

# Independent Assessment into the Management of the 2020 NSW northern Murray-Darling Basin First Flush Event



## Draft Report Findings and Recommendations

# Welcome & Agenda

- Presentation from the Independent Panel
  - Overview of the first flush event
  - Overview of the assessment approach
  - Draft report findings
  - Draft report recommendations
- Question & answer session



# Today's presenters: Independent Panel for the First Flush Assessment



Dr Wendy Craik



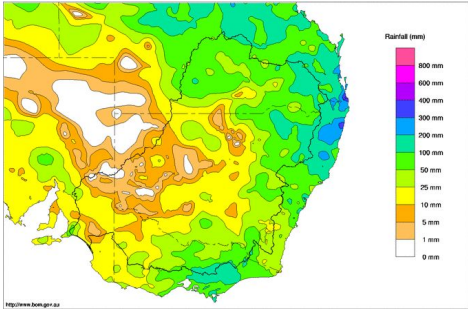
Mr Greg Claydon



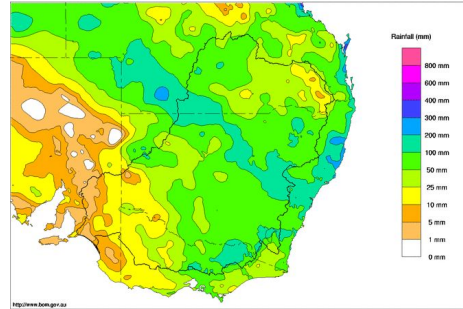
# Overview of the 2020 first flush event

- Jan to Apr 2020 widespread rain across northern NSW and southern Qld

Murray-Darling Rainfall totals (mm) January 2020  
Australian Bureau of Meteorology

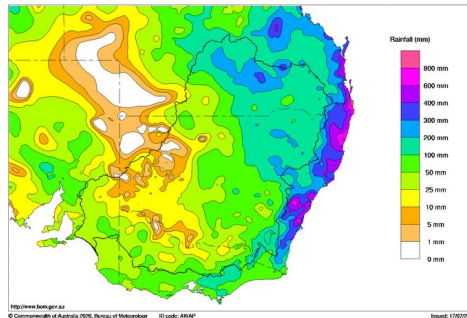


Murray-Darling Rainfall totals (mm) March 2020  
Australian Bureau of Meteorology



February 2020

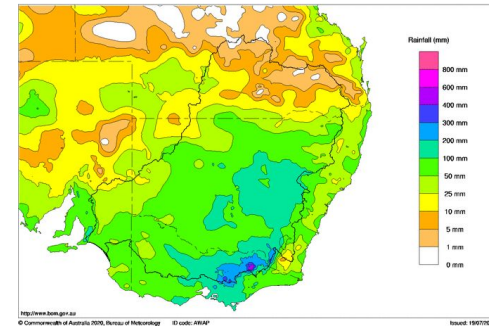
Murray-Darling Rainfall totals (mm) February 2020  
Australian Bureau of Meteorology



March 2020

April 2020

Murray-Darling Rainfall totals (mm) April 2020  
Australian Bureau of Meteorology



January 2020

# Overview of the 2020 first flush event

- Temporary water restrictions under NSW Water Management Act introduced Jan-Mar 2020 in northern NSW Murray-Darling Basin to manage first flows for critical human and environmental needs → “first flush event”
- Event complexities:
  - Consisted of multiple rainfall events
  - During early Feb much rain fell on unmonitored floodplains, not monitored upper catchments
  - Introduction and lifting of floodplain harvesting exemption regulation



## **Water Management (General) Amendment (Exemptions for Floodplain Harvesting) Regulation 2020**

under the  
Water Management Act 2000

# Overview of assessment approach

- March 2020 NSW Government appointed Independent Panel to assess management of the first flush event
- Assessment objectives:
  - Provide transparency on decision-making process used for the event
  - Recommend strategies to improve management of future first flush events
- Interviews held with:
  - relevant NSW, Commonwealth, Qld and Victorian agencies
  - Gomeroi and Ngemba Native Title applicant groups
  - Minister Pavey's office
- Establishment of a Water User Reference Group
- Public consultation 11 May to 7 June
  - 144 online surveys completed
  - 29 written submissions received
- Draft report released 13 July 2020
- Final report due end August 2020

# Draft findings

1. Management of the first flush event was complex
2. The first flush event achieved some wonderful outcomes for an environment and communities in need
3. Positive outcomes have been overshadowed by significant levels of frustration and stress across communities





