

Amendments to the Gwydir Valley Floodplain Management Plan

This document provides an overview of amendments made in 2023 to the *Floodplain Management Plan for the Gwydir Valley Floodplain 2016*.

Floodplain management plans are the primary legal framework for coordinating the development of flood works on a whole-of-valley basis. The plans are valid for 10 years and the NSW Government may amend within that 10-year period under certain circumstances, including if the changes are in the public interest.

This fact sheet gives an overview of the amendments made to the Gwydir Valley Floodplain Management Plan in 2023. The changes address some recommendations from recent reviews of the plan and its implementation, provide consistency with more recently developed floodplain management plans, and changes to Management Zones as a result of community consultation. They include changes to the Management Zone Map, additional rules and administrative changes.

Amending the floodplain management plan

The NSW Department of Planning and Environment has amended the Floodplain Management Plan for the Gwydir Valley Floodplain following consultation with stakeholders on the proposed changes during October and November 2022. The amended floodplain management plan commenced on 27 January 2023.

Overview of changes

Changes to the Management Zone Map

About management zones

Each floodplain management plan includes several management zones. Management zones contain specific rules that define the types of flood works that may be constructed within that management zone and the assessment criteria that apply to flood work applications.

There are four basic categories of management zones:

- **Management Zone A** includes major floodways and other areas where a significant discharge of floodwater occurs during flood events. These areas are generally characterised by high flood flow velocity and depth.
- **Management Zone B** includes areas of the floodplain that are important for the conveyance of floodwater during large flood events and for the temporary pondage of floodwaters during the passage of a flood. The outer boundary of Management Zone B may be defined by the inundation extent of a large flood.

- **Management Zone C** contains elevated areas or areas protected by existing flood work development.
- **Management Zone D** includes areas of the floodplain that have a high degree of flood dependency, such as swamps or billabongs, and hold significance to the Aboriginal community or have significant ecological importance or both. They are sensitive areas of the floodplain that require a high level of protection from potential impacts of flood work development.

Changes made

The following changes were made to the Management Zones Map in the Gwydir Floodplain Management Plan:

- local hydraulic and ecological refinements to Management Zone A
- refinements to Management Zone B and Management Zone C to reflect the alignment of works in flood work approvals
- designation of a new Management Zone D1 and mapping of additional ecological and cultural assets to this zone.

Note: Other floodplain management plans in the northern Murray–Darling Basin include Management Zone C – Urban for urban areas where there is either a flood study, a floodplain risk management study, a floodplain risk management plan, or areas that are protected by flood mitigation works, such as town levees. At this stage, the department has not proposed to add Management Zone C – Urban to the Gwydir Valley Floodplain Management Plan or expand the boundary to include Moree, but it has been noted for consideration when the plan is replaced in 2026-27.

Why the changes were made

Changes have been made in response to reviews of the plan that were undertaken in 2021 in accordance with sections 43 and 44 of the *Water Management Act 2000*. As part of these reviews, submissions were received in relation to the plan and the existing Management Zones Map.

Changes were made in response to:

- feedback from First Nations/Aboriginal communities about significant cultural assets for addition to Management Zone D1,
- feedback from landholders who provided evidence for local Management Zone corrections and refinements, and
- updated information on new or amended flood work approvals from WaterNSW.

The focus of these changes was to correct any errors or omissions and align with the methodology used to delineate the management zones in more recently developed floodplain management plans.

An overview of the management zone methodology is provided in the [*Rural floodplain management plans: technical manual for plans developed under the Water Management Act 2000*](#).

What these changes mean

The changes resulted in the existing area for each management zone increasing or decreasing as follows:

- Management Zone A has decreased by approximately 1.5% (4,600 hectares)

- Management Zone B has decreased by approximately 1.4% (8,100 hectares)
- Management Zone C has increased by approximately 3.2% (7,900 hectares)
- Management Zone D has not changed in area
- Management Zone D1 has been added covering approximately 4,800 hectares.

Schedule 2 has been added listing the places of ecological and cultural significance within Management Zone D1. The existing Schedule 1 was amended to include updates to ecological value information.

Figure 1 shows the changes made to the Management Zones Map, as highlighted in purple and red. Additional detail on the areas of change is available in the updated Background Document.

The changes to the Management Zones Map are generally limited to impacts at a local scale with individual landholders. For example, more restrictive rules apply where the zoning has changed from Management Zone B to Management Zone A. The department directly contacted and met with affected landholders to discuss any concerns related to the proposed changes.

