



Department of Planning, Industry and Environment

Namoi Catchment

Water for the Environment: Annual Priorities 2021-22



Water for rivers and wetlands



The Peel and Namoi valleys emerged from severe drought following improved weather patterns throughout 2020-21. Catchment storages received significant inflows, with Keepit and Chaffey dams now having been filled.

With ongoing support of natural inflows below the major storages, water managers will see how the year unfolds to determine the most appropriate use of water for the environment. It is likely environmental water managers will continue to focus support on native fish recovery, particularly below Wee Waa. Therefore, in the year ahead, water managers will focus on native fish in the system and provide movement and dispersal opportunities.

WaterNSW have undertaken construction works at Gunidgera Weir at the end of 2020-21. If unplanned delays occur, the end-of-system environmental water delivery may be disrupted. Payback arrangements are in place to offset the impact.

Management of water for the environment in the Peel Valley will continue to focus on in-channel productivity, habitat quality and native fish drought recovery upstream of Tamworth. A flow regime to be delivered in spring is likely.



Weather and water forecast



In April 2021, the Bureau of Meteorology confirmed the 2020–21 La Niña has now passed. Climate model outlooks indicate the El Niño–Southern Oscillation (ENSO¹) is now neutral with no sign of either La Niña or El Niño developing at least until September 2021. While good general rainfall was received in March, rainfall was below average and temperatures warmer than average in May and June 2021 for eastern mainland Australia, including the Namoi catchment, and this will continue in July.

Environmental water managers have prepared watering plans that consider a range of weather and water availability scenarios. This is known as resource availability scenario planning. As dam levels remain moderate, a significant degree of uncertainty remains around resource availability; however, on balance, the Namoi catchment outlook is rated as moderate to wet.

Resource availability scenario



Very dry

Main aim: Protect

- Avoid critical loss
- Maintain key refuges
- Avoid catastrophic events



Dry

Main aim: Maintain

- Maintain river functioning
- Maintain key functions of high priority wetlands



Moderate

Main aim: Recover

- Improve ecological health and resilience
- Improve opportunities for plants and animals to breed, move and thrive



Wet to very wet

Main aim: Enhance

- Restore key floodplain and wetland linkages
- Enhance opportunities for plants and animals to breed, move and thrive

¹ENSO: The interaction between the sea surface and atmosphere over the Pacific Ocean which results in dryer or wetter conditions (El Niño or La Niña).

Key planned actions for 2021-22



Native fish

No specific action planned. Water managers will look for opportunities to help support the recovery of native fish populations.



Vegetation

No specific action is planned.

Riparian and floodplain vegetation will be supported where regulated flows extend and from overland flow from recent and forecast flooding events.



Waterbirds

No specific action is planned. We expect an improvement in the diversity and abundance of waterbirds in response to natural flooding of Warrambools, high floodplain and riparian vegetation.

Refuge pools will support some minor waterbird habitat.



Connectivity

No specific action is planned.