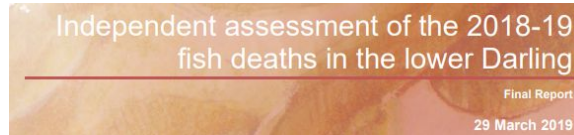
# Draft findings

4. There was insufficient resourcing in place to adequately plan and communicate for the first flush event
5. The decision-making framework and flow forecasting was reasonably robust, but there are some important improvements to be made
6. Use of temporary water restrictions demonstrated NSW Government's commitment to protecting environmental water and implementing some, but not all, of the recommendations from the Ken Matthews Inquiry, Vertessy Report and Natural Resources Commission Review

FINAL REPORT | KEN MATTHEWS AO

Independent investigation into NSW  
water management and compliance

Advice on implementation



Natural Resources Commission

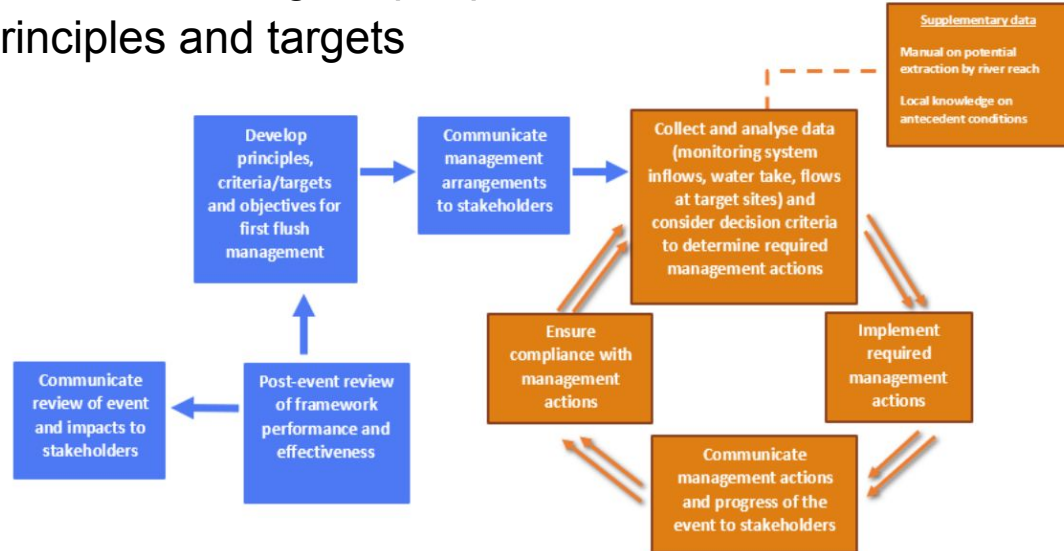
Final report  
**Review of the Water Sharing Plan for  
the Barwon-Darling Unregulated and  
Alluvial Water Sources 2012**

# Draft recommendations

1. Ensure water management provides for and promotes connectivity between water sources
2. Make any temporary water restrictions required to manage first flush events on a proactive basis (i.e. prior to specific forecasts of rain)
3. Until there are further statutory provisions for first flush event management, publish guidance materials which outline how the NSW Government will use temporary water restrictions to manage first flush events

# Draft recommendations

- Incorporate learnings from the event into systems that will be used to manage future first flush events in the short term, including consultation with communities, Aboriginal peoples and water users on the objectives, principles and targets



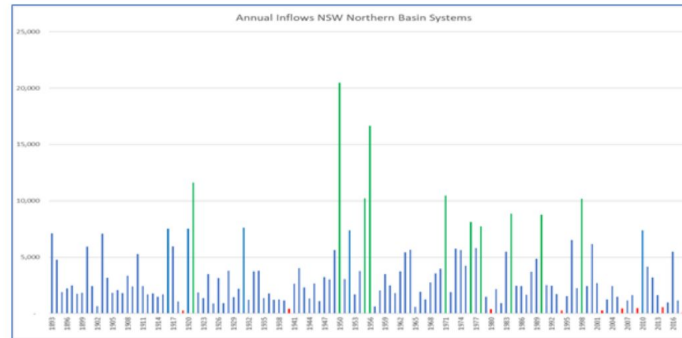
# Draft recommendations

5. Ensure evidence base and method for first flush management is quantified, science-based and made publicly available
6. Review and update incident management systems for managing first flush events
7. Put management of first flush events in the regulatory and policy framework for managing drought. Framework adopted should be developed with communities, Aboriginal peoples and water users



# Draft recommendations

8. Improve flow forecasting modelling and real-time monitoring capability, including measurement of extractions and the hydrometric system for inflows and monitoring end of system flows
9. Ensure current and future reform programs have clear implementation plans and regular communication of progress to the public
10. Improve and resource communication coordination and capability



Questions?



**Thank you**