

Macquarie Valley

Macquarie River Re-Regulating Storage Project

April 2020



Photo: Macquarie River at Gin Gin Weir

Project background

WaterNSW has been engaged by the Department of Planning, Industry & Environment (DPIE) to develop a Final Business Case (FBC) for a proposed gated re-regulating weir and fishway structure on the Macquarie River between the townships of Warren and Narromine.

Following initial option investigations and consultation, the preferred site has been identified and will be located about 200 metres downstream of the existing Gin Gin weir.

The aim of the project is to improve water security for the region and industries, in line with the strategic objectives set by the NSW Government for the Regional Water Strategies.

Benefits of the project will be improvements to long term water security, delivery efficiency and reducing transmission losses in delivering water through the system.

An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is being developed in parallel with the FBC as part of the project.

Project update

WaterNSW and delivery partner GHD are currently undertaking a number of studies and assessments near the existing Gin Gin Weir location for input to the final business case. Investigations include geotechnical, detailed land and river surveying.

OzArk Environment & Heritage, a professional environmental, ecological and heritage services consultancy, have been engaged to undertake a heritage assessment for the project.

The future of the existing Gin Gin Weir will also form part of the project, with studies to be undertaken to assess a full or partial decommissioning.

In the coming months we will be establishing an Operational Requirements Working Group (ORWG) with relevant state and federal agencies to further develop the operation and function of the weir. A workshop series with stakeholders will also be arranged to discuss the outcomes of the ORWG.

We will continue our engagement with stakeholders and the broader community over the coming months, see *inside for details on how to be involved*.

Project benefits



Achieve long-term water security for the Macquarie Valley within the sustainable diversion limits set under the Murray Darling Basin Plan



Maintain river flows by reducing transmission losses through evaporation and absorption



Improve delivery efficiency to customers and maintain water supply to the environment



Contribute to the improvement of future water supply for regional NSW

Environmental assessment requirements

The Macquarie River Re-regulating Storage Project has been classified as a State Significant Infrastructure project due to its size and estimated capital cost. As such the Secretary of DPIE is required to issue environmental assessment requirements (SEARs). The Secretary is required to consult with relevant government agencies in preparing the SEARs.

The SEARs outline requirements for:

- The impact assessment and process generally
- The structure and general content of the EIS
- The general process to be followed in undertaking the assessment and preparing the EIS
- Consultation.

The objective of the SEARs is to provide a better project outcome by focusing the assessment on those issues that:

- Cause the greatest impact
- Affect the most sensitive aspects of the environment
- Are the greatest interest and concern to the community and stakeholders.

The preferred option near the existing Gin Gin Weir will now undergo assessment involving geotechnical, economic feasibility studies, and further consultation.

Following approval of the FBC, the EIS will be completed and be put on public exhibition in accordance with statutory guidelines.

For more information on the SEARs please visit the **DPIE Major Projects website:** www.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/major-projects/project/27276.

NSW Government – Regional Water Strategies

The Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE) is working in partnership with WaterNSW, local councils and Aboriginal communities to develop 12 regional water strategies (RWS) across New South Wales.

The RWS will bring together the best and latest climate evidence with a wide range of tools to develop tailored solutions to manage the water needs of NSW over the next 40 years.

The Macquarie River Re-regulating Storage Project is part of the Macquarie Regional Water Strategy which is currently under development. The Strategy will identify policy, planning and infrastructure options that deliver resilient water resources for all water users in the Macquarie Valley.

This project and DPIE's Macquarie Regional Water Strategy are both funded from the Snowy Hydro Legacy Fund.

For more information on the RWS, visit: <https://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/regional-water-strategies>

Additional studies and assessments to be undertaken for EIS

A number of additional studies and assessments will be undertaken in the coming months as part of the EIS to support design and planning approvals. These will include, but are not limited to:

- Heritage
- Cultural
- Social
- Environmental



Pictures: Artist's impression – (Left) existing site overview, (Centre) proposed site plan, (Right) location of proposed weir

What is EPBC referral?