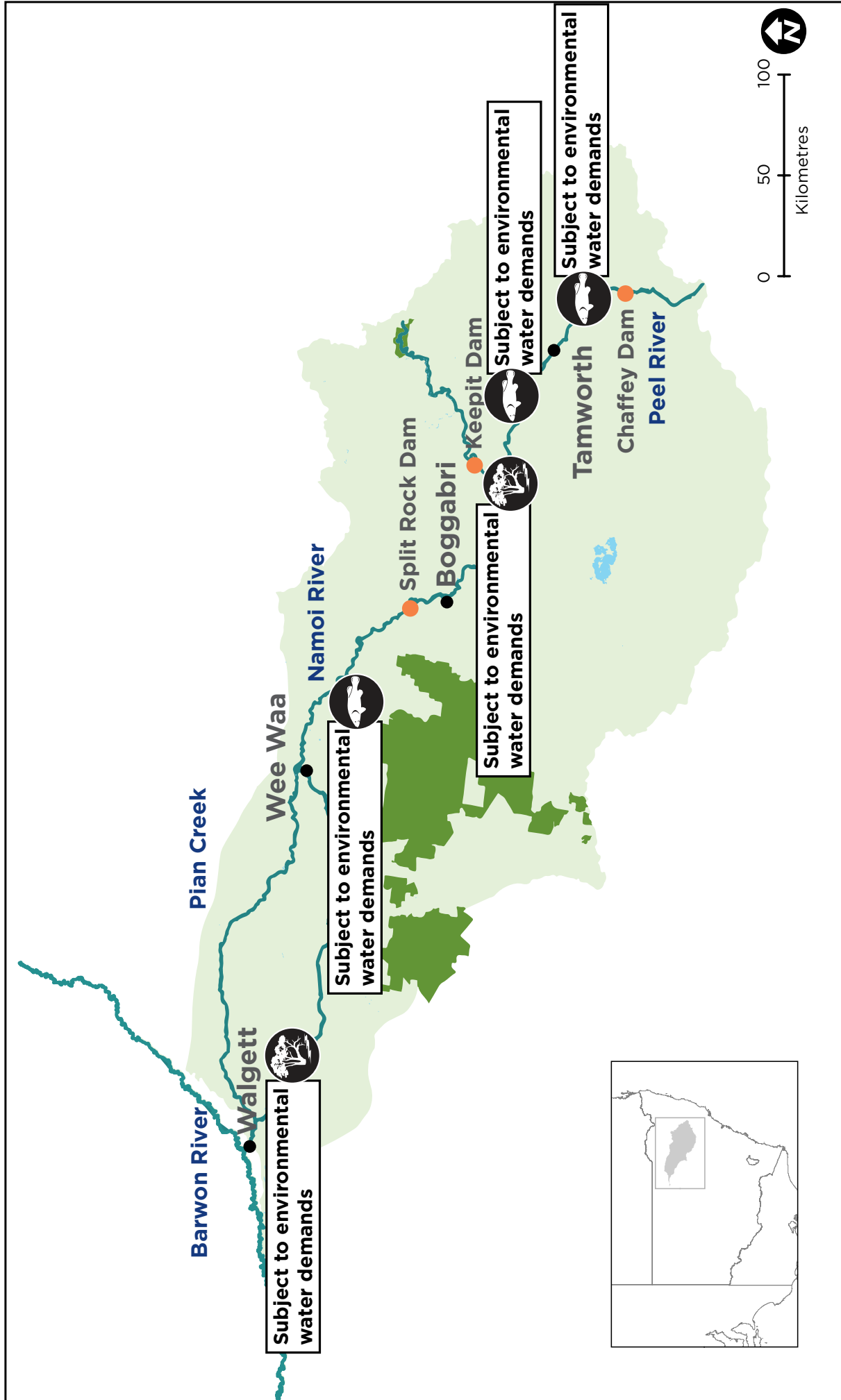


Figure 1 Map of proposed annual priority targets in the Namoi Water Resource Plan area 2021-22.

How we make decisions



The Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (the Department) is supporting the health and resilience of rivers and wetlands by delivering water for the environment where and when it is needed.

We use the best available science, management expertise and experience to manage water across the landscape.

This statement of annual priorities identifies the waterways and wetlands that are likely to receive water.

Our decision-making process considers:

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

The NSW Government works with the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder to manage water in the catchment.



What is water for the environment?

Water for the environment is a share of the water in dams and rivers that is set aside to support the long-term health of local rivers, creeks and wetlands. Healthy rivers carry water to homes, farms, schools and businesses. The waterways are important cultural and spiritual sites for Aboriginal people and the broader community.

About the catchment



The Namoi catchment covers an area of approximately 42,000 square kilometres.

The Namoi and Peel rivers are regulated, with major water storages being Keepit, Split Rock and Chaffey dams. Significant environmental values in the catchment include the Namoi River between Gunnedah and Narrabri which provides critical habitat for native fish and threatened species. Also, many small lagoons, wetlands and anabranches on the floodplain downstream of Narrabri provide habitat for waterbirds. Lake Goran, in the unregulated Mooki catchment, is listed as a wetland of national significance.

The Namoi catchment wetlands and rivers also support important Aboriginal cultural heritage values for the Kamilaroi (Gomeri) people.

Table 1 Expected environmental water volumes available at 1 July 2021.

Source	Maximum volume available (megalitres – ML)	Volume expected 1 July under current conditions (megalitres – ML)
Planned environmental water		
Environmental Water Allowance	5,000 ML	3,350 ML
Peel water licenced to the Commonwealth		
General security	1,257 ML	842 ML
Upper Namoi licenced to the Commonwealth		
General Security	105 ML	105 ML
Lower Namoi licenced to the Commonwealth		
General Security	13,548 ML	14,256 ML

Note: This is an indicative summary of expected volumes to be available. For further detail and information on available volumes, please contact the region via Department enquiries on 1300 361 967. 1 gigalitre = 1000 megalitres; 2.5 megalitre = 1 Olympic swimming pool.

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Cover photo: Peel River downstream of Chaffey Dam (Paul Keyte/DPIE); Page 2: Residual pool in the Namoi River near Carroll (Paul Keyte/DPIE); Namoi river, Warrabah National Park (David Young/DPIE); Page 3: Boundry Hole Namoi River, Warrabah National Park (David Young/DPIE), Infographic (J Humphries/DPIE); Page 6: Namoi River, Warrabah National Park (David Young/DPIE); Page 7: Namoi river next to campsite, Warrabah National Park (David Young/DPIE).