

APRIL 2021 | ISSUE #24

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ACCC Water Markets Inquiry final report



The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) has released the final report on its inquiry into water markets in the Murray-Darling Basin.

The ACCC was asked to recommend options to enhance markets for tradeable water rights. This included options to enhance the operations, transparency, regulation, competitiveness and efficiency of markets.

The ACCC's report recognises the existing benefits of water markets and makes 29 recommendations for comprehensive and focused reform across four themes. These themes are market integrity and conduct, trade processing and water market information, market architecture, and governance of the Basin water markets.

The NSW Government will respond to the report. The department is consulting with

stakeholders and state and Basin water management agencies to consider the costs, benefits and priorities of the recommendations. This will help ensure any reform is targeted, proportionate and sustainable.

As part of that consultation, we have developed a survey so you can have your say on the report's recommendations. The survey closes on Sunday, 16 May 2021.

Please visit [our website](#) for more information or to complete the survey.

Drought update

High rainfall across much of NSW in March 2021 has seen good inflows into our rural storages. As of mid-April 2021, all valleys have returned to stage 1 – normal operations.

All the major rural water storages in NSW are close to or above 30% capacity, with most over 50%. The total storage capacity of our rural dams is now 57%, compared to 26% this time last year.

In terms of river operations, there are no longer any drought measures in place. There are secure water supplies for towns and other high priority needs. General security allocations are available in all valleys, except the Belubula, which is still receiving good flows below the dam.

You can view more information at [Critical valleys in drought and key issues](#).

Large flows to reach Menindee Lakes system

The storms across northern inland NSW and southern Queensland in March have resulted in large inflows of water to the Menindee Lakes system. As of 28 April, over 250 gigalitres of water had entered the lakes, and they are expected to receive between 800 and 950 gigalitres by June.

In early May, the lakes will reach 640 gigalitres volume. At this point, based on the terms of the Murray Darling Basin Agreement, the lakes will return to the control of the Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA), and the water in the lakes will be a shared resource rather than a solely NSW resource. The lakes will remain under the control of the MDBA until the volume drops to 480 gigalitres.

The inflows will see water return to the two lower lakes of the system - Lakes Menindee and Cawndilla - for the first time in five years. While much of the initial flows will be absorbed by the dry riverbeds, the flows will help restore these lakes' unique and complex ecology and provide important cultural and social benefits to the local communities. The return of the water will also support long-term environmental watering activities, which had to be paused due to the severe drought.

The Lower Darling has now returned to Stage 1 – normal operations because of the inflows and Lower Darling general security allocations have increased to 100%.

Visit WaterNSW for [operations updates](#).

Town Water Risk Reduction Program update



The [Town Water Risk Reduction Program](#) is working with Local Water Utilities to design long-term solutions to issues they face. These solutions will reduce risks to water quality and supply, and improve services and processes that regulate and support Local Water Utilities.

One of the first issues identified by stakeholders for review and improvement is the department's approach to regulating and supporting the implementation of Integrated Water Cycle Management (IWCM) Strategies.

Stakeholders would particularly like to improve the transparency, accountability and efficiency of the department's assessment of Integrated Water Cycle Management Strategies. These are now being reviewed, and Local Water Utilities can expect improvements to the way the department regulates and supports IWCM Strategies.

While the review takes place, councils currently preparing or about to begin an IWCM Strategy can consider a range of options on how to proceed. For more information on these options visit [our website](#).

The program team has established a collaborative stakeholder advisory panel made up of key sector stakeholders and regulators to better understand how to give great service while regulating. This panel will help to ensure the program's scope will meet the needs of the sector and regulators, design a new approach to engagement and represent the sector on strategic issues and risks.

The program team has also begun a [specific monthly newsletter](#) to keep councils and Local Water Utilities up to date on the program and opportunities to be involved. To subscribe, please [email us](#).

Basin Ministers discuss future of Murray-Darling Basin Plan

Yesterday, on April 29, Murray-Darling Basin Ministers met virtually to discuss the future delivery of projects under the Basin Plan. The Ministers agreed to re-examine two major water efficiency projects in NSW, to better future-proof the success of the projects.

The communique from the meeting will be published on the MDBA website once finalised.

