

Proposed amendments to the Gwydir Valley Floodplain Management Plan

This document provides an overview of proposed changes to the *Floodplain Management Plan for the Gwydir Valley Floodplain 2016*.

Floodplain management plans are the primary legal framework for coordinating the development of flood works on a whole-of-valley basis. The plans are valid for 10 years from their commencement date. The NSW Government may amend floodplain management plans within that 10-year period under certain circumstances, including if the changes are in the public interest.

This fact sheet gives an overview of proposed amendments to the Gwydir Valley Floodplain Management Plan. The proposed changes address some recommendations from recent reviews of the plan and its implementation, and provide consistency with more recently developed floodplain management plans. They include changes to the Management Zone Map, additional rules and administrative changes.

Amending the floodplain management plan

The NSW Department of Planning and Environment has drafted an amended Floodplain Management Plan for the Gwydir Valley Floodplain and is consulting with stakeholders on the proposed changes.

Proposed changes

Changes to the Management Zone Map

About management zones

Each floodplain management plan will include several management zones. Management zones contain specific rules that define the types of flood works that may be constructed within that management zone and the assessment criteria that apply to flood work applications.

There are four basic categories of management zones:

- **Management Zone A** includes major floodways and other areas where a significant discharge of floodwater occurs during flood events. These areas are generally characterised by high flood flow velocity and depth.
- **Management Zone B** includes areas of the floodplain that are important for the conveyance of floodwater during large flood events and for the temporary pondage of floodwaters during the passage of a flood. The outer boundary of Management Zone B may be defined by the inundation extent of a large flood.

- **Management Zone C** contains elevated areas or areas protected by existing flood work development.
- **Management Zone D** includes areas of the floodplain that have a high degree of flood dependency, such as swamps or billabongs, and hold significance to the Aboriginal community or have significant ecological importance or both. They are sensitive areas of the floodplain that require a high level of protection from potential impacts of flood work development.

The proposed changes

We are proposing to make the following changes to the Management Zones Map in the Gwydir Floodplain Management Plan:

- local hydraulic and ecological refinements to Management Zone A
- refinements to Management Zone B and Management Zone C to reflect the alignment of works in a flood work approval
- realignment of Management Zone D to correct a projection error in the mapping for the Lower Gingham Watercourse area
- designation of a new Management Zone D1 and mapping of additional ecological and cultural assets to this zone.

Note: Other floodplain management plans in the northern Murray–Darling Basin include Management Zone C – Urban for urban areas where there is either a flood study, a floodplain risk management study, a floodplain risk management plan, or areas that are protected by flood mitigation works, such as town levees. At this stage, the department is not proposing to add Management Zone C – Urban to the Gwydir Valley Floodplain Management Plan or expand the boundary to include Moree, but it has been noted for consideration when the plan is replaced in 2026.

Why we propose making the change

In 2021, the plan was reviewed in accordance with section 43 of the *Water Management Act 2000*. As part of this [review](#), submissions were received in relation to the plan and the existing Management Zones Map. Proposed changes are also the result of:

- feedback from First Nations/Aboriginal communities about significant cultural assets for addition to Management Zone D1, and
- updated information on new or amended flood work approvals from WaterNSW.

The focus of these changes is to correct any errors or omissions and align with the methodology used to delineate the management zones in more recently developed floodplain management plans.

An overview of the management zone methodology is provided in the [Rural floodplain management plans: technical manual for plans developed under the Water Management Act 2000](#).

