New South Wales RiverBank

Business Plan

Part B: Annual Plan 2010–11

Buying and managing water for the environment
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1. Introduction

On 29 November 2005, the NSW Government announced the City and Country Environment Restoration Program. The program provides funding of $439 million over five years to tackle specific and significant environmental challenges. The largest single subprogram within the City and Country Environment Restoration Program is NSW RiverBank – a $105 million program to buy and manage water for environmental benefits, and specifically to protect and restore the State’s ailing wetlands and river systems.

RiverBank has been set up within the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water (DECCW) to work within the established water access rights framework to buy water rights and manage them for environmental benefit. In particular, its goal is to make a significant contribution to the rehabilitation and protection of stressed rivers and iconic wetlands in NSW.

RiverBank works within the existing water market, buying only from willing sellers. RiverBank is a legitimate market participant that supports water-dependent ecological assets on public and private lands, and provides a price signal in the market that reflects ecological values. All licence holders in the target valleys have an opportunity to interact with RiverBank. RiverBank will achieve its objectives by investing predominantly in water access licences and actively managing its licence portfolio for environmental benefit.

RiverBank provides these environmental water management services to the NSW and Australian governments, and may also provide these services to non-government organisations and individuals.

The RiverBank Business Plan is in two parts. The Program Plan 2006-2011 (Part A of the Business Plan) outlines the vision, objectives and expected outcomes and outputs of RiverBank, and establishes the basic philosophy, processes and business model that are applied. It outlines the environmental management services that are offered by RiverBank, and explains the strategies for licence acquisition and for use of the acquired licences. Finally, the Program Plan specifies the program monitoring, evaluation and reporting frameworks to provide the NSW Government, other potential investors, and the public with a means by which to gauge the program’s success.

This Annual Plan 2010-11 (Part B of the Business Plan) outlines the proposed RiverBank activities for 2010-11. In particular, it specifies annual water acquisition and trading targets and activities, strategies to develop effective water use at environmental assets, and strategic partnerships, program communications, and monitoring, evaluation and reporting. Appendix A outlines the key achievements of RiverBank during 2009-10.
2. Water acquisition and trading targets and activities

The RiverBank program has revised NSW Government funding for water purchase of $5.6 million for the 2010-11 financial year. As DECCW has reached its interim volumetric targets for water recovery in the Macquarie, Gwydir and Lachlan valleys, Table 1 shows the indicative investment targets.

Table 1: Indicative investment targets for RiverBank 2010–11*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Water source</th>
<th>Indicative investment targets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gwydir</td>
<td>$0.8 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macquarie</td>
<td>$0 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lachlan</td>
<td>$0 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murrumbidgee</td>
<td>$5.6 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unregulated rivers</td>
<td>$0 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>$5.6 million*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following adjusted year-by-year water investment targets apply to the RiverBank program: 2005–06: $6.2 million; 2006–07: $10.4 million; 2007–08: $44.4 million; 2008–09: $47 million; 2009–10: $21.8 million. In addition to the above, $5.27 million of separate Australian Government funding has been allocated in 2010-11 to purchase water licences in the Hawkesbury–Nepean river system.

The actual investment in each valley may vary from the target investment, as it will depend on the market availability and price of water products. In addition, the specific requirements of target valley environmental assets may be refined over time. Relative investment levels between valleys may therefore be modified in subsequent years. In particular, DECCW is aware that with existing and planned purchases of wetland property, there may be opportunities for strategic acquisition of water entitlements that will benefit future environmental management at these sites.

The indicative 2010-11 investment targets shown in Table 1 reflect the strengths of institutional arrangements for environmental water management and relationships with key landholders and managers at targeted assets, providing confidence that water application can achieve the required environmental outcomes. The targets also reflect:

- the 2010-11 target environmental assets identified in Section 3
- the relative market values of licences in each valley
- progress towards five-year acquisition objectives.

In 2010-11, the priority product for purchasing will continue to be general security access water entitlement, with high security and unregulated entitlement assessed where strategic benefit can be demonstrated. General security is the most commonly available product and strikes an appropriate balance between water availability and management flexibility to form the basis of a portfolio for each valley or asset. The acquisition of supplementary access water entitlement will not be a priority but may
be acquired where it is offered with general security and can provide the necessary flexibility and reliability of access for environmental watering needs.