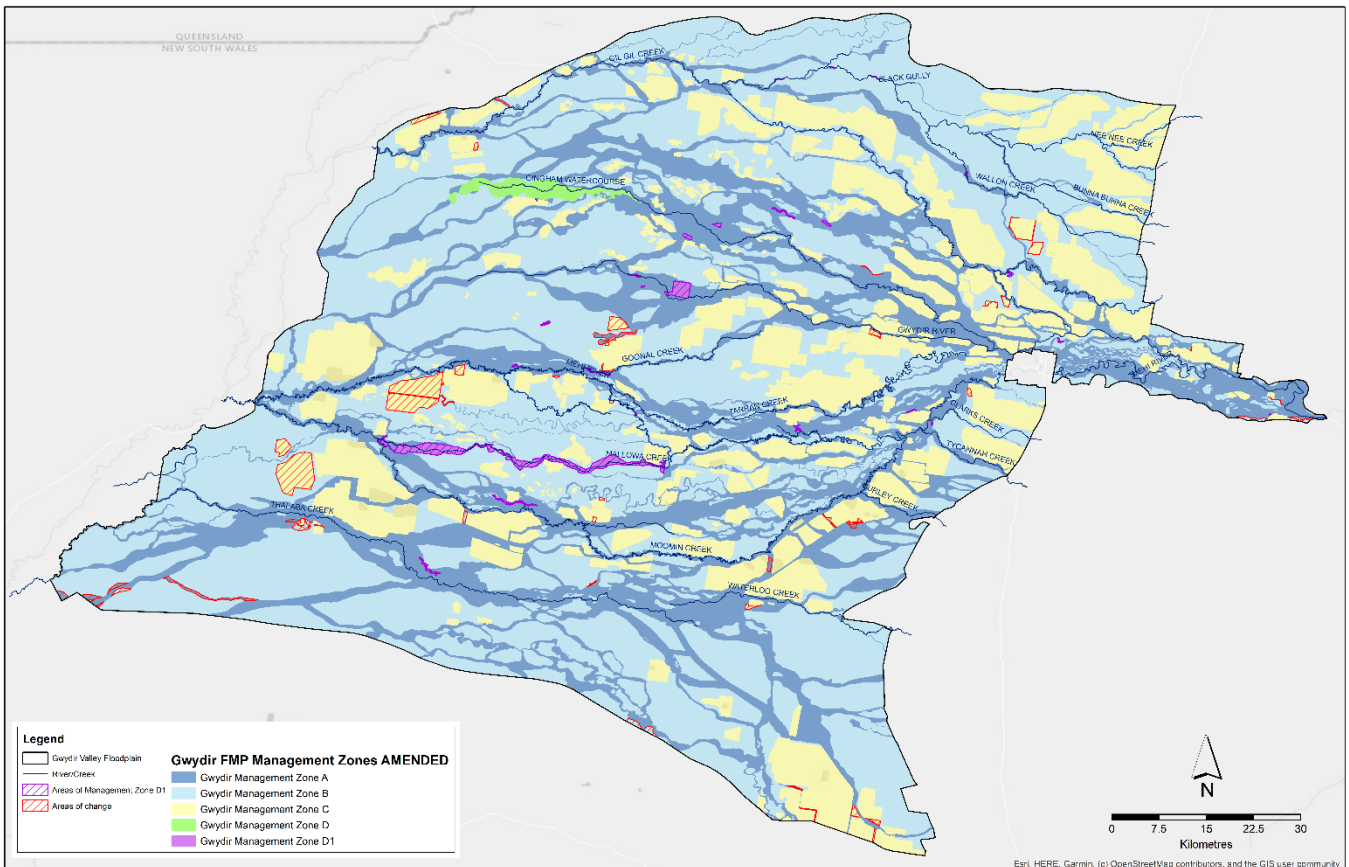


Figure 1. Areas of change on the Management Zones Map

Addition of rules for enhancement flood works

About enhancement flood works

There are three basic categories of enhancement flood works:

- ecological enhancement works are designed to provide a positive outcome for an ecological asset that is mapped, recognised in or protected by a floodplain management plan, or local, state or Commonwealth environmental plans, policy or legislation
- Aboriginal cultural value enhancement works enable the protection of locations or landscape features that have Aboriginal cultural value and are listed in a local, state or Commonwealth heritage register
- heritage site enhancement works provide a positive outcome for an identified heritage site that is listed in a local, state or Commonwealth heritage register.

Changes made

Additional rules have been included which allow for the construction of enhancement flood works in Management Zones A, D and D1. The purpose of these works is to enhance ecological assets, cultural assets or heritage sites, or a combination of these, on the floodplain.

Why the changes were made

In 2021, the Natural Resources Commission (NRC) completed an audit of the implementation of the Gwydir Valley FMP in 2021 in accordance with section 44 of the *Water Management Act 2000*. In their report, the NRC recommended the inclusion of these rules.

Floodplain management plans that have been recently developed include rules that allow for the construction of enhancement flood works in Management Zones A and D. However, these rules were previously not included in the Gwydir Valley Floodplain Management Plan.

The inclusion of these rules in the amended plan is consistent with section 30(c) of the *Water Management Act 2000* which allows for a floodplain management plan to deal with the restoration or rehabilitation of land, water sources or their dependent ecosystems.

What these changes mean

The change allows for the approval of enhancement flood works in Management Zones A, D and D1 for the purpose of enhancing ecological assets, cultural assets or heritage sites, or a combination of these, on the floodplain. Enhancement works may be required as part of the [Gwydir Reconnecting Watercourse Country Program](#).

