrastructure under the *Water Supply (Critical Needs) Act 2019*.
Use of aerators to protect fish	DPI-Fisheries has sourced new aerators for use this summer, and is assessing where these should be located. Key refuge sites to be protected over the coming summer are being identified. For more information on the government's native fish drought response, www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fishing/habitat/threats/nsw-native-fish-drought-response-2019-2020

Table 9. Specific issues for Deniliquin (Murray)

Issue	Response
Why are we sending so much water to South Australia?	The Murray Darling Basin Agreement sets the rules for sharing water in the Murray. This is a long-standing agreement (separate from the Basin Plan) that was first signed in 1987 as an amendment to the River Murray Waters Agreement (est. 1914). NSW has to operate to this agreement. NSW and Victoria have a commitment to supply South Australia with a certain amount of water under this agreement. Changes to these arrangements need to be agreed by all parties. The NSW Deputy Premier and Water Minister are continuing to raise issues with the sharing arrangements during drought periods.
Amount of water put aside for delivery/losses in the Murray. Why is water delivered all the way to South Australia when this incurs large transmission losses?	Losses in the Murray River system vary depending on conditions at the time (dry versus wet) and the amount of water being delivered. The proportion of the total resource taken up by losses reduces as inflows increase and conditions improve. The MDBA operates a major river system to deliver water for a range of purposes over thousands of kilometres—it is more than just an irrigation network. There are agreements, commitments and policies determining how water is shared between several states, including the need to ensure enough reserves to supply South Australia and Adelaide. Water used to deliver South Australia's entitlement is taken off their account.

Issue	Response
Why has NSW changed the resource assessment process and why is it being more conservative now?	The NSW resource allocations process has not changed. The process always requires that water is reserved for the following year's high priority needs—towns, domestic and stock and high security allocations, as well as carryover.
Why does NSW have a zero general security allocation from the Murray, when the other states' irrigators have allocations?	Given the severe conditions seen across the north of the state and inflows lower than the worst on record in these valleys, the department is putting water aside earlier in the Murray in case conditions worsen. Other states keep bigger reserves and allocate less at a time for irrigation. For example, total volume of entitlement in the Murray for NSW is 2,250 GL, while Victoria's is only 1,600 GL. Based on what we've heard from users, the department allocates water for general security users upfront (at the start of the water year) and let users manage how/when they use this water.
Town water restrictions	In NSW, local councils set restrictions on the use of town water supplies by its residents. However in times of water shortage, the NSW Government expects that local councils will act appropriately and implement town water restrictions. There is no concern over the ability to supply town water allocations in the Murray at this time.
Release of water from Menindee Lakes	Operating the Menindee Lakes is challenging, and the challenges are exacerbated by low inflows due to record-breaking drought conditions in the northern Murray–Darling Basin since 2017. Whenever water is released, consideration is given to environmental impacts, community needs, and the requirements of downstream water users. Water was released from the Menindee Lakes in 2016–17 and 2017–18 to meet South Australian commitments, provide water for the environment, and meet NSW lower Darling water needs. However, the vast majority of the water in storage was lost to evaporation and seepage. If possible, water is preferentially released from Menindee Lakes to meet South Australian requirements rather than from the Murray, simply because it is a significantly less efficient water storage than the Murray headwater dams.

