

Report on environmental watering coordination and principles – Queensland

The Queensland 2014–15 annual report on implementing the Basin Plan environmental management framework (Schedule 12, Item 10)

Reporting context

The Basin Plan aims to protect and restore water-dependent ecosystems to support a healthy working Basin. To help achieve this, the Plan makes more water available for the environment and also guides how environmental watering is planned, coordinated and used at a Basin-scale.

The processes for planning and delivering environmental water including principles to be applied when watering occurs are set out in the environmental management framework in Chapter 8 of the Basin Plan. It includes:

- processes to co-ordinate the planning, prioritisation and use of planned environmental water and held environmental water, under which:
 - the Authority is obliged to prepare a Basin-wide environmental watering strategy
 - each Basin State is obliged to prepare long-term watering plans for water resource plan areas
 - each Basin State is obliged to identify annual environmental watering priorities for water resource plan areas; and
 - the Authority is obliged to identify Basin annual environmental watering priorities (Division 5)
- the principles to be applied in environmental watering
- a mechanism to enable the Authority to co-ordinate the recovery of additional environmental water.

The purpose of this report is to monitor how Basin governments are implementing the environmental management framework. The report is a requirement of Chapter 13 of the Basin Plan and relates to Item 10 of Schedule 12.

Indicators for measuring success

Implementation of the environmental management framework is evaluated using the following indicators:

- Basin-wide environmental watering strategy, long-term watering plans and annual priorities were prepared with the required content and are published, reviewed and updated, **(10.1)**
- Watering strategies, plans and priorities are prepared in consultation with other parties and having regard to matters as required **(10.2)**
- How environmental watering principles are applied **(10.3)**

10.1: Basin-wide environmental watering strategy, long-term watering plans and annual priorities were prepared with the required content, published, reviewed and updated as obligated under Part 4 of Chapter 8, Divisions 2-5

Response (CEWH only)

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10.2: Watering strategies, plans and priorities were prepared consistently with Part 4 of Chapter 8, in relation to coordinating, consulting and cooperating with other Reporters and the matters to which regard must be had (Chapter 8, Part 4)

10.2.1. Describe how coordination, consultation and cooperation occurred including with other governments

Response

Queensland does not hold any Held Environmental Water (HEW) and has very limited ability to actively manage its Planned Environmental Water (PEW). Nearly all of the Queensland PEW is “rules based” event management water which is hard wired into Water Resource Plans and Resource Operations Plans.

In developing water resource plans and resource operations plans for the Queensland Murray–Darling Basin, the Queensland government undertook extensive consultation with stakeholders including water users, water infrastructure operators, sectoral interest groups and other jurisdictions. This ensured that their values and competing interests were balanced and accommodated where possible.

Examples where cooperative cross-border participatory processes have occurred include:

- The development of the New South Wales and Queensland Border Rivers Intergovernmental Agreement 2008 found on the Department of Natural Resources and Mines website at www.dnrm.qld.gov.au/water/catchments-planning/catchments/border-rivers.
- The development of low and medium flow water sharing rules for the Lower Balonne
- The development of flow sharing arrangements for the Lower Warrego.

These same stakeholder groups have been consulted as required as a part of Queensland’s preparations for implementation of the Basin Plan. To a large extent, all the above mentioned consultations have implicitly informed the development of the annual watering priorities included in this document.

Additionally, and in the context of framing the 2015–2016 annual environmental watering priorities, the Queensland government has consulted directly with the Commonwealth Environmental Water Office (CEWO), New South Wales government and SunWater—the operator of bulk water supply infrastructure, on proposed environmental watering priorities and possible cooperative arrangements.

The CEWO’s annual management decisions for 2015–2016 in relation to environmental water holdings in Queensland have been considered in the development of the annual watering priorities included in this document.

Also consultation has occurred with the Border Rivers Environmental Water Network and Border Rivers Food and Fibre in relation to the developing arrangements on the Border. For the Condamine and Balonne, engagement has occurred with key interests through the Lower Balonne Water Network (LBWN). The LBWN has representatives from Local Government, Queensland irrigators, local businesses, NSW floodplain graziers and NSW Government.

