

Summary of Northern Basin toolkit measures status (June 2020)

Toolkit Measure	Summary of measures and anticipated benefits	Status
Targeted recovery of water	<p>Improve environmental watering into Narran Lakes, Lower Balonne and Culgoa floodplains and the Barwon–Darling River, but avoids, minimises or mitigates any adverse socio-economic impacts of the recovery.</p> <p>Note, in the Condamine Balonne, there is potential for improved social and economic outcomes by recovering some water upstream of the Beardmore Dam.</p>	<p>The Australian Government, in consultation with NSW, Queensland and the Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA), is continuing to recover water through targeted purchase and investments in water-saving infrastructure to meet recovery targets in ways that improve environmental outcomes whilst minimising or avoiding any adverse socio-economic impacts.</p> <p>The Australian Government has published information on progress of Commonwealth environmental water recovery to improve the health of the river system under the Murray-Darling Basin Plan at http://www.agriculture.gov.au/water/mdb/progress-recovery/progress-of-water-recovery</p>
Protection of environmental flows	<p>Strengthen the efficient and effective delivery of environmental flows across the northern Basin; enhancing low flows and fresh flows, particularly in the unregulated river systems of the Condamine–Balonne and Barwon–Darling.</p>	<p><u>Queensland</u></p> <p>In Queensland, existing arrangements largely protect water that has been recovered for the environment and new mechanisms to protect that water have been codified in Queensland water resource plans. These new mechanisms were gazetted in February 2019. All Queensland water resource plans are now accredited and fully operational.</p> <p>Queensland will work with NSW to develop an accounting method supported by protocols and procedures for cross-border held environmental water. The accounting method will be in place and operating by end 2020.</p> <p><u>NSW</u></p> <p>NSW has implemented interim arrangements to protect water for the environment. Over the last two years water for the environment through the Barwon–Darling has been protected using temporary water restrictions.</p> <p>Legislation was amended in June 2018 to allow access rules under water sharing plans for the Macquarie Bogan, Gwydir and Barwon-Darling unregulated water sources to be amended to facilitate active management in these areas to protect water for the environment.</p> <p>NSW is developing enduring arrangements for protection of water for the environment to be implemented through water resource plans. All 11 groundwater plans have been submitted for accreditation, with the remaining nine surface water plans to be submitted by 30 June 2020.</p> <p>Enduring solutions that are key aspects of NSW reform include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. active management to protect water for the environment in the Barwon-Darling, and relevant unregulated water sources in the Macquarie and Gwydir; 2. manage resumption of flows in the Barwon-Darling after an extended dry period (first flush rule); 3. limit daily water take in the Barwon-Darling and 4. increasing the commence to pump threshold near Bourke to protect low flows. <p>Public consultation has been undertaken for proposed amendments to water sharing plans which seek to embed enduring arrangements for protecting environmental water, including new rules to implement active management in selected water sources and ‘Active Management in Unregulated Rivers - Draft policy’. Public and Stakeholder Advisory Panel feedback will be taken into account when finalising water sharing plan rules.</p>
Event-based environmental water mechanisms	<p>This includes mechanisms such as one-off temporary trade by event, options over pumping (enduring agreements) and store and release This measure aims to benefit the Narran Lakes, some areas of the Lower Balonne, the Border Rivers and Namoi regions.</p>	<p>Following extensive on-ground consultation, an implementation plan for event-based mechanisms in the Lower Balonne has been finalised and published (http://environment.gov.au/water/cewo/publications/event-based-mechanisms-lower-balonne-implementation-overview).</p>

	<p>Limited benefits are also expected to occur in the Barwon–Darling.</p> <p>The aim of this measure is to support the development of contractual and other mechanisms to complement the management of water for the environment, to benefit environmental outcomes in the northern Murray-Darling Basin.</p>	<p>Queensland has committed to review accounting and management arrangements, within the seasonal assignment framework, to facilitate the most comprehensive take-up of event-based mechanisms to allow for flow event transfers between entitlement holders and the CEWO.</p> <p>A pilot grant scheme was implemented in early 2020. The pilot involved paying a water allocation holder that was legally entitled to pump water from the Narran River to not pump. Lessons learned will support any future implementation of event-based mechanisms. Monitoring is underway. An independent review of this pilot is underway. A series of factsheets has been broadly distributed.</p>
Improved coordination & management of environmental water	<p>Maximise the environmental outcomes of water for the environment moving from upper catchments to downstream rivers, such as the Barwon–Darling and the Lower Balonne Rivers.</p> <p>Improve habitat for many aquatic organisms during dry times and improve the health of rivers downstream – such as the Culgoa and Narran Rivers.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Environmental Water Office (CEWO) and NSW have coordinated joint environmental releases to achieve whole-of-North connected flows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Northern Connectivity Event in 2018 (http://www.environment.gov.au/water/cewo/northern-rivers) and • the Northern Fish Flow in 2019 (http://www.environment.gov.au/water/cewo/catchment/northern-fish-flow-2019). <p>A Northern Basin Environmental Watering Group (NBEWG) comprising officials from MDBA, CEWO, NSW and Queensland has been established and has met on several occasions. The NBEWG will provide an enduring and formalised mechanism to coordinate planning and delivery of water for the environment across the northern Basin.</p>
Gwydir constraints	<p>There are a number of constraints in the Gwydir catchment which are preventing flows reaching the Gwydir wetland. This measure will remove and manage flows to the wetlands. Significant environmental benefits are expected in the Gwydir wetlands by removing constraints to allow higher river flows without third party impacts.</p>	<p>NSW has been provided funding to develop a feasibility proposal to remove constraints in the Gwydir catchment.</p> <p>The proposal will be subject to assessment and undergo further development as outlined below for environmental works and measures.</p>
Environmental works & measures	<p>This measure includes environmental works to promote fish movement and habitat and broader ecological outcomes in the northern Basin, including construction of fishways and control of cold water pollution.</p> <p>The aim of installing fishways is to improve fish passage through removal of barriers (e.g. weirs) to enhance the native fish outcomes. The aim of installing cold water prevention strategies on large storages is to reduce the effect of cold water pollution on native fish species.</p>	<p>An ecological prioritisation framework has been developed and endorsed by the Basin Officials Committee. NSW and Queensland have been provided funding to prepare feasibility proposals for Commonwealth assessment using the prioritisation framework.</p> <p>Following assessment and prioritisation of feasibility proposals, business case development for priority projects will occur, including community consultation. Business cases were expected to be submitted by end 2020, however, this has been delayed. It is expected that implementation of priority projects will commence in 2021. Implementation is subject to the prioritisation process and a decision by the Commonwealth Minister to proceed with implementation.</p>