

# Western Weirs

## Frequently Asked Questions

### ***What is the Western Weirs program?***

WaterNSW, together with the Department of Planning Industry and Environment (DPIE)-Water is delivering the Western Weirs program strategic business case. The strategic business case will assess and evaluate the capacity of existing town weirs as part of a whole-of-river system approach to provide water security for respective local towns. Alternative infrastructure options will also be evaluated to improve water security for towns and improve river flows along the Barwon-Darling and Lower Darling rivers.

This strategic business case will be considered by the NSW Government later in 2021. Implementation of the program may include all or some of the following:

- Construction of either new or upgraded weirs at towns incorporating gates and fishways
- Possible removal or lowering of some weirs that do not supply water for towns
- Alternative options to weirs to improve town water security.

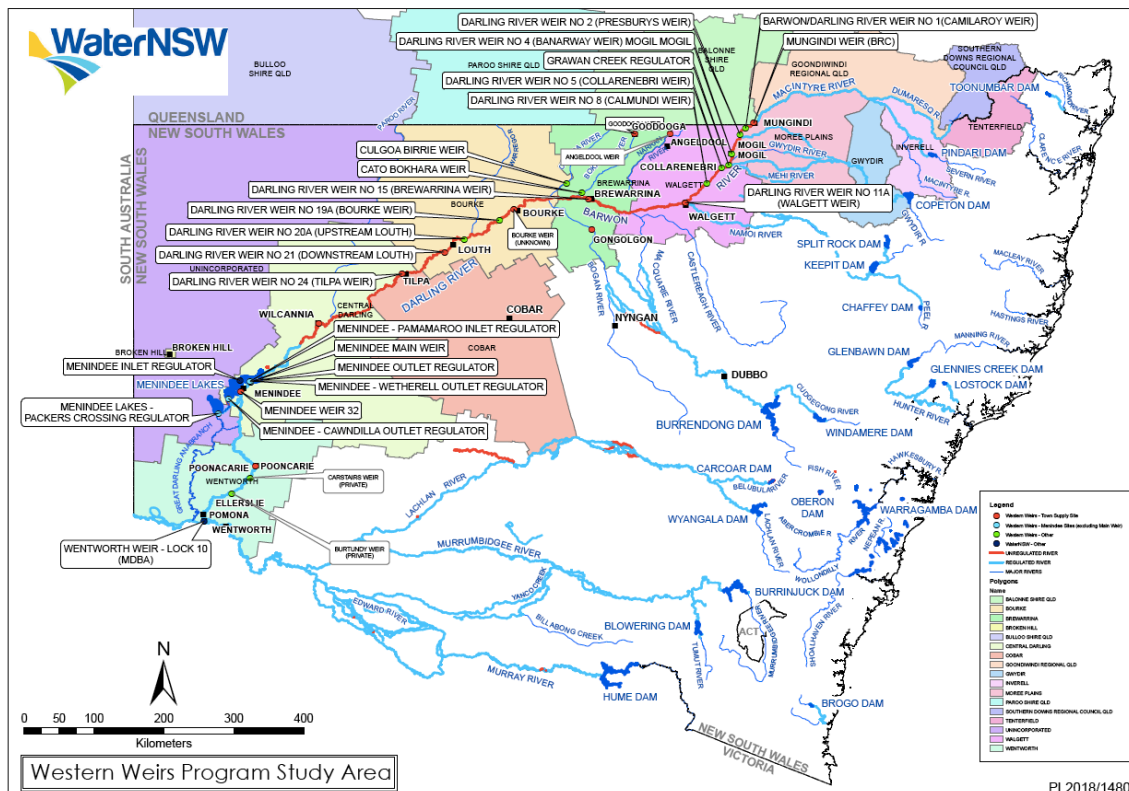
### ***What river systems is the Western Weirs program covering?***

The program covers the Barwon-Darling River and the Lower Darling River.

### ***Which weirs are being investigated in the study?***

There are currently 28 weirs that have been included in the study area under the following principles:

- Weirs are located on the main stem river of the Barwon-Darling or Lower Darling rivers in NSW between Mungindi and Wentworth.
- A weir that is on a tributary to the Barwon-Darling River and its primary purpose is potable drinking water supply for local towns, or its proximity to Barwon-Darling River provides an opportunity to investigate improved system functionality and environmental flows.



### Why are you investigating weirs?

While a number of weirs along these river systems still serve a useful purpose, many of the weirs are in poor condition. The current infrastructure is also known to have a number of other deficiencies including no system level functionality, flow regulation limitations, town water supply and security concerns and unclear responsibility of structures. Extreme low flows due to drought have also impacted these river systems and in turn affected the health and wellbeing of the region’s communities and the environment.