The following table documents consultation on the 2015-16 Annual Environmental Watering Priorities undertaken by Queensland.

Consultation on environmental watering

Organisation	Date of consultation
SunWater	ongoing
New South Wales – Office of Water	04/05/2015
CEWO	18/05/2015
Lower Balonne Water Network	ongoing
Border Rivers Environmental Water Network	ongoing
Border Rivers Food and Fibre	ongoing

Queensland cooperates with the Commonwealth Environmental Water Office (CEWO) on their portfolio management planning in the Border Rivers through regular teleconferences, which also include representatives from NSW Government. Queensland recognises the real benefit of these teleconferences (and occasional face to face meeting) and appreciates the collegiate approach demonstrated by CEWO.

Queensland also is consulted by CEWO on watering options for the Condamine Balonne catchment focussing on the Lower Balonne.

Queensland commenced development of its first Long Term Watering Plan for the Warrego, Paroo and Nebine catchments in the first half of 2015. To date there have been limited opportunities to consult with CEWO or NSW as the document is at first draft stage, but interagency consultation is planned for 2015-16.

10.2.2. Describe what difference coordination, consultation and cooperation made

Response

As described in 10.2.1 Queensland does not hold any Held Environmental Water. The Planned Environmental Water is managed according to rules in statutory plans which were developed by a consultative planning process. Queensland provides expert advice to intergovernmental forums whenever necessary but it is not possible to detail what effect this has had on watering decisions made by other jurisdictions.

10.3: How environmental watering principles were applied, consistently with Division 6 of Chapter 8, Part 4

10.3.1. Provide at least one case study that demonstrates how environmental watering principles were applied and identify the relevant principles.

Response

Principle 1: Environmental watering to be undertaken having regard to the Basin annual environmental watering priorities.

In the 2014-15 Basin Environmental Watering Priorities document three strategies were identified to assist in maximising environmental benefits. Strategy 3: *Maximise environmental benefits by managing water in harmony with natural cues* is the one of relevance to Queensland’s environmental watering. Excerpts from that document are annotated with examples of how Queensland applied Strategy 3.

Translucent/transparent operating practices – maintaining seasonally appropriate flows (page 6)

Storage operational practices known as ‘translucent’ and ‘transparent’ flows permit small to medium inflow events to be passed directly through water storages. Translucent flows allow a proportion of inflows to be passed through storages; and the less frequent practice of transparent flow operations allows all inflows to be passed. This maintains the same or similar hydrograph shape to a natural flow. Existing translucent and transparent flow operating practices provide important opportunities for environmental water holders to protect and restore some elements of seasonal flow variability.

A relevant Queensland example is the pass flow required from Coolmunda Dam which is the storage for the Macintyre Brook Water Supply Scheme in the Border Rivers Catchment. The first 100ML per day of inflow into the dam must be released to provide in stream benefits. Another example is the passing of inflows up to 730ML from Beardmore Dam, which is the storage for the St George Water Supply Scheme in the Balonne catchment, to improve connectivity at times of low flow.

Managing unregulated rivers – maintaining and extending low, medium and high flow events (page 7)

Unregulated rivers are defined by those without large public storages to capture and re-regulate water. In some of these rivers, a large volume of water is extracted directly from the river and is often stored in large private reservoirs. Protection of flows from extraction by event and season can restore some natural variability of flows, including peak flows, to augment periodic flooding of refuge sites, reconnect pools and improve water quality. Event management rules are contained in Resource Operations Plans for the Lower Balonne, Warrego and Border Rivers catchments. The details of how these rules operate are explained in Queensland’s Annual Environmental Watering Priorities document.

https://www.dnrm.qld.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0006/104838/environmental-water-2015-16.pdf

Managing unregulated rivers for the environment can be achieved by purchasing entitlements and leaving flows in-stream. This is the strategy followed by the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder for their Held Environmental Water in Queensland.

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