What the change would mean

The changes will result in the existing area for each management zone increasing or decreasing as follows:

- Management Zone A will decrease by approximately 1.2% (3,500 hectares)
- Management Zone B will decrease by approximately 0.1% (600 hectares)

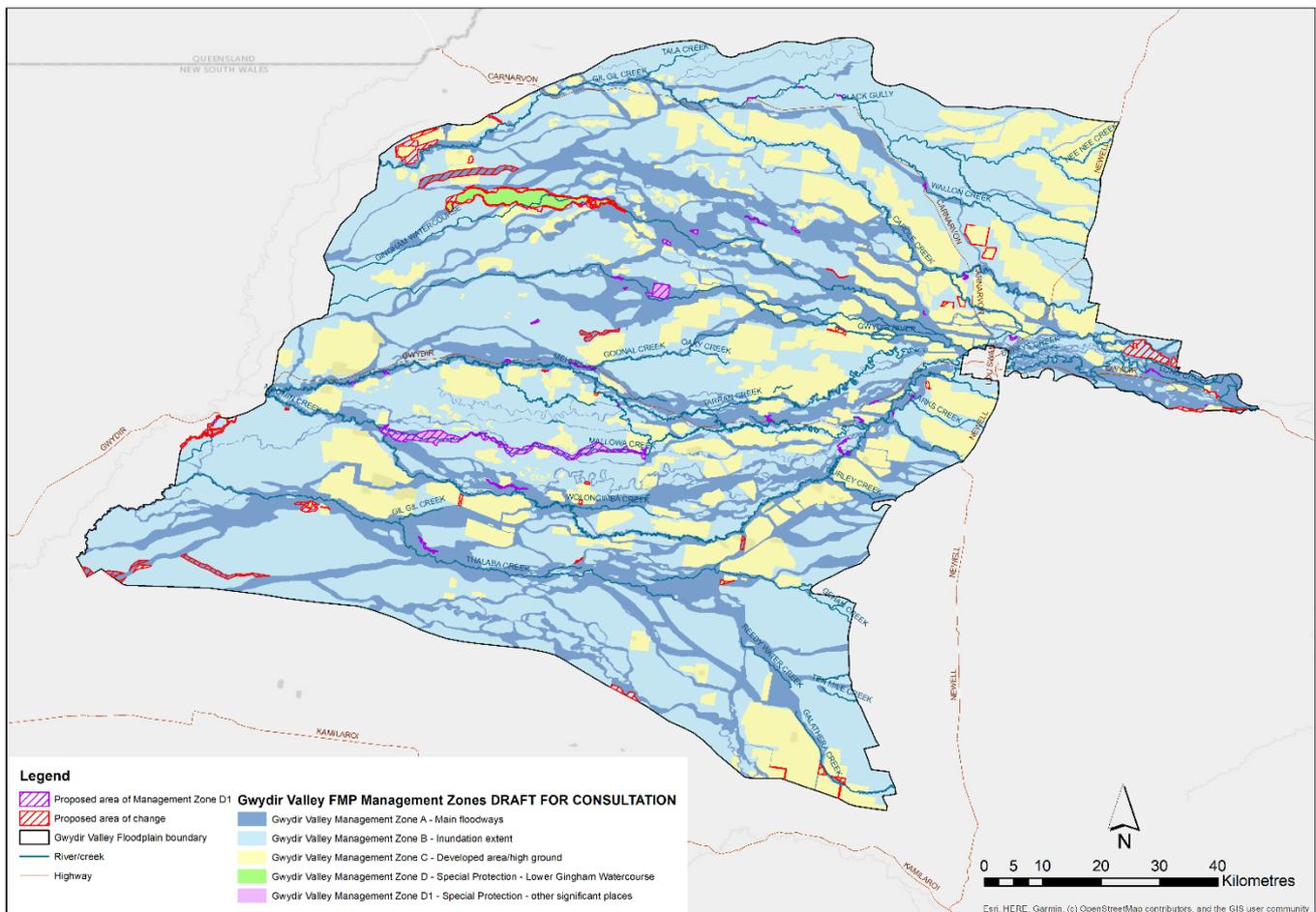
- Management Zone C will decrease by approximately 0.5% (1,300 hectares)
- Management Zone D (Management Zone D and D1 combined) will increase by approximately 117% (5,400 hectares).