Other changes to ensure consistency

About other rural floodplain management plans

Since 2016 there have been six rural floodplain management plans developed in the northern inland Murray–Darling Basin. The Gwydir Valley Floodplain Management Plan was the first developed. As part of the process of developing floodplain management plans, refinements have been made to the way plans are drafted to improve clarity and simplicity. These refinements are now reflected in the Gwydir Valley Floodplain Management Plan.

Changes made

A range of changes, as outlined below, were made to ensure consistency between the Gwydir Valley Floodplain Management Plan and more recently developed plans.

1. Moving the term ‘below the natural surface level’ to the specific requirements for supply channels in **Management Zone A** (new or amended flood work approvals). The list of authorised flood works in Management Zone A includes ‘supply channels below the natural surface level’. The inclusion of ‘below the natural surface level’ is inconsistent with the wording for all of the other work types in this clause. Subsequent northern Murray–Darling Basin floodplain management plans have moved the below-ground wording to the specifications for supply channels. *There is no change to the intent of the rule.*
2. Removal of the below-ground requirement for supply channels in **Management Zone A** that were *constructed prior to the commencement of the plan in August 2016*: This change makes the existing works rule less restrictive as both above-ground and below-ground supply channels are now able to be considered for approval, subject to meeting the assessment criteria.
3. Inclusion of an additional height threshold of 50 cm for primary access roads in **Management Zone A**: This change improves the reliability of primary access roads during a small to medium flood event. The other specific requirements for access roads (for example, causeways), along with the assessment criteria, will also apply to these higher-level access roads.
4. Additional rules for new and existing flood works in the new **Management Zone D1**. New works are now limited to enhancement works only. Existing minor works (those constructed prior to the commencement of the plan in August 2016), including access roads, supply channels, stock refuges, and infrastructure protection works may be considered for approval, subject to meeting the assessment criteria. The rules also allow for the modification of existing flood work approvals. This change is a consequence of the additional areas identified in Management Zone D1 and is consistent with the existing works rules for Management Zone A. As most of the areas identified for Management Zone D1 were already mapped to Management Zone A, there is minimal change in the rules for existing works.
5. Separation of the assessment criteria for ecological and Aboriginal cultural values in **all management zones**: This change ensures flora and fauna considerations are distinct from Aboriginal cultural values and heritage site considerations. *There is no change to the intent of the assessment criteria.*
6. Amendment of the assessment criteria in **Management Zones B and C** to allow for localised increases in velocity: This change increases flexibility for landholders to manage isolated increases in velocity at a property scale.
7. Additional assessment criteria in **Management Zones B and C** to limit increases in flood levels for high value infrastructure: This change ensures high value infrastructure is provided a high level of protection. A definition of high value infrastructure has been added to the Dictionary - *a flood work that is for the purpose of protecting houses, stock yards and other major infrastructure, such as machinery sheds in times of flooding.*
8. Update to the objectives, strategies and performance indicators of the plan: This change was a result of legal review and ensures there is a clear link between the performance indicators measuring success (or not) of the strategies in reaching the objectives.
9. Additional new terms to the dictionary such as flood connectivity, flood wave, high value infrastructure, primary access road and wetland: This change is a consequence of the changes made, as outlined above and provide additional clarity about the intent of the rules.

Why the changes were made

It is important to ensure consistency between floodplain management plans, where possible. This ensures fairness for all landholders when applying for a flood work approval and maintains protection for each floodplain and its dependent ecosystems and Aboriginal cultural values.

Floodplain management plans are based on the best available information including hydraulic modelling, spatial data and existing flood works in the landscape. The changes are based on information that has been refined and updated since the commencement of the Gwydir Valley Floodplain Management Plan in 2016.

What these changes mean

Most of the changes made will increase flexibility for landholders while improving protection for the floodplain. Additionally, the changes ensure consistency between floodplain management plans and are largely administrative in nature.

Review of the changes

The changes made to the Gwydir Valley Floodplain Management Plan were reviewed and supported by an Interagency Regional Panel.

Key experts from the NSW Department of Primary Industries (agricultural interests) and the Department of Planning and Environment (water and environmental interests) were represented on this panel. Input from WaterNSW, the Natural Resources Access Regulator and Local Land Services was also sought as part of the review process.

All community feedback received was reviewed by the department and the Interagency Regional Panel prior to finalising the changes to the plan.

Further work

The Gwydir Valley Floodplain Management Plan is due for replacement in 2026-27. As part of this, additional changes may be considered, including refinements to the Management Zones Map. Many of the additional recommendations made in the [Section 43 Review of the Gwydir Floodplain Management Plan - Final Report](#) will also be considered as part of this process. Further opportunities for community input will be provided through broad public consultation.

More information

To read the amended Floodplain Management Plan for the Gwydir Valley Floodplain and other fact sheets, visit <https://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/plans-programs/plans/valleys/gwydir-valley>.