

New South Wales – NSW Murray and Lower Darling

Formal submission submitted to the MDBA: 30 June 2020

Disclaimer: New South Wales (NSW) formally submitted the proposed Murray and Lower Darling water resource plan (proposed WRP) package to the Murray–Darling Basin Authority (the MDBA) under the Water Act 2007 (Cth). At the time of publication, a recommendation on accreditation has not yet been made by the MDBA to the Commonwealth Minister responsible for water. The proposed WRP is not operational. The publication of the proposed WRP on the MDBA's website is to enable transparency.



The NSW Murray and Lower Darling WRP area (SW8) includes the NSW portion of the Murray River catchment and the Darling River downstream of Menindee Lakes in the southern part of the Murray–Darling Basin. The WRP area covers over 186,000 km² and comprises about 20% of the Murray–Darling Basin. In NSW, the River Murray moves through three distinct landscapes, beginning in the mountains and undulating slopes of the upper catchment. The Lower Darling comprises the portion of the Darling River system that is downstream of the Menindee Lakes Scheme, near the town of Menindee.

Water resources: The NSW Murray and Lower Darling WRP applies only to the surface water in the WRP area and encompasses two SDL resource units: NSW Murray (SS14) and Lower Darling (SS18).

Towns and regions: Menindee, Wentworth, Pooncarie, Deniliquin, Albury, Broken Hill and Corowa.

Water users: Largely pastoral industries (sheep/wool, cattle and goat farming) as well as irrigated cropping (particularly rice), horticulture and viticulture.

Population¹: The population of the WRP area is around 124,000 or about 4.8% of the total Murray–Darling Basin.

For more detailed maps please visit (please note: some plans overlap):

<https://www.mdba.gov.au/publications/maps-spatial-data>

About water resource plans

Water resource plans are an integral part of implementing the Basin Plan.

They set new rules on how much water can be taken from the system, ensuring the sustainable diversion limit is not exceeded over time.

Basin state governments are developing water resource plans. The Murray–Darling Basin Authority is working closely with Basin state governments to ensure water resource plans meet the requirements of the Basin Plan.

There are 33 water resource plans in total, covering groundwater and surface water management across the Basin. Water resource plans to be completed by state include:

- 20 in New South Wales
- five in Victoria
- three in Queensland
- three in South Australia, and
- two in the Australian Capital Territory.

Next steps

The MDBA is currently assessing the Murray and Lower Darling WRP for consistency with the Basin Plan. The Authority will then consider the assessment and provide a recommendation to the Commonwealth Minister responsible for water that will inform the accreditation decision.



1. Population figures are estimates only as ABS Census area boundaries and WRP area boundaries do not align

For more information on water resource plans, visit: www.mdba.gov.au/water-resource-plans

For more information on the NSW Murray Lower Darling Surface water resource plan, visit <https://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/plans-programs/water-resource-plans/drafts>

Acknowledgement of the Traditional Owners – In the spirit of strengthening partnerships with Aboriginal people the MDBA acknowledges the cultural authority of the Traditional Owners in the Murray–Darling Basin.

How the WRP was developed

New South Wales (NSW) has been developing this WRP since 2017 with the first draft received by the MDBA in 2019. This WRP brings together new and existing rules and arrangements used by NSW to manage water in the NSW Murray and Lower Darling WRP area. This includes making the *Water Sharing Plan for the New South Wales Murray and Lower Darling Regulated Rivers Water Sources 2020*, the *Water Sharing Plan for the Murray Unregulated River Water Sources 2011* and the *Water Sharing Plan for the Lower Murray-Darling Unregulated River Water Source 2011*. The new water sharing plans replace the *Water Sharing Plan for the New South Wales Murray and Lower Darling Regulated Rivers Water Sources 2016*, the *Water Sharing Plan for the Murray Unregulated and Alluvial Water Sources 2011* and the *Water Sharing Plan for the Lower Murray-Darling Unregulated and Alluvial Water Sources 2011*.

Public consultation informed the development of the state plan, and that consultation underpins the WRP. The NSW Government has worked with the relevant Traditional Owners to identify their objectives and outcomes for water resource management to help improve the protection of Aboriginal values and uses in the WRP area.

In assessing the WRP, the MDBA will seek advice from Murray Lower Darling Indigenous Nations (MLDRIN).

Regional details

The NSW Murray and Lower Darling WRP area covers approximately 20% of the Murray-Darling Basin. Conservation and forestry are dominant land uses in the hilly catchment above Hume Dam and grazing is the most common agricultural enterprise. Agriculture, including grazing, dryland cropping, and irrigation, is the dominant land use along the Murray River downstream of Hume Dam, accounting for around 90 per cent of the land area. Rice farming is a major industry, with the WRP area producing around 50% of Australia's rice crop.

There is a wide variation in climate across the NSW Murray and Lower Darling WRP area due to the extent and topography of the area.

The Commonwealth is finalising the recovery arrangements for surface water in the NSW Murray and Lower Darling WRP area.

Addressing risks

The NSW approach to managing water resources requires the identification and assessment of risks to the condition and ongoing availability of water resources and the assessment of existing management strategies and the need for new management strategies. The WRP risk assessment outlines the risks and management strategies in the NSW Murray and Lower Darling Surface WRP area.

In assessing the WRP, the MDBA will consider the risk management arrangements NSW has put forward for accreditation to protect the water resources of the WRP area, including other water resources with significant hydrological connections to the NSW Murray and Lower Darling WRP area water sources. For more information about these risks visit: <https://www.mdba.gov.au/basin-plan-roll-out/water-resource-plans/common-challenges-across-water-resource-plans>

Water for the environment must be protected in law to at least the same level as was in place prior to the commencement of the Basin Plan in 2012. The MDBA's assessment will ensure the WRP does not reduce the net level of protection of water for the environment that was available at that time.

Further information

WRPs complement existing arrangements for water use at the state level. More information about these arrangements can be found at the links below:

Murray and Lower Darling WRP Schedule A - Water Sharing Plan for the New South Wales Murray and Lower Darling Regulated Rivers Water Sources 2020

Murray and Lower Darling WRP Schedule A - Water Sharing Plan for the Murray Unregulated River Water Sources 2011

Murray and Lower Darling WRP Schedule A - Water Sharing Plan for the Lower Murray-Darling Unregulated River Water Source 2011

Water Management Act 2000:

<https://www.legislation.nsw.gov.au/#/view/act/2000/92>

Water Security for Regions Program:

<https://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/plans-programs/infrastructure-programs/water-security-for-regions>

Office locations

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