

Floodplain Harvesting Action Plan

Quarter 4 2020 progress report (October - December 2020)

February 2021

Implementing a robust floodplain harvesting framework

In September 2019 the NSW Government released the Floodplain Harvesting Action Plan (action plan). The action plan is a road map to ensure water taken from floodplains across key areas in the northern Murray-Darling Basin is managed and measured within legal limits set by the Basin Plan 2012 and state water sharing plans. In the action plan the government committed to:

1. Use the best available facts, data and scientific analysis to underpin the licensing framework and explain this work to you
2. Set clear rules for floodplain harvesting and consult with you about them
3. Ensure rules are followed
4. Improve floodplain harvesting management over time.

Progress to date

This is the second progress report on the NSW Government's Floodplain Harvesting Action Plan. It demonstrates that the government has delivered on key objectives outlined in the plan and is making good progress on the remaining objectives for the reform. As of December 2020, nine actions identified in the action plan have been completed. A further 10 actions are in progress and 9 actions are identified as future actions.

Next steps

By June 2021, we expect the licensing framework for floodplain harvesting to be operational in relevant water sharing plans in the Border Rivers, Gwydir, Barwon Darling, Macquarie and Namoi valleys. This includes having water sharing rules in place for floodplain harvesting and adaptive management practices to improve implementation over time.

The NSW Government is committed to updating these progress reports regularly to show how we are tracking against our commitment to establish a strong and transparent floodplain harvesting framework.

Floodplain Harvesting Action Plan deliverables

Use the best available facts, data and scientific analysis to underpin the licensing framework and explain this work to you

Our commitment	Target date	Progress	Updates
Report on how sensitivity and uncertainty in the model has been treated by the department and how much it affects users	Q4 2019	Complete	Documentation will now be included in valley-based model reports
Report on the significance of additional rainfall runoff due to irrigation and how this is being managed	Q4 2019	Complete	Report available on the website. We propose that runoff from irrigation areas will not be licensed as floodplain harvesting in certain circumstances
Write to individuals to explain the parameters that we will use to work out their licence entitlements	Q1 2020	Complete	Complete for all valleys
Publish valley-based model build and model scenario reports	Q3 2020	In progress	Complete for Border Rivers and Gwydir valleys. Revised target Q1 and Q2 2021 for remaining valleys
Publish valley-based environmental benefit reports	Q3 2020	In progress	Complete for Border Rivers and Gwydir valleys. Revised target Q1 and Q2 2021 for remaining valleys
Hold a focus workshop with peak water user groups in northern NSW valleys to provide information about how the modelling approach applied to individual farms is supported by sensitivity testing	Q3/Q4 2019	Complete	Workshop and field trip held with peak water user groups October 2019 in Moree

Set clear rules for floodplain harvesting and consult with you about them

Our commitment	Target date	Progress	Updates
Publish all independent reviews about policy implementation	Q3 2019	Ongoing	Reports available on the website. Border Rivers and Gwydir valleys reports published.

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Release a response to each recommendation of the Independent Review of NSW Floodplain Harvesting Policy Implementation	Q3 2019	Complete	Report available on the website
Release a guideline about how the department is implementing the policy	Q3 2019	Complete	Guidelines available on the website
Release proposed water sharing plan and water resource plan rule changes for floodplain harvesting	Q3 2020	In progress	Complete for Border Rivers and Gwydir valleys. Revised target Q1 and Q2 2021 for remaining valleys
Hold workshops with stakeholders to explain the guideline	Q3 2019	Complete	
Hold workshops with stakeholders about proposed water sharing plan and water resource plan rule changes	Q3 2020	In progress	Complete for Border Rivers. Gwydir workshops scheduled for February 2021. Revised target Q1 and Q2 2021 for remaining valleys
Release draft entitlements for comment	Q3/Q4 2020	In progress	Revised target Q1 and Q2 2021
Finalise licences and amend water sharing plan and submit water resource plan for re-accreditation	Q2 2021	In progress	

Ensure rules are followed

Our commitment	Target date	Progress	Updates
Meet Compliance Compact obligations by publishing a program for improved measurement of floodplain harvesting	Q2 2019	Complete	Improvement program available on the website
Release the final Floodplain Harvesting Measurement Policy	Q4 2019	Complete	Policy available on the website
Require licence holders to install telemetry-ready, continuous water-level loggers on all on-farm storages used for floodplain harvesting	Q2-2021	In progress	Implementation will be through the Floodplain Harvesting Measurement Policy and supporting guidelines. See website for details

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Our commitment	Target date	Progress	Updates
Start enforcement of the new floodplain harvesting licensing framework through the Natural Resources Access Regulator	Q3 2021	Future action	
Develop a best-practice guideline for floodplain harvesting measuring in partnership with Queensland and Murray–Darling Basin Authority	Q2 2021	In progress	
Implement best-practice guidelines	Q3 2021 onwards	Future action	
Support the development of technologies that enable better auditing and compliance of floodplain harvesting, including through the department's Water Technology Pilot Program	Q3 2019 onwards	Ongoing	Information about the Water Technology Pilot Program is available on the website
Encourage the Natural Resources Access Regulator to address unapproved flood works on a risk basis to improve outcomes for the environment and downstream water users	From Q3 2019	Ongoing	

Improve floodplain harvesting management over time

Our commitment	Target date	Progress	Updates
Collect floodplain harvesting diversion data by implementing the Floodplain Harvesting Measurement Strategy	From Q3 2021	Future action	Implementation will be through the Floodplain Harvesting Measurement Policy. See website for details
Consider opportunities to expand the river gauging network to improve the quantification of return flows from the floodplain to the river	Q3 2021	Future action	Options being scoped as part of the Northern Basin Toolkit and Hydrometric Networks and Remote Sensing Project
Continue to invest in remote sensing to improve our understanding of flood flow breakouts and return flows from the floodplain to the river	Q3 2021	Future action	Options being scoped as part of the Northern Basin Toolkit and Hydrometric Networks and Remote Sensing Project

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Undertake modelling to assess the effects of climate change on floodplain harvesting, as well as on downstream water users and the environment	Q3 2021	Future action	Will be guided by regional water strategies
Invest in robust monitoring and evaluation programs to better understand the hydrological and ecological effects of floodplain harvesting	Q3 2021	In progress	A MER framework is being developed to better understand the hydrological and ecological effects of floodplain harvesting
Recalibrate models using floodplain harvesting measurement data	Q3 2021	Future action	
Improve model capability by explicitly representing flows from the floodplain to the river using all new data and information collected	From 2025	Future action	
Review water sharing rules and amend them as necessary to improve the management of floodplain harvesting over time, based on improved data and information	From 2025	Future action	