

August 2021 | ISSUE #28

Message to our readers

As the current COVID-19 situation continues across NSW and Australia, we recognise that lockdowns are affecting many people in our communities. We hope you and your loved ones stay safe in this challenging time. Please get tested if you are showing any symptoms and continue to look out for one another.

The NSW Government has [support measures in place to help those affected](#) by the current COVID-19 restrictions.

Understanding floodplain harvesting policy, facts and figures made easier



Understanding the detail of how the NSW Floodplain Harvesting Policy is put into action and what it means for you can be confusing. New, easy-to-read fact sheets and infographics are now available online that address key issues of concern. New modelling and data analysis on floodplain harvesting events in northern NSW and cease-to-flow periods in the Barwon–Darling system have also been released.

We are also updating our FAQs to provide answers to commonly misunderstood aspects of the policy. For example, did you know that licensing floodplain harvesting will allow us to restrict the practice where necessary to comply with water source legal limits and improve its measurement? This means that where total water take in a valley exceeds the legal limits, floodplain harvesting will be reduced to bring total take within the legal limit.

Visit our website to read the [new available information](#).

Reconnecting River Country Program



Local community called to help shape the Reconnecting River Country Program

[Water Infrastructure NSW](#) and its partner agencies, will soon begin consulting on the recently launched Reconnecting River Country Program.

Private landholders, First Nations people and community organisations are invited to share their local knowledge and expertise to help shape the future of the Reconnecting River Country Program.

Stakeholders are encouraged to share their experiences and discuss key parts of the program, including flow rates and potential mitigation options, with NSW Government field staff. Their feedback will help develop the program's next phase.

The program replaces the previous Constraints Measures Program and was developed based on feedback from the local community and the best available science. It will focus on delivering local community benefits first and foremost, as part of our commitment to delivering sensible, community driven Murray-Darling Basin Plan outcomes with broad community support.

We'll begin consulting when COVID-19 restrictions allow. For more information on how to provide feedback and on eligibility, visit the [program's website](#), or [subscribe](#) to hear about upcoming engagement opportunities.



Reconnecting River Country: Monitoring flows

Recent wet weather in the upper catchments of the Murray and Murrumbidgee Rivers was an opportunity for the Reconnecting River Country Program team to improve the accuracy of our new models. In the first week of August, flows in the Murrumbidgee River peaked at ~44,000 ML at Wagga Wagga, and flows in the Murray River peaked at ~30,000 ML at Yarrawonga.

The program team has been out on the ground collecting data to map where the water went, and at what level. We've sourced satellite, aerial and on ground images, taken manual gauge readings, and worked with landholders to install monitoring cameras on their properties.

This data helps us understand what this volume of flows looks like on the ground, and share that information with the community. We will use it in future conversations with landholders and communities to ground-truth inundation maps. We're working to test the Snap, Send, Solve smartphone app so our stakeholders can help contribute to the accuracy of models in the future.

For further information visit: [Reconnecting River Country Program](#)

Draft Lower Hunter Water Security Plan on exhibition



The Lower Hunter Water Security Plan is one of several long-term strategies we are developing to maintain the resilience of the state's water resources over the coming decades.

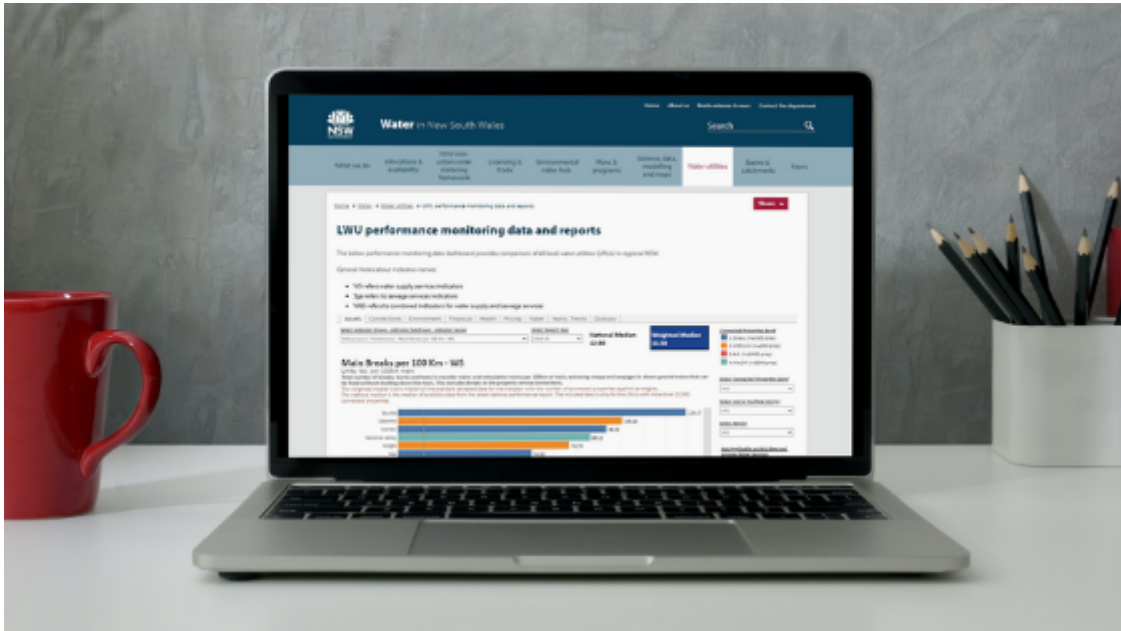
In a whole of government approach, the draft plan will ensure the region has resilient, secure and sustainable water supply, now and for future generations. This new long-term plan will better enable us to adapt to future uncertainties, such as population growth and climate variability.

