

Water resource plans – quarterly report

December 2019

Published by the Murray–Darling Basin Authority
MDBA publication no: 48/19
ISBN (online): 978-1-925762-53-2



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Acknowledgement of the Traditional Owners of the Murray–Darling Basin

The Murray–Darling Basin Authority pays respect to the Traditional Owners and their Nations of the Murray–Darling Basin. We acknowledge their deep cultural, social, environmental, spiritual and economic connection to their lands and waters.

The guidance and support received from the Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations, the Northern Basin Aboriginal Nations and our many Traditional Owner friends and colleagues is very much valued and appreciated.

Water resource plan progress

Water resource plans are an integral part of implementing the Basin Plan as 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 (WRPs). The Murray–Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) continues to engage with Basin state governments with the aim of having all WRPs submitted to the MDBA in 2019. The MDBA is responsible for assessing WRPs and making a recommendation about WRP accreditation to the Commonwealth Minister responsible for water (the Minister). It is important to note that, when considering this quarterly progress report, it is not presumed that all submitted WRPs will necessarily be accredited. During the assessment phase the MDBA has found that some WRPs do not meet Basin Plan requirements. The MDBA is working closely with Basin states to negotiate a way forward, as per the steps in the Water Act, to enable these WRPs to be accredited. Ultimately though, the Minister will make the final decision on WRP accreditation after a recommendation provided by the Authority on whether to accredit.

To do this, the MDBA uses a WRP assessment framework that includes a range of policy and guidance material to support the preparation and accreditation of WRPs. The [WRP assessment framework](#) was published in October 2018 on our website. The MDBA has worked to ensure adequate resources are dedicated to the water planning and assessment task. The MDBA, in undertaking the assessment of submitted WRPs, is required to follow the processes set out in the *Water Act 2007*. Within the MDBA, procedures to ensure a robust process include the provision of training modules to all staff associated with WRPs. An external provider has been contracted to undertake a process review aimed at providing confidence that due diligence has been followed and that the assessment outcome is justified.

There are 33 WRP areas in total, 19 for surface water, 19 for groundwater and five that cover both. Basin states and the MDBA continue to work together to progress the development of WRPs and prepare them for submission, assessment and accreditation.

Eight WRPs have been accredited and are currently operational.

The development of WRPs by states and assessment of submitted plans by the MDBA is progressing. WRPs are on track to be assessed for accreditation recommendations for all Basin states in early 2020, with the exception of New South Wales (NSW).

NSW is required to submit all WRPs by the end of 2019 (consistent with Division 2.1A of the *Water Regulations 2008*¹). Successful accreditation depends upon NSW bringing forward WRPs that meet the relevant requirements of the Basin Plan. However, recent public commentary from NSW ministers suggesting that their WRP submission be delayed until after the drought has broken, heightens the risk of delay beyond 31 December 2019.