‘Expressions of interest’ (EOIs) continue to be an effective way of identifying willing sellers and giving all licence holders an opportunity to participate in the RiverBank program, although the program and its method of operation are now well known to most water market participants. EOIs will continue to be issued at least once a year in target markets. This will continue to be supplemented by direct negotiations between RiverBank and willing sellers, by working through established water agents or brokers, and by using online water trading platforms.

RiverBank will not now pursue the acquisition of Queensland water access rights for use in the Narran River system. NSW notes that the Australian Government is now buying water in Queensland under its Water for the Future program, which should benefit Narran Lakes.

In 2010-11 DECCW aims to implement a $5 million licence purchase project in the Hawkesbury–Nepean river system. This project is part of a larger and separate initiative fully funded up to $77.4 million from the Australian Government’s Water Smart Australia fund. This program aims to improve river health below the major water supply dams by increasing the water available for environmental flows in the river and reducing nutrient loads. During its implementation, the project also seeks to engage and involve landholders with all levels of government.

The Water Licence Purchase Project aims to:

- stimulate the use of water trading in the water source once the Metropolitan Water Sharing Plan is gazetted (if not gazetted in 2010, RiverBank will investigate an alternative purchase of unregulated entitlement in part)
- gauge the market value of water in the water source and, over time, deepen the market
- purchase an estimated 3 gigalitres of water entitlement for the environment and to reduce existing diversions for irrigation.

This purchase project will follow the EOI process and use the governance structure of the RiverBank program. However, due to the characteristics of the Hawkesbury–Nepean water source and existing distribution of water licences (many small licences held as horticultural interest in a multi-lingual society, no existing water market) more emphasis will be placed on program promotion, communication and tailoring the purchasing to best achieve the environmental objectives while setting a fair market price for willing sellers. The licence purchase approach for the Hawkesbury–Nepean river system is summarised in Appendix B.

Other ongoing water acquisition and trading activities for 2010-11 include:

- tracking market prices for water products
- selling water allocations from time to time, consistent with the RiverBank Water Trading Strategy, to recover a proportion of water entitlement portfolio costs
- complying with Water Management Act 2000 (WMA) requirements for water licence acquisition and management.
3. Water use targets and activities

The target environmental assets for 2010-11 remain the same as those for previous years and are specified in Table 2.

Table 2: Target environmental assets by valley for 2010–11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Water source</th>
<th>Target environmental assets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Macquarie Regulated River          | Vegetation communities in the Macquarie Marsh Nature Reserve  
                                         Private Ramsar areas  
                                         Smaller wetlands on the Macquarie River system upstream of the Macquarie Marshes |
| Gwydir Regulated River             |Disconnected and discrete wetlands where management arrangements can be negotiated with landholders and managers  
                                         Ramsar sites within the wetland system to which water can be delivered  
                                         Supplementation of planned environmental releases to the Gingham, Lower Gwydir and other wetlands  
                                         In-stream environmental health |
| Murrumbidgee Regulated River       | Semi-permanent wetland areas within and adjacent to Yanga National Park, including areas of southern bell frog habitat  
                                         River red gum forests and woodlands within Yanga National Park  
                                         Significant bird, fish, and amphibian breeding locations within Yanga National Park and on the Nimmie-Caira system |
| Lachlan Regulated River            | Lake Ita (within Kalyarr State Conservation Area)  
                                         Booligal Swamp on Merrimajeel Creek  
                                         Small wetland assets on private land in the mid and lower Lachlan creeks (e.g. Wallaroi, Wallamundry, Bumbuggan and Torriganny) |
| Hawkesbury–Nepean river system     | In-stream environmental benefits to be secured by the Metropolitan Water Sharing Plan |

The assets selected reflect the growing amount of water that will be available to the program over this period, and within the Murray–Darling Basin (MDB), a cooperative water-delivery arrangement with the Australian Government that allows co-delivery of water available from the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder (CEWH).
There is a focus on assets that are currently being actively managed by the NSW Government for environmental and cultural benefit, are in public ownership, or are privately owned and the landholders are willing to be involved in managing them for improved environmental outcomes.