New insights gained during the drought have confirmed that the region is more vulnerable to drought than previously thought. A key objective of future planning is to make sure Hunter Water can supply enough water to meet the demand from households, businesses and industrial customers, while underpinning regional prosperity and nurturing the unique Lower Hunter environment.

The department is working with Hunter Water to complete [community engagement](#) to ensure that the plan reflects the views of the community.

For more information or to have your say on the plan, [please visit our website](#). Consultation closes on 26 September 2021.

Local water utilities monitoring data updated



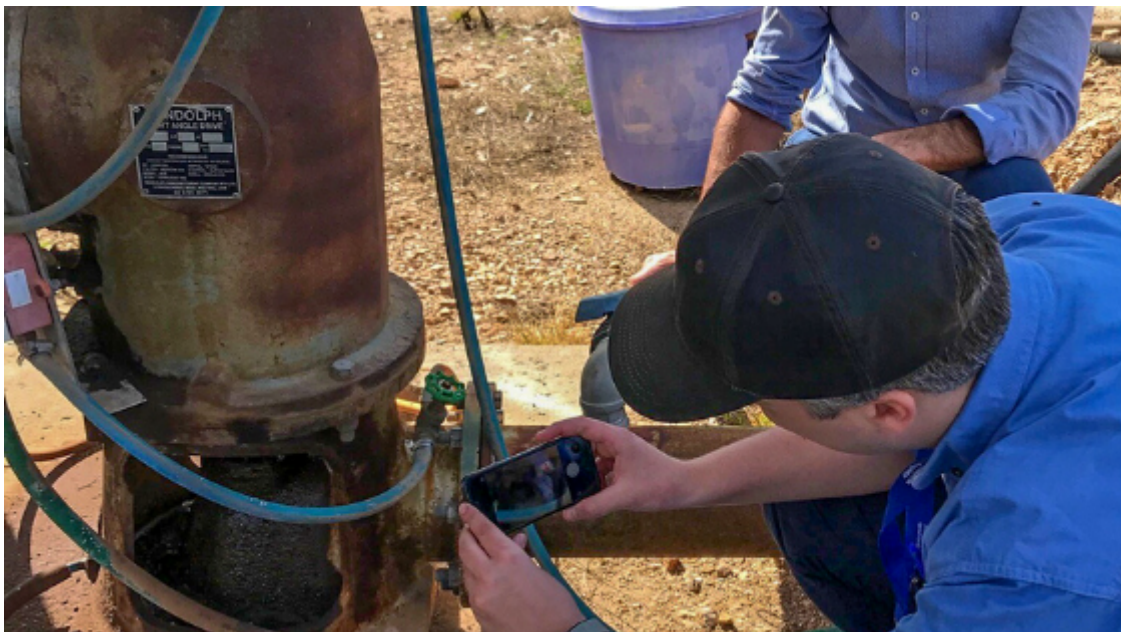
Our water utilities team has upgraded the online dashboard that reports over 400 annual performance indicators for regional NSW local water utilities.

The dashboard is a platform to analyse and compare annual performance of utilities against one another or the state median over the last 7 years. National median values are also available for the indicators that are part of the National Performance Report (NPR).

The indicators are grouped under various business activity categories. There is a glossary tab at the end which lists all the indicators, their corresponding tab and the National Water Initiative (NWI) code used in the NPR. We've also created a filter for geographical regions.

Please access the dashboard [here](#). You can [email us feedback](#) or ideas to help improve the dashboard.

Bore audit puts focus on groundwater compliance



The Natural Resources Access Regulator's (NRAR) pilot project to protect the state's fragile groundwater sources is now complete.