Armidale Regional Council fined \$3,000 for alleged unlawful water take

In March, the Natural Resources Access Regulator (NRAR) issued the Armidale Regional Council with two penalty notices, with fines totalling \$3,000, for alleged unlawful water take between December 2019 and February 2020.

The regulator alleges the council allowed a business in Guyra to take water from two of its test bores without the required Water Access Licence (WAL) or Specific Purpose Access Licence (SPAL).

The council applied for and was granted an exemption to construct a bore without having to apply for or hold a water supply work approval in January 2020.

When granting the exemption, NRAR informed the council that a WAL or SPAL was required for water taken through the bores. NRAR alleges the council unlawfully took water from bores without holding a WAL or SPAL for water taken from the bores.

Read the [media release](#).

NRAR focuses on unlawful spearpoints in Harrington



The Natural Resources Access Regulator (NRAR) visited the Manning River in the Harrington region tackling unlawful shallow bores in sand, colloquially known as spearpoints.

After finding unauthorised spearpoints in the Harrington area in late 2020, NRAR officers hand-delivered letters to residents in Harrington in January to explain how to authorise spearpoints or other bores.

A spearpoint is a type of bore (water management work) that provides access to groundwater. It is important that works like spearpoints or bores are assessed by WaterNSW, as water quality, and impacts to the aquifer are looked at during the assessment process.

Graeme White, Director of Water Regulation (East), NRAR is encouraged to see water users taking steps to authorise their spearpoints after receiving a letter from the regulator.

“We were pleased that WaterNSW reported an increase in inquiries about how to authorise spearpoints and bores from water users in the area,” said Mr White. “A promising number of water users have already become compliant after receiving the letter in January.”

Outcomes from this campaign will be available in May.

Learn more [about spearpoints](#).

NRAR sets sights on quarry compliance

Natural Resources Access Regulator (NRAR) officers visited quarries in the Northern Rivers, the Hunter and Sydney Metro to assess their compliance with water laws.

NRAR’s Director of Water Regulation (East), Graeme White said quarries that intercept groundwater or divert surface water must hold an access licence under the *Water Management Act 2000*.

“Quarrying can affect local surface water flows and ground water levels, whereas sand and gravel extraction can cause significant erosion and scour within a river channel if poorly managed,” Mr White said.

“These potential impacts can adversely affect neighbouring water users and the environment, so it is important that quarry operations comply with the rules.

“NRAR officers will audit these quarry operations to assess compliance with the rules.”

Read the [full story](#).

Updates to water sharing plan online links

When necessary, the department may amend or replace water sharing plans. The Water website links to where these documents are stored on the NSW legislation website.

Many plans were amended or replaced in July 2020, but it can take time for these changes to be fully incorporated on the NSW legislation website. Changes initially appear in the 'as made' section of the site before moving to the 'in force' section, where the searchable water sharing plan is located.

The changes from July 2020 are all now live in the 'in force' section. The department is working with the Parliamentary Counsel, which maintains the site, to minimise the time to make accessible documents available. Where possible, we will make alternate documents available on our website in the interim.

You can view the water sharing plan for your area now.

Local Water Utility Performance Monitoring Data now available for 2019-20

Our Water Utilities team has updated our online dashboards to include performance tracking data for regional NSW local water utilities for the 2019-2020 reporting year. The dashboards show performance trends over the last seven years, and you can use them to analyse and compare annual and relative performance of the utilities over this period.

The data can be filtered for an individual local water utility or state-wide weighted median levels. You can also choose between indexed (consumer price index) or nominal values of the financial and pricing indicators. You can provide valuable feedback to improve the dashboard by completing the feedback form located below the dashboard or [email us](#).

Access [the dashboard](#) on our website.

