

# NSW Statement of Reasons: Barren Box Channel Feasibility Project

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Resilient Rivers Water Infrastructure Program

August 2024



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## Acknowledgement of Country

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land and pays respect to Elders past, present and future.

We recognise Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' unique cultural and spiritual relationships to place and their rich contribution to society.

Artist and designer Nikita Ridgeway from Aboriginal design agency – Boss Lady Creative Designs, created the People and Community symbol.

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### More information

Commonwealth Grants Program, Grants Management Office (GMO)

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# 1 Project details

<b>Name</b>	<b>Barren Box Channel Feasibility Study</b>
<b>Location</b>	Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area
<b>Proponent</b>	Murrumbidgee Irrigation Ltd
<b>Commonwealth funding sought</b>	\$1,768,151
<b>Water recovery for the environment</b>	Nil – feasibility project only

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## 2 Project summary

The proposed project will investigate the feasibility of upgrading water infrastructure to improve water supply from the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Ltd (MI) network to the Barren Box Storage (BBS) facility, to achieve water savings estimated at 10 gegalitres for the customers of the Wah Wah irrigation area. The applicant anticipates water savings to be achieved without negative impacts on irrigators, delivering a more reliable water supply even through periods of uncertainty.

The feasibility project is expected to lead to a full project which will build industry resilience by improving water quality through less intrusive maintenance and reduced windblown silt and debris accumulation in the creek system.

Approximately 200 end-users are reliant on the Mirrool Creek system which is a natural feature and feeds the BBS facility. Current water losses are attributable to seepage, evaporation, meter accuracy and operational losses. The proposal aims to measure and analyse these losses in detail and develop a set of viable options that will inform the development of a full project. These include infrastructure upgrades to improve efficiency and alternate supply pathways to meet demand.

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## 3 NSW Government decision

The NSW Government has determined through the Resilient Rivers Water Infrastructure Program (RRWIP) expert panel (the panel) that the project meets the feasibility criteria and the intended full project would deliver water for the environment to the Australian Government through efficiency gains from eligible activities.

The panel reviewed the project against the case for change and deliverability criteria and determined the project meets the criteria.

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## 4 Summary of key steps

The NSW Government worked with MI between May and August 2024 to develop a project proposal for the Barren Box Channel Feasibility Project.

The panel reviewed the feasibility project proposal on 2 August 2024. The panel includes water experts from within the NSW Government and an independent advisor, as well as an independent probity advisor. The panel considered the information prepared by MI when making its recommendation.

The panel endorsed the NSW Statement of Reasons on 15 August 2024 and the steering committee approved the proposal on 22 August 2024 to be submitted to the Australian Government.

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## 5 Reasons for the decision

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### 5.1 Impacts on the region

The panel considered the expected outcomes of the full project and determined the feasibility project would inform a full project application that will address the socio-economic criteria and is eligible for consideration under the RRWIP.

A full project is expected to deliver water efficiency savings of up to 10 gigalitres. MI intends to work with local contractors to deliver the full project, resulting in direct investment in the regional economy and local communities. Additionally, the full project would provide long-term benefits to the region by increasing water security, ensuring the long-term viability of irrigation-dependent industry in the region, even during critical times. Water quality will also be improved by reducing windblown silt and debris accumulation. Environmental benefits are also expected, including a reduction in transmission losses, reduced noxious weed growth, reduced need for chemical weed treatment, and improved water quality.

The feasibility study itself is also expected to benefit the region's economy, by engaging consultants who will visit the region.

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### 5.2 Eligibility

The panel determined that the project is eligible under Stream D of the Australian Government RRWIP Program Guide State-led Water Recovery Project Start-up which require projects to investigate the feasibility of developing a full project under Streams A to C of the RRWIP.

The feasibility project will determine the volume of water savings that can be achieved in a full project.

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## 5.3 Value for money

A detailed budget has been provided for eligible activities that are valid and will inform a full project proposal. The project budget includes a suitable contingency amount. The panel assessed the submission and is satisfied that it represents value for money.

The panel considered the applicants capacity to deliver the project and was satisfied that experience from similar projects by MI would underpin successful delivery of the feasibility project.

The panel also noted that MI has demonstrated the ability to spend funds appropriately in similar previous projects, and this provides assurance that MI has the ability to deliver this project in a way to achieve the best possible value for money.

The feasibility study will also facilitate a full project that would support local communities through employment opportunities. MI intends to leverage established relationships with providers in the region and target 75% of capital expenditure to local contractors, representing value for money by reducing mobility costs and utilising local knowledge.

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## 5.4 Community and industry engagement

The panel noted that public support had been obtained and that engagement processes were adequate, however it flagged that early and close engagement with Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs) could help mitigate potential cultural risks.

MI advises that it will apply standard customer engagement and communication processes to works proposed under the feasibility project and complete a preliminary Aboriginal Heritage Impact Plan.

Customer engagement plans will be developed for proposals that form part of a full project application, and MI will seek letters of support for these.

Significant stakeholders currently identified include:

- MI customers along Mirrool Creek and in the Wah Wah irrigation area
- Griffith City Council
- NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI) - Fisheries
- NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) - Water Group
- NSW Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
- Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs).

Local councils and community groups have shown support for previous water saving projects completed by MI. Letters of support and positive responses have been received to advertised socio-economic assessments for the previous Off-farm Efficiency and Private Irrigation Infrastructure Operations Program projects completed by MI.

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## 5.5 Cultural and environmental considerations

The NSW Government notes that MI is currently progressing a Reconciliation Action Plan developed with Reconciliation Australia. MI will continue to engage with local First Nations people to further build good relationships and manage risks associated with any impacts to cultural artifacts identified during the feasibility study and as part of the full project. A preliminary Aboriginal Heritage Impact Plan will be developed in consultation with local First Nations groups. Where required, MI also commits to undertake full assessments as part of full project construction, and develop environmental management plans for each individual sub project.

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## 6 Next steps

The Barren Box Channel Feasibility Project proposal will be submitted to the Australian Government for assessment. The Australian Government will consider the application and make a recommendation to the Minister for the Environment and Water on whether funding for the project should be granted.

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## 7 Further information

For further information regarding the Resilient Rivers Water Infrastructure Program, please visit: [water.nsw.gov.au/resilient-rivers](https://water.nsw.gov.au/resilient-rivers)

or contact the Commonwealth Grants Program team, NSW DCCEEW on:

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