

# Water resource plan - quarterly report

June 2019

Published by the Murray–Darling Basin Authority  
MDBA publication no: 11/19  
ISBN (online): 978-1-925762-26-6



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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. The Murray–Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) is working cooperatively and effectively with Basin state governments to have all water resource plans (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. It is important to note that when considering this quarterly progress report it is not presumed that all WRPs that are submitted will necessarily be accredited. Ultimately the minister will make the final decision on WRP accreditation after a recommendation provided by the Authority on whether to accredit or not.

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 over 2018 and for 2019. 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 including five which 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. One WRP has been accredited and is currently operational. One plan has been provided to the Commonwealth Minister responsible for Water for accreditation decision and there are 11 plans with the MDBA for assessment and recommendation decision.

WRP development and assessment is progressing well and is on track for WRPs to be assessed in 2019, with the exception of New South Wales. NSW is proposing to submit all WRPs by the end of 2019, with assessment completed for all WRPs by early-mid 2020.

In early 2019 a regulation was made under the *Water Act 2007 - Water Amendment (Water Resource Plan Accreditation) Regulations 2018*, which established a deadline for WRPs to be submitted to the MDBA by 28 February 2019 and provided for the Commonwealth Minister responsible for water to consider extensions for the submission of WRPs up to 31 December 2019. Basin States have taken the opportunity to apply for extensions using this regulation and extensions were granted to Queensland, South Australia, the Australian Capital Territory and Victoria until 30 April 2019. New South Wales has an extension request that is pending a decision by the Commonwealth water minister for the submission of its WRPs. South Australia has also requested an extension that is pending a decision by the Commonwealth water minister in case the South Australian River Murray

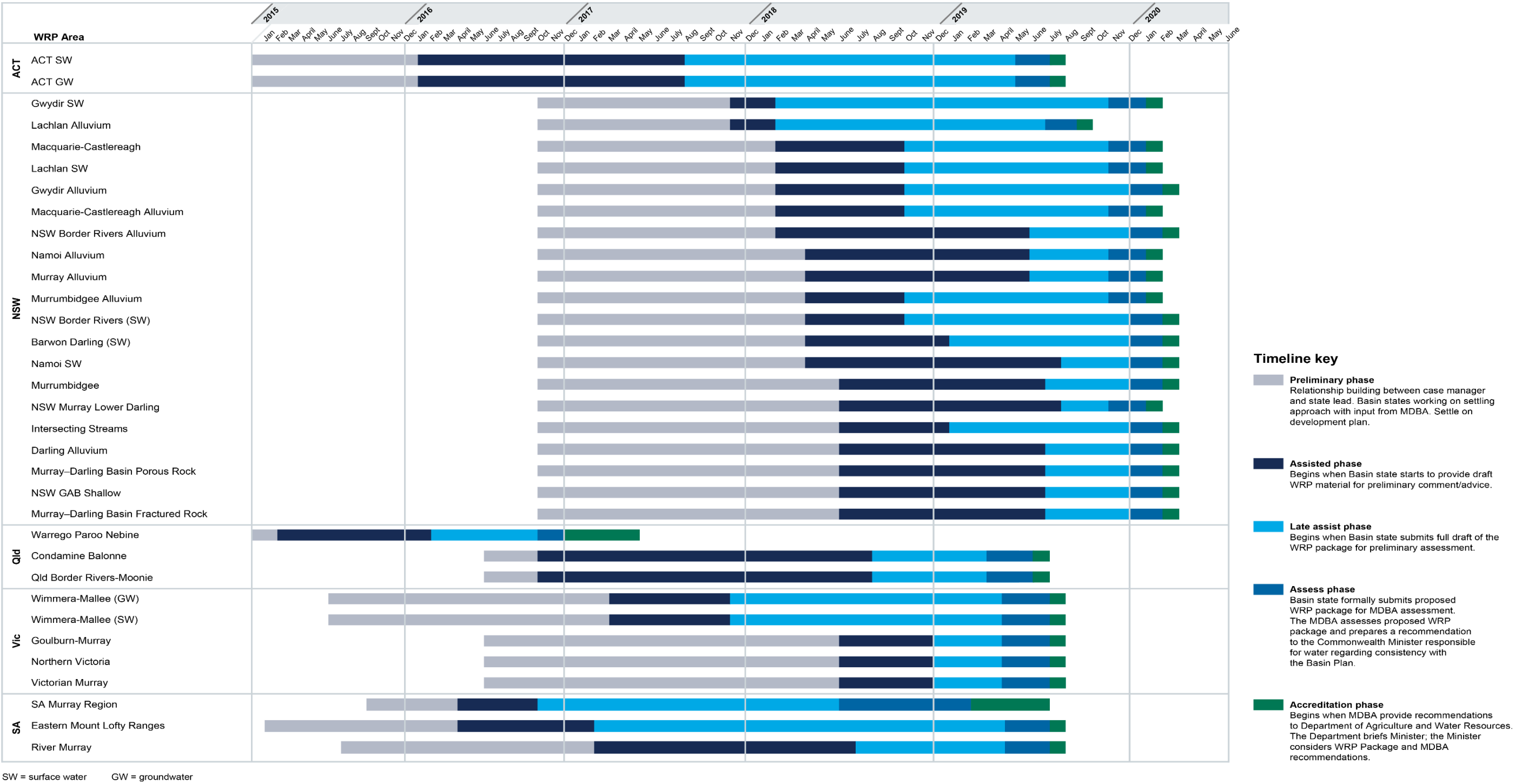
and Eastern Mount Lofty Ranges WRPs need to be resubmitted. Information on all extensions is available at the [Department of Agriculture website](#).