March 2021 flood event - Manly Hydraulics Laboratory data capture



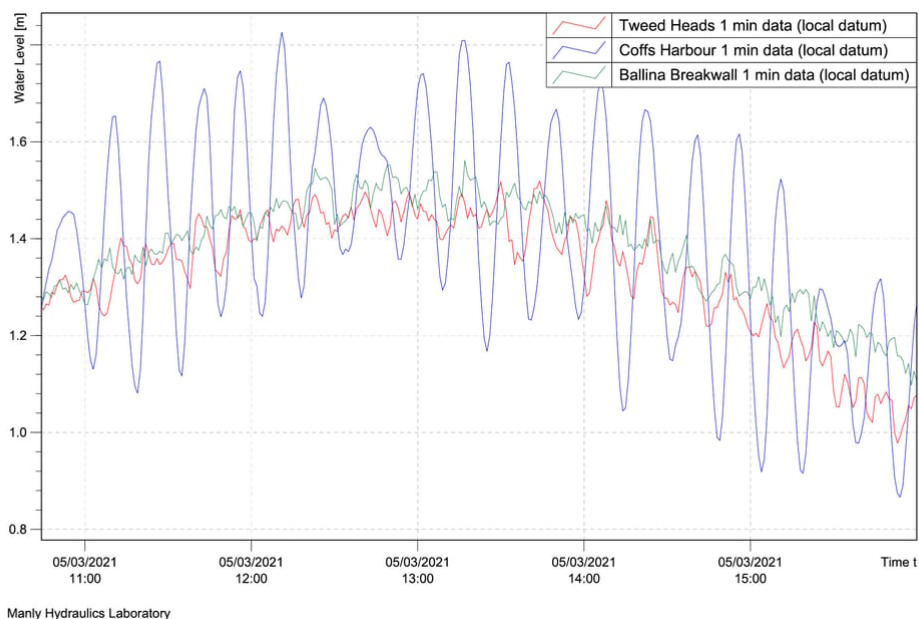
The Manly Hydraulics Laboratory (MHL) operates and maintains a monitoring network of over 600 gauges that measure rainfall, water level, water quality and other parameters. This data helps support flood management by the SES, the Bureau of Meteorology (BoM) and local government.

During the floods in March this year, 15 MHL staff helped collect and report data for the response. Field teams surveyed peak levels, captured data and responded to requests for data.

The monitoring showed that affected regions of NSW received rainfalls of up to 900 mm, and reached major flood water levels. MHL is developing a flood data summary report for the event, providing weather, coastal and flood data records.

It will be available on the [MHL website](#) when complete.

NSW tidal gauges detect New Zealand tsunami



On 5 March, there was a magnitude 8.1 earthquake in the Kermadec Islands region, about 1,000 kilometres from New Zealand's two main islands. It generated a tsunami wave that was detected at the department's tidal gauges along the NSW coast.

The location of the earthquake meant the strongest wave signal was received on the NSW north coast. The highest tsunami waves were recorded in trapped harbour bays including Coffs Harbour and Ulladulla, with waves up to 0.65 metres.

Among open bays, the highest tsunami waves were at Shoal Bay, at 0.47 metres. At more open river sites, including Tweed Heads and Ballina, the tsunami waves were dampened. However, wave disturbances travelled upstream at these sites.

The tide gauges are part of a network of over 600 continuous monitoring stations maintained by Manly Hydraulics Laboratory on the NSW east coast. The long-term data is essential so that NSW can effectively manage floods, storms, and sea level, and helps the Bureau of Meteorology provide warning services for public safety.

Visit the [Manly Hydraulics Laboratory website](#).

Have your say

Current and upcoming consultations and information events:

8 Feb - 16 May

[Public exhibition of the Review of Coastal Harvestable Rights](#)

3 March - 16 May

Regional Water Strategies on public exhibition

- [Namoi Regional Water Strategy](#)
- [North Coast Regional Water Strategy](#)

6 April - 18 May

[5th year review of the Gwydir valley floodplain management plan](#)

19 April - 16 May

[Webinar and online survey to inform the NSW Government response to the ACCC Murray–Darling Basin water market inquiry final report](#)

20 May

Tamworth meeting - Non-urban water metering - what users need to know - for the Peel Valley

- [Session 1: 12:30pm - 2:30pm](#)
- [Session 2: 5:30pm - 7:30pm](#)

[View all](#)

Latest water news from the department

- [Historic agreement marks progress in Murray Darling Basin Plan](#)
- [Snowy River high-flows to commence in June](#)

- [NRAR visits more than 2,000 properties in six months](#)
- [NRAR attends Tocal, Riverina and Norco Primex field days](#)
- [NRAR Assessing compliance with new metering regulations](#)
- [Almost half of reported properties in North Coast are breaking water rules](#)

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Contact us

Water News is our monthly update on water planning, management and reform in NSW. If you have any questions or feedback contact us at:

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