Operation Drawdown focused on enforcing bore water extraction limits in the Lower Murrumbidgee, Lachlan, Macquarie-Castlereagh, and Namoi groundwater sources at risk from high and increasing water demand. Enforcing bore extraction limits is a focus area for NRAR during 2021-22.

NRAR assessed compliance with water licence conditions through a combination of auditing digital records and on-site inspections by field staff. The good news is that 90 per cent of the water access licences inspected were fully compliant.

Just over 4 per cent of licences had minor compliance issues and owners were sent advisory or warning letters. The remaining 6 per cent of licences were found to have major breaches. Their owners were issued with penalty notices or will be the subject of further investigations and possible prosecutions.

Read more about [Operation Drawdown here](#).

Environmental water news



New resources on protecting environmental water

We've updated the environmental water hub with new resources about environmental water protection rules. These help explain how environmental water protections work in practice.

For example, rules for protecting environmental water that came into effect in December 2020 were used this year to protect the [first flow events](#) in the Barwon Darling.

The first flows after long dry periods are very important to reconnect pools for wildlife, and meet human and stock needs. So we have rules to protect first flows after long dry periods, including the ['resumption of flows' rule](#). This rule was triggered in the Barwon-Darling after 90 days of dry conditions at Wilcannia early

this year. This meant that access to water was restricted until January 29, when forecast flows met the triggers for relaxation of restrictions.

When the first flows began, environmental water was released in the Gwydir and Barwon-Darling to supplement the flows. This water was not allowed to be extracted under the rules of [active management](#). These rules are a way to manage water in unregulated river systems. They adjust access thresholds based on the volume of environmental water present.

To take water under active management, [licence holders](#) must submit an expression of interest and obey [public access announcements](#) by WaterNSW. They also must obey their new individual daily extraction components ([IDECs](#)). These IDECs are designed to minimise the effects of rapid extraction on other water users and the local environment.

[More information on environmental water reforms.](#)



Commonwealth Environmental Water Office plans for the year ahead

This year, the highly-variable Murray-Darling Basin has lived up to its reputation as 'a land of droughts and flooding rains'. While many rivers are flowing again, not all catchments have had rain, and some areas of the basin remain drought-declared.

Whether it's wet or dry, water for the environment has an important role to play in keeping rivers and wetlands healthy across the Basin. The Commonwealth Environmental Water Office's (CEWO) Water Management Plan 2021-22 scopes where water for the environment might best be delivered in the year ahead.

The plan is the result of months of working with NSW water managers, along with other state water managers, local communities, First Nations and scientists to prioritise sites and carefully plan how we will work together to deliver water to where it's needed most.

CEWO's Water Management Plan 2021-22 is available on the [CEWO website](#). Or contact [Local Engagement Officers](#) in Walgett, Moree, Griffith and Wagga Wagga.

Applications for Off-farm Water Efficiency Program funding now open



Individuals and entities in the irrigation, urban and manufacturing sectors across the Murray-Darling Basin are encouraged to apply for funding under the Off-farm Water Efficiency Program. The program is a \$1.48 billion Australian Government initiative to upgrade water infrastructure to reduce water losses and increase water available for the environment.

Projects eligible for funding under the program include:

- **Irrigation networks:** installing new, or upgrading existing, irrigation infrastructure and technology in water delivery networks to supply water to irrigators
- **Industrial or mining:** constructing, replacing, upgrading, installing, improving, or refurbishing industrial water uses, including reducing leakage, for the purpose of using water for producing goods and services
- **Urban:** constructing, replacing, upgrading, installing, improving, or refurbishing urban water supply arrangements
- **Stock and domestic:** improving stock and domestic water supply on one or more properties for the purpose of watering stock and supplying water for human use.

[Water Infrastructure NSW](#) will work with applicants to develop project concepts into proposals for the Australian Government to consider. If you are interested in applying for the funding, please email us.

Visit the [website for more information on eligibility and the program](#).

Drought Recovery

Visit our website for the latest information on drought recovery in NSW.

Have your say

Current and upcoming consultations and information events:

Yanco Creek Modernisation Project community information sessions

- [6 September \(10.00am -12.00pm\) - First Nations focused session webinar](#)
- [7 September \(12.00pm - 2.00pm\) -Webinar](#)
- [8 September \(2.00pm – 4.00pm\) - Webinar](#)
- [9 September \(10.00am – 12.00pm\) - Webinar](#)
- [9 September \(2.00pm – 4.00pm\)- First Nations focused session webinar](#)

[View all](#)

Latest water news from the department

- [Local community called to help shape Reconnecting River Country Program](#)
- [Up to \\$1.5 billion available for off-farm efficiency projects in NSW](#)
- [Rising river alert – Snowy River below Jindabyne Dam](#)
- [Work begins to Reconnect River Country in southern Murray-Darling Basin](#)

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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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