Consistent with a Murray–Darling Basin Ministerial Council decision in December 2018, Basin states and territory governments have agreed to enter into agreements with the Commonwealth to ensure key elements of the WRPs are given effect from 1 July 2019 where WRPs are not accredited by that date. A bilateral agreement was signed between NSW and the MDBA in February and draft agreements are currently being prepared with all other Basin state and territory governments.

The agreements will ensure that sustainable diversion limits and measures to protect and better manage environmental water are in place from 1 July 2019. This is necessary because while all WRPs, except NSW, have been submitted they may not be accredited by this date. In addition, the Authority has also published a [public statement](#), alerting Basin state and territory governments to the Authority’s requirement to have these and other key policy issues resolved, before the MDBA will recommend WRPs to the Minister for accreditation. Water Resource Plans are a starting point for establishing new rules on how much water can be taken from the system, ensuring the sustainable diversion limit is not exceeded over time. Once WRPs are accredited, it is expected that they will continue to evolve and improve over time.

This quarterly report reflects state-by-state progress as at 31 May 2019.

# Water resource plan timeframes



Note 1: The WRP timeframes reflect current timeframes as at May 2019.

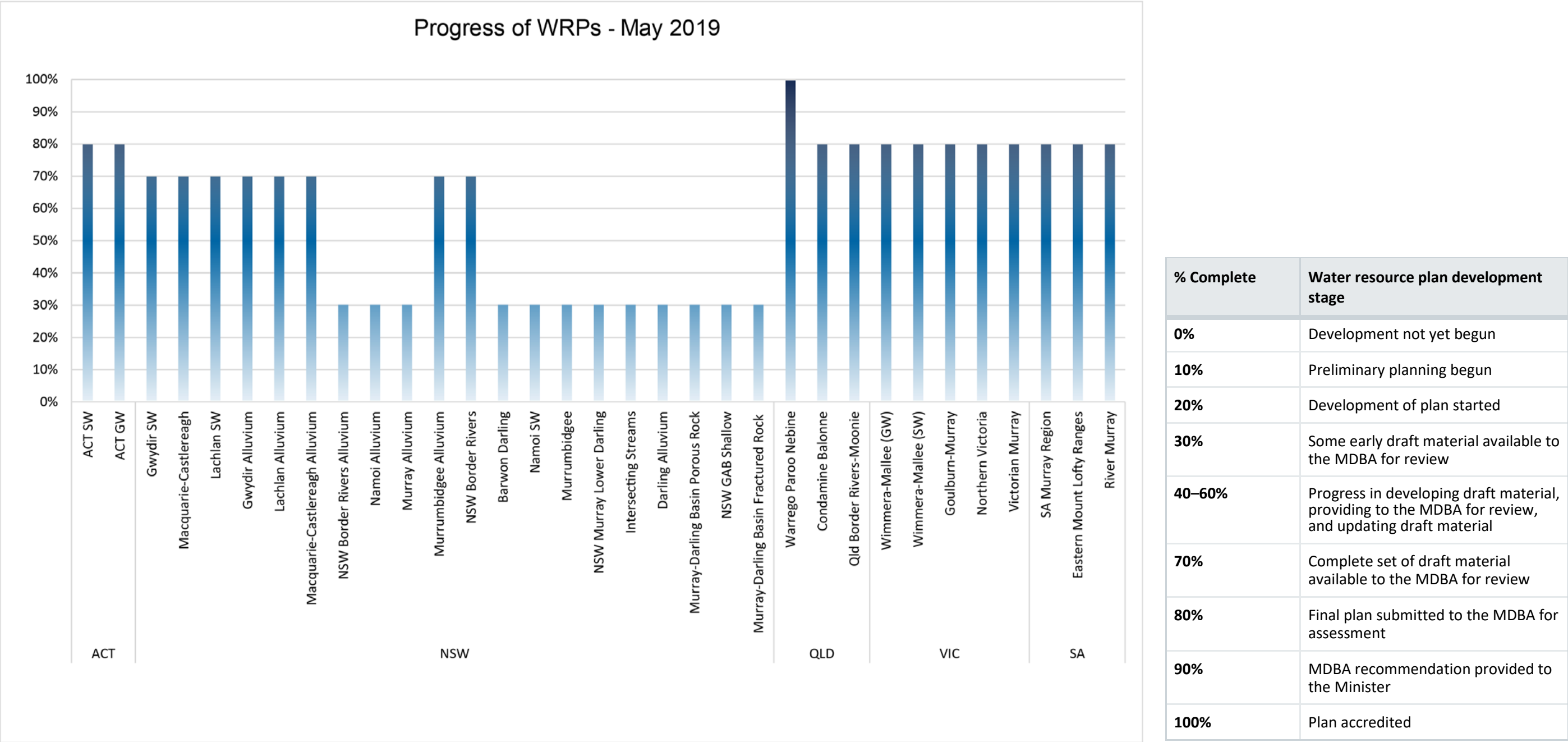
Note 2: NSW timeframes are subject to the WRP submission extension request of NSW to the Commonwealth minister, and MDBA and NSW finalising a WRP submission plan that will enable all NSW WRPs to be submitted by 31 December 2019.

