

Darling Alluvium Water Resource Plan - outcomes of public exhibition

The NSW Government has agreed to develop water resource plans as part of the implementation of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan 2012 (the Basin Plan).

Water resource plans demonstrate how the Basin States (New South Wales, Australian Capital Territory, Queensland and Victoria) coordinate their water management with the federal government's Basin Plan, including how the sustainable diversion limits (SDLs) set out in the plan will be met.

As part of the planning process, the draft Darling Alluvium Water Resource Plan and a new, state water sharing plan for the Darling alluvial groundwater sources were publicly exhibited from 15 July 2019 to 23 August 2019.

The public exhibition period provided valuable feedback that helped to develop and inform the changes proposed for the Darling Alluvium water resource plan and water sharing plan. This fact sheet outlines the main changes since public exhibition of the draft plans.

Submissions

We received four submissions on the draft Darling Alluvium Water Resource Plan and associated documents. The submission raised 13 issues for consideration. Submissions that have the author's permission for publication can be viewed on the department's website at <https://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/plans-programs/water-resource-plans>. Note that not all authors elected to have their submissions published.

The issues raised in each submission were sorted into three broad categories—plan specific, state-wide or out of scope—and then aligned with the corresponding themes in the water resource plan.

How issues were considered

The NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment examined the nature of the issue raised or suggestion made in the submission and then considered the:

- scope of water resource planning
- principles outlined in the Basin Plan
- principles set by the NSW Government for water resource plans, and any statutory technical or administrative constraints

We considered the following questions for each issue or suggestion:

- Is it likely to have an effect on water availability for licence holders, and if so, how?
- Is it likely to alter how water is distributed to access licences of different categories or within a category, and if so how?
- Is it likely to result in a net reduction in planned environmental water?
- Can current statutory mechanisms enable the change, or is legislative change required?
- Is it consistent with current policy settings, and if not, is development of robust alternative policies feasible within the timeframe to develop the water resource plan?
- Are there additional costs for the NSW Government?

- Will there be a cost to NSW licence holders?
- Does it relate to water charges, costs, operational activities or licensing matters outside of the scope of the water resource plan?
- Are existing programs/processes or other departments addressing the issue?
- Is a full investigation of the issues feasible within the timeframe of developing the water resource plan?
- Is it consistent with the Basin Plan requirements?
- Does it set a precedent for other water resource plans?

Changes resulting from public consultation

Based on the considerations outlined above, the NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment completed an assessment of all the issues raised in submissions. The outcomes of this assessment resulted in changes being made in the following areas:

- The **access rules** in the water sharing plan **that apply to groundwater users in the Lower Darling Alluvium**. The original intent of the rules was not being realised in the operation of the plan. The replacement rules will provide access as intended.
- The water sharing plan to remove the mandatory condition sub clause relating to State Significant Developments and Infrastructure under the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 (EP & A Act). This sub clause was inconsistent with the NSW Aquifer Interference Policy. Department of Planning, Industry and Environment - Water assesses the potential impacts of an aquifer interference activity against the minimal impact considerations set out in the policy as well as any specific rules in a relevant water sharing plan, based on the information provided in the proponent's environmental assessment and provides subsequent advice and proposed conditions of approval to the EP & A Act planning process for each project.
- The water resource plan to **clarify that local water utilities are required to hold water supply work approvals** in addition to water access licences, and that local water utilities in this plan area include local government authorities.
- Schedule D (the risk assessment) of the water resource plan – clarify that **local water utilities can apply for additional shares** if they don't have an integrated water cycle management plan, if they can demonstrate the share and extraction components of the licence are the minimum required for the proposed use of the water.
- Schedule F (the water quality management plan) of the water resource plan to demonstrate the **protection of groundwater water quality** by additional access rules in the Darling Alluvium. The aquifer access rules prevent saline groundwater movement into freshwater lenses by restricting groundwater extraction unless salinity is less than 3000µS/cm.

Outcomes of preliminary Murray–Darling Basin Authority review

The Murray–Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) assesses the draft water resource plans as part of the plan development. This assessment informs the federal minister's decision whether to accredit the water resource plan. Once accredited by the minister, the water resource plan is operational.

The formal assessment of the water resource plan occurs once NSW formally submits it to the MDBA. Once submitted to the MDBA the draft plan can be found on the MDBA's website.

The MDBA has undertaken a preliminary review of the public exhibition version of the water resource plan. This early feedback has been valuable for informing additional changes to the

documents, primarily the water resource plan, water quality management plan and risk assessment.

These changes generally related to clarifying and justifying matters to ensure Basin Plan requirements are met. This included providing further detail on the processes and criteria for assessing new bore applications and applications for trades (dealings). These specific provisions for accreditation are included in Schedule I of the water resource plan.

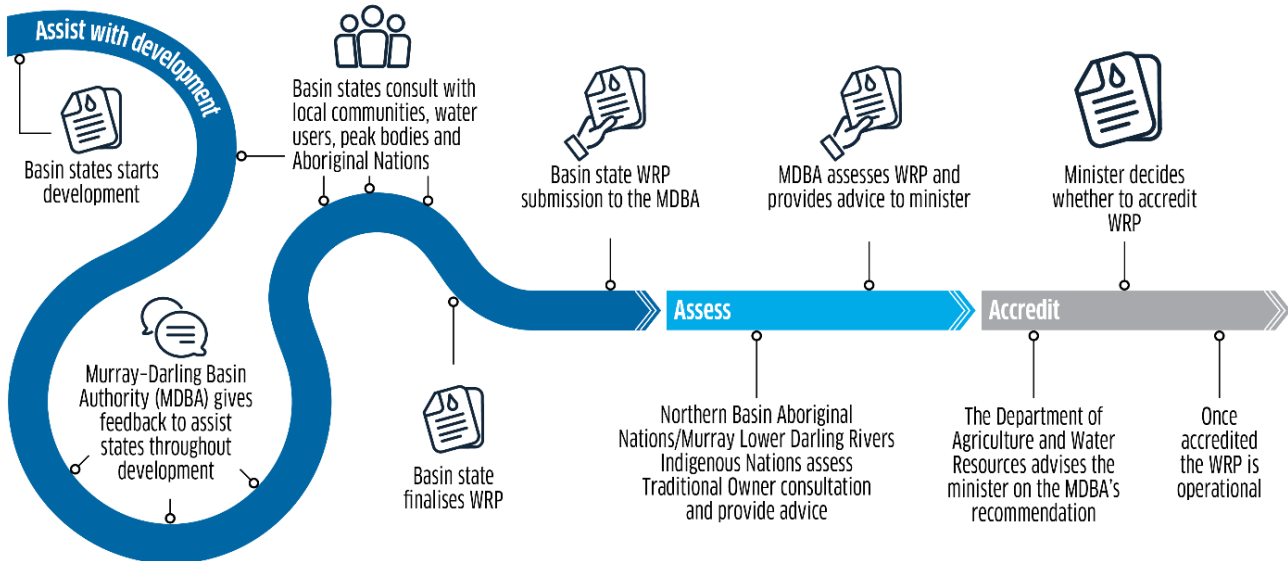


Figure 1. Water resource plan accreditation timeline (<https://www.mdba.gov.au/basin-plan-roll-out/water-resource-plans>, accessed 12 June 2020)

More information

A copy of the submitted water resource plan and the schedules and appendices is available on the MDBA website <https://www.mdba.gov.au/basin-plan-roll-out/water-resource-plans>

The draft Darling Alluvium Water Resource Plan that was on public exhibition and supporting fact sheets are available from the NSW Department of Industry's website <https://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/plans-programs/water-resource-plans>

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