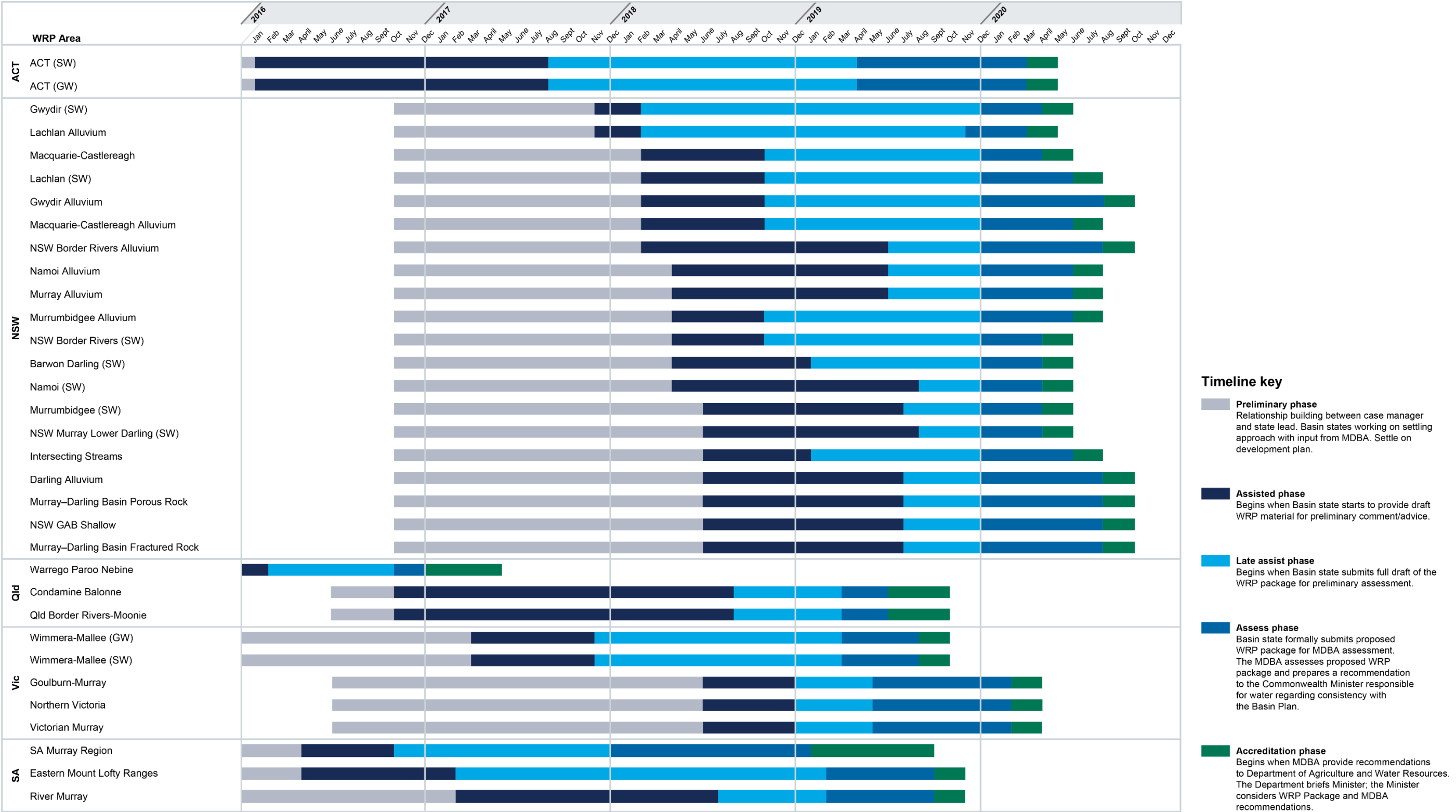
If NSW does not submit WRPs to the MDBA for assessment by 31 December 2019, consideration will be given to other pathways available for progressing the resolution of these WRPs. This would include the procedures to be followed before exercise of the step-in powers which are set out in s 73 of the Act. Under these arrangements, all efforts will be made to find a resolution through good faith negotiations with NSW. Only if Ministers were unable to reach a resolution would step-in (which sees the Commonwealth Minister ask the MDBA to prepare a WRP) be considered.

Consistent with a Murray–Darling Basin Ministerial Council decision in December 2018, all Basin state and territory governments entered into bilateral agreements with the Commonwealth to ensure key elements of the WRPs were given effect from 1 July 2019 where WRPs were not accredited by that date. These bilateral agreements have been published on the [MDBA website](#).

This quarterly report reflects state-by-state progress as at 30 November 2019.

¹ In late 2018 the *Water Amendment (Water Resource Plan Accreditation) Regulations 2018* commenced, effectively amending the *Water Regulations 2008* to establish the timelines within which Basin states were required to submit WRPs to the MDBA. These regulations require WRPs to be submitted no later than 28 February 2019, or, subject to Ministerial extension, by 31 December 2019. Basin states have taken the opportunity to apply for extensions under this regulation and extensions were granted to Queensland, the Australian Capital Territory and Victoria until 30 April 2019. New South Wales and South Australia also requested extensions for the submission of their WRPs until 31 December 2019. These requests were granted by the Commonwealth Minister responsible for water in July. Information on all extensions is available at the [Department of Agriculture website](#).

