



Managing environmental flows

Water for the environment

Roles of agencies

Water allocated and managed specifically to improve the health of rivers, wetlands and floodplains is known as water for the environment.

Part of the NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, the NSW Water for the Environment program (the program) is responsible for management of water for the environment in New South Wales.

This fact sheet explains the roles and responsibilities of the Commonwealth and state agencies we work with to deliver managed flows to rivers, creeks, wetlands and wildlife for the greatest environmental benefit.

Water for the Environment program

The program leads the management of water for the environment in New South Wales. The program has dedicated water management, planning, policy and governance teams.

The program manages a portfolio of water on behalf of the NSW Government and Commonwealth Government. It works with the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder to deliver environmental water in New South Wales.

With strategic and practical roles, the program decides where and when to provide environmental flows to rivers, wetlands and floodplains that benefit waterbirds, and native fish and vegetation, and bolster the life-giving services these ecosystems provide.

The program also:

- manages environmental water licences and environmental allocations made under water-sharing plans
- convenes Environmental Water Advisory Groups
- publishes annual environmental water priorities for each water source to inform Basin-wide annual priorities
- develops long-term water plans for the Murray–Darling Basin Authority
- monitors use of environmental water, and reports annually on this use and its outcomes
- advises the Minister for the Environment on concurrence to the making or amendment of water sharing and floodplain management plans.

Murray–Darling Basin Authority

The Murray–Darling Basin Authority (the authority) plans water resources across the entire Basin. It plays a role in operating the River Murray system to deliver water on behalf of partner governments, and performs monitoring, research and education.

The authority develops, implements and reviews the long-term strategy for the Basin’s environmental water. It prepares the Murray–Darling Basin Plan, the Basin-wide environmental watering strategy, and Basin annual environmental water priorities. It identifies and accounts for held environmental water.

The authority also monitors, reports on, and enforces compliance with:

- sustainable diversion limits – the average amount of water that towns, communities, industry and farmers can take from the Basin on a sustainable basis
- water trading rules
- water resource plans.

Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder

The Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder is an independent entity established by law. It leads the Commonwealth Environmental Water Office, a division of the Australian Government Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water.

It holds the largest portfolio of water for the environment and manages this in accordance with the Basin Plan and Basin-wide environmental watering strategy.

Seeking Basin-wide outcomes, the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder contributes to environmental watering at sites across the entire Murray–Darling Basin. It partners with the NSW Water for the Environment program to plan and deliver environmental water in New South Wales. It also has a role in monitoring ecological response to environment flows and reports annually on the use and outcomes of water for the environment.

Water Group

The Water Group –in the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water –administers the *Water Management Act 2000* and leads implementation of the Murray–Darling Basin Plan on behalf of New South Wales. The Water Group determines the rules for sharing water between users and the environment. It also develops policies for water trading and plays a role in monitoring ecosystem health.

In pursuit of these goals, the Water Group prepares water management plans, including:

- water sharing plans
- plans to regulate development on floodplains, and protect flows to environmental assets like native plants, fish and waterbirds.

Each year, the Water Group determines the volume of water available to allocate to water users and the environment. It allocates this water in accordance with water-sharing plan rules and priorities.

Environmental Water Advisory Groups

Environmental Water Advisory Groups (EWAGs) inform the management of water for the environment in New South Wales. They draw on the expertise and experience of community members, including water managers, recreational fishers, landholders, Aboriginal groups, independent scientists, local government representatives and various partner agencies.

These groups meet regularly to discuss proposed or upcoming watering events and any related issues or concerns, results of watering events, and future opportunities.

In New South Wales, there are EWAGs for 6 catchments where water for the environment is targeted:

- Gwydir
- Macquarie
- Lachlan
- Murrumbidgee
- Murray and Lower Darling–Baaka
- Hunter-Paterson.

WaterNSW

WaterNSW is a state-owned corporation that manages surface and groundwater resources to maximise reliability for users in New South Wales. It is responsible for the operation of the state's regulated river systems.

Under a Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water water-operating licence, WaterNSW operates dams, infrastructure and bulk water supply systems, and delivers water to licence holders. In the River Murray system, it does this in collaboration with the Murray–Darling Basin Authority.

WaterNSW also administers water access: the licensing, trading and ordering of water.

Natural Resources Access Regulator

Established under the *Natural Resources Access Regulator Act 2017*, the independent Natural Resources Access Regulator enforces the water management rules in New South Wales. In addition to enforcing compliance, it provides compliance education, and issues licences and approvals.

Department of Primary Industries – Fisheries

Through research, policy implementation, education and compliance, the Department of Primary Industries manages and protects fish populations in New South Wales.

Southern Connected Basin Environmental Watering Committee

The Southern Connected Basin Environmental Watering Committee coordinates delivery of water for the environment in the southern part of the Murray–Darling Basin. It works with multiple water holders and jurisdictions, meeting regularly to discuss environmental flow management.

The committee also produces an annual report that summarises watering actions, environmental outcomes, lessons learned, communication and community involvement, coordination, and an update on jointly managed water and other activities.

Northern Basin Environmental Watering Group

The Northern Basin Environmental Watering Group provides advice and guidance on water for the environment in the northern part of the Murray–Darling Basin. The group's coordinated work informs the planning and delivery of inter-valley and cross-border water to enhance connectivity and improve environmental outcomes. Catchment-scale operational matters and decisions remain a New South Wales responsibility.

Victorian Environmental Water Holder

The Victorian Environmental Water Holder holds and manages Victoria's environmental water entitlements. It works with catchment management authorities to ensure environmental water entitlements achieve the best environmental outcomes. It collaborates with Commonwealth and state agencies to coordinate environmental flows along the New South Wales and Victoria border.

Department for Environment and Water

South Australia's Department for Environment and Water works with the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder to plan, manage, deliver and monitor water for the environment in South Australia.

More information

[Water for the environment](#)

[Murray–Darling Basin Authority](#)

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Environment and Heritage, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, Locked Bag 5022, Parramatta NSW 2124. Phone: 1300 361 967; Email: info@environment.nsw.gov.au; Website: www.environment.nsw.gov.au.

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