### Which weirs are being considered for possible replacement with gated structures or for other major changes?

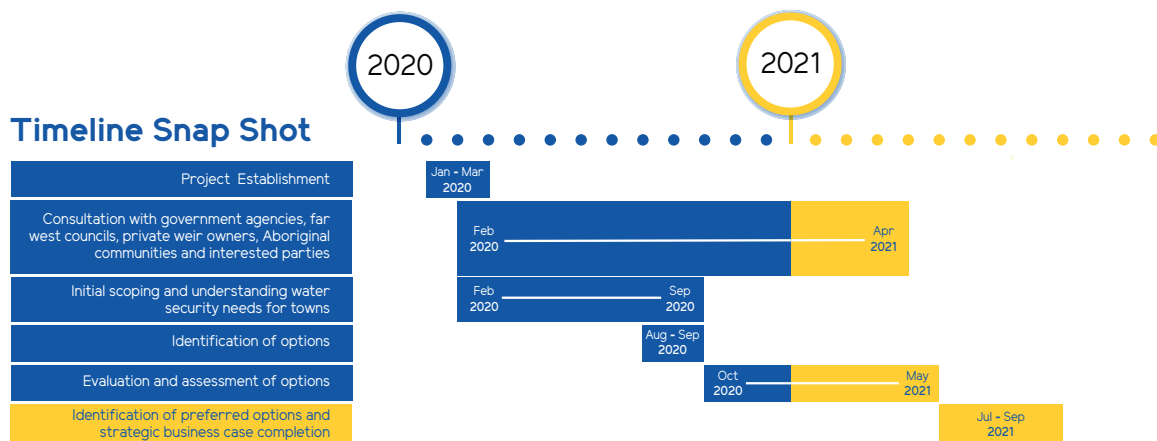
As the strategic business case is still in the options identification phase, it is still to be determined which of these 28 weirs, if any, will be considered for further changes.

### What is the timeline for Western Weirs?

WaterNSW has received weir funding to develop a strategic business case that is assessing the options, risks and benefits of taking a holistic operation and management approach. WaterNSW is in the process of identifying options for the program. These options will be evaluated and assessed before the business case is submitted to Infrastructure NSW later in 2021 for assessment.

Consultation with key stakeholders, weir owners and community groups is being undertaken as part of the strategic business case process. COVID-19 has meant some delays to delivering face-to-face consultation; with targeted online sessions being delivered where possible until the project team can safely resume travel.

### Western Weirs project timeline



### **What are the objectives of the Western Weirs Strategic Business Case?**

The aim of conducting this strategic business case is to:

- Improve water security for local towns and Aboriginal communities in the far west region
- Investigate infrastructure options that may improve the adaptive management of flows along the system
- Investigate weir ownership and future funding arrangements to address local and state government concerns on the cost of ongoing operations and maintenance of critical river infrastructure.

### **How is the Western Weirs Strategic Business Case funded?**

The Western Weirs strategic business case is funded under the state government's Restart NSW Water Security for Regions program, which aims to help regional communities improve water security.

At this stage, the Western Weirs program has only been funded to undertake a strategic business case.

### **When will the strategic business case be completed?**

The strategic business case is due for completion and to be submitted to Infrastructure NSW for review in late 2021.

### ***What is a strategic business case?***

A strategic business case is an initial assessment carried out at the beginning of a program to determine whether there is justification to progress to a more detailed stage, known as a final business case.

A strategic business case is the first phase of the Infrastructure NSW gateway review process and includes independent reviews.

Once completed, a strategic business case will provide an understanding of the options that may be developed and analysed further, via the final business case process if this is funded to progress.

WaterNSW will submit the Western Weirs Strategic Business Case through the Infrastructure NSW gateway in late 2021. Infrastructure NSW will determine if the program receives further funding to proceed to the next phase for a more detailed study.

### ***I want to learn more about the strategic business case and gateway review process.***

More information can be found on the Infrastructure NSW website – <https://www.infrastructure.nsw.gov.au/project-assurance/resources/nsw-gateway-reviews/>

### ***What is the purpose of conducting a strategic business case for Western Weirs?***

A strategic business case will provide an understanding of the potential options that may be developed and analysed in greater depth, and if the project is funded to progress to a more detailed study, known as a final business case.

The Western Weirs strategic business case is assessing the feasibility of changing the operation of the existing river infrastructure by replacing existing fixed crest weirs with regulated weirs, altering the height of some weirs and possible removal of other weirs. The strategic business case will also assess alternative non-weir options that could have similar benefits for improving town water security.

### ***Are fishways being considered as part of this program?***

Fishways are proposed for all new weirs or existing weirs that are changed as part of the project.

