

# Water for the environment

Who decides where water for the environment is used?



The water in our rivers and dams is shared among many different users. Some water is set aside for towns, some for farms. And a share of the water in our rivers is managed for the health of the river itself.

Communities, government and industry groups all have a role in managing river health. These groups work together to achieve the best possible outcomes for native plants, fish, birds, animals and people alike.

## What is the role of the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment

In NSW, the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE) manages water set aside for the environment through water sharing rules and water licences. DPIE also delivers water held by the Commonwealth Environmental Water Office for environmental management.

DPIE has been working with local communities over many years to deliver water in five regulated river catchments - the Gwydir, Macquarie, Lachlan, Murrumbidgee and Murray-Lower Darling.



## Does the community have a say?

Yes. In each of these catchments, an Environmental Water Advisory Group (or EWAG) has been established to inform the decision-making process.

Stakeholders include:

- community representatives
- recreational fishers
- irrigation and farming groups
- Aboriginal organisations
- floodplain graziers
- environment representatives
- scientists, and
- partner agencies

These groups help decide which sites to target for watering as well as the best timing to maximise outcomes for rivers and wetlands and the plants and animals that depend on them. They also help to develop strategies for various weather scenarios and provide advice on how to minimise disruption to farmers and communities.

## How does DPIE decide which sites to water?

DPIE uses the best available science, management experience and local knowledge to identify priority watering sites. Water managers aim to provide the right amount of water where and when it is needed in order to support the health and function of river and wetland habitats for the benefit of plants, animals and people.

DPIE prepares an Annual Environmental Water Plan for each valley. Advisory groups inform the development of these plans which include a list of river and wetland sites that may be targeted under a range of climate and other scenarios.

Depending on seasonal conditions, watering events and their objectives may change. Plans must be flexible to accommodate these variations.

## Who else is involved?

### **Commonwealth Environmental Water Office**

– CEWO holds the largest portfolio of water for the environment on behalf of the Australian Government. CEWO contributes to environmental watering at sites across the whole Murray-Darling Basin, seeking basin wide outcomes. It also has a monitoring role.

**Murray Darling Basin Authority** – The MDBA assists with environmental watering at a whole-of-basin scale and is responsible for the development of a long term strategy for environmental water across the basin.

**DPIE Water** – determines the volume of water available for allocation to towns, water users and the environment each year. DPIE Water determines the water sharing rules between users, and policies for water trading. DPIE Water also has a role in monitoring ecosystem health.

**WaterNSW** – is a business unit of the NSW Government responsible for the operation and maintenance of dams and weirs to enhance water supply and security.

Cover photo: River discussions, B.Driver/DPIE.

Above left to right: Fishing on the Gulpa Creek, D.Finnegan/DPIE; Advisory group, P.Morton; Scientist in the field, D.Herasimtschuk.

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