

JANUARY - FEBRUARY 2021 | ISSUE #22

Take our simple survey so we can better serve your needs

Please take a few minutes to take our survey. Your feedback will help us better understand your needs so we can improve your access to the information and services you want.

Amended Barwon–Darling water sharing plan improving connectivity



Image: Andrew Brown

The new resumption of flow rule in the Barwon–Darling water sharing plan was triggered on 12 January 2021. This meant that holders of A, B and C class licences could not pump when flows resumed along the river. This was the first time the resumption of flow rule had been triggered since it was incorporated into the plan in July 2020.

The rule aims to support the reconnection of water pools in the Barwon–Darling River after a prolonged period of low or no flows. These flows protect the first flush

of water so it can replenish town water supplies, improve water quality and support wildlife.

Before the new rules, licence holders could pump when the river reached the commence-to-pump threshold, even if part of the flow was released to benefit the environment. This meant that users could extract held environmental water and this water may not have benefitted the environment the way it was meant to. In some cases, removing this water from the system prevented flows from passing downstream to replenish the lower reaches of the river and towns such as Wilcannia.

Positive results from this flow are occurring along the river. As at 27 January 2021, 26,657 ML of water had passed Bourke. Of this amount, 5.8%, or 1,539 ML, comes from dedicated environmental releases. This means that around 95% of the flows at Bourke have been from unregulated tributary flows.

As modelling now confirms, the water will reach Menindee. We restored normal access rules upstream of Bourke from 9 am on Friday 29 January.

Information confirming the status of the resumption of flow rule and Barwon–Darling flow class is available on the [WaterNSW WaterInsights portal](#).

New online dashboard tracks groundwater extraction against extraction limits



Sample image

The department has launched an online dashboard that allows groundwater users to see how groundwater extraction is tracking against extraction limits in their area.

Each year, the department assesses whether average extractions over five years exceed the compliance trigger. This is set at the long-term average annual extraction limit, plus a buffer. If extractions exceed the compliance trigger, the department may need to reduce access to groundwater in the next water year.

For each inland groundwater source, the dashboard shows the following for the current water year:

- volume available in water accounts
- volume that, if extracted, will reach the compliance trigger (calculated annually)
- volume remaining to be extracted before reaching the compliance trigger (calculated throughout the year after accounting for recorded extraction)
- likelihood that the department may reduce access to groundwater in the next water year.

The dashboard offers water users early information to help manage the risk of reduced groundwater access. Check out the [groundwater dashboard](#).

Learn more about [managing groundwater extraction to extraction limits](#) on our website.

Review of coastal harvestable rights



The NSW Government is completing a review of harvestable rights limits for coastal draining catchments. The review explores the potential benefits and implications of increasing the access to water captured under harvestable rights but does not determine what the best arrangement may be.

In late December, the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment published the [Coastal Harvestable Rights Review discussion paper](#) as the first step in consultation with the community. The paper considers increasing the allowable size of unlicensed farm dams, and other ways to improve water access in areas that drain to the coast.

Consultations will take place through drop-in sessions on 25 February in Bega and 3 March in Coffs Harbour, and two public online webinar sessions on 1 and 4 March. An online survey and opportunity to lodge submissions will be open from 8 February until 5 April 2021.

For more information on the Coastal Harvestable Rights Review and consultation, [visit our website](#).

Drought update

Over the summer holiday period, good flows in the Gwydir and Namoi rivers improved water storage levels in these valleys. Keepit Dam increased notably, from 26% in mid-December to 45% in mid-January. The total storage capacity of our rural dams is now 48%, compared with 23% in February 2020.

In January, general security allocations increased in several valleys, with the Murrumbidgee and Upper Namoi valleys reaching 100% general security allocations. The Peel valley also received its first general security allocation since October 2018. The Belubula is the only regulated river valley in the state without a general security allocation.