- EPBC referral is formal assessment and approval under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act).
- It facilitates environment & heritage protection and biodiversity conservation.
- An EPBC referral has been made for this project, due to the potential impacts on the RAMSAR wetlands and threatened species, as well as other environmental values.

Summary of engagement to date

From July 2019, we have been engaging with stakeholders, including representatives from local government, Local Aboriginal Land Councils and federal and state government agencies, as well as directly impacted landowners and a number of community, environmental, angler and recreational groups. Face-to-face engagement activities to date have included:

- **WaterNSW initiated briefings** – September, November & December 2019 and February 2020
- **Presentations to WaterNSW Customer Advisory Groups and River Operating Stakeholder Consultative Committees** – September 2019 and February 2020
- **Guest presentations at existing regional meetings** – September & October 2019 and February & April 2020
- **Stakeholder forums** (three forums) – November 2019
- **Landowner and community drop-in sessions** – July & December 2019

How your feedback has shaped the current design

Feedback received so far from the community, targeted stakeholders, and landowners has greatly contributed to both the location selection and current design of the proposed new re-regulating weir and fishway. Input has contributed to:

- The development of the EIS Scoping Report submitted to DPIE. This is now publicly available on the DPIE Major Projects website (see page 2 for website details).
- The design of the engagement activities and best ways to continue consulting with all interested parties.

In summary, major changes include:

- Storage capacity and size of the proposed structure has reduced significantly from 9GL to 6GL based on stakeholder feedback and further technical investigations to support the change. The reduced capacity will minimise the impact to aquatic and terrestrial environments, as well as impacts to landowners, while also meeting operational needs and reducing project cost.
- Operation efficiency to reduce the impact on the environment has also been discussed with stakeholders. The way the storage may be operated will evolve based on consultation to date and future engagement with our stakeholders.

As the project progresses, we will continue to capture input from our stakeholders to help refine the design and operations of the structure and fishway, as well identify any opportunities or constraints.



Pictures: Artist's impression – (Left) existing site overview, (Centre) proposed site plan, (Right) location of proposed weir

Continue to provide your feedback via email and phone in the short-term

WaterNSW values all stakeholder and community input in assisting with the development of the Final business case (FBC).

Your comments or enquiries are encouraged and can be sent to the email address below.

Following the approval of the FBC, community input will also form part of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

Future engagement opportunities

Unfortunately due to the outbreak of COVID-19, and the resulting government requirements to slow the spread of the virus, WaterNSW has postponed all face-to-face stakeholder forums that were scheduled at the end of last month.

We are committed to ongoing and transparent consultation for this project. However, we need to ensure that the information can be distributed safely and through technology, which is both easily accessible and reliable.

We are currently investigating alternative methods to carry out these sessions, as well as other planned engagement activities that will remove the need for face-to-face interaction, take into account the collective safety of the communities in the Macquarie Valley, and meet current government requirements.

We are continuing our engagement program and welcome feedback from the community. Comments will be taken into consideration for the FBC and in preparing the EIS.

Recreational online survey

We are keen to receive feedback on the issues that are important to stakeholders and members of the community and to gain an understanding of what people see as the potential benefits of the project.

We invite you to complete an online recreational user survey to share your views on how you use the existing area at Gin Gin.

Visit www.waternsw.com.au/mrrrs

The survey will be available from Monday 27 April 2020. Hard copies of the survey are also available upon request, please contact our project team for more information.

Upcoming Stakeholder forums and Workshop Series

Earlier stakeholder forums have been postponed due to COVID-19. We are rescheduling these sessions for late April / May 2020. Register your details to receive further information when dates have been finalised. The workshop series will be an extension of the stakeholder forums. These sessions will be discussed further at the next stakeholder forums.

Stay informed

Visit us online at:
www.waternsw.com.au/MRRRS

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www.waternsw.com.au/subscribe

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Macquarie River Re-regulating Storage Schedule