The NSW Office of Water has approved water use plans (WUPs) for adaptive environmental water for the Gwydir, Macquarie, Lachlan and Murrumbidgee valleys; these plans satisfy the requirements of an implementation plan prepared under section 8E (7) of the WMA. Separate WUPs for NSW Murray and Living Murray icon sites (inter-jurisdictional management) are being prepared. These plans, together with non-statutory annual watering plans (AWPs) prepared by DECCW, will identify watering priorities under different climatic conditions and various water availability scenarios. AWPs are prepared for RiverBank target valleys in consultation with environmental water advisory groups before each water year. Further detail on the DECCW environmental water management planning framework is available at: www.environment.nsw.gov.au/environmentalwater/WaterManagementPlanning.htm.

Since the program commenced, the volumes of RiverBank adaptive environmental water used have continued to increase:

- **2007-08**: a total of 675 megalitres used, all delivered to Macquarie Marshes
- **2008-09**: a total of 902 megalitres used; 90 megalitres delivered to Whittakers Lagoon in the Gwydir Valley in late November 2008; 812 megalitres delivered to wetlands within Yanga National Park in early December 2008, in addition to planned environmental water flows, to support the endangered southern bell frog.
- **2009-10**: a total of 8,580 megalitres used. See Table 3.

### Table 3: RiverBank adaptive environmental water use 2009–10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Water source</th>
<th>Adaptive environmental water use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Macquarie Regulated River** | 2,574 megalitres delivered during August and November to Macquarie Marshes in combination with 16,535 megalitres planned environmental water and 90 megalitres CEWH adaptive water. These deliveries alleviated damage to some core wetland areas from prolonged drought.  
435 megalitres of supplementary environmental water delivered to Macquarie Marshes in December as part of a total 1,000-megalitre cooperative delivery with the CEWH. This was the first use of RiverBank and CEWH supplementary entitlements and extended the benefits from the above delivery, in combination with local rainfall. |
<p>| <strong>Gwydir Regulated River</strong> | 70 megalitres delivered to Whittakers Lagoon in November to continue this wetland’s restoration. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Water source</th>
<th>Adaptive environmental water use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Murrumbidgee Regulated River</td>
<td>• 1,580 megalitres delivered to Yanga National Park in several separate events between October and December, in combination with 2,780 megalitres planned environmental water and 7,141 megalitres CEWH adaptive water. These deliveries targeted the breeding habitats of southern bell frog and allowed small waterbird (egret and cormorant) breeding colonies to successfully fledge young birds. The first delivery of supplementary entitlement was made to the north-bank Lowbidgee with a 2,000-megalitre delivery in March, 300 megalitres from RiverBank accounts and 1,700 megalitres from the CEWH.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lachlan Regulated River</td>
<td>• Due to critical water conditions persisting, there was no access available to the small volumes in account and therefore no opportunities to use RiverBank water.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Funds management

The Environmental Trust’s approval of this Business Plan will secure the $5.6 million NSW Government RiverBank budget water purchase allocation for 2010-11. This allocation has been reduced relative to the original funding profile by $22.2 million, with expenditure accelerated into the forward years in 2007–08 ($6.1 million), 2008–09 ($3.5 million) and 2009–10 ($5.75 million), and extended into 2011–12 ($6.8 million).

Similarly, $2.573 million of Australian Government funds were accelerated into 2008–09 from 2009–10 under the NSW Rivers Environmental Restoration Program (RERP). The final Australian Government contribution to RERP Subprogram I of $2.497 million was expended during 2009-10 in accordance with the RiverBank Business Plan and the RERP Investment Strategy. DECCW has made arrangements to manage and separately identify the assets purchased with these funds, as agreed with the Australian Government.

The Australian Government’s Hawkesbury–Nepean River Recovery Program (HNRRP) funds are allocated to the NSW Office of Water (NOW) (Office of the Hawkesbury–Nepean) and distributed to the project agencies from there. The $5.27 million balance of funds available under the Hawkesbury–Nepean Water Licence Purchase Project for 2010–11 will be available from NOW in accordance with progress against milestones in the HNRRP funding deed, including approval of this Business Plan and a Water Licence Purchase Project communication plan.
5. Strategic partnerships, communications and marketing

As the environmental water manager for NSW, DECCW will continue to work with environmental water advisory groups, catchment management authorities (CMAs) and landholders to achieve the best outcomes through its environmental watering activities.

The Water for the Environment Communication Strategy focuses on communicating and promoting DECCW’s role as an environmental water manager, as outlined in the RiverBank Business Plan (Part A), as well as the environmental and community benefits of the program.

