

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 Murrumbidgee Water Resource Plan, and proposed amendments to the existing water sharing plans, were publically exhibited from 5 June 2019 to 14 July 2019.

Public meetings were held in Wagga Wagga on the 17 June 2019 with 24 attendees, Jerilderie 18 June 2019 with 11 attendees, Griffith 18 June 2019 with 55 attendees and in Hay on the 19 June 2019 with either attendees.

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

Submissions

We received a total of 21 submissions on the draft Murrumbidgee Surface Water Resource Plan and associated documents, with 39 separate issues for consideration.

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.

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 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
- 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 Murrumbidgee Regulated River Water Source 2020 Water Sharing Plan

- Provisions around the end of system flow at the Darlot gauge have been amended to explicitly state that water used to meet end of system flows cannot be extracted by water users below the Darlot gauge.
- Operator discretion has been removed in relation to the crediting of the environment water allowance (EWA) 2 from PSV 1.
- The release rules for the EWAs have been amended to remove operator discretion. The operator will be required to deliver EWA water in line with procedures established by the Minister.
- The provision around the access of uncontrolled flows has been amended to ensure that the current arrangements remain and that the application of this rule is on an individual licence basis only.
- Provisions around dam operations during floods and spills have been amended to clarify that water must be spilled from the dam in a manner that will minimise downstream flood damage.
- The economic objectives for the plan have been updated to include a targeted objective which states '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'

- An amendment provision has been included to facilitate total extractions reaching the long-term average annual extractions, or long-term average sustainable diversion limit, when the total extractions are significantly less than those over the long term.
- Minor wording changes to improve clarity and reduce ambiguity

Changes to Murrumbidgee Unregulated River Water Source Water Sharing Plan

- No material changes are being made to the unregulated WSP since public exhibition.
- Minor wording changes to improve clarity and reduce ambiguity

Outcomes of preliminary MDBA review

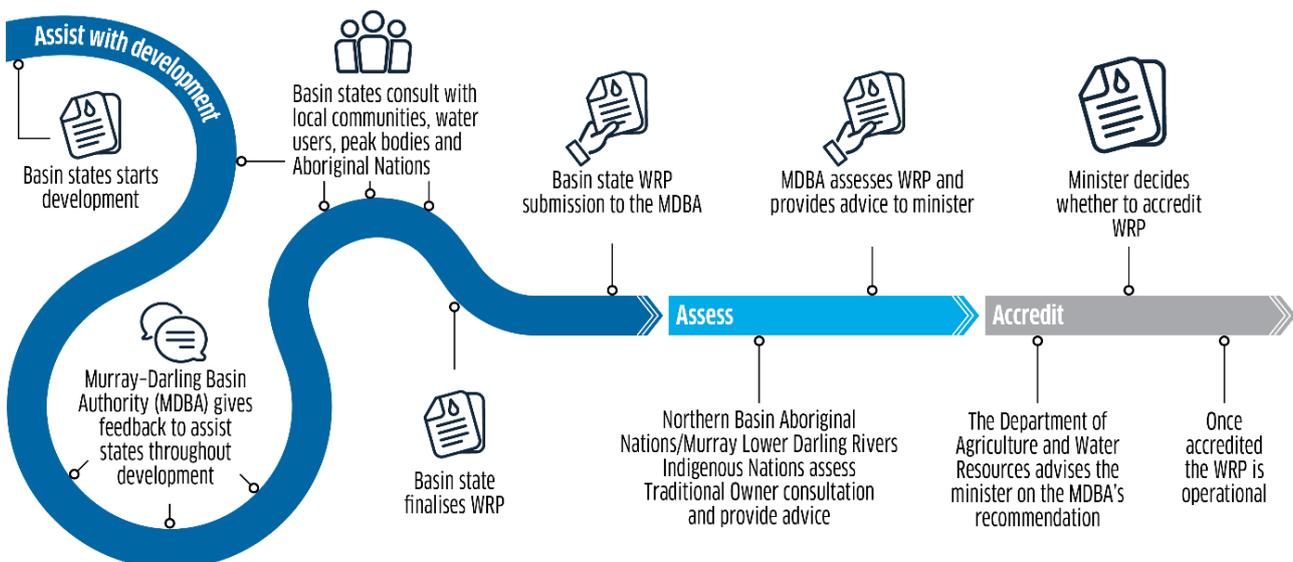
The Murray–Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) assesses the draft water resource plans as part of the plan development. The assessment informs the federal minister’s decision on whether to accredit the water resource plan.

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 Murrumbidgee 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 Murrumbidgee Surface Water Resource Plan and fact sheets are available from the department's 'website at (<https://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/plans-programs/water-resource-plans/drafts/murrumbidgee-surface>)

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