

# Managing environmental flows

## Who does what?

Water allocated and managed specifically to improve the health of rivers, wetlands and floodplains is known as water for the environment.

Part of NSW's Department of Planning and Environment, the Environment and Heritage Group is the lead agency for management of water for the environment in NSW.

This fact sheet explains 'who does what', outlining the roles and responsibilities of the many Commonwealth and state agencies we work with to deliver managed flows to rivers, creeks, wetlands and wildlife for the greatest environmental benefit.



## Murray–Darling Basin Authority

The Murray–Darling Basin Authority plans water resources across the entire Basin. It plays a role in operating the River Murray system to deliver water on behalf of partner governments, and performs monitoring, research and education.

The authority develops, implements and reviews long-term strategy for the Basin's environmental water. It prepares the Murray–Darling Basin Plan, Basin-wide Environmental Watering Strategy, and Basin annual environmental water priorities. It identifies and accounts for held environmental water.

The authority also monitors, reports on, and enforces compliance with:

- sustainable diversion limits: the average amount of water that towns, communities, industry and farmers can take from the Basin on a sustainable basis
- water trading rules
- water resource plans.

## Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder

The Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder is an independent position established by law. It leads the Commonwealth Environmental Water Office, a division of the Australian Government's Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water.

On behalf of the Australian Government, it holds the largest portfolio of water for the environment and manages this in accordance with the Basin Plan and Basin-wide Environmental Watering Strategy.

Seeking Basin-wide outcomes, the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder contributes to environmental watering at sites across the whole Murray–Darling Basin. It partners with the NSW's Environment and Heritage Group to plan and deliver environmental water in our state. It also has a monitoring role, and reports annually on the use and outcomes of water for the environment.

## Department of Planning and Environment – Water

The Department of Planning and Environment's Water Group administers the *Water Management Act 2000* and leads NSW's implementation of the Murray–Darling Basin Plan. The Water Group determines the rules for sharing water between users and the environment. It also develops policies for water trading and plays a role in monitoring ecosystem health.

Toward these goals, the Water Group prepares water management plans, including:

- water sharing plans
- plans to regulate development on floodplains, and protect flows to environmental assets like native plants, fish and waterbirds.

Each year, the Water Group determines the volume of water available to allocate to water users and the environment. It allocates this water in accordance with water sharing plan rules and priorities.

## Department of Planning and Environment – Environment and Heritage Group

The NSW Department of Planning and Environment leads our state's management of water for the environment. The department has dedicated water management, planning, policy, and governance teams clustered within the Environment and Heritage Group. The department manages a portfolio of water on behalf of the NSW Government and the Commonwealth Government. It works with the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder to deliver environmental water in NSW.

With strategic and practical roles, the department decides where and when to provide environmental flows to rivers, wetlands, and floodplains that benefit waterbirds, native fish, and vegetation, and bolster the life-giving services these ecosystems provide.

The department also:

- manages environmental water licences and environmental allocations made under water sharing plans
- convenes Environmental Water Advisory Groups (EWAGs)
- publishes annual environmental water priorities for each water source to inform Basin-wide annual priorities
- develops long-term water plans for the Murray–Darling Basin Authority
- monitors use of environmental water, and reports annually on this use and its outcomes
- advises the Minister of Environment on concurrence to the making or amendment of water sharing and floodplain management plans.

## Environmental Water Advisory Groups

Environmental Water Advisory Groups inform the management of NSW’s water for the environment. They draw on expertise and experience of community members, including water managers, recreational fishers, landholders, Aboriginal groups, independent scientists, local government representatives and various partner agencies.

These groups meet regularly to discuss proposed or upcoming watering events and any related issues or concerns, results of watering events, and future opportunities.

In NSW there are Environmental Water Advisory Groups for each of the 5 catchments where water for the environment is targeted:

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

## WaterNSW

WaterNSW is a state-owned corporation that manages surface and groundwater resources to maximise reliability for users in NSW. It’s responsible for the operation of the state’s regulated river systems.

Under a Department of Planning and Environment water operating licence, WaterNSW operates dams and infrastructure and bulk water supply systems, and delivers water to licence holders. In the River Murray system, it does this in collaboration with the Murray–Darling Basin Authority.

WaterNSW also administers water access: the licencing, trading and ordering of water.

## Natural Resources Access Regulator

Established under NSW’s *Natural Resources Access Regulator Act 2017*, the independent Natural Resources Access Regulator enforces the state’s water management rules. In addition to enforcing compliance, it provides compliance education, and issues licences and approvals.

## Department of Primary Industries—Fisheries

The Department of Primary Industries manages and protects fish populations in NSW through research, policy implementation, education and compliance.

## Southern Connected Basin Environmental Watering Committee

The Southern Connected Basin Environmental Watering Committee coordinates delivery of water for the environment in the southern part of the Murray–Darling Basin. It works with multiple water holders and jurisdictions, meeting regularly to discuss environmental flow management.

The committee also produces an annual report that summarises watering actions, environmental outcomes, lessons learned, communication and community involvement, co-ordination, and an update on jointly-managed water and other activities.

## Northern Basin Environmental Watering Group

The Northern Basin Environmental Watering Group provides advice and guidance on water for the environment in the northern part of the Murray–Darling Basin. The group’s coordinated work informs the planning and delivery of inter-valley and cross-border water, to enhance connectivity and improve environmental outcomes. (Catchment-scale operational matters and decisions remain a state responsibility.)

## Victorian Environmental Water Holder

The Victorian Environmental Water Holder holds and manages Victoria’s environmental water entitlements. It works with catchment management authorities to ensure environmental water entitlements achieve the best environmental outcomes. It collaborates with state and federal agencies to co-ordinate environmental flows along the NSW–Victoria border.

## South Australia Department of Environment and Water

South Australia’s Department of Environment and Water works with the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder to plan, manage, deliver and monitor water for the environment in that state.

## More information

[Water for the environment, Environment and Heritage Group](#)

[Murray–Darling Basin Authority](#)

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