Issue	Response
Recent flows through the Barmah Choke	Menindee Lakes is effectively empty and is not able to contribute flows into the Murray. As a result, all South Australian commitments must be provided from the Murray and therefore more water is being delivered through the Barmah Choke. The Murray River is a complex system operated by the MDBA on behalf of stakeholder jurisdictions (NSW, Victoria and South Australia).The physical system of dams, weirs, and limited channel capacities is balanced against demands, delivery losses and risks, in consultation with jurisdictions, and in accordance with the Murray Darling Basin Agreement. There has been no net increase in entitlement traded downstream of the Choke. When water is traded downstream, it must be balanced with trades upstream so there is no net increase downstream. Flow through the Choke does go overbank and can flood parts of the forest if the MDBA has to get water downstream to meet commitments when they have not been able to be provided by tributary inflows. The system is operated as efficiently as possible.
Is the NSW side of the border seeing less rain and lower inflows?	Yes. The NSW tributary inflows to the Murray have been significantly less in recent years than the Victorian inflows, and this impacts on the NSW share of the resource. Under the Murray Darling Basin Agreement, NSW and Victoria share inflows to Dartmouth and Hume Dams 50:50. However, tributary inflows downstream of Albury are allocated to the generating state. The entitlement to be provided to South Australia has to be met equally from NSW and Victorian shares.

Table 10. Specific issues for Griffith (Murrumbidgee)

Issue	Response
Why does water for basic landholder rights take priority over town water supply?	Basic landholder rights apply when you have direct access to a river or directly overlie an aquifer. You can take water for domestic and stock purposes only. This right does not apply to water use for production purposes (e.g. intensive stock operations). In normal circumstances, the highest priority for water is for water source health and basic landholder rights. If water is able to be released to run the river system, then these needs are effectively met. However during extreme drought and if the relevant water sharing plan has been suspended, essential town water supplies and critical domestic water needs take priority. The NSW Government passed the Water Supply (Critical Needs) Bill 2019 on 14 November 2019. The Bill was assented to on 21 November (now the *Water Supply (Critical Needs) Act 2019*). The Act identifies particular locations/towns in NSW (e.g. Tamworth) currently affected by severe water shortages and provides a pathway to expedite the approval of emergency town water supply works as a priority.
Irrigator involvement in critical water advisory panels (CWAPs)	Water NSW runs community consultative committees—river operations stakeholder consultation committees—in each regulated river valley and brings issues raised by stakeholders during those forums to CWAPs. CWAPs at times are required to discuss confidential and market sensitive information.
Groundwater allocation statements should also include probability of reduced groundwater allocations in the next water year	Groundwater sources normally only have a start-of-year allocation, unlike regulated rivers where the allocation can change throughout the year if water availability improves. However, in May 2019, given the increasing interest in groundwater because of the drought, the department published a pre-water year groundwater statement for the first time. This flagged those groundwater systems where allocations could be reduced on 1 July because extractions could exceed the extraction limit. The department will again publish a groundwater allocation statement around May 2020 before the start of the next water year and flag where there are potential allocation reductions. The likely allocation reduction percentage is more difficult to predict as it depends on meter readings, which are not finalized until sometime after the start of the next water year. However the department will look into this.

Issue	Response
Inter-valley transfer (IVT) releases in the Murrumbidgee	The IVT balance **reduces** when there is trade **into** the Murrumbidgee or delivery of water **from** the valley. The IVT balance is updated publicly by WaterNSW daily at around 9 am: waternsw.com.au/customer-service/ordering-trading-and-pricing/trading/murrumbidgee Water users can track the rise and fall of the IVT balance and anticipate trade opening and closing as triggers are met. The MDBA will 'call' water from the Murrumbidgee IVT account when needed in the Murray as the IVT balance represents the volume of water owed by the Murrumbidgee to the Murray.
Will drought operations impact on town water access?	Local councils need to make sure their river water intakes are deep enough to access low flows in the river.
Trading from high security to general security carryover—impact on general security allocation for next year	Trading from high to general security doesn't change the total amount of water available. There is a liability/risk in carrying over water that needs to be considered. Moving from one account to another in accordance with transfer rules should not impact others. Water users trade water to suit their business.
What would trigger cuts to high security allocations?	If on 1 July there is not enough water to supply towns, stock and domestic, run the river and meet full high security allocations and general security carryover, then temporary restrictions may be required to high security and carryover—the cuts are likely to result in reductions to both categories.
Why were the temporary reductions made in the 1990s to the water available to general security users to provide water for the environment, then made permanent through the water sharing plans?	The water reforms during the 1990s introduced environmental flow rules to be trialled. Following the *Water Management Act 2000* and the development of statutory water sharing plans, it was required that water be formally set aside for the environment. River management committees (including a cross-section of the community) discussed and agreed on the environmental flow rules and these were incorporated into water sharing plans, which were also placed on public exhibition for comment.
Fixed charges for high security licence holders should be reduced as the maximum high security allocation in the Murrumbidgee is 95%	The amount of costs that need to be recovered from water users through fixed water charges does not change. Therefore spreading costs based on a 95% maximum high security allocation would not alter the total user contribution to be recovered. IPART determines how water charges are applied. Community members should make a submission to IPART if they would like to argue that changes are required.