RiverBank and related program outcomes and achievements are available through:

- regular website information updates including up-to-date information on the amount of water entitlements held (www.environment.nsw.gov.au/environmentalwater/achievements.htm)
- publishing and distributing periodic newsletters
- reporting to the Minister for Climate Change and the Environment, NSW State Plan (E1 and E4 targets), Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and the Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) Ministerial Council (contribution to NSW reports), and reporting to the Australian Government as an investment partner (RERP, The Living Murray, NSW Wetland Recovery Program)
- public reporting and ongoing engagement with stakeholders.

Target audiences for public information include licence holders, landholders, CMAs, non-government organisations, potential investment partners and interested members of the public.

Strategic partnership and communication activities for 2010-11 include:

- being involved in developing national park plans of management where RiverBank target environmental assets are within a national park, e.g. Yanga National Park, Macquarie Marshes Nature Reserve, Booligal Station and Old Dromana.
- coordinating NSW environmental water planning and support forums, including environmental water advisory groups in relevant valleys
- developing partnerships with landholders to use private infrastructure in the delivery of water (e.g. Whittaker’s Lagoon in the Gwydir)
- progressing integrated environmental water management arrangements with other agencies, CMAs, other programs and other environmental water holders
- developing the environmental watering partnership and memorandum of understanding with the Australian Government Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts (DEWHA)
- maintaining the strong relationships developed with relevant agents and brokers in target water markets
- continuing to liaise with other government water recovery programs to ensure program objectives are aligned
- participating in relevant State Water Corporation customer service committees
- communicating the outputs and outcomes of the program in a timely manner.
6. Monitoring and evaluation

Determining the significance of the RiverBank and other program contributions to the rehabilitation and protection of stressed rivers and iconic wetlands in NSW requires a long-term commitment to:

- measure and account for delivery of water to ecological targets
- determine ecological and other outcomes related to the application of the purchased water at the targets
- improve future management actions so the contribution of RiverBank water is optimised.

RiverBank must also be accountable to the public as investors; financial monitoring and reporting is a central activity for the program.

Key activities for 2010-11 include:

- **Coordination with other NSW environmental water recovery programs**: DECCW’s role as the NSW Government water manager encompasses RiverBank and a number of other programs, including finalisation of the Rivers Environmental Restoration Program (RERP) and water licence purchases under the Hawkesbury-Nepean River Recovery Program. DECCW will continue to integrate these programs to optimise their investment and outcomes.

- **Coordination with other governments**: DECCW will continue to work with the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder to develop collaborative arrangements for watering of NSW assets, and with the Murray–Darling Basin Authority for effective management of water recovered under the Living Murray (TLM) initiative.

- **Further development of a monitoring framework**: The development of a monitoring, evaluation and reporting (MER) strategy is continuing in the context of both a new MER framework for NSW and the development of a new reporting framework under the MDBA Basin Environmental Watering Plan. New learning from current investments in science and technology under TLM, RERP and the Wetland Recovery Program (WRP) will guide the development of a consistent state-wide MER framework.

- **Reporting on program performance indicators**: RiverBank will comply with the reporting requirements of DECCW’s corporate reporting systems including reporting on entitlements acquired and water delivered to target assets.

- **Development and maintenance of a register of RiverBank licences**: The registration requirements of the National Water Initiative are met by the Land and Property Management Authority, NOW and the State Water Corporation registers of licences and licence information. DECCW (NOW) has developed a NSW Environmental Water Register that can be interrogated to provide reports for State, MDB and national reporting purposes. DECCW will continue to refine and improve its information systems for the NSW environmental water access licences that it holds.

- **Periodic reports to the Environmental Trust and Minister, including reporting of acquired licences (volume and licence category) and financial reporting**: This is an ongoing activity, the framework for which is shown in Table 3 and has been applied across all years of the RiverBank program.
Table 4: RiverBank reporting content and frequency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contents of report</th>
<th>Bi-annual</th>
<th>Yearly</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summary of program to date</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background to, and objectives of, the program</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcomes achieved</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Environmental outcomes achieved in reporting period</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Environmental outcomes achieved in reporting period</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Outputs and milestones</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Milestones achieved, compared with those planned</td>
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<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The most important outputs produced or achieved</td>
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<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to date</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology and approach</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Summary of activities undertaken, approach used and</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>why</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Role and contribution of strategic partners</td>
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<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issues, changes, problems, opportunities</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Any problems encountered and steps taken or proposed</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to manage them</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Opportunities that have arisen and what will or could</td>
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<td>be done to harness them</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Lessons from the program, long-term opportunities</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>and how benefits from the program could be spread more</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>widely</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>• Other issues</td>
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<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finances</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Total amount spent to date</td>
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<td>• Financial report showing:</td>
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<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>actual income and expenditure of Environmental Trust</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>funds, compared with approved budget</td>
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<td>estimated value of in-kind contributions</td>
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<td>Attachments</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Any significant completed documents, publications</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>and materials produced</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Summary of media coverage obtained and significant</td>
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<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>written feedback on the program from stakeholders</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7. Appendices

