



Natural  
Resources  
Commission

# ***Review of the Water Sharing Plan for the North Western Unregulated and Fractured Rock Water Sources 2011***

## **Report Summary**

*This slide pack provides an overview of findings and recommendations – the Commission’s full and official advice is available via our website – <https://www.nrc.nsw.gov.au/wsp-reviews>*

Image: Storm approaching  
near Tibooburra

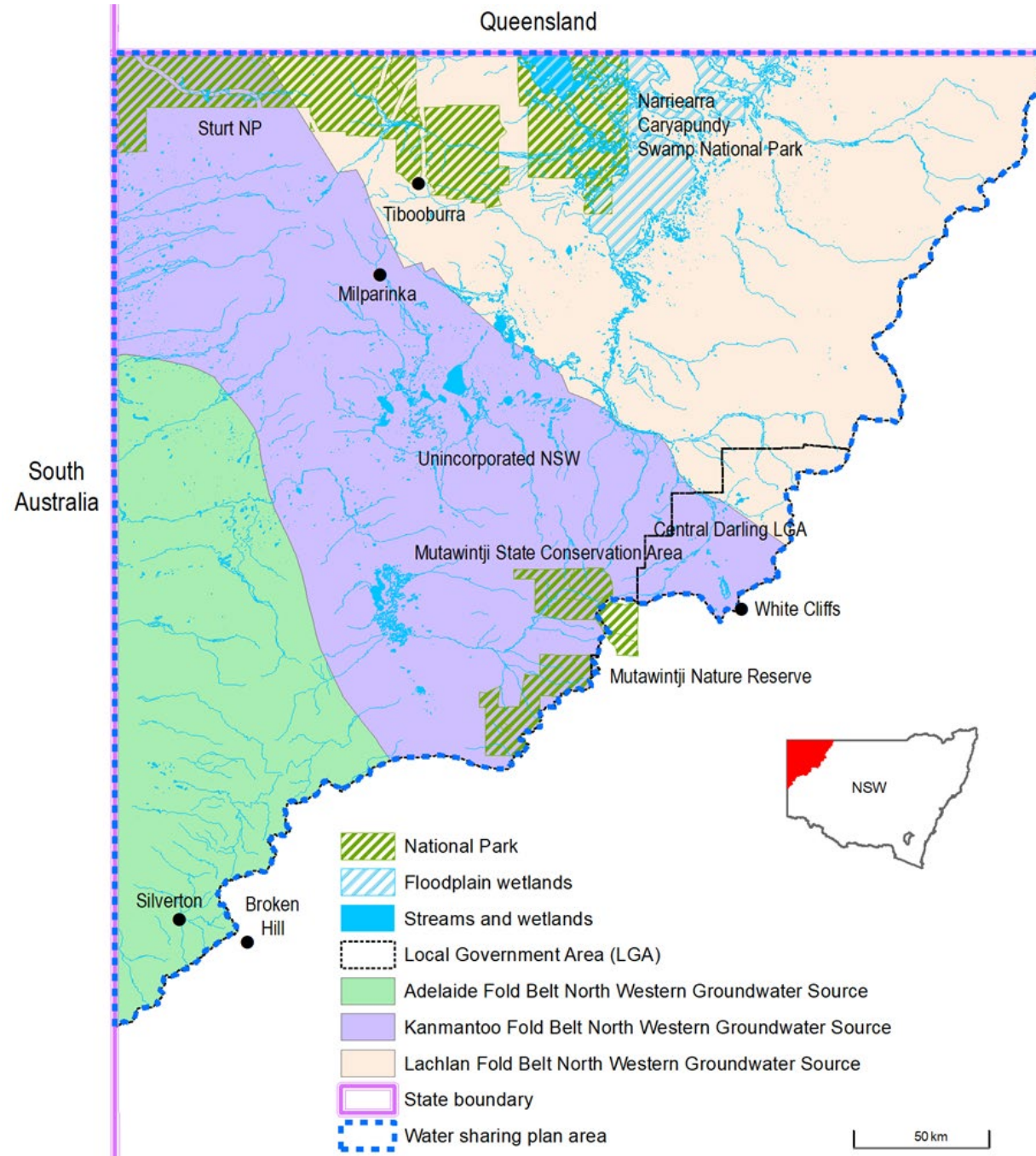
# Acknowledgement of Country

- The Commission acknowledges and pays respect to the Traditional Owners past, present and future of lands and waters in the Plan area, the Karenggapa, Wongkumara, Malyangapa, Wiljali and Barkandji Traditional Owners, as well as other Aboriginal peoples for whom these waterways are significant
- Aboriginal peoples have a deep cultural, social, environmental, spiritual and economic connection to their lands and waters – we value and respect their knowledge in natural resource management and the contributions of many generations, including Elders, to this understanding and connection

# Our review

- The Natural Resources Commission (the Commission) has a statutory role under s43A of the *Water Management Act 2000* (the Act) to review water sharing plans approaching expiry
- Our reviews consider if a plan's environmental, social, cultural and economic outcomes have been achieved, and what improvements can be made
- As part of our reviews, we recommend whether a plan should be extended or replaced
- Our reviews consider relevant data and documents, technical advice, stakeholder consultation and public submissions

