

Supporting the Peel River below Chaffey Dam

Providing for the Peel River's environmental water needs



What happens to the Peel River when the pipeline is being used?

The Chaffey Dam to Dungowan pipeline is part of the Government's drought response aimed at improving water supply security for Tamworth. There are temporary changes in how environmental water is made available and managed to support the Peel River when the pipeline is operating.

Pipeline operating

On 3 June 2020, the Minister for Water authorised WaterNSW to operate the Chaffey Dam to Dungowan pipeline. This authorisation was subject

to conditions and required changes to the normal rules for how water is released from Chaffey Dam.

The conditions allow the pipeline to be used when Chaffey Dam storage is less than 20%. When the dam is below 20%, water can be supplied to Tamworth Regional Council using the pipeline and releases from Chaffey Dam into the Peel River cease.

To help support habitat for fish and platypus when releases stop from Chaffey Dam, a small volume of water accrues daily as an environmental water allowance. The environmental water allowance volume is managed by the Peel Environmental Water Technical Advisor Group, established as part of the authorisation's conditions.



The Peel Environmental Water Technical Advisory Group

Using expert and local knowledge, the Peel Environmental Water Technical Advisory Group provides advice about environmental flow. The Group is made up of representatives from the Department of Regional NSW (Fisheries), Department of Planning, Industry and Environment and the Commonwealth Government. To bring local knowledge to the decision-making, the Group has extended an invitation to Tamworth Regional Council, Peel Valley Water Users Association, local recreational fishing representatives and Gomeroi Traditional Owners to assist.

Helping fish and platypus

The pipeline began operating on 17 June 2020, and releases from Chaffey Dam ceased a few days later. By the end of July, 61.5 megalitres had been set aside for environmental use. This volume is equal to four to five days' water supply for Tamworth.

Monitoring of flows in the Peel River since the pipeline began operation showed the 7.5-kilometre section downstream of Chaffey Dam had stopped flowing and retracted to a series of disconnected river pools.

Despite good rainfall at the end of July, it was not enough to return flowing water to this section of the river. With the river reduced to a series of pools there was potential for significant impacts on local populations of platypus, rakali (native water rat), turtles and threatened fish species such as silver perch and Murray cod, which are listed under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

The Peel Environmental Water Technical Advisory Group recommended release of the available accrued environmental water allowance over four days from 30 July 2020 to re-connect pools. The release was also needed to fully re-wet the channel to improve the effectiveness of the minimum daily release of three megalitres, which has now recommenced with Chaffey Dam having reached more than 20%.

Our next steps

Chaffey Dam is slowly rising and is almost at 25%. The Bureau of Meteorology's seasonal outlook is positive for more rain over the next few months.

Meanwhile, with Dungowan Dam now full, Tamworth Regional Council has started taking town water supply from Dungowan Dam and will likely not use the new pipeline from Chaffey Dam for several months.

While Chaffey Dam stays above 20%, three megalitres per day is now being released to the river as required under the water sharing plan for the river. This will keep some pools upstream of Woolomin topped up.

The Peel Environmental Water Technical Advisory Group and WaterNSW continue to monitor the condition of the river and make recommendations on the use of the environmental water allowance to help support habitat for native fish and platypus while the pipeline is in use.

More information

If you have questions or you would like to report conditions along the river, contact:
Environment, Energy and Science | Department of Planning, Industry and Environment
E info@environment.nsw.gov.au **P** 1300 361 967

Or visit these websites:

- WaterNSW: www.watarnsw.com.au
- Tamworth Regional Council: yourvoice.tamworth.nsw.gov.au/town-water-supplies
- DPIE Water: www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/allocations-availability/droughts-floods/drought-update/critical-valleys-in-drought

Cover photo: Peel River, D Ward/DPIE.

Above left to right: Peel River; Peel Platypus; Woolomin, D Ward/DPIE.

Environment, Energy and Science Group,
Department of Planning, Industry and Environment, Locked Bag 5022, Parramatta NSW 2124. Phone: 1300 361 967 (environment and national parks enquiries); email: info@environment.nsw.gov.au; website: www.environment.nsw.gov.au.

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