Drought stages have now eased to Stage 1 normal operations for the Upper and Lower Namoi, Gwydir and Peel valleys. However, with no improvements in storage levels in the Border Rivers and Lower Darling, these valleys are still rated as in Stage 2 (recovering) drought.

Flows in the Barwon–Darling have now reached Wilcannia after many months of no flows. The Barwon–Darling is also rated as in Stage 2 drought.

For the drought stages map and information on the major valleys, visit our [Critical valleys in drought and key issues](#) webpage.

Public exhibition of the draft NSW Water Strategy



The first 20-year NSW Water Strategy will be released for public consultation in mid-February. The draft NSW Water Strategy identifies priorities and actions to improve the security, quality and resilience of the state's water resources. It is a blueprint to help us tackle the key challenges and opportunities for water management across our state.

The NSW Water Strategy will set the strategic direction for the NSW water sector for the long-term. It is part of a suite of 12 long-term regional and 2 metropolitan strategies that the NSW Government is developing to maintain the resilience of the state's water services and resources over the coming decades.

For more information and to have your say, [visit our website](#).

NRAR

Survey reveals increasing public trust in water enforcement

A community benchmarking survey commissioned by the Natural Resources Access Regulator (NRAR) found that attitudes towards water enforcement in NSW have improved since NRAR's inception in April 2018.

The survey drew responses from 1,000 members of the public, 1,000 water licence holders and 40 stakeholder groups, including Indigenous, environmental, industry and government groups, in the water community.

The survey found that 60% of water licence holders and 49% of the public believed that the compliance and enforcement of water laws had historically been mismanaged in NSW.

Now, however, 67% of the public, 56% of water licence holders and 53% of stakeholder groups report feeling confident in the enforcement of water laws. 'We still have a way to go, but we are on the right track,' said Grant Barnes, NRAR's Chief Regulatory Officer.

[Read the full story on our website](#).



NRAR welcomes first Indigenous board member

The Natural Resources Access Regulator (NRAR) board welcomes [Phil Duncan](#), a Gomeri man with more than 38 years' experience working with Indigenous people, communities and government.

NRAR Chief Regulatory Officer Grant Barnes said Duncan would complement the experience of the existing board and ensure efficient decision-making.

'We are humbled to welcome Mr Duncan,' Barnes said. 'With the board's existing experience in law, natural resources management, compliance and regulation, Mr Duncan's experience in water management and his deep connection to Australia's Indigenous community will bring a crucial new perspective.'

Duncan is well-respected within the water community and has acted as the Chair of the Basin Community Committee of the Murray–Darling Basin Commission since January 2020. He represents the rights and interests of Indigenous people in NSW as a member of many other committees and councils.

For more information about Duncan, visit the [visit the NRAR website](#).

Should your dam be declared?

[Dams Safety NSW](#) is the state's independent dam safety regulator, overseeing the safety of declared dams in NSW. It regulates 400 dams across the state.

Dams Safety NSW 'declares' those dams that have the potential to threaten downstream life or cause major property, environmental or public-welfare damage. Once the regulator declares a dam, the dam owner must comply with the requirements of the *Dams Safety Act 2015* and the Dams Safety Regulation 2019.

You must refer dams more than 15 metres high to Dams Safety NSW to be considered for declaration.

For more information about whether you should refer your dam to Dams Safety NSW, read our fact sheet [Should your dam be declared?](#)

You can also call us on (02) 9842 8073 or email us at info@damsafety.nsw.gov.au.

Important cultural heritage investigations begin at Menindee



Austral Archaeology has completed initial Aboriginal cultural and heritage survey work in Menindee, the Lower Darling and Great Darling Anabranch to understand the scale and type of effects of potential works and measures considered for the Menindee Lakes project.

The project team will use the results to assess project options and to guide the team in reviewing viable alternatives to the 2017 sustainable diversion limit adjustment mechanism (SDLAM) business case scheme. More survey work may be necessary in the coming weeks, as the project team works towards a preferred option and understands its potential footprint.

