

Consultation overview

NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment – Water recently sought community feedback on the NSW Government’s information platforms for the water market. We wanted to understand how useful they are and what information we should be sharing. We also wanted to know what improvements we should make to address community concerns and meet the needs of our water users, market participants and the public. Read the [discussion paper](#).

Public consultation ran from 30 November 2020 to 1 February 2021. Public engagement included webinars and the opportunity for the public to give their feedback through a ‘have your say’ survey or written submission.

Consultation participation

The consultation response included:

- 177 completed surveys
- 38 written submissions
- 66 webinar attendees

Respondents included individuals, businesses, community organisations, industry groups and government agencies. A wide range of market participation was represented, including irrigators, environmental water holders, water brokers, non-water-using traders, and analysts. There was also a significant portion of respondents who do not participate in the water market.

The majority of survey participants were from the NSW Riverina region and Western NSW and 40% held water licences. The ‘About You’ section of the [Survey Dashboard](#) gives more details about survey participants.

Survey questions

The survey asked over 50 questions about the various NSW water information platforms, to understand their usefulness and usability. There were also opportunities for comments throughout the survey, and many respondents provided valuable additional insight in this way. The [Survey Dashboard](#) summarises the responses to each of the survey questions.

Written submissions

There were 38 written submissions, 28 of which gave permission to be published. You can read the [28 submissions](#). There were 13 submissions based on a form template.

Webinars

We held 2 interactive webinars in December 2020 and January 2021. The webinars outlined the current NSW information management and gave an overview of the [WaterInsights Portal](#) and the [Trade Dashboard](#). There was also an opportunity to ask questions. [Recordings of the two webinars](#) are available.

Summary of responses

The department reviewed of all the consultation material qualitatively and quantitatively. Overall, consultation demonstrated low satisfaction with the accessibility and usability of information. Below is a summary of the key insights from the consultation.

1. We need to improve awareness of our water information platforms

The survey demonstrated low awareness of most of the information platforms, and particularly the newer products such as the WaterInsights Portal and Trade Dashboard. This was also demonstrated in many survey comments and written submissions where, for example, people asked for information that is already available.

2. We need to help people understand how to use the platforms

The survey outlined that many people do not find the existing platforms useful, particularly for infrequent users. Comments and submissions highlighted concerns that the platforms are complex, difficult to understand and hard to interpret. People requested training and supporting material such as help guides.

3. We need to improve functionality

Consultation demonstrated significant support for making the platforms easier to use. Many submissions requested improved search functionality so that users don't need detailed information to begin their investigation. There was also support for simpler, map-based interfaces, and for providing as close to real-time data as possible.

4. We need to consolidate information into one location

Consolidating all information into one location was strongly supported, to create a single point of truth for all water information. This included all existing information from the NSW Water Register, Water Access Licence Register, Environmental Water Register and the Commonwealth Government's Register of Foreign Ownership of Water Entitlements. Many suggested the WaterInsights Portal as the most appropriate means of achieving this for NSW data, pending the recommendations of the ACCC Water Market Inquiry on this topic.

5. We need to improve accuracy of the data

Consultation highlighted concerns about differences in data across different platforms. People requested more consistent data and terminology across the platforms, as well as data assurance and auditing processes.

6. We should continue to treat all licences equally

There was strong support for all licences to be treated equally, regardless of size, ownership or licence type, as is currently the case. Only 5% of survey respondents felt that there should be different information about different licences.

7. We should publish more of the data that is already being collected

Consultation demonstrated support for the following information to be published:

- a generic identifier of the licence type
- trade purpose categories
- map-based locations of works or licences
- the 'strike date' that the trade price was agreed between parties
- whether a broker was involved in a trade
- all data on low-value and zero-dollar trades.

There were a range of views about publishing names and account values. The survey respondents did not give strong support for publishing this information, and a number of submissions strongly opposed the idea on the basis of protecting privacy and commercially sensitive information. Conversely, several comments and submissions called for full transparency of names and account values, with a particular interest in the details of foreign-held entitlements or entitlements held by non-water users.

8. We should collect and publish new data

Survey results demonstrated support for collecting and publishing new information on the intended use of traded water and the use of an entitlement. Licence holders were also most supportive of sharing this data.

Next steps

The department is now preparing a program of works to address the issues and suggestions raised during consultation. We acknowledge the release of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission's final report on the Murray–Darling Basin water markets inquiry, which makes more recommendations on water information transparency. The department will consider these recommendations in preparing the program of works.

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