



## Better Bidgee Program: questions and answers

Answers to the questions asked by stakeholders during the Better Bidgee Program webinar series, meetings and other interactions.

A recording of one of the webinars can be found at [dpie.nsw.gov.au/better-bidgee](https://dpie.nsw.gov.au/better-bidgee)

### Planning and approvals

#### Which Better Bidgee initiatives are going ahead?

We are investigating a range of initiatives to deliver outcomes but will only progress projects that are broadly supported by our communities. Infrastructure improvements and operating rules are all being considered to make the Murrumbidgee system more flexible, so its rivers and floodplains can be protected, and enhanced, and sustainable local communities, agriculture and industries are supported.

We are committed to developing initiatives that have community and stakeholder support.

[More information](#) on the Better Bidgee Program.

#### How will these initiatives be assessed and approved?

Once Water Infrastructure NSW has worked with stakeholders and community to develop and design the initiatives within the Better Bidgee program, NSW will seek approval for funding from the Australian Government and endorsement for the suite of measures from the other Basin States. Once projects have funding approval, planning approvals will be obtained. Throughout this process, we are committed to engaging with the community on the development of each initiative.

#### What is the current timeframe for the Balranald Weir project?

We are still in the early stages of planning for the Balranald Weir project and progress is dependent on community feedback and support. Business case development is likely to start in 2022 and once this has commenced, we will have a better idea of the delivery timeframe and when the weir is likely to be operational.

#### Is there a possibility of a wider range of options under the proposed Cold Water Pollution initiative?

Yes, we are still in the early stages of planning for this initiative, working closely with WaterNSW as the asset owners, and we will take all feedback into account. We will provide ample opportunities for stakeholders and communities to provide feedback, whether this be online and face-to-face.

#### Does the rescoped Yanco Creek Offtake proposal meet the expectations of the local community who were concerned about the former proposal?

The rescoped proposal is not a final design. We want to ensure this proposal has broad community support from both an ecological and cultural heritage perspective, otherwise the former concerns will remain. The new proposal is open for community feedback, so we can identify what, if anything, needs to change.

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It is important to note we will not deliver the project in its originally envisaged form, and we are not considering raising the height of the weir pool by more than 1.2 m (the previous proposal saw a 2.5 m height increase).

### **Is there an update on the NSW Government's re-negotiation of the timeframes and the assessment process with the Australian Government?**

The priority for the Better Bidgee program is delivering beneficial outcomes for First Nations people, the community, the environment and local economies.

These factors will determine the timeframes for the program's progress. After we have consulted with the community on what needs to be adapted or changed, and broad community support for initiatives is gained, we will liaise with the Australian Government regarding next steps. Only initiatives with broad community support will be progressed.

### **What long-term monitoring program will be implemented and maintained to assess all outcomes of the program?**

Developing a monitoring and evaluation framework is a core component of all Water Infrastructure NSW projects, and one will be put in place for the final Better Bidgee program initiatives once we have broad community support for the package of initiatives.

### **Will there be a Technical Advisory Group established for key stakeholders to discuss the details of each initiative?**

Our current focus is on identifying and confirming the initiatives the community supports, while also providing an opportunity for the community to propose alternate initiatives that meet the program's objectives. While we want to work with communities to determine how they want to be engaged and what are the best ways for the community to feed into the process, we also want to build on existing governance forums and stakeholder groups where appropriate to ensure we make the best use of what is already in place.

### **Will ecologists be included in a technical advisory group?**

Ecologists are critical to developing up project proposals and experts will be called on in helping develop up initiatives. This may be through existing technical advisory groups, using experts internal to Government, engaging independent experts or a combination of those options.

## Local businesses and jobs

### **How can we access work as a local contractor based regionally?**

Water Infrastructure NSW is committed to working with local business, First Nations businesses and contractors to deliver our projects. Businesses interested in working with us can register on the [Water Infrastructure NSW business registry](#).

Registered business will receive business-related updates and information on upcoming opportunities across the state.

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### **Will there be partnerships and funding opportunities to compliment the industry works providing fish passages?**

A: Water Infrastructure NSW is committed to working with local business, First Nations businesses and contractors to deliver our projects. Businesses interested in working with us, including those businesses that specialise in fish passage, can register on the [Water Infrastructure NSW business registry](#).

Registered business will receive business-related updates and information on upcoming opportunities across the state.

### **Will tourism and recreation be affected?**

A desired outcome for the Better Bidgee program is to deliver better cultural and economic outcomes for local communities, as well as environmental outcomes.

One of the key drivers of the Better Bidgee program is improving native fish access to more than 1,000 km of the Murrumbidgee system by installing fishways at key sites where fish passage is currently blocked, addressing cold water pollution discharges from large dams, and installing screens on pumps and diversions that is expected to save tens of millions of fish annually.

It is expected these improved environmental outcomes will have significant benefits for local visitor economies and create improved recreational opportunities.

## Environment and sustainability

### **How will you manage rising temperatures that dry up the ground and water?**

Various models and strategies will determine how we respond to this challenge, and in-depth research will be undertaken by environmental experts. This will build on and utilise the climate change modelling work DPIE Water has been undertaking as part of developing the 12 Regional Water Strategies across NSW.