Issue	Response
When did the compliance trigger for the Murrumbidgee groundwater water sharing plan get updated from a three-year to a five-year average?	The current revised draft of the water sharing plan for the Murrumbidgee Alluvium includes assessing compliance with the long-term average annual extraction limits in each of the groundwater sources over the past five years. This is a change for the lower Murrumbidgee shallow and deep groundwater sources, which previously had a three-year assessment period. It provides consistency across all seven groundwater sources, and will provide sufficient flexibility to accommodate climatic variability while still protecting environmental values. This change will take effect once the revised water sharing plan is accredited by the MDBA and gazetted—the aim is 1 July 2020.
Will Snowy 2.0 have an impact on allocations in the Murrumbidgee?	No. The project is about recirculating water within the Snowy Scheme itself to increase power generation. The obligation to release water to western flowing rivers is not changing.
Is the drought impacting on Snowy Hydro's required annual releases for next year?	A lack of inflow to the Snowy Scheme can significantly affect the required annual release. Snowy Hydro is not expected to release water it doesn't have. The department talks regularly to the Snowy Hydro Scheme operators to obtain the latest information and forecasts on Snowy water availability. This information is incorporated into the water allocation statements for the Murrumbidgee and NSW Murray water sources.

Details of meeting locations

Table 11 provides details of the consultation meetings held in 2019.

Table 11. 2019 meeting details

Date	Location	Number of attendees	Groups represented
17 October	Wilcannia	20	Aboriginal community members, Wilcannia residents, tour operators, Australian Floodplain Association, graziers, irrigators, local media, Central Darling Council
18 October	Menindee	20	Landowners, farmers, local businesses, NSW Farmers, Darling River Action Group, MDBA, Wentworth Shire Council, Far West Health, local media
29 October	Condobolin	50	Landowners, farmers, local businesses, Lachlan Valley Water, Lachlan Shire Council, Education representative
30 October	Dubbo	35	Landowners, farmers, local businesses, Fletcher International, Local Land Services, MDBA rep, Orange & Region Water Security Alliance, Healthy Rivers Dubbo, Rivercare, Narromine Shire Council, Dubbo Regional Council, Gilgandra Shire Council, Orana Joint Organisation, Rural Financial Council
19 November	Moree	25	Landowners, farmers, local businesses, cotton industry reps, Gwydir Valley Irrigators, Moree Plains Shire Council, CEWO rep, MDBA rep
20 November	Goondiwindi	20	Landowners, farmers, local businesses
21 November	Narrabri	30	Landowners, farmers, local businesses, cotton industry reps, MDBA rep, Local Land Services, Narrabri Shire Council, Gunnedah Shire Council, Education rep, local media
27 November	Deniliquin	30	Landowners, farmers, irrigators, Murray Irrigation, Local Land Services, Edward River Council, Murray River Council, Carrathool Shire Council, Balranald Shire Council, CEWO rep, Local media
28 November	Griffith	50	Landowners, farmers, local businesses, Griffith City Council, Murrumbidgee Council, Leeton Shire Council, Murrumbidgee Shire Council, Coleambally Irrigation, NSW Farmers