

Draft Murray and Murrumbidgee Regional Water Strategies

This document answers frequently asked questions about the Murray and Murrumbidgee regional water strategies

How has the department improved and integrated its hydrological modelling capabilities for the southern NSW regions?

To gain a more sophisticated understanding of how climate affects the water resources of the Murray and Murrumbidgee regions, the NSW Government has invested in new climate datasets and new hydrological modelling. It has also significantly improved existing models.

We are working collaboratively with other Basin states and territories, the Murray–Darling Basin Authority, Snowy Hydro Limited and Icon Water to enhance the integration and functionality of our hydrologic model. This important work brings together all separate river system models, plus a range of smaller rainfall/runoff models, into an integrated modelling framework for the southern connected system for the first time.

It also enables us to better reflect the complex interjurisdictional linkages between the systems of New South Wales, Victoria, the Australian Capital Territory and the Snowy Mountains and better represent the physical connectivity of the southern system. This work ensures we have state-of-the-art models that will allow us to better understand the regions' climate and the risks to water users.

When will the new climate and hydrological results for the draft Murray and Murrumbidgee regional water strategies be available?

Given the complexity and uniqueness of the modelling work, we are completing extensive reviews and quality assurance processes before we release the results for the regional water strategies. The NSW Government intends to make the new climate evidence publicly available to all stakeholders.

How do the draft Murray and Murrumbidgee regional water strategies account for existing commitments, including the Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment Mechanism program?

The draft Murray and Murrumbidgee regional water strategies reiterate NSW's commitment to the Basin Plan, which includes progressing projects under the Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment Mechanism (SDLAM).

The draft strategies list all SDLAM projects relevant for the Murray and Murrumbidgee regional water strategy areas as 'existing government commitments', reflecting the current position and status of these projects at the time of their publication. The strategies will not assess SDLAM projects (this includes economic or environmental appraisals), as separate assessment processes already apply to them.

Water Infrastructure NSW is currently engaging with regional communities on the Reconnecting River Country Program, the Better Bidgee Program and the Better Baaka Program. This engagement

is critical to ensure that the concerns of the communities are heard and that we can mitigate the effects that carrying out these projects has on communities.

The NSW Government is also actively pursuing a dialogue with the Australian Government about the challenges of the existing delivery timeframes for the SDLAM program. The NSW Government has consistently advocated for an extension of the current delivery timeframes beyond 2024 and will continue to explore ways to address the challenges of the 2024 deadline.

How will the draft Murray and Murrumbidgee regional water strategies account for the ongoing work on the Snowy Water Licence Review?

The NSW Government is progressing the environmental water and water release investigations arising from the 10-year review of the Snowy Water Licence. The Snowy Technical Working Group has been set up to support this work.

In line with other existing government commitments, the draft Murray and Murrumbidgee regional water strategies note the investigations that are taking place but do not seek to actively influence their completion or direction. However, in future iterations, the regional water strategies may carry forward recommendations of the investigations.

In addition, the climate datasets and new integrated models present the opportunity to inform future Snowy Licence Reviews. Both draft strategies include an option to this effect.

Why are the boundaries of the Murray and western regional water strategies different from those of the water resource plan (surface water)?

The regional water strategy boundaries reflect key issues and concerns raised by stakeholders about addressing connectivity along the length of the Barwon–Darling river system in a coordinated way. Strategic planning of a combined Barwon–Darling River system will allow us to consider issues identified in the Lower Darling River when we shape strategy outcomes for the Barwon–Darling upstream of Menindee Lakes.

Because of this decision, the Murray Regional Water Strategy covers only the NSW Murray surface-water SDL resource unit, with the addition of the Snowy–Genoa water sharing plan area. The inclusion of the Snowy–Genoa recognises the strong hydrological linkages between the Snowy River and the Murray River, created by the Snowy Mountains Scheme. The Murray Regional Water Strategy does not discuss water-related issues or challenges across the border in Victoria.

Will the draft Murray and Murrumbidgee regional water strategies discuss water management arrangements in other jurisdictions (for example, Victoria, South Australia, the Australian Capital Territory) and make recommendations?

The draft Murray and Murrumbidgee regional water strategies touch on the complexities of the interstate water sharing agreements and the rules that govern water resources in the Murray River.

The draft Murrumbidgee Regional Water Strategy also notes the rules that govern water sharing between New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory and the rules that outline the water release requirements from the Snowy Mountain Scheme.

The draft Murray and Murrumbidgee regional water strategies focus on issues concerning the NSW water management framework and water-related risks for NSW water users. However, the draft Murray Regional Water Strategy highlights the challenges of interstate water sharing arrangements under the Murray–Darling Basin Agreement, in light of changing climatic conditions and water user needs. The draft Murray Regional Water Strategy recommends that the partner governments investigate and discuss these matters further in the future. It does not give recommendations on changes to state-based water management arrangements within other jurisdictions.

Several other options included in the draft Murray Regional Water Strategy would require inter-governmental collaboration, given the shared nature of the Murray River water resources. Where relevant, the accompanying document of long-list options highlights this.

Will the draft Murray and Murrumbidgee regional water strategies recommend restricting particular land uses in the regions?

The intent of the draft Murray and Murrumbidgee regional water strategies is to better understand the climate and the key water-related risks and challenges in the NSW Murray and Murrumbidgee regions.

Several joint government investigations are already underway to assess and address known risks and challenges in the regions. The draft strategies highlight the potential risks to water resources (water quality and delivery) from particular land uses. They suggest that more integrated land and water management would be beneficial for communities, industries and the environment.

However, the regional water strategies are not proposing to prohibit particular land uses in NSW regional areas. Land-use planning will continue to be managed under the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*. Option 14 in both Murray and Murrumbidgee regional water strategies seeks to better understand the linkages between land uses and water resources to determine if land-use planning controls are adequate for protecting water resources.