



Natural  
Resources  
Commission

# ***Review of the Water Sharing Plan for the Murray Unregulated 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>*

# 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 Bangerang, Barapa Barapa, Nyeri Nyeri, Tati Tati, Wadi Wadi, Weki Weki, Wemba Wemba, Wiradjuri and Yorta Yorta 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



 Local Government Area (LGA)  
 Murray Unregulated Plan

 100km

# Plan area

- Represents a small percentage of the overall water volume in the Murray Valley, but contains substantial environmental assets, including the Ramsar-listed Central Murray Forests and the last remaining self-sustaining population of the endangered Macquarie Perch in the NSW Murray
- Traditional Owners are peoples of the Bangerang, Barapa Barapa, Nyeri Nyeri, Tati Tati, Wadi Wadi, Weki Weki, Wemba Wemba, Wiradjuri and Yorta Yorta Nations
- Significant connections to regulated Murray River, groundwater sources and Snowy Scheme storages
- Heavily impacted by drought and bushfires during the Plan period

# 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 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



## New data available

- Considerable new information to inform Plan remake since the Plan was developed
- Includes water resource plan risk assessments, a long-term water plan, and understanding of fire impacts on water quality and Macquarie perch population in Mannus Creek



## Key risks

- New data shows ecological values at risk
- Risks from highly altered flow regimes are not effectively managed
- Drought has highlighted the need to secure town water supply
- Sharing rules not strongly aligned with priorities of the Act
- Floodplain harvesting has yet to be assessed yet represents significant take
- Risks from growth in use in the Middle Murray Extraction Management Unit



## Plan remake should:

- Set sustainable, numeric long-term average annual extraction limits (LTAAELs), accounting for all take
- Address potential inequities within and across plans, ensuring environment, basic landholder rights and town water needs are met
- Strengthen and clarify environmental protections, including flows for key threatened species
- Improve outcomes for Aboriginal people, recognise native title claims and protect known Aboriginal values
- Account for connectivity with groundwater and Snowy Scheme

# Establishing sustainable extraction

## Key issues

- The Plan lacks sustainable, numerically defined LTAAELs
- There is a risk that once all forms of take are accurately accounted for, the LTAAELs may be exceeded, requiring a potentially significant reduction in annual water allocations for unregulated access licence holders.
- LTAAEL compliance has not been undertaken, despite entitlement being considerably higher than the estimated allowable licenced extraction

## Key recommendations for DPE-Water

- Establish sustainable, fixed numeric LTAAELs based on best available information including ecological requirements, all forms of interception and extraction and climate change



# Improving equitable water sharing

## Key issues

- Rules may not provide priority access for local water utilities over other licensed access
- Potentially significant reductions in allocations for unregulated access licence holders once floodplain harvesting and basic landholder rights is accurately accounted for
- This impact could also be inequitable between the Plan's two extraction management units, with the Middle Murray EMU at greater risk

## Key recommendations for DPE-Water

- Ensure any reductions in allocations required in response to growth in use are applied fairly, are consistent with the priorities in the Act, and transparent to licence holders
- Develop CTP rules based on needs of environment and basic landholder rights
- Clarify CTP rules for local water utilities and support augmentation of town water supply to ensure town water supply needs are met

# Strengthen environmental protections

## Key issues

- Evidence that Plan rules do not adequately protect water dependent ecological values
- Significant risks in the Mannus Water Source, including to the threatened Macquarie perch population
- Held environmental water is not protected
- Low flows may be accessed due to incorrect gauge reference risking end of system flows
- Water sources with highly altered flow regimes associated with Snowy Scheme
- Uncertainty around risks to regionally significant wetlands

## Key recommendations for DPE-Water

- Draw on significant new data from long term water plans and Fish and Flows framework, and HEVAE mapping
- Address concerns in medium to high risk water sources
- Clarify rules for Mannus Dam and cease to pump gauge requirements in Mannus Water Source
- Determine the best mechanism for protecting held environmental water and include the Plan
- Identify and assess risks to regionally significant wetlands

# Improving outcomes for Aboriginal people

## Key issues

- Limited consideration of values associated with native title claims and a planned Indigenous Protected Area (IPA)
- Reoccurring state-wide issues including limited proactive engagement and barriers to use of water by Aboriginal people

## Key recommendations for DPE-Water

- Proactively consider native title and IPA and engage with Traditional Owners to support values
- Identify and protect high value cultural sites
- Undertake work to understand Aboriginal water values
- Better support Aboriginal water access and use
- Allocations to be prioritised for cultural water use
- Incorporate Aboriginal water values in water sharing plans and ensure these are included in the NSW Aboriginal Water Strategy

# Recognising connectivity

## Key issues

- Extraction under other plans and water releases from the Snowy Scheme can impact the flow regime and water availability in the Plan area

## Key recommendations for DPE-Water

- Consider interactions and connectivity in the review of the Murray Alluvial Groundwater Plan
- Include amendment provisions to address any impacts on connectivity, including reflecting changes to Snowy Water Licence conditions in the Plan



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