



Natural  
Resources  
Commission

*Review of the Water Sharing  
Plan for the Peel Valley  
Regulated, Unregulated,  
Alluvium and Fractured Rock  
Water Sources 2010  
– Report summary*

# Our review

- The Natural Resources Commission (the Commission) has a statutory role under s43A of the *Water Management Act 2000* 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 – we received 29 public submissions for this review



# Peel Valley plan area

- The *Water Sharing Plan for the Peel Valley Regulated, Unregulated, Alluvium and Fractured Rock Water Sources 2010* (the Plan) covers the water sources of the Peel Valley Catchment
- Water managed under the Plan provides flows that support threatened species and endangered ecological communities
- The Plan also manages town water, including for Tamworth, and water for a diverse range of regional industries
- The Plan area is Gomerioi Country – to whom the water resources of the area are very important – and includes several significant cultural sites
- The Peel Valley is currently experiencing the worst drought on record, which has had significant impacts on communities, the environment and water users
- The Plan's water sources will be split across four water sharing plans to align them with water resource plan areas
- The Namoi Regional Water Strategy is also being developed to improve water security in the region

# Key issues should be addressed in the new plans

## **The Commission recommends a staged approach to address issues in the new plans:**

- **By 1 July 2020**, address priority issues carried over from the current Plan to the draft Water Sharing Plan for the Peel Regulated River 2020
- **By July 2022**, address other issues identified in this review that are carried across from the current Plan to the four replacement water sharing plans. This will provide time for:
  - additional studies and consultation
  - alignment with the Namoi Regional Water Strategy, which is due to be released in 2021
  - replacement of the Water Sharing Plan for the Namoi and Peel Unregulated Water Sources 2012 in 2023

# Summary of key findings

## **Lack of transparency, particularly around long-term average annual extraction limits (LTAAELs)**

- The LTAAEL for the unregulated water sources is not quantified numerically and is combined with the Namoi unregulated limit
- LTAAEL compliance for the unregulated river has not been assessed, metering is minimal and the Non-urban Metering Policy will only apply to around one third of licensees
- Modelling for the regulated river LTAAEL is disputed by water users

## **Limited knowledge of environmental water requirements**

- Ecological values and assets and their required flows are not clearly defined
- Knowledge gaps regarding environmental water requirements existed when the Plan was developed - many of these are addressed in the new Namoi Long Term Water Plan

# Summary of key findings (cont.)

## **Some environmental flow provisions are not adequate**

- The environmental contingency allowance is not adequately protected from extraction, limiting the effectiveness of this provision in delivering environmental outcomes
- Delays in implementing access rules in the unregulated water sources posed a risk to ecologically important components of the flow regime, specifically low flows. Visible flow rules are ambiguous

## **The Plan cannot sufficiently respond to risks**

- The level of entitlement is much greater than the LTAAEL, which creates a risk that water may not be able to be secured in line with the priorities of the Act
- The Regulated River has a 10-year rolling average LTAAEL assessment process that is not in line with other NSW Murray-Darling Basin plans, and prevents a timely and adequate response to this risk from prolonged droughts, changes in water user behaviour and climate change
- The Plan lacks mechanisms to adequately protect critical water needs from natural variability or climate change
- Some bores in alluvial aquifers are assigned to the Peel Fractured Rock Water Source, reducing the ability to manage extraction risks

# Summary of key findings (cont.)

## **Levels of connectivity are disputed**

- There are conflicting views around the extent and variability of connectivity in alluvial water sources - this will continue until the NSW Government's groundwater studies and modelling are completed and reviewed, risking compromising Plan outcomes and community trust in water management

## **Splitting the Plan's water sources risks fragmented management**

- Splitting provisions across four new plans risks fragmenting water management if appropriate links are not included between the four water sharing plans

## **Aboriginal water values**

- There has been limited engagement with Aboriginal stakeholders and limited consideration of Aboriginal cultural water values, and support for cultural water access and use

# Summary of key findings (cont.)

## **Trade and dealing provisions**

- The Plan provides opportunities for trade but it has been limited
- Stakeholders called for more flexibility around trade, including reinstatement of temporary intervalley trading between the Peel Valley and Lower Namoi, indicating a lack of clarity over why this ceased

## **Monitoring, evaluation and reporting**

- The Plan lacks clear, measurable objectives
- Comprehensive monitoring, evaluation and reporting has not been implemented to assess the extent to which the Plan's outcomes are being achieved
- There are key information gaps regarding the level of take, specifically in the unregulated water sources, due to a lack of metering and monitoring



# Summary of key recommendations

## **Better manage available water determinations, extraction and variability**

- Independently review and publish Peel modelling to improve transparency
- Bring the Peel LTAAEL assessment process in line with other NSW Murray-Darling Basin water sharing plans, and publish a method for assessing extraction and LTAAEL compliance in unregulated water sources
- Develop targeted mechanisms for addressing LTAAEL exceedance and local impacts, and document clear rules for proactively managing water shortages through available water determinations
- Investigate licences in the Peel Fractured Rock Water Source that are extracting from alluvial aquifers

## **Environmental water requirements**

- Recognise the need to align environmental water provisions with the Namoi Long Term Water Plan
- Strengthen environmental water provisions and access rules to prioritise and protect the environmental contingency allowance, and improve environmental outcomes