The discovery of a range of artefacts during the investigations, including burials, grinding stones, ovens and scar trees, highlighted the significance of the project area. The investigations will help in further understanding potential impacts and offer opportunities for new Aboriginal site monitors to learn new skills from their Elders.

Read more about the [Menindee Lakes project](#).

Training for metering and telemetry suppliers and installers

In an Australian first, the NSW Government has partnered with training provider Irrigation Australia to develop a brand-new certification—[Certified Meter Installer and Validator](#). The course gives practitioners the skills to install telemetry-enabled storage meters under NSW's floodplain harvesting measurement rules.

'This is a critical step in rolling out NSW's robust floodplain harvesting measurement rules and shows NSW is getting on with its commitment to develop an advanced, transparent and fair water management system for all of NSW,' said Aaron Walker, Director of Special Projects.

The NSW Government has funded the development of the course and subsidised the first 20 participants. The first three-day training course was completed in

Narrabri in November, with two more run in 2020. More courses will be scheduled in 2021 based on demand.

For more information about the courses, visit [Irrigation Australia](#).

NSW Modelling and Monitoring Knowledge Hub Forum 2020

The 2020 NSW Water Modelling and Monitoring Knowledge Hub annual forum took place virtually, bringing together government and industry water experts from across the state. Presenters shared updates and case studies on modelling and monitoring, and the forum highlighted the need for government agencies to have a consistent approach to knowledge-based decision-making.

Read the full wrap of the [MaMH Forum 2020](#).

Climate resilience podcast launches

Local Government NSW has launched a new podcast series to showcase climate resilience in the state. The Department of Planning, Industry and Environment is funding the podcast's series [Climate Resilience: Namoi](#).

Three inspirational episodes are now available. In the first two, staff and councillors from Walcha and Tamworth Regional councils share their experiences of unprecedented drought and discuss their preparations for a future of climate uncertainty. The third episode visits a farm on the Liverpool Plains, where farmers are working to keep water in the landscape for longer and help ensure a viable future for agriculture.

Former ABC documentary maker Gretchen Miller, along with sound engineer Judy Rapley, produces and presents these stories of climate resilience.

To download the podcasts, type in 'Climate Resilience: Namoi' into Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts or Spotify.

Have your say

The following strategies and plans are on public exhibition:

- 11 February: WEBINAR - [Floodplain harvesting in the context of Water Management Act priorities](#)
- 2 February - 5 March: [The department is seeking feedback from licence holders in areas that are most likely to exceed groundwater extraction limits in 2020-21](#)
- 8 February - 5 April: [Coastal Harvestable Right Review](#)
- 12 February - 12 March: [Public exhibition period of draft rules for floodplain harvesting licences in the water sharing plans for Gwydir valley](#)
- 12 February: WEBINAR - [Draft rules for floodplain harvesting licences in the water sharing plans for Gwydir valley](#)

- 24 and 25 February: [Public information sessions draft rules for floodplain harvesting licences in the water sharing plans for Gwydir valley.](#)

Latest water news from the department

- [Extension of exhibition for draft Central Coast Unregulated and Alluvial Water Sharing Plan](#)
- [NRAR works with leading satellite providers to conduct its monitoring campaign](#)
- [Reflecting on the year that was 2020](#)
- [Survey reveals increasing public trust in water enforcement](#)
- [Amended Barwon-Darling Water Sharing Plan improving connectivity](#)
- [Government response to Independent Panel's first flush recommendations](#)
- [NRAR reflects on court decision](#)
- [Update on flood events in northwest NSW](#)

[View all](#)

Contact

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

NSW Government – Water Relations

Phone +61 2 9338 6600

water.relations@dpie.nsw.gov.au

[View previous newsletters](#)



Department of Planning, Industry & Environment, Parramatta Square, 12 Darcy Street, Parramatta, NSW
2150, Australia

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