

Reconnecting River Country Program



About the program

In the Murray and Murrumbidgee valleys, there are currently a range of constraints or barriers restricting the effective use of water for the environment. As a result, rivers connect to their floodplains less often than is needed to maintain healthy river, wetland and floodplain ecosystems.

Currently in development, the Reconnecting River Country Program is a key Murray-Darling Basin Plan initiative. Its goal is to increase the frequency and extent rivers connect to wetlands and floodplains, to improve the health of Country in the Murray and Murrumbidgee valleys and make the best use of water for the environment. Should the program proceed to delivery, connecting these rivers to floodplains would be achieved by releasing water for the environment into flow corridors.

The program is proposing to remove constraints to enable more flexible use of water for the environment. Removing system constraints is critical to achieving the improved environmental outcomes of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan.

Establishing an environmental flow corridor

A flow corridor is the area of land inundated by environmental flows up to the selected flow option limit. This area of land includes the riverbank, wetlands and low-level floodplain areas. The program proposes to send higher environment flows down the corridor to mimic the river's natural cycle. These corridors will also include a flow option buffer, where needed.

These flow options are still being considered. In this development phase, engagement is helping to ensure the selected flow options would provide the best outcomes for the environment and community.

You can find the program's inundation mapping and more about flow options at dpie.nsw.gov.au/reconnecting-river-country-program



Darlington Point, Cookoothama.

Flow options being considered

The program is currently considering flow limit options within the following ranges in the Murray and Murrumbidgee valleys:

- Murray – Hume to Yarrawonga – flows between 30,000 and 40,000 ML/d (measured at Doctors Point)
- Murray - Yarrawonga to Wakool Junction (including Edward-Wakool river system) – flows between 25,000 and 45,000 ML/d (measured downstream of Yarrawonga weir, with a maximum buffer for mitigation of up to 50,000 ML/d)
- Murrumbidgee River (including Yanco-Billabong creek system) – flows between 32,000 and 40,000 ML/d (measured at Wagga Wagga, with a maximum buffer for mitigation of up to 45,000 ML/d).

These flow limits would apply to managed releases for environmental purposes. They would provide an upper limit for environmental flows, and many would occur at lower levels, reflecting the broad range of environmental priorities and variability in climate and environmental water availability.

No decision has been made about preferred flow option limits. Flow options are being discussed with landholders, First Nations communities and other

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stakeholders. Inundation mapping provides a clear indication of the extent of the different flow options being considered by the program. Find inundation mapping and more about flow options at water.nsw.gov.au/rrcp-inundation-mapping.

What does this mean for landholders and communities?

The program has the potential to deliver benefits to regional economies in southern NSW. If the program proceeds to delivery, investment in infrastructure can deliver benefits to landholders, community and First Nations communities through improving access and connection and contributions to healthy Country.

Should the program proceed, the proposed higher environmental flows would result in some periodic low-level inundation of some private and public land. Landholders, with property in a proposed flow corridor, would have a fair and reasonable opportunity to negotiate enduring agreements. These agreements would address impacts to their property on just terms.

Next steps

Across the Murray and Murrumbidgee program areas, the program is scoping early works and measures packages to deliver wetlands and floodplain outcomes by December 2026.

You can find more information on early works and measures packages being scoped at water.nsw.gov.au/rrcp-early-works.

In the Murrumbidgee program area, we are working with stakeholders to collect information and feedback

on the implications and benefits of the different flow options. This feedback will inform a flow options assessment to be included in a Murrumbidgee final business case.

The program is also working with the Murray Darling Basin Authority, and other Basin state governments, to support development of the constraints roadmap, a part of the Australian Government's Water Amendment (Restoring Our Rivers Bill) 2023.

Acknowledgement

The NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water acknowledges we stand on Aboriginal land. We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land, and we show our respect for Elders past and present and emerging through thoughtful and collaborative approaches to our work, seeking to demonstrate our ongoing commitment to providing places in which Aboriginal people are socially, culturally and economically included.

Find out more

- visit dpie.nsw.gov.au/reconnecting-river-country-program
- email water.enquiries@dpie.nsw.gov.au
- phone **1300 081 047**
- subscribe for updates water.nsw.gov.au/RRCPUpdates
- get in touch with your local engagement officer.