

Revised Australian and New Zealand Guidelines for Fresh and Marine Water Quality 2018

For over 25 years, governments across Australia and New Zealand have worked together to develop and support a set of water quality guidelines to manage the quality of our water. The Australian and New Zealand Guidelines for Fresh and Marine Water Quality (the guidelines, formerly ANZECC 2000) have now been improved and updated.

The guidelines provide water managers with tools and guidance to assess, manage and monitor the water quality of aquatic systems in Australia and New Zealand. The guidelines are designed to help support all community values associated with water, including the plants and animals that live in water, as well as a range of uses (primary industries, and Indigenous cultural and spiritual values).

The guidelines have been jointly developed by the Australian and New Zealand governments and Australian state and territory governments and provide a best practice platform for consistent and effective water quality management and planning. They are not mandatory standards but have been used by state and territory governments to develop water management policy and/or regulation.

The improved and revised guidelines, which incorporate new science and knowledge developed over the past 20 years, are publically available through a new, easy-to-use and interactive website waterquality.gov.au/anz-guidelines

Below are responses to some frequently asked questions about the revision process and the use of the guidelines in New South Wales.

The guidelines have worked well in the past. Why have they been changed?

Since the guidelines were last revised in 2000, substantial new scientific data and techniques for both establishing guideline values and assessment have become available. Incorporating this new information into the guidelines allows for more efficient and effective assessment, management, and monitoring of water quality in water resources in Australia and New Zealand, based on the best available science.

Won't the revisions to the guideline values cost more money to implement? Who will be paying for the extra costs?

The guidelines are not mandatory and the NSW Government will carefully assess how to best use them. The NSW Government will work with stakeholders to ensure that regulations/policies are appropriate and, if implemented, are managed efficiently and effectively.

The guidelines provide tools and advice for water managers to assist in effectively managing water resources. They are based on the best available science. In some circumstances, the default guideline values for toxicant or physical and chemical stressor levels are more stringent and in others they are less, but either way, provide better information for management and monitoring.

The revision has taken several years and would have been expensive; who paid for it?

The revision of the guidelines was a joint project of the Australian and New Zealand governments and Australia's state and territory governments, who shared the costs. The production of new and default guideline values have been funded by either the joint governments, or individual states or territories, or institutions.

Will we have to implement the guidelines?

The guidelines are not mandatory. The NSW Government will work with stakeholders to ensure that regulations/policies based on the guidelines are appropriate and, if implemented, are managed efficiently and effectively.

Will the revisions to the guideline values restrict our current usage of water resources?

The NSW Government will work with stakeholders to develop regulations/policies that consider all of the community values associated with water resources, including current usage. The NSW Government has processes and procedures in place to ensure that any policy and/or regulation based on the revised guideline values considers their potential economic, social or environmental impacts and that, if implemented, the policy or regulation is managed efficiently and effectively.

The improved scientific information gives the community the tools to better manage the water resources for long-term use, to best suit all of the environmental, social and economic values of our water resources.

Won't less stringent guideline values mean less protection for the environment?

Any revision of default guideline values is based on the best available science, including new scientific data and methods for monitoring and evaluation. This new information assists in decision-making and won't reduce environmental protection.

Even though a specific value of a default guideline value may have changed, the guidelines will still provide protection to the identified range of aquatic species. Including new data increases confidence in the values provided.

Some of the toxicant Default Guideline Values (DGVs) are listed as draft—does this mean they are likely to change?

No. Each new or revised toxicant DGV will be published as a draft for public comment for a period of three months as a part of the approval process. Until the approval process has been successfully completed, the draft DGV should not be used or referred to as an Australian and New Zealand Guidelines for Fresh and Marine Water Quality DGV. It was agreed that all new DGVs would be published as draft for three months to allow stakeholders to assess them and determine what actions, if any, may be required.

The draft DGVs will only change if new data that meets the quality standard in the agreed default guideline value derivation method (waterquality.gov.au/anz-guidelines/guideline-values/derive/warne-method-derive) is provided and a new DGV is derived. The new DGV will then need to go through the publication approval process (waterquality.gov.au/anz-guidelines/guideline-values/default/draft-dgvs) and in turn be published as a draft for three months.

What if conditions in water resources change?

The default guideline values are not standards or limits. They identify levels where there is some risk of unacceptable effects occurring to the community value/s associate with a water resource and some action may need to be taken. Water quality is constantly changing. The revised guidelines include improved monitoring guidance to help users integrate monitoring and reporting more effectively into management.

The revised guidelines include a new method that will enable default guideline values to be derived for additional chemicals over time, as well as a procedure for continuously including them in the guidelines. The method and procedure can also be used to revise existing default guideline values.

The revised guidelines also include updated Sediment Quality Guidelines, with updated guidance on sampling and assessment approaches.

Why can't we have print-based guide materials as we've had in the past? Our members prefer hard copies.

The decision to publish the guidelines online was based on feedback from users. The website will revolutionise the way the guidelines are used.

The website provides easy access to the guidelines for water quality managers, industry, governments and community members via desktop and mobile platforms, which can be quickly and cost-effectively updated as new data becomes available or other changes occur.

The new website is fully interactive and includes information about how to tailor national default guidelines values, enabling users to personalise their use of the information and guidance for their own circumstances and local conditions.

The design and layout of the website has been extensively tested by users, and revised where necessary, to ensure it is easy to navigate and use. We will continuously collect user feedback and use it to inform future improvements.

How can national water quality guidelines be suitable for all purposes?

The guidelines provide a framework for managing water quality that can be adapted to local conditions. This includes guidance on how to set objectives for water quality outcomes for protecting community values that have been identified for individual circumstances, as well as guidance on monitoring and reporting against those objectives.

The guidelines also provide default values for the protection of aquatic ecosystems that can be tailored to specific catchments, regions or drainage basins.

Do we have to abide by these guidelines?

The guidelines are not mandatory but have been used by all Australian and New Zealand governments. The revised guidelines will provide more accurate and effective water management advice and tools, as they are based on the best available science and incorporate feedback from a wide range of stakeholders.

Why has extra consideration been given to Indigenous values in the revised guidelines?

Consideration of Indigenous cultural and spiritual values has always been part of the guidelines. The revised guidelines include principles and processes that were not available in the previous version to guide the protection of Indigenous cultural and spiritual values.