



Natural  
Resources  
Commission

*Overview of findings and  
recommendations of the*

# **Review of the Water Sharing Plan for the Gwydir Unregulated River Water Sources 2012**

*This slide pack provides an overview of the Commission's review and should not be taken as our advice regarding the Gwydir plan review. The Commission's official advice and full recommendations for the plan are available via our website –*

*<https://www.nrc.nsw.gov.au/wsp-reviews>*

# Acknowledgement of Country

The Natural Resources Commission acknowledges and pays respects to the Gomeroi / Kamilaroi, Yuwaalaraay and Anaiwan People as traditional owners and Aboriginal peoples that have a connection to the Gwydir unregulated river water source.

The Commission recognises and acknowledges that 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 ongoing contributions of many generations to this understanding and connection.

The Commission also recognises and pays respects to any other Aboriginal peoples for whom these waterways are significant.

# Our review

- The Natural Resources Commission has a statutory role to review water sharing plans approaching their 10-year expiry
- Our review considered evidence provided via public submissions, stakeholder consultation, technical advice and document review as well as other relevant State-wide and regional government policies or agreements that applied
- Our review evaluated if the plan provisions adequately contributed to achievement of environmental, social, cultural and economic outcomes and identified where improvements can be made
- Finally, our review recommended whether the plan should be extended as is or replaced with an improved plan



# Overview of plan area

- The plan area covers 26,000 km<sup>2</sup> with landscapes transitioning from eastern tablelands to central slopes and western floodplains and wetlands
- Agriculture is the main industry accounting for 40 percent of employment in the Gwydir local government area
- The plan area supports internationally significant wetlands, threatened species and endangered ecological communities. The Gwydir wetlands cover more than 100,000 ha and are among the most significant in north-west NSW.
- Moree is the major town with smaller population centres in Uralla, Guyra, Bingara and Warialda

# Overall recommendation

- There are material risks to the achievement of environmental, social and cultural outcomes and economic outcomes
- The plan should be improved based on the Commission's recommendations and replaced by 1 July 2025.

<b>Recommendation options available under s43A of the <i>Water Management Act 2000</i></b>	
Extend existing plan for 10 years	
<b>Improve and replace plan within 2 years</b>	<b>⊗</b>



# Actions for plan replacement

- The Commission has identified key issues that should be addressed in plan replacement to improve environmental, social, cultural and economic outcomes
- The following slides detail these issues and the actions that should be undertaken by DPE Water to improve plan outcomes
- Full recommendations made by the Commission to be considered by DPE Water in plan replacement are included in our public report available on our website

# Improve water management against extraction limits

## Key issues

- The Plans lack sustainable, numerically defined long-term average annual extraction limits (LTAAELs)
- Unregulated river access licence entitlement is approximately 6.5 times greater than the Basin Plan's estimated extraction limit
- Available water determinations (AWDs) have been set to 100 percent for all licences despite risks of over extraction and lack of LTAAEL compliance
- A lack of LTAAEL assessment and AWD adjustment risks overextraction and potentially impacts river resilience
- Lack of extraction management units at the appropriate scale limits the ability to manage different extraction risks across the plan

## Recommended actions for DPE-Water

- Establish sustainable, fixed numeric LTAAELs based on best available information including ecological requirements, hydrological, historical and projected climate information
- Establish extraction management units if assessment indicates these will assist with management of extraction
- Undertake LTAAEL compliance and adjust AWDs as required
- Apply a conservative AWD until compliance is completed
- Revise account management rules (carryover and account limits) to support AWD changes and avoid river extraction during periods of increasing climatic stress
- Review and update estimated take under basic landholder rights

# Improve protection of environmental water

## Key issues

- Gauging stations within the plan area have not been utilised to generate flow-based water access rules
- Water sources in the plan use a default no visible flow rule
- Not all significant wetlands are recognised by the Plan and the Gwydir “raft” may have adverse impacts
- Active management only provides protection of ‘held’ environmental water
- Plan rules and recent amendments have reduced protection of planned environmental water in the Lower Gingham and Lower Gwydir water sources and do not protect connecting flows to the Barwon River
- Risks from floodplain harvesting have not been fully assessed or managed

## Recommended actions for DPE-Water

- Utilise current hydrometric network to establish flow-based access rules and reduce pressure at low flows
- Amend daily access rules to reduce extraction pressure, particularly for high-value water sources
- Include all significant wetlands in the updated plan
- Adjust water access rules impacted by the Gwydir raft to ensure environmental water is available for wetlands
- Protect ‘held’ environmental water from floodplain harvesting
- Adjust plan rules to allow for connectivity to the Barwon River
- Update, where required, delivery and protection of replenishment flows from the regulated Gwydir River

# Improve equity between water users

## Key issues

- The plan does not effectively protect replenishment flows from the regulated river, which may impact the ability of these flows to achieve their objectives for basic landholder rights and environmental purposes
- Different carryover rules, account limits and patterns of extraction mean unregulated access licences and unregulated floodplain harvesting licences may generate inequities between users associated with any AWD adjustment
- Town water supply protections may need to be enhanced to meet future demands

## Recommended actions for DPE-Water

- Adjust carryover provisions in plan to only apply to high flow access licences, where required, to protect low flows
- Revise account management rules (carryover and account limits) to avoid any inequities resulting from AWD adjustment
- Apply daily extraction limits as a mandatory condition on access licences
- Revise provisions to require AWD reductions against the licence category responsible for LTAAEL exceedance
- Clarify provisions regarding the announcement and protection of replenishment flows to enable their use for the environment and basic rights
- Utilise the plan hydrometric network to develop plan rules that protect town water supply requirements

# Provide opportunities for trade

## Key issues

- Trade is highly restricted in the plan with users seeking opportunities to increase trade
- Trade can be a mechanism to achieve outcomes and adapt to a changing climate
- Trade rules can encourage users to shift from extracting water during low flow periods to periods with less impact

## Recommended actions for DPE-Water

- Complete a trade analysis assessing the use of water source groupings as the basis for trading rules.
- Increase the size of trading areas in conjunction with detailed mapping of ecological assets to allow expansion of trade while protecting specific areas with high water dependent values
- Consider the introduction of low and high flow licence categories. If high flow licences are introduced determine the area within which high flow licences can be traded and develop high flow daily access rules and trade limits.
- Consider the need for trade rules to manage risks associated with regulated and unregulated floodplain harvesting licences
- Ensure impacts of trade considers the interactions between

# Improve outcomes for Aboriginal people

## Key issues

- Lack of proactive involvement of Aboriginal people in the identification and determination of Aboriginal values and rights for the purpose of water planning and management
- No protection of known Aboriginal high value water dependent cultural assets
- Limitations on use of water by Aboriginal people

## Recommended action for DPE-Water

- Consult with Aboriginal stakeholders to accommodate any future native title determinations and water access rights required to meet cultural and economic uses
- Identify and protect high value water dependent cultural assets
- Allocations to be prioritised for cultural water use
- Ensure the plan is consistent with the NSW water strategy relating to Aboriginal people's rights and values and access and ownership of water for cultural and economic uses



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