



How Environmental Water Advisory Groups work with communities

The Department of Planning and Environment works closely with the community to deliver water for the environment to priority sites across the state.

What is the role of Environmental Water Advisory Groups?

Environmental Water Advisory Groups (EWAGs) draw on the expertise and experience of community members to help inform decision making around the use of water for the environment.

Advisory groups may include environmental water managers, First Nations, irrigators, recreational fishers, landholders, independent scientists, non-government organisations, local government and a range of partner agencies.

EWAGs meet regularly and communicate out of session to discuss the following:

- proposed or upcoming watering events
- any issues or concerns
- results of watering events
- future opportunities.

Members play a key role in sharing information with their communities as well as bringing community views to the decision-making table. They represent a diversity of stakeholder groups with a clear interest in the work of the environmental water program.

Where have these groups been established so far?

Environmental Water Advisory Groups or EWAGs have been established in five key NSW catchments including:

- Gwydir
- Macquarie Cudgegong
- Lachlan
- Murrumbidgee
- Murray and Lower Darling-Baaka.

As needs arise, additional EWAGs can be established.



How do the EWAGs and the Department work together?

The aim of each advisory group is to bring together a range of knowledge and experience to advise on both planned and held environmental water.

Before the start of each water year (July to June), each EWAG provides advice to the department on the development of an annual watering plan. These plans identify the waterways and wetlands that are likely to receive water in the coming year.

The decision-making process considers:

- expected availability of water in the coming year
- conditions of the previous year
- current health of the plants and animals in these ecosystems.

EWAGs aim to anticipate short and longer term opportunities and identify how to implement various watering actions in order to meet identified environmental objectives.

EWAGs must ensure that the advice and reports they produce are consistent with the relevant water sharing plan for their regulated water source.

Who are the partners working together and how do they make decisions about water for the environment?

DPE Environment and Heritage is the lead agency for the delivery of water for the environment in NSW. The Department has strategic and practical roles in deciding where and when to provide environmental water to rivers, wetlands and floodplains to achieve a range of outcomes for waterbirds, native fish, vegetation, ecosystem services and system connectivity. The Department also has a monitoring role.

Decisions about water for the environment are made in collaboration with a range of partners including industry, conservation representatives, government, research institutions and regional communities. Some of the government agencies include:

- The Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder (CEWH) holds the largest portfolio of water for the environment on behalf of the Australian Government. CEWH contributes to environmental watering at sites across the whole Murray-Darling Basin. It also has a monitoring role.
- DPI Fisheries is the lead agency for the management and protection of NSW fish populations. DPI Fisheries plays a role in research, policy implementation, education and compliance.
- NSW Local Land Services work with landholders and communities to improve agricultural productivity and better manage natural resources.
- The Department of Planning and Environment -Water administers the *Water Management Act 2000* and leads the NSW response to the implementation of the Basin Plan.
- The Murray Darling Basin Authority assists with environmental watering at a whole-of-basin scale and is responsible for the development of a long-term strategy for environmental water across the basin.

The NSW Government is committed to co-operative management of water for the environment as documented in the Cooperative management of environmental water to improve river and wetland health in NSW (PDF 71KB).

What is the role of a Snowy Advisory Committee?

In the Snowy Montane, a Snowy Advisory Committee (SAC) provides vital community and expert input into the pattern of release for environmental flows to the Snowy River and Snowy Montane rivers. The SAC represents Aboriginal, local community and environmental interests, alongside NSW and Victorian Government representatives.

In the Snowy Montane, the water year runs from 1 May to 30 April.

Cover photo, Terry Cooke. Page 2, John Spencer/DPE.
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