

Critical water advisory panels

The NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment plays a vital role in managing, allocating and protecting the water resources of NSW. This is especially important during extreme events such as droughts or water quality incidents.

Incident response guides

The Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (the Department) has developed incident response guides for each water resource plan area in NSW that describe how extreme events will be managed under the [NSW Extreme Events Policy](#). They provide guidance on the approach, the range of management responses and consultation arrangements for responding to extreme events. This guidance is based on the experience of the millennium drought and other more recent droughts. The material is designed to provide guidance and is not binding.

The guides are a component of their associated water resource plan and have been developed in consultation with key stakeholders.

The guides will be reviewed and updated to incorporate any new findings from this and any future extreme events.

Staged 'toolbox' approach

Incident response guides set out critical trigger levels that define four stages of drought, from Stage 1 (normal operations) to Stage 4 (critical drought), specific to each water resource plan area. The guides provide a 'toolbox' of options for water managers to consider during extreme conditions.

In the case of a drought event, the management response will involve progressively introducing more stringent measures to support highest priority needs as the event becomes more critical.

For water quality events, management responses will be guided by the type of event, which can be varied.



Figure 1. Keepit Dam pictured during the 1995 drought

Critical water advisory panels

To deliberate further in specific water resource plan areas during extreme events, the Department will convene a critical water advisory panel. The panel will provide valley-specific advice to the Minister on the most appropriate management actions during an extreme event.

Panel membership

Each panel is made up of NSW Government officers, WaterNSW staff and local government representatives via the NSW Joint Organisation of Councils network.

The Department seeks input from a range of different agencies, with a focus on incorporating local knowledge to inform recommendations to the Minister.



Figure 2. Critical water advisory panels are formed when necessary

Consultation on management actions

There are a number of ways that stakeholders can provide input to proposed management actions during an extreme event.

Consultation with key water users will mainly occur through valley-based [River Operations Stakeholder Consultation Committees](#) (ROSCCOs), convened by WaterNSW. NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment representatives regularly attend ROSCCO meetings. Any relevant feedback from the ROSCCOs will be fed back into the decision making process.

Other Panel representatives, including Local Land Services and local councils, also have a role in providing input on local issues.

Public information sessions may also be held to gather feedback from communities affected by a particular extreme event.

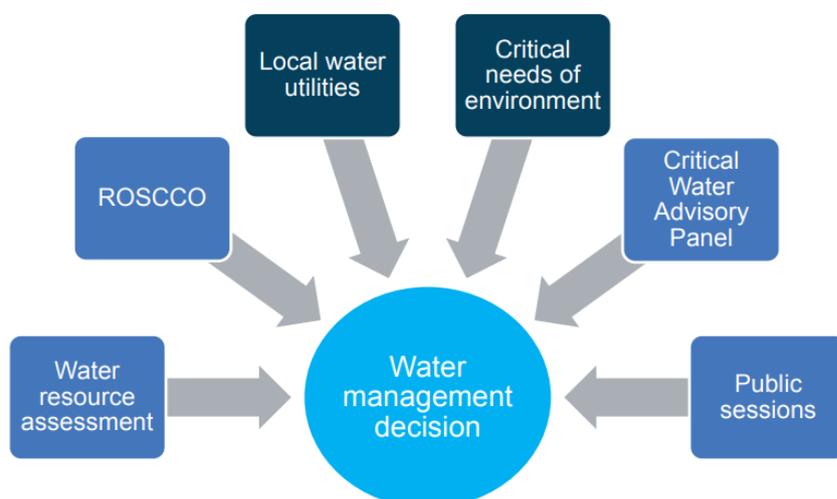


Figure 3. Stakeholder input to management decisions is gathered in a number of ways

Communication

Each panel operates in accordance with a communications and engagement plan that provides guidelines for information sharing, engagement protocols and processes. Support materials are available for releasing information to external stakeholders and affected parties.

The outcome of panel meetings will be communicated to the NSW Office of Drought Response to ensure the NSW Government's management of water security during drought is effectively coordinated across departments.

[Periodic updates](#) will also be published on the NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment's website.

The current drought stage for each water resource plan area will be included in the published [summary of current water allocations](#) and individual valley [water allocation statements](#) on the Department's website.

The statement describes any management responses being implemented at that stage, consistent with WaterNSW's operational plans and advice from the critical water advisory panel.

Any [temporary water restrictions](#) or [suspensions](#) to water sharing plan rules will also be communicated on the Department's website, including the reasons for those decisions.

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