A schedule will be included in the plan to list the places of ecological and cultural significance that are proposed to be added to Management Zone D1 and the existing Schedule 1 will be amended to include updates to ecological value information.

Figure 1 shows the proposed changes to the Management Zones Map, as highlighted in purple and red.

The changes to the Management Zones Map are generally limited to impacts at a local scale with individual landholders. For example, more restrictive rules will apply where the zoning has changed from Management Zone B to Management Zone A. The department is contacting affected landholders directly and is offering appointments to discuss any concerns related to the proposed changes.

Figure 1. Proposed changes to the Management Zones map



Addition of rules for enhancement flood works

About enhancement flood works

There are three basic categories of enhancement flood works:

- ecological enhancement works are designed to provide a positive outcome for an ecological asset that is mapped, recognised in or protected by a floodplain management plan, or local, state or Commonwealth environmental plans, policy or legislation
- Aboriginal cultural value enhancement works enable the protection of locations or landscape features that have Aboriginal cultural value and are listed in a local, state or Commonwealth heritage register
- heritage site enhancement works provide a positive outcome for an identified heritage site that is listed in a local, state or Commonwealth heritage register.

The proposed change

We are proposing to include rules which would allow for the construction of enhancement flood works in Management Zones A and D. The purpose of these works would be to enhance ecological assets, cultural assets or heritage sites, or a combination of these, on the floodplain.

Why we propose making the change

Floodplain management plans that have been recently developed include rules that allow for the construction of enhancement flood works in Management Zones A and D. However, these rules were not included in the Gwydir Valley Floodplain Management Plan.

The inclusion of these rules in the amended plan is consistent with section 30(c) of the *Water Management Act 2000* which allows for a floodplain management plan to deal with the restoration or rehabilitation of land, water sources or their dependent ecosystems.

What the change would mean

The change would allow for the approval of enhancement flood works in Management Zones A and D, with the purpose of enhancing ecological assets, cultural assets or heritage sites, or a combination of these, on the floodplain. Such works may be required as part of the [Gwydir Reconnecting Watercourse Country Program](#).

Other changes to ensure consistency

About other rural floodplain management plans

Since 2016 there have been six rural floodplain management plans developed in the northern inland Murray–Darling Basin. The Gwydir Valley Floodplain Management Plan was the first developed. As part of the process of developing floodplain management plans, refinements have been made to the way plans are drafted to improve clarity and simplicity. These changes are not reflected in the current Gwydir Valley Floodplain Management Plan.

The proposed change

There are a range of proposed changes to ensure consistency between the Gwydir Valley Floodplain Management Plan and more recently developed plans. These are outlined below and are considered to have minimal impact on current or future applications for flood work approvals:

1. Moving the term ‘below the natural surface level’ to the specific requirements for supply channels in **Management Zone A** (new or amended flood work approvals). The list of

authorised flood works in Management Zone A includes 'supply channels below the natural surface level'. The inclusion of 'below the natural surface level' is inconsistent with the wording for all of the other work types in this clause. Subsequent northern Murray–Darling Basin floodplain management plans have moved the below-ground wording to the specifications for supply channels. *There is no change to the intent of the rule.*

