

Meter transition scheme

- The NSW Government has confirmed it will transition all government-owned meters on private land to private ownership, and that it will consult with affected water users on the design of a meter transition scheme.
- The scheme will set out the processes and protections for water users to ensure meter transfer is fair and efficient.
- The scheme will commence in 2020, with a view to all meters being transferred before 2022.

Roundtable discussions to develop the scheme

In November 2019, staff from the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment, together with WaterNSW, held roundtable discussions with water user representatives from the Southern Basin, Bega and the Hawkesbury Nepean.

The purpose of the discussions was to provide preliminary information about the scope and intent of the scheme and to seek feedback on key aspects of the scheme, including water user protections, timing of transfer, and engagement with water users.

This document outlines next steps and summarises what we heard during the roundtable discussions.

Next steps

We are carefully considering all of the feedback we received during the roundtable discussions.

In February next year we will publicly exhibit a draft scheme for comment, including a draft regulation and draft operational rules.

We want all water users with a government owned meter to have the opportunity to comment on the draft scheme before it is made. We will be writing to them early in the new year to give them information about the scheme and the public exhibition.

We will hold a series of information sessions in February 2020 so that water users can ask questions and get any further information they need. The dates and locations of the information sessions will be provided in the letter.

Water users will be invited to have their say on the draft scheme by making a written submission or giving feedback during an information session.

What we heard during the roundtable discussions

There is broad, but not universal, opposition to the government's decision to transfer meters to private ownership, especially in the Southern Basin.

There are concerns about the short time frames for transitioning all meters, and water users want to know they will not be held responsible if the government does not meet the deadline.

Water users want all relevant information about a meter, including its maintenance history, to make a decision about whether or not to opt out of the scheme. They also want to discuss their decision with someone from WaterNSW with technical expertise and local knowledge.

Water users want to be confident the metering equipment is compliant before it is transferred and they expect a warranty of some type will be offered.

Water user representatives support the regulation containing only a high level of detail. However water users want to know what the rules will mean for them in practice. They also need clarity about what will be done with buried meters, what roles and responsibilities they will have once a meter is transferred, and if they are paying depreciation as a component of their current metering service charge - whether this will be refunded.

Detailed feedback

Concerns about private meter ownership

Water user representatives from Bega and the Hawkesbury Nepean are generally supportive of private ownership because it means they will be able to service and maintain the meters themselves, rather than rely on government.

Most (but not all) representatives from the Southern Basin disagree with the government's decision to transition meters to private ownership. This is primarily due to the history of the meter roll-out in these areas, as well as concerns about the cost of ongoing maintenance, the fear that government may reverse its decision in the future, and the perception that private ownership will undermine their social licence because they will own and maintain the same equipment that is used to regulate them.

Meter standards

While water user representatives support the regulation containing only high level detail about the scheme so it is flexible enough to be applied in different situations, they say water users will want clarity about what work will be done to their meters to make them compliant.

In the Southern Basin, water user representatives said that water users with buried meters will want to know what will be done to ensure they can access the meter to carry out maintenance. If any metering equipment needs to be moved or removed, they think the site should be remediated. They expect that accuracy testing of each meter will need to take place to ensure the meter is compliant before transfer. In addition to the necessary standards, they expect meters will be designed to work to maximum efficiency, be accessible and IT compatible, and have had a routine maintenance check carried out, including the cleaning of solar panels and installation of new batteries.

In Bega, water user representatives are concerned about how their existing telemetry system will be transitioned under the new rules.

In the Hawkesbury-Nepean, water user representatives emphasised the need for robust meters that are able to withstand flood conditions. They also queried whether all water users will need to maintain telemetry after the transition.

General Feedback

- Water users want more information about the metering rules to help with current confusion.
- Concerns about validating a meter when there is no water available to do a flow test.
- Concerns about the numbers of meters and duly qualified persons to meet demand.

More information

- Information about the meter transition scheme, and metering generally, is available at <https://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water-reform/metering-framework>.
- Please email any questions to water.reform@industry.nsw.gov.au.