A. Achievements in 2009–10

- Continuous improvement of the program’s administrative systems.
- Building DECCW’s reputation as a credible and responsible manager of environmental water under RiverBank and related programs.
- Developing corporate and partner awareness and understanding of the environmental water and wetland management programs administered by DECCW and their relationship to each other.
- Securing new water licence entitlements across the target valleys under the Business Plan, including preparation for purchasing water licences within the Hawkesbury-Nepean river system.
- Implementing a system of cooperative use for environmental water holdings for the benefit of priority wetland sites in NSW with the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder. To this end, DECCW is revising a memorandum of understanding with DEWHA for the 2010–11 water year.
- Engaging with program participants, in particular existing licence holders, water brokers and agents through market contact, and landholders on whose land the water is to be applied.
- Working with NOW to develop a robust system for adaptive environmental water (AEW) management in NSW, including seeking the necessary approvals for DECCW and related environmental water use, and ensuring consistency of NSW environmental water policy with the National Water Initiative.
- Continuous improvement of water use planning for AEW, with water use plans for the Gwydir, Macquarie, Lachlan and Murrumbidgee rivers now approved. The content of AEW water use plans will be improved over time as they are applied.
- Revision of annual watering plans in a consistent format across target valleys and applying adaptive environmental water conditions to acquired access licences.

RiverBank has made substantial progress in licence acquisition during 2009-10, including completion of acquisition under the Australian Government component of the RERP. Up-to-date information on acquisitions is available from the DECCW website at [www.environment.nsw.gov.au/environmentalwater/achievements.htm](http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/environmentalwater/achievements.htm)

Full expenditure of the 2009–10 water purchase budget has been achieved, including an additional $5.57 million accelerated from the Environmental Trust. The focus of expenditure in 2009–10 has been in the Macquarie and Murrumbidgee valleys, including the strategic purchase of $5.0 million of unregulated pumping entitlements from Tala Lake on the Lowbidgee floodplain. This has allowed watering strategies for the southern section of Yanga National Park to be progressed. A single high security entitlement in the lower Lachlan has also been accepted for contract.

Other milestones:

- RiverBank adaptive environmental water was used in the Gwydir, Macquarie and Murrumbidgee valleys, and supplementary access licences were used in the Macquarie and Murrumbidgee.
- A strong community awareness and acceptance of RiverBank and its objectives continues to be apparent to DECCW.
• DECCW completed the water purchase components of the Wetland Recovery Program (WRP), the Rivers Environmental Restoration Program (RERP) and The Living Murray (TLM) initiative,

• The Australian Government also had a significant presence in the water purchase market in 2009-10, and reports its water holdings at www.environment.gov.au/water/policy-programs/cewh/holdings.html.

B. Approach to purchasing licences for the Hawkesbury–Nepean river system

• Develop a project communication plan in consultation with other Hawkesbury–Nepean (HN) program partners, given the licensee community is multilingual.

• Carry out an independent desktop water valuation study.

• Assess the water licence market and review existing data and information to establish licence characteristics.

• Assess the environmental benefits from water purchases against program objectives, and identify the scope for targeting the application of the project, either spatially or to particular licence types, e.g. sleeper licences.

• Develop awareness of the water licence purchase project among water licence holders, and provide a mechanism for pre-registration of interest in sale.

• Develop a streamlined legal process for the conveyancing associated with water licence transfers, as licences are likely to be small and relatively low in value.

• Approach the market with an expression-of-interest process.

• Negotiate to accept offers from willing sellers whose offers fall within the value range and priorities.

• Purchase entitlements under contract, and secure savings as environmental water under relevant terms of the Greater Metropolitan Water Sharing Plan.

• Conduct a post-measure survey of participants.