

# NSW Statement of Reasons: Murrumbidgee Irrigation Channel Piping, Lining and Covering 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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# Contents

- Acknowledgement of Country ..... ii
- 1 Project details ..... 4
- 2 Project summary ..... 4
- 3 NSW Government decision..... 4
- 4 Summary of key steps..... 5
- 5 Reasons for the decision..... 5
  - 5.1 Impacts on the region.....5
  - 5.2 Eligibility.....5
  - 5.3 Value for money.....6
  - 5.4 Community and industry engagement.....6
  - 5.5 Cultural and environmental considerations .....6
- 6 Next steps ..... 7
- 7 Further information ..... 7

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# 1 Project details

<b>Name</b>	Murrumbidgee Irrigation Channel Piping, Lining and Covering Feasibility Project
<b>Location</b>	Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area
<b>Proponent</b>	Murrumbidgee Irrigation Ltd
<b>Commonwealth funding sought</b>	\$1,770,269
<b>Water recovery for the environment</b>	Nil - Feasibility project only

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# 2 Project summary

Murrumbidgee Irrigation Ltd (MI) has submitted an application to conduct a feasibility project to assess channel piping, lining and covering infrastructure options to reduce water losses due to seepage, evaporation, de-weeding and de-silting across their irrigation network.

The project will review the effectiveness of piping and lining works previously completed, in addition to investigating new options. It will also include a review of the network to identify areas most suitable for implementing efficiency measures. MI also intends to conduct a literature review and install a prototype channel covering to ensure the subsequent full project is designed effectively.

The feasibility project will help inform a full project to be developed which improves the industry's resilience by improving water quality through less intrusive maintenance and reduced windblown silt and debris accumulation in the channel system. The applicant has indicated that a full project would also deliver water savings without negative impacts on irrigators and would deliver a more reliable water supply even through periods of uncertainty.

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# 3 NSW Government decision

The expert panel (the panel) has reviewed the project against the Resilient Rivers Water Infrastructure Program Feasibility criteria assessing the case for change and deliverability and has determined that the project meets the criteria. The panel is satisfied that the project is likely to lead to a full project which will achieve water savings for the environment.

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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 Murrumbidgee Irrigation 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 determined that the feasibility project is likely to lead to a full project that would address the socio-economic criteria under the RRWIP.

Full project water savings of up to 11 gigalitres are expected. 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 the region's irrigation-dependent industry 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 project 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

The activities detailed in the feasibility proposal are valid and are likely to lead to a full project proposal. The project budget also includes a suitable contingency funding amount. The panel assessed the submission and is satisfied that it represents value for money.

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 project 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.

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.

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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 has committed to seek letters of support and develop customer engagement plans for its full project. MI advises that it will apply its standard customer engagement and communication processes to works proposed under the feasibility project and complete a preliminary Aboriginal Heritage Impact Plan.

Community and local councils have shown support for previous water saving projects completed by MI, with letters of support being received in response to socio-economic assessments of previous projects completed under the Off-farm Efficiency Program and the Private Irrigation Infrastructure Operators Program.

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## 5.5 Cultural and environmental considerations

MI acknowledges the prior use of the land by the Wiradjuri First Nations people and is currently progressing a Reconciliation Action Plan developed with Reconciliation Australia. MI intends to continue the good relationship with local First Nations people created on past projects by ensuring all pipeline designs utilise existing channel reserves and previously disturbed areas which decreases the risk of any impacts to cultural artifacts and undertaking full assessments where required as part of construction and environmental management plans for each individual sub project.

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## 6 Next steps

The Murrumbidgee Irrigation Channel Piping, Lining and Covering Feasibility Project 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 feasibility 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](http://water.nsw.gov.au/resilient-rivers)

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

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