# Summary of key recommendations (cont.)

## **Responding to risks**

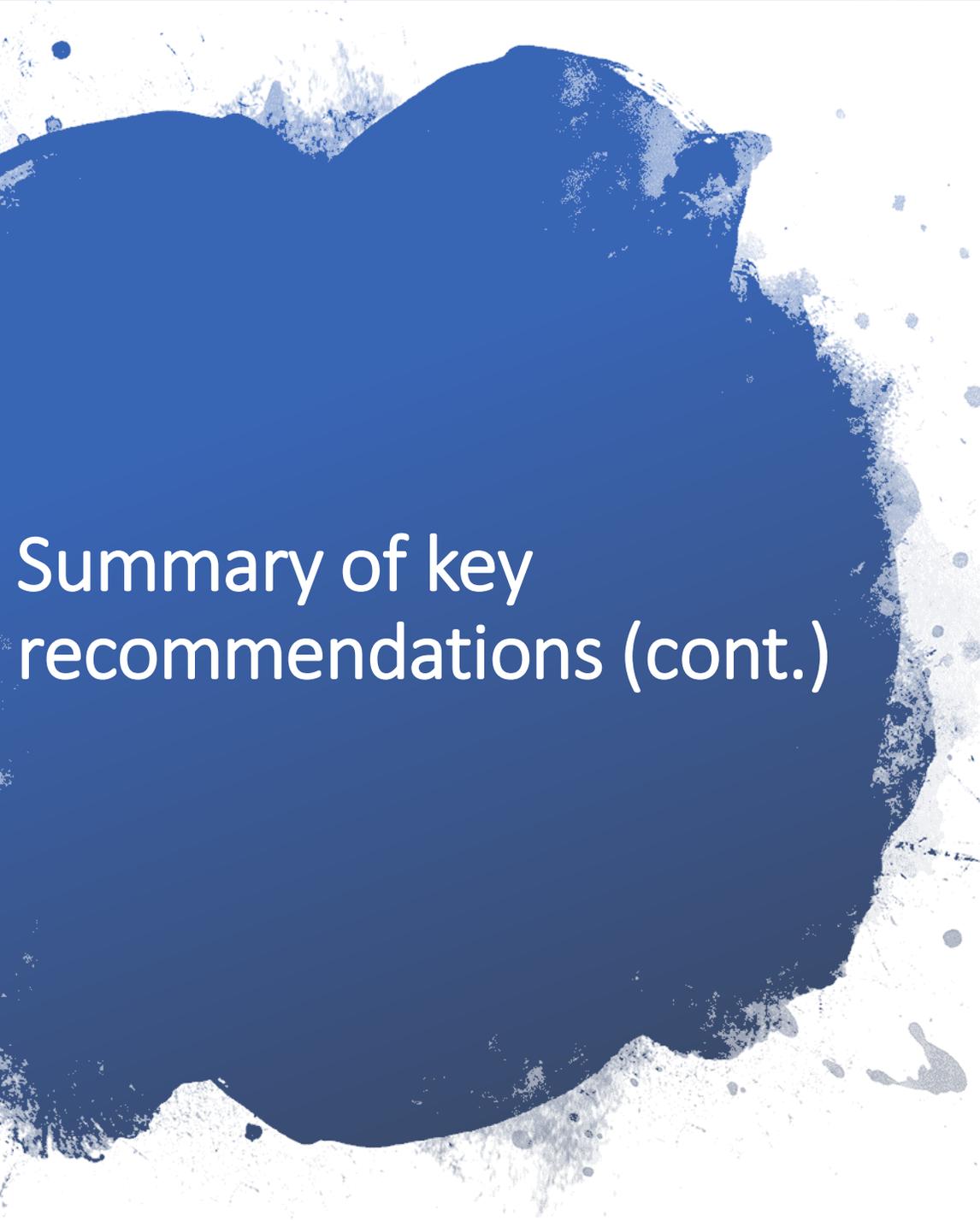
- Include or amend provisions to better protect basic landholder rights
- Model risks associated with climate change

## **Surface-groundwater connectivity**

- Ensure settings are cross-referenced across new plans and provisions are linked within plans to reflect connectivity
- Improve connectivity definitions and information in plans
- Complete current study into the extent and variability of connectivity in the Cockburn, report results to stakeholders and amend access rules where warranted

## **River connectivity**

- Investigate options for improving river connectivity (including between the Peel and Namoi River) and protecting environmental water between regulated rivers



## Summary of key recommendations (cont.)

### **Trade and dealings**

- Publicly report the reasons for removal of temporary intervalley trading between the Peel and Lower Namoi
- Undertake further investigations into conversion of high security licences in the regulated river system to access licences in connected upstream unregulated water sources given these systems already have high entitlement

### **Aboriginal water values**

- Identify Aboriginal values, uses and flow allocations, and codesign water access options with Aboriginal stakeholders based on their identified needs
- Finalise the NSW Aboriginal Water Framework to provide consistent and transparent guidelines and resourcing for Aboriginal involvement in water planning and management

### **Monitoring, evaluation and reporting**

- Ensure that there are adequate resources for monitoring, evaluation and reporting to assess plan effectiveness and inform adaptive management
- Identify and address critical knowledge gaps
- Prioritise completion of Basin wide cultural, social and economic MER plans