

Australian Capital Territory (Surface Water)

Disclaimer: The Australian Capital Territory (ACT) provided the proposed Australian Capital Territory (Surface Water) 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 Australian Capital Territory (Surface Water) WRP area covers the entirety of the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) in Southern NSW, within the upper Murrumbidgee.

Water resources: The WRP covers the surface water for the area, including the waters of the Cotter River catchment wholly within the ACT, and those of the Molonglo and Murrumbidgee as they pass through the ACT. The WRP also covers the surface water resources of the Googong Dam area in NSW, to which the ACT has paramount rights.

Towns and regions: Canberra

Water users: urban water, forestry plantations, some irrigated agriculture

Population: ~420,000

For more detailed maps, including the boundaries of WRP areas as defined by the Basin Plan, and the names of the Traditional Owners within each area (noting some plans overlap) please visit:

<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 ACT.

Next steps

The MDBA is currently assessing the ACT (surface water) 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 decision to accredit the WRP or not.



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

For more information on the ACT (surface water) water resource plan, visit: www.environment.act.gov.au

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

The Australian Capital Territory (ACT) has been developing this WRP since 2014 concurrently with the WRP covering the groundwater resources of the WRP.

In 2015 the ACT produced drafts of these WRPs that the MDBA considered to have shortcomings against Basin Plan requirements. In response, the MDBA and ACT worked closely to redraft the WRPs throughout 2017–18.

Following this collaboration, the plans were returned to the ACT for final reviews and approval by ACT Cabinet prior to formal submission. The MDBA is currently assessing the WRP for consistency with the Basin Plan.

Regional details

The ACT WRP area sits entirely within the Murrumbidgee catchment and WRP area of NSW. Canberra, the largest population centre in the Murray–Darling Basin, is within the WRP area, and urban water is correspondingly a significant proportion of total use. The surface water resources of the Goongong Dam area, upstream of the ACT in NSW, are also included in the WRP as the ACT has paramount rights to these water resources, and responsibility for their management.

Addressing risks

This WRP is entirely within a separate state, both upstream and downstream. This poses a number of challenges to be addressed.

As a predominantly urban catchment, water quality for human and environmental use is also an area of risk. The WRP will be assessed to ensure risks to water quality are appropriately managed. Protections for water for the environment can only increase in WRPs. The MDBA's assessment will ensure protection is not reduced.

Arrangements to address other risks will be assessed in the WRP. Some risks include: connectivity, water quality, climate change and water use (which is measured by baseline diversion limits).

For more information about these risks visit:
mdba.gov.au/water-resource-plans

Further information

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

Environmental Flows Guidelines

<https://www.environment.act.gov.au/water/water-regulation/environmental-flows-guidelines>

(Note these are currently under review for updating in 2018–19)

Water Resources Act 2007 (ACT)

<https://www.legislation.act.gov.au/a/2007-19/>

Territory Plan 2008 (ACT)

<https://www.legislation.act.gov.au/ni/2008-27/default.asp>

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