Water resource plan timeframes



SW = surface water GW = groundwater

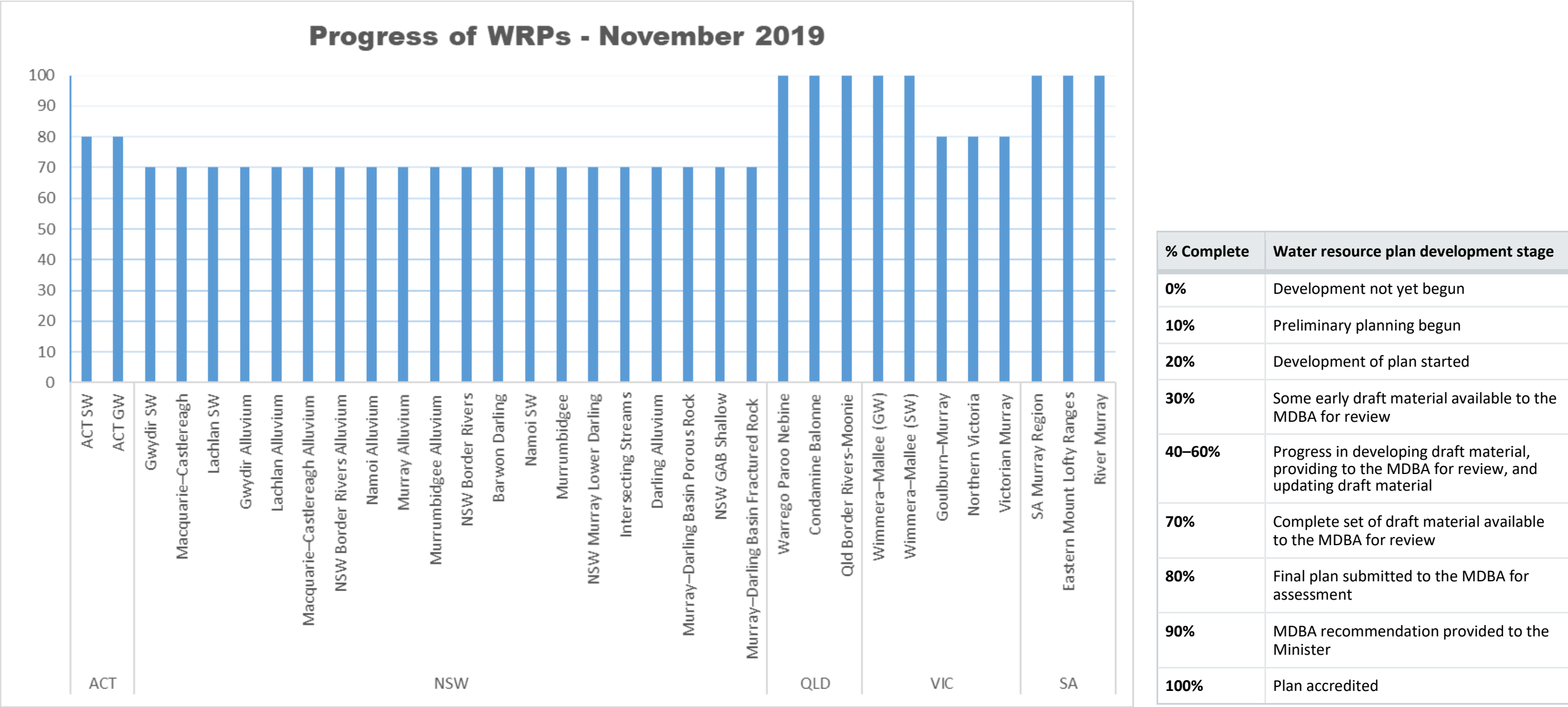
The WRP timeframes reflect current timeframes as at November 2019.

Note: Due to volume, assessment of NSW WRPs submitted on 20 December 2019 will be staggered

For more information about the water resource plan process and accreditation, visit mdba.gov.au/water-resource-plans

Progress of water resource plans from development to accreditation

The progress table indicates the current stage of development for each WRP as at November 2019.



State-by-state progress development report

This report is MDBA's assessment of WRP development as at 30 November 2019.

The tables used in this report show the MDBA's level of confidence that each WRP is progressing, based on the state's approach and the material provided. Ratings include:



>75% confidence: indicates the state is making good progress



50–75% confidence: indicates the state is making progress



25–50% confidence: indicates the state is making some early progress



<25% confidence: indicates that so far the state has made limited progress.

Australian Capital Territory

Development work continues

Two plans under development

The Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Government submitted the proposed ACT surface water (SW) and ACT groundwater (GW) water resource plans (the WRPs) on 30 April 2019. The MDBA advised the ACT that its assessment found that the WRPs needed further development. The ACT subsequently withdrew the WRPs on 27 September 2019. The ACT are now working on revised WRPs in preparation for resubmission.

Water resource plan	Percentage of confidence plan is progressing to schedule
ACT (SW)	80%
ACT (GW)	80%

New South Wales

Behind schedule

20 plans under development

New South Wales (NSW) is well behind initial WRP development timelines. In July 2019, the Commonwealth Minister granted NSW an extension for the submission of all NSW WRPs to the MDBA by 31 December 2019.

Based on advice received from NSW officials, the first pilot WRP (Lachlan Alluvium) was to be submitted in October 2019. NSW have not yet submitted their pilot WRP.

