

## Outcomes from public exhibition of the plan

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

Water resource plans (WRPs) demonstrate how the Murray-Darling basin states of NSW, the ACT, Queensland and Victoria coordinate their water management with the Commonwealth government's Basin Plan 2012, including how the sustainable diversion limits set in the Basin Plan will be met.

As part of the planning process, the draft NSW Murray and Lower Darling Surface WRP package, including the proposed new regulated river water sharing plan (WSP) and amendments to the existing unregulated river WSPs, was publicly exhibited from 4 September 2019 to 13 October 2019, with an extension granted for the Lower Darling to 25 October 2019.

Four public meetings were held on 17 to 19 September 2019, with stakeholders attending as follows: Corowa (7), Deniliquin (11), Barham (16) and Dareton (12). Once the Barwon-Darling WRP was on public exhibition, a further public meeting was held at Menindee on 18 October 2019, and this was attended by ~20 stakeholders.

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

## Submissions

There were 20 submissions on the draft NSW Murray and Lower Darling Surface WRP package. The submissions total almost 200 pages and raise several dozen themes in over 600 points mentioned for consideration.

### How submissions were considered

NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE) examined the nature of the issues raised 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, the following questions for each issue or suggestion were considered:

- 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 to 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, the three water sharing plans of the NSW Murray and Lower Darling WRP area, and other 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 the two amended unregulated water sharing plans, in mid-2020, to provide information on the principles applied to ensure compliance with the long-term annual average extraction limits and sustainable diversion limits.

## General changes to the water sharing plans

- The objectives of the water sharing plans were revised to address comments raised in submissions and to better align with strategies and performance indicators. This included the removal of references to the Long Term Water Plan in the notes to the plan objectives
- Provisions relating to sustainable diversion limit compliance have been amended to clarify that the compliance process will follow the requirements of the Basin Plan
- An amendment clause has been added to provide for the conversion of 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 any development of these dealing rules, if they are progressed.

## Changes to the NSW Murray and Lower Darling Regulated Rivers Water Sharing Plan

- There was broad support for the proposed changes specific to this WSP and, with one exception (see later), there has been no material change made to the regulated rivers WSP since public exhibition.
- The proposed changes were: enabling provisions for the implementation of the Pre-requisite Policy Measures (PPMs) of environmental flow reuse and 'piggybacking', increased reference to inter-valley trade and the operation of the Barmah-Millewa environmental water allowance (EWA) – without any changes to the existing separate operating rules, the establishment of a Lower Darling River Restart Allowance and a broadening of the permissible uses of the Lower Darling EWA – to address any water quality issue in that water source.
- River Murray increased flows (RMIF) will be recognised as a new account of planned environmental water, with the same rules of operation as proposed in the WSP placed on public exhibition. The proposed operating rules are the same as the current temporary rules, which have been in place since RMIF water entitlements were recovered in 2011.
- The third definition of planned environmental water as “water that is not committed after the commitments to basic landholder rights and for sharing and extraction under any other

access rights have been met”, in Part 4 of the regulated rivers WSP, has been removed to reduce potential ambiguity

- The release rules for the environmental water allowances (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 economic objectives for the plan have been updated to include the objective “maintain, and where possible 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 extraction limit, or the long-term average sustainable diversion limit, when total extractions are significantly less than these, over the long term
- Minor wording changes to improve clarity and reduce ambiguity.

### Changes to the Murray Unregulated River Water Sharing Plan

- No material changes have been made to this unregulated WSP since public exhibition
- Minor wording changes to improve clarity and reduce ambiguity.

### Changes to the Lower Murray-Darling Unregulated River Water Sharing Plan

- No material changes have been made to this unregulated WSP since public exhibition
- Minor wording changes to improve clarity and reduce ambiguity.

## Outcomes of MDBA’s preliminary review

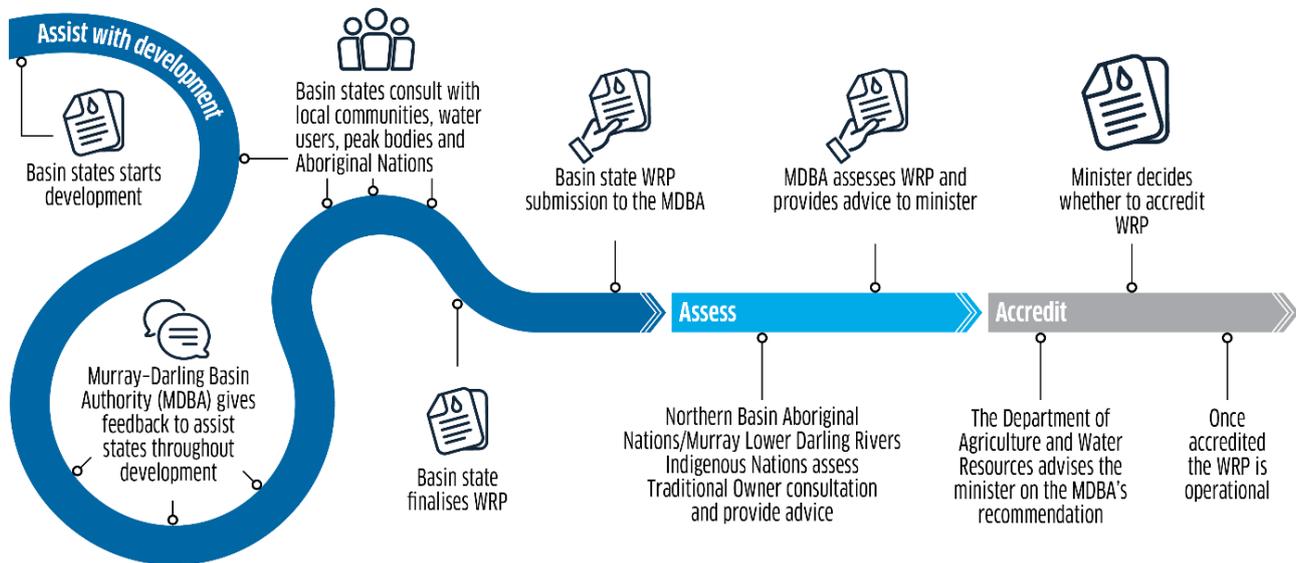
The Murray–Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) assesses the draft water resource plan as part of plan development. The assessment informs the Commonwealth minister’s decision on whether to accredit the water resource plan.

While official assessment will not happen until formal submission of the water resource plan to the MDBA, the MDBA has undertaken a preliminary review of the plan, as placed on public exhibition. 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. The changes generally relate to clarifying and justifying matters to ensure Basin Plan requirements are met.

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

Once accredited, the final NSW Murray and Lower Darling Surface Water Resource Plan will be placed on MDBA’s website. The draft plan can be found on MDBA’s website.

Figure 1. Water resource plan accreditation process



## More information

The draft NSW Murray and Lower Darling Surface Water Resource Plan and associated fact sheets are available from the department's website at ([www.water.nsw.gov.au](http://www.water.nsw.gov.au))

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