

Context

The NSW Government established an Interagency Working Group – Environmental Water (IWG) in February 2018 in accordance with the NSW Government's [Water Reform Action Plan](#). The IWG was responsible for presenting the NSW Government with a package of interim solutions for better managing environmental water within 90 days of its commencement.

The IWG presented the *Better management of environmental water: Interim solutions package* to the Minister with the report released publicly in June 2018. The Minister agreed to progress the recommendations in this package, which include:

- interim solutions, including trials for better managing environmental water and establishing the legislative framework for enduring solutions (as part of the *Water Management Amendment Bill 2018*)
- roadmap to deliver the interim solutions and progress enduring solutions
- governance arrangements and reporting, including a continuing role for the Interagency Working Group until at least such time as Water Resource Plans commence in 2019
- consultation approaches, including using the existing Basin Plan water resource planning consultation process, to progress these reforms.

The *Water Management Amendment Act 2018* was assented on 27 June 2018. This included legislative amendments recommended in the interim solution package, including amendments to water sharing plans to facilitate:

- active management to share flows in the future in the Barwon-Darling, the Macquarie-Bogan and the Gwydir Unregulated water sources
- the implementation of Individual Daily Extraction Limits (IDELs) in the Barwon-Darling.

The desired outcome from this reform area is:

“Improved management of environmental water which leads to more effective, efficient and transparent use of environmental water for a range of outcomes throughout NSW, noting that the NSW Government’s position remains that licensed water recovered for the environment should retain the same characteristics of licences used for other purposes”.

Purpose

The IWG will work collaboratively with the Water Renewal Taskforce to guide implementation of interim solutions and the roadmap, and to provide advice on an appropriate package of enduring solutions for improved management of environmental water.

Scope

The IWG will:

- a) Identify key objectives to be achieved through proposed changes to environmental water management.
- b) Help guide analysis of enduring solutions identified in the roadmap, including the assessment of risks, costs and benefits, and practicalities of implementing options.

- c) Advise as appropriate on technologies, metering or gauging necessary for implementing and monitoring enduring solutions.
- d) Provide advice in scoping and assist in developing material to meet the WRAP deliverables to increase transparency on how environmental water is managed and protected, including:
 - I. Publish information on the Department of Industry’s website about activities in protecting environmental water – Quarter 4 2018
 - II. Publish explanatory materials to inform the public on how environmental water is managed – Quarter 1 2019
- e) Contribute to implementing and monitoring the effectiveness of trials implemented under the interim solutions package, with results informing decisions about the future application of these solutions.
- f) Provide the Minister with a report on progress against the roadmap by end April 2019.
- g) Provide advice to the Minister on the most appropriate package of enduring solutions for improved environmental water management for NSW.
- h) Provide advice to the Minister on the enduring governance arrangements for environmental water management in the NSW portion of the northern Basin.

Membership

The IWG comprises representatives from agencies with expertise in aspects of environmental water management:

- Water Renewal Taskforce – Department of Industry (Chair)
- NSW Department of Industry – Water
- NSW Natural Resources Access Regulator
- Murray-Darling Basin Authority
- Commonwealth Environmental Water Office
- NSW Office of Environment and Heritage
- NSW DPI Fisheries
- NSW DPI Agriculture
- Water NSW
- NSW Natural Resources Commission

The chairperson may review the membership as necessary.

Technical staff and identified experts may attend IWG meetings by prior arrangement with the Chair. They are required to observe all confidentiality and respect the input of all participants.

Role of Chairperson

The Water Renewal Taskforce will chair the IWG. The Chairperson will:

- schedule meetings and invite members
- share all relevant documents for discussion
- ensure that the Interagency Working Group operates within the Terms of Reference
- ensure that members are informed of any changes in scope or focus
- invite experts to attend meetings, as required
- identify actions and outcomes from meetings
- establish partnerships within and between government departments
- facilitate engagement between key stakeholders and the Working Group
- report to the Water Renewal Oversight Committee on progress being made against WRAP actions

- report on any dissenting views among IWG members or between the IWG and other stakeholder groups to decision-makers
- prepare briefs for the Oversight Committee and Minister as required.

Meetings

The IWG will

- hold meetings as required and as convened by the Chairperson
- make decisions by general consensus
- undertake work, out of session, as required to meet critical deadlines.

The Water Renewal Taskforce will provide administrative support, including preparing agendas and meeting minutes and may, at times, engage an independent facilitator to help the Interagency Working Group achieve its purpose.

A summary of the meetings, as approved by the IWG, is to be published on the DoI Water website.

Member responsibilities

Members will:

- assist with analysis of possible options for improving environmental water management
- share technical expertise and insights from related initiatives
- participate in working group meetings as needed
- participate in stakeholder engagement, as appropriate
- input to reports submitted to Government, as required
- regular report back to member agencies regarding priorities, activities and recommendations
- support improved transparency about environmental water management, including assisting to develop key publications on environmental water management, as appropriate.
- be able to make decisions at the IWG on behalf of the organisation they represent
- withdraw from discussions when necessary and appropriate on issues in which a member could be considered to have a market interest, and to ensure market sensitive information is not shared inappropriately.

Coordination with other processes

The Water Renewal Taskforce recognises that the actions included in the roadmap support and/or deliver a number of State priority deliverables in the water space. Many of these deliverables are also being progressed through existing processes such as Water Resource Plan development. It is integral to the successful delivery of the roadmap that the IWG and Taskforce work closely with teams in DoI Water, Water NSW, NRAR and OEH to effectively progress these reforms and avoid any duplication of effort.

Related projects/commitments include:

- Development of Water Resource Plans (WRP), including amendments to water sharing plans as part of the WRP process in consideration of Basin Plan requirements.
- Implementation of Northern Basin Toolkit measures recommended as part of the Northern Basin Review
- Implementation of Prerequisite Policy Measures (southern Basin)
- Murray-Darling Basin Compliance Compact

- Intergovernmental Agreement on implementing water reforms in the Murray-Darling Basin.

Other complementary projects include the development of Long Term Watering Plans which the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage is leading and other projects underway by the Taskforce, for example, improved metering of water take and transparency.

Stakeholder Engagement

The success of the roadmap will be dependent on effective engagement with key stakeholders. The Water Renewal Taskforce will be responsible for coordinating stakeholder engagement, with assistance from the IWG as appropriate. The Taskforce will utilise existing stakeholder engagement forums such as Stakeholder Advisory Panels and public exhibition processes to seek input on enduring solutions.