The updated timelines shown on page 3 represent NSW's most recent proposed submission dates. This would see all of NSW WRPs submitted at the end of 2019, establishing a very challenging timeframe for the Commonwealth to assess and accredit these WRPs, and have transparent water management arrangements in place before the end of this water year (30 June 2020).

Recent commentary from NSW ministers indicates that the State's WRPs may not be submitted until after the drought has broken. Should NSW not deliver WRPs, the mechanisms under the Act which provide for Ministerial step in would be considered. As is contemplated by s 73 of the Act there are certain procedures to be followed before the Minister exercises a step-in power. These procedures may be useful in resolving a delay but, if negotiations were to fail, the Minister may request the Authority to prepare WRPs.

The MDBA remains committed to working cooperatively with NSW in the development of its WRPs and to assist in the resolution of issues, such as regulation of floodplain harvesting, the protection of environmental water in the northern NSW catchments, and completion of appropriate Traditional Owner consultation.

The NSW and ACT governments have also committed to working together to establish trade arrangements in the upper Murrumbidgee catchment.

The bilateral agreement signed by the MDBA and NSW brought key Basin Plan commitments into effect on 1 July 2019 – including sustainable diversion limit accounting processes. The agreement promotes transparency, giving the MDBA and the community confidence in the consistent application of key Basin Plan elements across all NSW catchments regardless of when WRPs will be accredited.

NSW public exhibition is complete for all 20 draft WRPs, establishing significant transparency on what NSW are proposing to submit for accreditation. The rating of green (70%) in the table below is based on the WRP material that has been developed and exposed for public consultation. It does not capture the risk of NSW potentially not submitting their completed WRPs to the MDBA for assessment by 31 December 2019.

Water resource plan	Percentage of confidence plan is progressing to schedule*
Gwydir (SW)	70%
Macquarie–Castlereagh (SW)	70%
Lachlan (SW)	70%
Gwydir Alluvium	70%
Lachlan Alluvium	70%
Macquarie–Castlereagh Alluvium	70%
NSW Border Rivers Alluvium	70%
Namoi Alluvium	70%
Murray Alluvium	70%
Murrumbidgee Alluvium	70%
NSW Border Rivers (SW)	70%
Barwon–Darling	70%
Namoi (SW)	70%
Murrumbidgee (SW)	70%
NSW Murray Lower Darling	70%
Intersecting Streams	70%
Darling Alluvium	70%
Murray–Darling Basin Porous Rock	70%
NSW GAB Shallow	70%
Murray–Darling Basin Fractured Rock	70%

SW = surface water

* NSW confidence ratings are based on timeframes subject to NSW submitting all WRPs by 31 December 2019.

Queensland

Completed on schedule

All three plans accredited

Queensland's Warrego–Paroo–Nebine WRP is fully accredited.

Queensland's Condamine–Balonne and Border Rivers–Moonie WRPs, were provided to the Minister for an accreditation decision on 17 June 2019. The Minister accredited these two WRPs on 18 September 2019.

Water resource plan	Completion
Warrego–Paroo–Nebine	100%
Condamine–Balonne	100%
Qld Border Rivers–Moonie	100%

Victoria

Progressing to schedule

Two WRP are now accredited

Three plans submitted for assessment

The Wimmera–Mallee Water Resource Plan (covering the Wimmera-Mallee (surface water) and the Wimmera-Mallee (groundwater) water resource plan area) was accredited by the Minister on 19 September 2019.

Victoria's North and Murray Water Resource Plan package (covering the Goulburn-Murray, Northern Victoria and Victorian Murray water resource plan areas) was submitted to the MDBA on 30 April 2019. The MDBA advised Victoria that its assessment found that the WRPs needed further development. Subsequently Victoria withdrew and then resubmitted Victoria's North and Murray Water Resource Plan package on 26 November 2019.

Water resource plan	Percentage of confidence plan is progressing to schedule
Wimmera–Mallee (GW)	100%
Wimmera–Mallee (SW)	100%
Goulburn–Murray	80%
Northern Victoria	80%
Victorian Murray	80%

SW = surface water, GW = groundwater

South Australia

Completed on schedule

All three plans accredited


The South Australian Murray Region WRP was accredited by the Minister on 20 August 2019.


The Eastern Mount Lofty Ranges WRP and the South Australian River Murray WRP were accredited by the Minister on 13 November 2019.


Water resource plan	Completion
South Australian Murray Region	100%
Eastern Mount Lofty Ranges	100%
South Australian River Murray	100%

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