NSW GOVERNMENT Office of Environment & Heritage

Murrumbidgee catchment

Annual environmental watering priorities 2017–18

environment.nsw.gov.au

Planning for the year ahead

In 2016–17, the Murrumbidgee valley experienced very wet conditions with very high inflows. This resulted in widespread inundation of floodplain creeks, rivers and wetlands which led to significant waterbird breeding and habitat recovery.

Water managers are planning to build on these outcomes through the careful management of water for the environment in 2017–18.

Weather and water forecast

As a result of recent floods, the availability of planned and licensed water is expected to be relatively high.

Warmer and drier than average conditions are forecast for the coming year and water management plans reflect this.

Water managers have prepared watering plans that take into consideration a range of weather and water availability scenarios, in case it rains more or less than expected. This is known as resource availability scenario planning (www.mdba.gov.au/sites/default/files/archived/altered-PBP/APBP-Ch7-Guideline.pdf). Dry to moderate scenario actions are proposed for the Murrumbidgee valley.

Murrumbidgee resource availability scenario

Very dry

Main aim: Protect

- Avoid critical loss
- Maintain key refuges
- Avoid catastrophic events

Dry

Main aim: Maintain

- Maintain river functioning
- Maintain key functions of high priority wetlands

Moderate

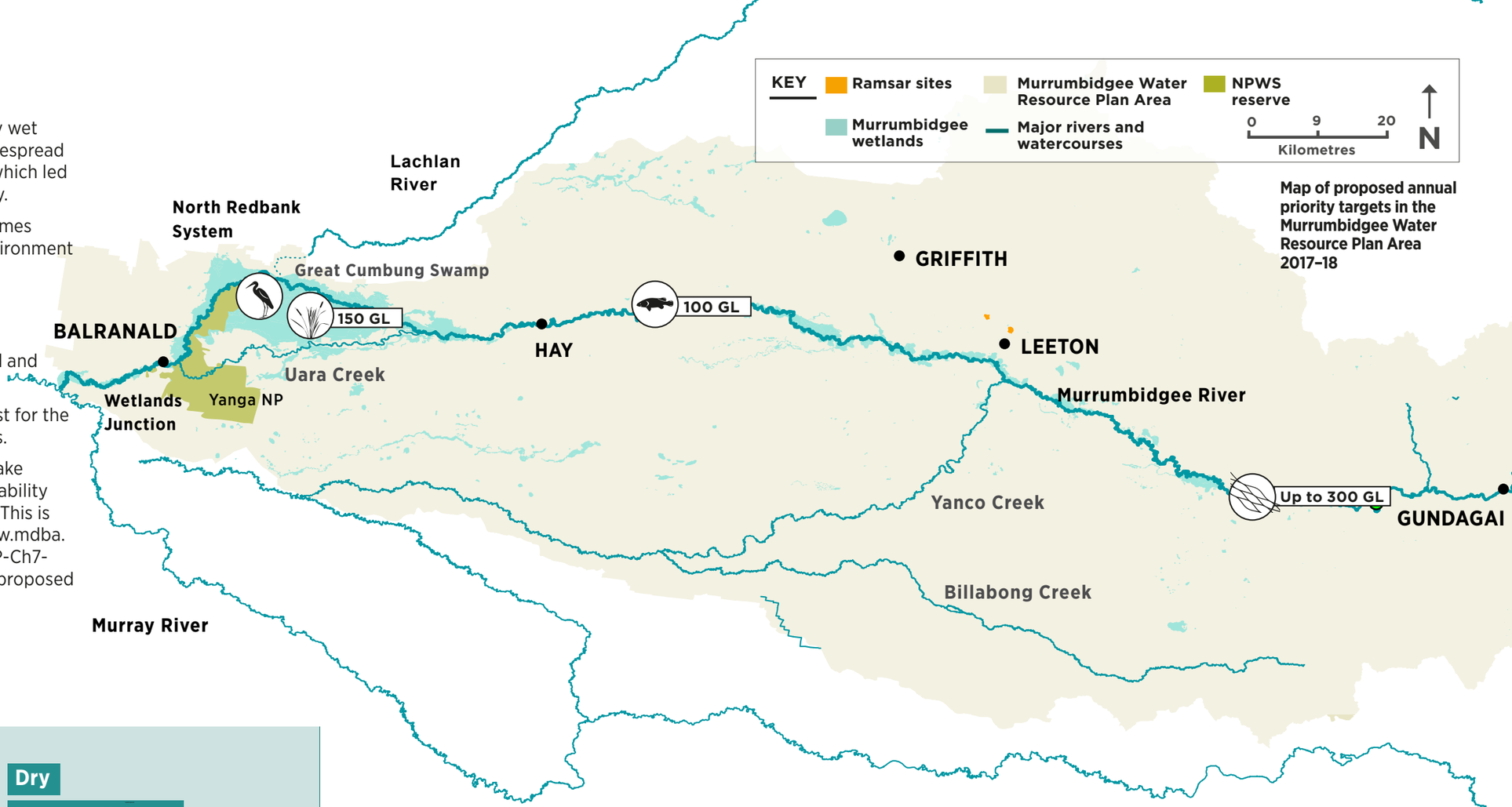
Main aim: Recover

- Improve ecological health and resilience
- Improve opportunities for plants and animals to breed, move and thrive

Wet to very wet

Main aim: Enhance

- Restore key floodplain and wetland linkages
- Enhance opportunities for plants and animals to breed, move and thrive



Key planned actions for 2017–18

Waterbirds

Flows (up to 150 gigalitres) are planned to support vegetation recovery which will provide foraging and nesting habitat for colonial waterbirds and support the habitat of southern bell frogs in Yanga National Park, the Nimmie-Caira wetlands and North Redbank areas.

Vegetation

Flows (part of the 150 gigalitre flow) are planned to support vegetation recovery at key sites throughout the Murrumbidgee valley.

Native fish

Flows (up to 100 gigalitres) are planned to encourage native fish population recovery in the lower Murrumbidgee River reaches.

Connectivity

Flows (up to 300 gigalitres) on the back of very low rainfall are planned to simulate a natural high flow event that inundates hundreds of lagoons, creeks and swamps along the Murrumbidgee River from Gundagai to the Murray River Junction. The flows support the recovery phase after a dry spell and restores in-channel natural flows affected by regulation (such as dams, weirs, off-takes and storages).

How we make decisions

OEH uses the best available science, management expertise and experience to identify watering sites and provide the right amount of water where and when it is needed.

