



# Sharing water

## Water for the environment

### How water is shared

The water in our rivers and dams is shared among many different users. Some water is set aside for towns, some for farms. And a share of the water in our rivers is managed for the health of the river itself.

Communities, government and industry groups all have a role in managing river health. These groups work together to achieve the best possible outcomes for native plants, fish, birds, animals and people alike.

### Role of the Water for the Environment program

In New South Wales, the Water for the Environment program (the program) manages water set aside for the environment through water-sharing rules and water licences. The program also delivers water held by the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder for environmental management.

For many years, the program has been working with local communities to deliver water in the Gwydir, Macquarie, Lachlan, Murrumbidgee, Hunter–Paterson and Murray–Lower Darling catchments.

The program works with the Snowy Advisory Committee, partner agencies and ecological experts to design releases for the Snowy and Montane rivers.

Water for the environment is also managed in other valleys in New South Wales – the Barwon–Darling, Border Rivers, Intersecting Streams, and Namoi – in collaboration with relevant state and Commonwealth agencies.

## Community has a say

Environmental Water Advisory Groups (or EWAG) have been established to inform the decision-making process.

Stakeholders include:

- community representatives
- recreational fishers
- irrigation and farming groups
- Aboriginal organisations
- floodplain graziers
- environment representatives
- scientists
- partner agencies.

These groups help decide which sites to target for watering as well as the best timing to maximise outcomes for rivers and wetlands and the plants and animals that depend on them. They also help to develop strategies for various weather scenarios and provide advice on how to minimise disruption to farmers and communities.

## Deciding which sites to water

The Water for the Environment program uses the best available science, management experience and local knowledge to identify priority watering sites. Water managers aim to provide the right amount of water where and when it is needed to support the health and function of river and wetland habitats for the benefit of plants, animals and people.

The program prepares an Annual Environmental Water Plan for each valley. Advisory groups inform the development of these plans, which include a list of river and wetland sites that may be targeted under a range of climate and other scenarios.

Depending on seasonal conditions, watering events and their objectives may change. Plans must be flexible to accommodate these variations.

## Other involved groups

**Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder** (CEWH) holds the largest portfolio of water for the environment on behalf of the Australian Government. CEWH contributes to environmental watering at sites across the whole Murray–Darling Basin, seeking Basin-wide outcomes. It also has a monitoring role.

**Murray–Darling Basin Authority** assists with environmental watering at a whole-of-Basin scale and is responsible for the development of a long-term strategy for environmental water across the Basin.

**Water Group, in the NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water**, determines the volume of water available for allocation to towns, water users and the environment each year. It determines the water-sharing rules between users, and policies for water trading. It also has a role in monitoring ecosystem health.

**WaterNSW**, the business unit of the NSW Government, is responsible for the operation and maintenance of dams and weirs to enhance water supply and security.

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