***I want to know more about fishways and fish habitats.***

For more information about fishways:

<https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fishing/habitat/rehabilitating/fishways>

To learn more about fish habitats in your region use the clickable map:

<https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fishing/habitat/your-catchment>

***What are the expected program outcomes for the Western Weirs project as a whole?***

If fully implemented, the Western Weirs project aims to:

- Protect cultural values and Aboriginal people's rights, interests and access to water
- Construct new infrastructure to meet town water security needs, which may include an integrated system of gated weirs to replace the current fixed crest weirs along all or parts of the river, or other cost-effective alternative.
- Provide fish passage on all new and existing weirs along the river
- Remove weirs and river structures that provide no effective water supply security outcomes and impede fish passage
- Implement new ownership, maintenance, operations and cost recovery arrangements for infrastructure and operations along the river
- Amend the Water Sharing Plans, if new infrastructure improves the opportunity for adaptive management of flows.

***Why are there weirs in NSW?***

There are estimated to be over 3,000 weirs on rivers in New South Wales and they have a long history in supporting the amenity of the towns and properties they serve.

Most weirs were originally built to provide a reserve of water for towns or properties to carry them through dry periods. Others were built to facilitate diversion of water into effluent streams or onto floodplains to spread the productive benefits of water over a wider area. In more recent years, weirs have been built to help river operators manage releases from dams or to increase water depth for pumps and diversion channels in major irrigation developments. And, in a few cases, weirs have been built for purely recreational or aesthetic purposes. In some rivers, significant lengths of stream are held behind weirs. For example, 40 percent of the Barwon-Darling River is captured in weir pools.

***Why is WaterNSW working with NSW Department of Planning Industry and Environment (DPIE) on this project?***

The Western Weirs program is closely aligned with the Western Regional Water Strategy that is being developed by the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment. The strategic business case will be reflected in the Western Regional Water Strategy, recognising that the Western Weirs program is a key future consideration for the western region. The project will also be required to consider interactions with the Menindee Lakes SDLAM Project and projects to protect and enhance native fish outcomes, including fish passage.

***I want to know more about DPIE's Regional Water Strategies.***

You can find more information on regional water strategies on DPIE's website: <https://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/plans-programs/regional-water-strategies>

***I want to know more about the Menindee Lakes SDLAM Project.***

You can find more information about this project by following this link: <https://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/plans-programs/water-recovery-programs/sustainable-diversion-limits/menindee-lakes>

***Are you consulting the community on this program and, if so, when and how?***

Meeting with stakeholders face-to-face and providing equal opportunities for all stakeholders to be consulted is an important part of our engagement approach. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, consultation for the strategic business case has been delivered online where possible, and face-to-face consultation delayed. To date, WaterNSW has been consulting with far west councils including Brewarrina Shire, Moree Plains Shire, Walgett Shire, Bourke Shire, Central Darling Shire, Wentworth Shire and other weir owners to collate important information on the weirs and receive feedback to input into the strategic business case.

Due to COVID-19, the timing around broader engagement with community groups, including with Aboriginal communities, has been planned from February to April 2021 when face-to-face consultation can resume more safely. Where possible, the project team is continuing engineering, modelling, surveying and assessment work. These activities are currently limited by the COVID-19 restrictions and the team's abilities to be on site and travel regionally with safe arrangements in place.

### ***How are you engaging with Aboriginal stakeholders?***

WaterNSW recognises Aboriginal peoples' rights, interest and access to water, and engagement with Aboriginal communities is a key priority for the Western Weirs program.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, we have deferred all face-to-face engagement until it is safe to resume. An approach for the delivery of Aboriginal engagement is currently being planned. WaterNSW and DPIE-Water are planning to deliver joint consultation sessions with Aboriginal communities, starting in early 2021.

### ***I am part of a relevant community group. Why haven't we been consulted yet?***

Due to COVID constraints, broader face-to-face consultation has been postponed until it is safe to visit far west communities. We are currently planning to deliver consultation with community groups and Aboriginal stakeholders in early 2021.

### ***How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted this project?***

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, which started in March 2020, the NSW Government placed restrictions on travel, public gatherings and social distancing. This has meant we've had to make some changes to some of the activities for the project, so communities are safer.

The WaterNSW project team will ensure any activities on site and face to face will be undertaken with a COVID-19 safety plan in place. Where possible the project team are continuing engineering, modelling, surveying and assessment work. These activities may still be limited by the COVID-19 restrictions and the team's abilities to be on site and travel regionally.

### ***How do I stay up to date with this project or get in touch with your project team?***

Information and updates are being provided online, over phone and email, and on our website.

Stakeholders can also receive more information on the project via:

**WaterNSW's helpdesk:** 1300 662 077

**WaterNSW's email:** [projects@waternsw.com.au](mailto:projects@waternsw.com.au)

**Western Weirs program webpage:** [www.waternsw.com.au/projects/new-dams-for-nsw/western-weirs-program](http://www.waternsw.com.au/projects/new-dams-for-nsw/western-weirs-program)