

Report on how local communities influenced Basin Plan implementation – New South Wales

New South Wales' annual report on using local knowledge and solutions to implement the Basin Plan (Schedule 12, Item 6)

Reporting context

The success of the Basin Plan and associated water reforms depends on working closely with the communities and stakeholders who have the necessary local knowledge and solutions to effectively implement the Plan.

The Basin Plan requires Basin States, the Authority and the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder to draw on local knowledge and solutions across a range of Basin Plan activities including long-term watering plans, annual environmental watering priorities and water resource plans.

It also requires that the best available knowledge (including scientific, local and cultural knowledge), evidence and analysis be used where practicable to ensure credibility, transparency and usefulness of monitoring and evaluation findings.

The purpose of this report is to monitor the extent to which local knowledge and solutions have influenced implementation of the Basin Plan during 2013-14. The report is a requirement of Chapter 13 of the Basin Plan and relates to Item 6 of Schedule 12.

Indicators for measuring success

The use of local knowledge to inform Basin Plan implementation is evaluated using the following indicators:

- Processes used to identify stakeholders from local communities, peak bodies and individuals (**Indicator 6.1**)
 - How stakeholders were engaged (**Indicator 6.2**)
 - How engagement influenced Basin Plan implementation (**Indicator 6.3**)
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Indicator 6.1: Processes used to identify stakeholders from local communities, peak bodies and individuals

Response

In 2007-2010, NSW formed Environmental Water Advisory Groups (EWAG) for each water resource plan area, which were developed based on groups identified through relevant water sharing plans (WSP) (Gwydir ECAOAC; Macquarie-Cudgegong EFRG; Murrumbidgee EWARG) and identified needs (Lachlan RWG; Murray-Lower Darling EWAG). The original memberships reflected the acknowledged diversity of stakeholder interests at the time of the WSP development. In 2009, OEH reviewed the group's memberships and strengthened Indigenous stakeholder representation and assigned chairing roles to Catchment Management Authorities (now Local Land Services). Further reviews have been

Response

initiated to determine whether the expectations of both government and stakeholders are being met, the adequacy of resourcing and other support provided, and the capacity of the groups to advise other NSW and Commonwealth agencies regarding implementation of their respective planning activities. EWAGs are central to developing annual watering priorities and will also play a pivotal role in the development of long-term watering plans. OEH views a strengthened commitment from the CEWO to these groups as a critical advance in delivering on Basin Plan outcomes.

Indicator 6.2: How stakeholders were engaged

Response

EWAGs have existed for varying periods, and operational cultures have evolved over time in each water resource plan area. Each one has developed its own operational style, but all have an appropriate diversity of stakeholder representatives and therefore an appropriate range of relevant audiences. The value of EWAGs is that all audiences, via their representatives, participate equally through regular face-to-face meetings, teleconferences and other forms of communication when necessary (e.g. during event delivery). Broader communication is via records of meetings, bi-annual newsletters of e-water management and annual outcome reports.

EWAGs act as a sounding board for the implementation of environmental watering, provide community endorsement for watering actions and act as a forum for information exchange. They are also an important platform for communities to deal with existing and ongoing tensions and conflicts around environmental water. During planning meetings, a range of possible scenarios are canvassed and the implications for each stakeholder/audience group are discussed and resolved. EWAGs also advise during event delivery if conditions that were not anticipated during planning provide opportunities for environmental gains.

Currently, the primary focus of EWAGs is advising on annual watering priorities, with the role to be extended to providing advice on long-term watering plans (LTWP). Most EWAGs are already working in a longer-term planning framework, the main elements of which are expected to populate the LTWPs. The five-year history of this model has not generated any contentious advice (i.e. advice from EWAG rejected by OEH) as a result of strong local ownership and respect for a diversity of community views.

Indicator 6.3: How engagement influenced Basin Plan implementation

Response

The role, performance and achievements of EWAGs are partly described above. Stakeholder contributions are provided at each meeting, discussed and recommendations made, usually by consensus. Occasionally alternate views are

Response

recorded for those stakeholder members who cannot accept the majority view. Relevant providers of scientific information are invited to meetings to update EWAGs on monitoring results and implications for management. Annual watering priorities are informed by both the longer-term planning objectives and the information on current status of ecological assts. Over time, EWAGs are progressively influencing the focus of monitoring and other forms of scientific investigation.

An independent review of EWAGs was commissioned by OEH in order to provide objective information on their performance, particularly from a diverse stakeholder perspective. Overall, the review found that EWAGs are a successful mechanism for public participation in environmental water management and reflect an effective localism approach.