

Summary of northern Basin Toolkit measures status (November 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), will recover water for the environment by modernising off-farm water delivery infrastructure.</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 <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 have commenced work with NSW to develop an accounting method supported by protocols and procedures for cross-border held environmental water. Interim arrangements will be in place by the end of December 2020 with the new accounting method expected to be in place and operating by 30 June 2021.</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>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 the end of 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 are on track to commence 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</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>).</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 is being finalised and published. A series of update factsheets were published and broadly distributed during the flow event.</p>

	management of water for the environment, to benefit 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>) and</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>).</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	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>NSW has submitted to the Commonwealth a feasibility proposal to address constraints in the Gwydir catchment.</p> <p>The proposal will be subject to Commonwealth 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>NSW and Queensland have submitted feasibility proposals to the Commonwealth for assessment. Proposals are being assessed on value for money and according to the ability to deliver maximum environmental outcomes in the northern Basin. The Commonwealth has engaged independent experts to assess the ecological merits of proposals against the Northern Basin Toolkit Prioritisation Framework.</p> <p>The Commonwealth Minister will determine which priority projects will proceed to business case development. Business cases are expected to include community consultation.</p> <p>Business cases were expected to be submitted by end 2020, however, this has been delayed. Following business case assessment, implementation of priority projects will be determined by the Commonwealth Minister.</p>