

**Summary of Northern Basin Toolkit measures status (as at 23 March 2021)**

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, recovering water upstream of the Beardmore Dam in the Condamine-Balonne is unlikely to contribute to efficiency measures water recovery.</p>	<p>The Australian Government, in consultation with NSW, Queensland and the Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA), will recover water for the environment by modernising off-farm water delivery infrastructure. On 3 March, Minister Pitt announced the new Off-Farm Efficiency program including \$1.33 billion in state-led efficiency projects and \$0.15 billion in direct grants. There is an additional \$60 million available for on-farm projects. Further details are available at <a href="#">Off-farm Efficiency Program - Department of Agriculture</a>.</p> <p>The Australian Government publishes information on progress of Commonwealth environmental water recovery to improve the health of the river system under the Murray-Darling Basin Plan at <a href="http://www.agriculture.gov.au/water/mdb/progress-recovery/progress-of-water-recovery">http://www.agriculture.gov.au/water/mdb/progress-recovery/progress-of-water-recovery</a></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, in collaboration with New South Wales and the Commonwealth Environmental Water Office, has progressed the development of an accounting method for cross-border held environmental water. An interim arrangement will be trialled when there is a suitable flow event. Queensland plans to finalise the improved cross-border water accounting arrangements, including formal supporting procedures and protocols, by 30 June 2021.</p> <p><u>NSW</u></p> <p>NSW has implemented interim arrangements to protect water for the environment, including use of temporary water restrictions to protect water for the environment through the Barwon–Darling.</p> <p>NSW has developed enduring arrangements for protection of water for the environment to be implemented through water resource plans. All 11 groundwater plans and nine surface water plans have been submitted to the MDBA for accreditation under the Basin Plan. It is anticipated that accredited plans will be in place by December 2021.</p> <p>Enduring solutions that are key aspects of NSW reform include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. active management to protect water for the environment in the Barwon-Darling, and relevant unregulated water sources in the Macquarie and Gwydir;</li> <li>2. managing resumption of flows in the Barwon-Darling after an extended dry period (first flush rule);</li> <li>3. limiting daily water take in the Barwon-Darling and</li> <li>4. increasing the commence to pump threshold near Bourke to protect low flows.</li> </ol> <p>NSW commenced active management on 1 December 2020 in the three unregulated water sources. The three other aspects of the reform (first flush rule, daily extraction limits and increases to some A Class access thresholds) came into effect from 1 July 2020 in accordance with the amended Water Sharing Plan for the Barwon–Darling unregulated water source.</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. 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</p>	<p>Following extensive on-ground consultation, an implementation plan for event-based mechanisms in the Lower Balonne has been finalised and published (<a href="http://environment.gov.au/water/cewo/publications/event-based-mechanisms-lower-balonne-implementation-overview">http://environment.gov.au/water/cewo/publications/event-based-mechanisms-lower-balonne-implementation-overview</a>). The CEWO will implement a second event-based mechanism in the Lower Balonne if a suitable sized flow event occurs in early 2021.</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. An independent review of this pilot has been completed and published on the CEWO website. The review was supportive of the design and implementation of the event-based mechanism. Before and after monitoring was undertaken and published. A series of update factsheets were published and broadly distributed during the flow event.</p>

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	environmental outcomes in the northern Murray-Darling Basin.	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 Commonwealth Environmental Water Office (CEWO).
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 CEWO and NSW have coordinated joint environmental releases to achieve whole-of-North connected flows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the Northern Connectivity Event in 2018 (<a href="http://www.environment.gov.au/water/cewo/northern-rivers">http://www.environment.gov.au/water/cewo/northern-rivers</a>);</li> <li>• the Northern Fish Flow in 2019 (<a href="http://www.environment.gov.au/water/cewo/catchment/northern-fish-flow-2019">http://www.environment.gov.au/water/cewo/catchment/northern-fish-flow-2019</a>); and</li> <li>• the Northern Waterhole Top-Up in 2020/2021 (<a href="https://www.environment.gov.au/water/cewo/catchment/northern-waterhole-top-up">https://www.environment.gov.au/water/cewo/catchment/northern-waterhole-top-up</a>).</li> </ul> <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 whilst addressing third party impacts.</p>	<p>NSW submitted to the Commonwealth feasibility proposals to address constraints in the Gwydir catchment.</p> <p>The Commonwealth Minister has determined that Commonwealth funding will be made available to develop business cases for the following proposed projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gwydir – Gingham Watercourse</li> <li>• Gwydir – Lower Gwydir Watercourse</li> <li>• Gwydir – Lower Mehi River.</li> </ul> <p>Activities to develop the project will include community consultation. Business cases are expected to be submitted to the Commonwealth in November 2021 for Commonwealth assessment. Decisions on implementation of these projects will be determined by the Commonwealth Minister following submission of the business cases.</p>
Environmental works & measures	<p>This measure includes environmental works to promote fish movement and habitat, improve the effectiveness of environmental water delivery to key ecological assets and broader ecological outcomes in the northern Basin.</p> <p>On-ground works will include construction of fishways and regulators and installation of diversion screens to protect juvenile native fish.</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.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Minister has determined that Commonwealth funding will be made available to implement the following proposed projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NSW Fish for the Future: Reconnecting the Northern Basin</li> <li>• Macquarie Marshes enhanced watering project</li> <li>• NSW Fish for the Future: Fish-friendly Water Extraction project</li> <li>• Queensland Fish Friendly Water Extraction: Condamine-Balonne and Border Rivers project.</li> </ul> <p>The Commonwealth Minister has determined that Commonwealth funding will be made available to develop business cases for the following proposed projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Queensland Enhance the Flexibility and Capability for Distributing and Managing Low Flows Through the Lower Balonne River System Bifurcation Weirs project</li> <li>• Queensland Reconnecting Catchments: Condamine-Balonne project</li> <li>• Queensland Improving Within-Catchment Fish Resilience.</li> </ul> <p>Activities to develop the project are expected to include community consultation. Business cases are expected to be submitted to the Commonwealth in November 2021 for Commonwealth assessment. Decisions on implementation of these projects will be determined by the Commonwealth Minister.</p>