# Plan area



# Plan area

- Has unique arid landscapes, ecology, land use and policy frameworks
- Contains less than 0.01 percent of NSW's population but supports a \$90 million pastoral industry, tourism destinations and may become an important mining and gas development region
- Significant environmental assets, including Ramsar-listed and Ramsar-nominated wetlands
- State-significant Aboriginal cultural values, including NSW's first Aboriginal-owned national park (Mutawintji Lands)
- The area's arid environmental assets are adapted to a boom-and-bust cycle of water availability, communities are vulnerable to water stress, with the physical availability of water a key limiting factor
- Groundwater-dependent ecosystems (GDEs) play a critical role as refuges in arid environments
- Unique extraction profile, with minimal licensed extraction but high harvestable rights allowances
- Town water supplies are largely managed by volunteer village committees

# Overall finding on Plan extension and replacement

- The Commission has identified several opportunities to improve outcomes that justify replacing the Plan
- The Commission recommends an extension of up to two years to the existing Plan to allow time to undertake required data collection and analysis, consultation, and development of amended provisions

# Overview of key issues



## Key risks

- Long-term average annual extraction limits (LTAAELs) are not based on best available data and may be too high
- The surface water LTAAEL excludes harvestable rights – a significant volume of extraction, as landholders can capture all rainfall runoff in dams on ephemeral first or second order streams
- Potential for significant growth in extraction if mining or gas production, or alternative energy generation grows
- Lack of monitoring and evaluation threatens outcomes



## Valuable, vulnerable assets must be protected

- The small number of licences means the Plan is not a DPE-Water priority for improvements
- However, the region contains fragile, high-priority environmental and cultural assets, vulnerable communities and valuable industries
- The area has a relatively small extraction volume compared to other parts of NSW, but it is potentially a high proportion of the water available in the arid environment
- These warrant basic improvements to protect the very limited water resources



## The Plan remake should:

- Establish sustainable extraction levels, with sustainable extraction limits including all forms of take
- Better recognise surface-groundwater connectivity and connectivity between water sharing plans
- Better support socioeconomic outcomes, including assessing risks from growing industries and identifying town water needs
- Restore and protect Aboriginal water rights, values and uses
- Protect GDEs
- Require the implementation of the monitoring, evaluation and reporting plan

# Establishing sustainable extraction

## Key issues

- Structural Plan elements (boundaries, definitions, and consideration of connectivity) make it hard to manage sustainable extraction
- Surface water LTAAEL not based on sustainability assessment and excludes harvestable rights (a major form of extraction)
- Significant surface water entitlement available despite concerns water sources are under pressure
- Groundwater LTAAELs are underpinned by limited data and groundwater source boundaries create confusion
- Potentially significant risks from increasing harvestable rights capture – this is not licensed, monitored or assessed
- Other interception (rangeland rehabilitation works and road maintenance) may impact flows and local water availability

## Key recommendations for DPE-Water

- Revise and clarify water sources and plan boundaries and connectivity
- Target research and gauging to better understand hydrology, water needs, hydrogeology, recharge and connectivity
- Refine LTAAELs with better evidence and consider all forms of extraction
- Consider halting controlled allocation orders until research has been completed and sustainable LTAAELs established
- Engage with stakeholders to assess suitability of harvestable rights provisions
- Monitor and manage risks from rangeland rehabilitation and road maintenance works



# Supporting socioeconomic outcomes

## Key issues

- The Plan does not include town water entitlements for four villages
- Volunteer committees managing town water have been under-resourced and inadequately engaged
- Growing industries – tourism, events, and mining, gas and solar – will require water from an already limited system
- Umberumberka Reservoir sits within the Plan area but is outside the Plan's surface water source

## Key recommendations for DPE-Water

- Define and licence town water needs and include their entitlements in the Plan, describe town water arrangements and role of volunteer committees
- Support town water management in remote villages
- Include all water-dependent activities in economic assessments, including tourism and amenity
- Resolve Umberumberka licensing requirements and include in the Plan

# Restoring Aboriginal water rights, values and uses

## Key issues

- There is no water for native title, Aboriginal uses, or cultural licences, despite the Plan area having a native title determination, an Aboriginal-owned and managed national park, an Aboriginal area, a Local Aboriginal Land Council reserve and multiple areas of cultural significance
- There are recurring, systemic state-wide issues, including limited proactive engagement and barriers to use of water by Aboriginal people

## Key recommendations for DPE-Water

- Recognise native title rights of Barkandji Traditional Owners
- Consult with Traditional Owners and quarantine water entitlements for future native title and other cultural water access rights before releasing additional controlled allocations
- Engage with Traditional Owners to identify and protect high-value water-dependent cultural assets

# Protecting GDEs

## Key issues

- The Plan lists four high priority GDEs but does not list internationally and nationally-listed wetlands – so they are not protected by provisions
- No culturally-significant GDEs are listed in the Plan, though it is likely these exist in the Plan area
- Setback distances are significantly less for cultural sites compared to other high value GDEs, with no justification
- Concerns that GDEs categorised as karst environments in the Plan may not be in karst landscapes and have less stringent setback distances than other GDEs

## Key recommendations for DPE-Water

- Revise the list of high priority GDEs (for environmental and cultural values)
- Check adequacy of setback distances for culturally-significant GDEs
- Seek further guidance around the categorisation of GDEs as karst environments and update Plan as needed, including setback distances to ensure adequate protection



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