2. Removing the below-ground requirement for supply channels in **Management Zone A** that were *constructed prior to the commencement of the plan in August 2016*: This change would make the existing works rule less restrictive as both above-ground and below-ground supply channels would now be able to be considered for approval, subject to meeting the assessment criteria.
3. Including an additional height threshold of 50 cm for primary access roads in **Management Zone A**: This change improves the reliability of primary access roads during a small to medium flood event. The definition of a primary access road - *a road providing access from a public road to a permanently occupied fixed dwelling via a direct route* - will be included in the Dictionary. The other specific requirements for access roads (for example, causeways), along with the assessment criteria, will also apply to these higher-level access roads.
4. Adding rules for new and existing flood works in the new **Management Zone D1**. New works will be limited to enhancement works only. Existing minor works (those constructed prior to the commencement of the plan in August 2016), including access roads, supply channels, stock refuges, and infrastructure protection works will be considered for approval, subject to meeting the assessment criteria. The rules will also allow for the modification of existing flood work approvals. This change is a consequence of the additional areas identified in Management Zone D1 and is consistent with the existing works rules for Management Zone A. Most of the identified areas are currently mapped to Management Zone A, so there will be essentially no change in the rules for existing works.
5. Separating the assessment criteria for ecological and Aboriginal cultural values in **all management zones**: This change will ensure flora and fauna considerations are distinct from Aboriginal cultural values and heritage site considerations. *There is no change to the intent of the assessment criteria.*
6. Amending the assessment criteria in **Management Zones B and C** to allow for localised increases in velocity: This change increases flexibility for landholders to manage isolated increases in velocity.
7. Adding assessment criteria in **Management Zones B and C** to limit increases in flood levels for high value infrastructure: This change will ensure high value infrastructure is provided a high level of protection. A definition of high value infrastructure will be added to the Dictionary - *a flood work that is for the purpose of protecting houses, stock yards and other major infrastructure, such as machinery sheds in times of flooding.*
8. Updating the objectives, strategies and performance indicators of the plan: This change is a result of legal review and will ensure there is a clear link between the performance indicators measuring success (or not) of the strategies in reaching the objectives.
9. Adding new terms to the dictionary such as flood connectivity, flood wave, high value infrastructure, primary access road and wetland: This change is a consequence of the

changes being made, as outlined above and provides additional clarity about the intent of the rules.

Why we propose making the change

It is important to ensure consistency between floodplain management plans, where possible. This ensures fairness for all landholders when applying for a flood work approval and maintains protection for each floodplain and its dependent ecosystems and Aboriginal cultural values.

Floodplain management plans are based on the best available information including hydraulic modelling, spatial data and existing flood works in the landscape. These changes are based on information that has been refined and updated since the commencement of the Gwydir Valley Floodplain Management Plan in 2016.

What the change would mean

Most of the proposed changes will increase flexibility for landholders while improving protection for the floodplain. Additionally, the changes ensure consistency between floodplain management plans and are largely administrative in nature.

Transitional provisions

Provisions for dealing with outstanding flood work applications lodged prior to the adoption of the proposed amendments are not planned at this time. However, the department will consider public feedback on this issue prior to finalising the proposed amendments.

In the meantime, flood work applications will continue to be assessed and determined in accordance with the Floodplain Management Plan for the Gwydir Valley Floodplain 2016 as it is currently in force. This is clarified by section 95(3) of the *Water Management Act 2000*, which prevents an approval being granted if it contravenes the provisions in a relevant management plan.

Review of the proposed changes

An Interagency Regional Panel has reviewed the proposed changes to the Gwydir Valley Floodplain Management Plan.

Key experts from the NSW Department of Primary Industries (agricultural interests) and the Department of Planning and Environment (water and environmental interests) are represented on this panel. Input from WaterNSW, the Natural Resources Access Regulator and Local Land Services is also sought as part of the review process.

All community feedback will be reviewed by the department and the Interagency Regional Panel prior to finalising any changes to the plan.

Further work

The Gwydir Valley Floodplain Management Plan is due for replacement in 2026. As part of this, additional changes may be considered, including refinements to the Management Zones Map. Many of the additional recommendations made in the Section 43 Review of the Gwydir Floodplain

Management Plan - Final Report will also be considered as part of this process. Further opportunities for community input will be provided through broad public consultation.

More information

To read the draft amended Floodplain Management Plan for the Gwydir Valley Floodplain and other fact sheets, or to make a submission on the proposed changes, visit www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/plans-programs/plans/plans-on-public-exhibition/gwydir-valley-floodplain.