This statement of annual environmental watering priorities identifies the waterways and wetlands that are likely to receive water. We take into account how much water is expected to be available in the coming year, conditions of the previous year, and the current health of the plants and animals in these ecosystems.

As rainfall is difficult to predict, we plan for a range of objectives based on different scenarios. These scenarios are determined by how much water is likely to be available in the coming year, the climate conditions of the previous year and the seasonal forecast for the coming year.

Community-based Environmental Water Advisory Groups (EWAGs) provide feedback and advice to OEH on the management of water for the environment.

What is water for the environment?

Water for the environment is a share of the water in dams and rivers that is set aside to support the long-term health of local rivers, creeks and wetlands. Healthy rivers carry water to homes, farms, schools and businesses. In the Murrumbidgee valley, rivers and wetlands are important cultural and spiritual sites for Aboriginal people.

About the Murrumbidgee valley

The Murrumbidgee valley covers 81,527 square kilometres and includes 26 storage or diversion structures, 1690 kilometres of the river, and surrounding wetlands. The climate conditions range from alpine in the Snowy Mountains to semi-arid on the Riverina plains.

Wetlands throughout the Murrumbidgee support threatened species listed under the *Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* and *NSW Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995.*

Expected environmental water volumes available at 1 July 2017

Source	Maximum volume available	Volume expected at 1 July under current conditions
Planned environmental water		
Environmental water allowance (1)	50 gigalitres	50 gigalitres
Environmental water allowance (2)	Trigger by dam inflows	30 gigalitres
Environmental water allowance (3)	Trigger by dam inflows	-
Water licensed to NSW		
General security	28 gigalitres	8 gigalitres
Supplementary	5 gigalitres	Dependent on surplus flows
NPWS general security	2 gigalitres	Generally not available
NPWS (South Redbank/Yanga) Lowbidgee supplementary access licence	155 gigalitres	Dependent on surplus flows
Water licensed to the Commonwealth		
High security	4 gigalitres	4 gigalitres
General security	200 gigalitres	50 gigalitres
Supplementary	20 gigalitres	Dependent on surplus flows from unregulated tributaries
Lowbidgee supplementary	381 gigalitres	Dependent on surplus flows

Note: This is an indicative summary of expected volumes to be available. For further detail and information on available volumes please contact the region via the Environment Line 131 555.

1 gigalitre = 1000 megalitres

2.5 megalitre = 1 Olympic swimming pool

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Cover photo: Pelican rookery in the Murrumbidgee valley at Nimmie Caira, V Bucello.
Page 2 infographic: J Humphries/OEH.

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