### **What sort of environmental assessment will be undertaken for these initiatives?**

The environmental assessment process is critical for all infrastructure projects. Once we are further down the development pathway and understand what projects will be progressed, we will investigate the most appropriate environmental planning and approvals pathway. The assessments pathway will largely depend on the size and scale of the initiatives to be progressed. We will keep the community informed on the assessment and approval pathway as the program is further developed.

### **How will you factor drought into planning?**

Mitigating the impacts of future droughts will be a key to further planning for the Better Bidgee program. We need a resilient system with flexible assets and infrastructure, and we will be using the latest climatic modelling and data to inform our planning.

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### **Is there a reason fish passage is such a high priority?**

Improving fish passage across the Murrumbidgee River system is key to improving the overall health and population size of native fish species, such as Golden Perch and Murray Cod. In addition to important ecological outcomes, improvements in fish health and populations will have significant cultural heritage, tourism and economic benefits for the region.

### **Has research been undertaken on connectivity between groundwater and surface water and how these interactions may be affected by the changes proposed?**

Research is being undertaken to improve modelling where there are gaps in our knowledge of local hydrology, including the links between groundwater and surface water. The Regional Water Strategies focus on identifying options supporting groundwater improvement and how we can better utilise water resources. In addition, NSW is currently developing a Groundwater Strategy which will be released in 2022.

### **Will the 1,200 ha increase of Murrumbidgee National Park be achieved through land repurposes or rezoning other Crown Lands?**

At this stage, it is envisaged that the 1,200 ha expansion would be made through land purchase not through rezoning Crown Lands.

### **If resilience is reduced during drought, what will the outcomes be for water trading on the Murrumbidgee River?**

We will develop detailed modelling to identify broader water impacts coming out of the program, and this will feed into considerations on the potential impact on water markets. However, it is important to note that the Better Bidgee program aims to help improve resilience and environmental outcomes in a future where there is more climate variability.

### **How does the volume of offset expected from the rescoped proposals differ from the original proposal?**

The potential offset volume from the program will be calculated at the modelling stage, after community consultation is complete and the initiatives with broad community support are identified.

### **Will you be defining the volume and timing of environmental needs over the long-term for these initiatives?**

The Murrumbidgee long-term water plan identifies the targets and water priorities for the river system each year. This plan documents our ecological priorities and water regimes with the goal of meeting broader ecological outcomes. It will guide the future development of the Better Bidgee program.

### **What actions are being taken to reduce the impacts of climate change and build ecosystem resilience?**

The Department of Planning, Industry and Environment's Water Group is currently developing the Murrumbidgee Regional Water Strategy. A key focus of this is mitigating the impacts of climate variability and climate change. Infrastructure that allows for flexibility to sustainably manage and

deliver environmental water, and a review of the effectiveness of existing environmental water arrangements under climate change projections, form part of these investigations.

### **Is water treatment the solution?**

The NSW Government is investigating a range of water treatment options to address water quality including:

- working with Water NSW to reduce cold water pollution as part of the Better Bidgee program
- developing the Murrumbidgee Regional Water Strategy
- providing grants to local councils to address water risks through the Safe and Secure Water Program.

## Infrastructure

### **How will the new Yanco Weir work with a 1.2 m raise, but no Yanco regulator in the Yanco Creek?**

Increased elevation allows for greater flow and management control between Yanco Creek and the Murrumbidgee River. The specific engineering behind this proposal has not yet been finalised, and options are being evaluated to determine how the weir will operate.

### **Will the designs incorporate a regulator, weir or both?**

Community feedback will guide what infrastructure we need to upgrade or construct, whether it be a regulator, weir or both.

### **Are there plans to install fish screens at the Murrumbidgee River irrigation offtake structures?**

There are several opportunities within the Murrumbidgee River system being assessed for suitability. This assessment will be undertaken in consultation with local communities and irrigation organisations.

## SDLAM (Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment Mechanism)

### **Will the previous work of the SDLAM engagement team be incorporated into the rescoped Yanco Creek Offtake initiative?**

The work undertaken by the SDLAM team forms the foundation of the rescoped Yanco Creek Offtake initiative, though we want to work with the community to further develop the proposed initiative.



### **Is there a timeline for planning to meet the base deadline of the NSW Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment Mechanism (SDLAM) projects?**

Community consultation may go into the first or second quarter of 2022. NSW is committed to working with the community and taking as long as needed so everyone agrees on how we move forward.

### **What happens if the NSW Government misses its NSW Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment Mechanism (SDLAM) timelines?**

Any outcomes if the NSW Government miss its SDLAM deadlines will be negotiated by the NSW Minister for Water, Property and Housing and the other basin Ministers. Once the program initiatives with broad community support are identified they will be put forward to the other Basin Ministers for consideration.

### **Does rescoping mean you hope to achieve environmental outcomes with less water?**

The rescoping of the Yanco Creek Offtake project focusses on designing and implementing a program with broad community support. We are trying to do more with less, ensuring a systematic approach to environmental outcomes. The NSW Minister for Water, Property and Housing has made it clear that NSW will not move forward with projects that don't have broad community support.

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