Note 3: South Australian timeframes are subject to the WRP submission extension request of South Australia to the Commonwealth minister that will enable the South Australian River Murray and Eastern Mount Lofty Ranges WRPs to be submitted by 31 December 2019 should those plans need to be resubmitted.

For more information about the water resource plan process and accreditation, visit [mdba.gov.au/water-resource-plans](https://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 May 2019.



# State-by-state progress development report

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

The tables used in this report show the MDBA's level of confidence that each WRP is progressing to schedule, 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

## Progressing to schedule

### Two plans submitted for assessment

The Australian Capital Territory and the MDBA have worked closely to prepare the final documents for the ACT surface water and ACT groundwater WRPs. After seeking a further two month extension in February, the ACT submitted the proposed WRPs by the deadline of 30 April 2019. The MDBA is assessing the material provided.

Water resource plan	Percentage of confidence plan is progressing to schedule
ACT (SW)	90%
ACT (GW)	90%

SW = surface water, GW = groundwater



# New South Wales

## Behind schedule

### 20 plans under development

New South Wales (NSW) is behind WRP development timelines and there is a large volume of work that needs to be completed. NSW has written to the Commonwealth Minister for Water requesting an extension for the submission of all WRPs to the MDBA by 31 December 2019. The NSW request is currently under consideration by the Minister.

NSW need to resolve a number of complex policy implementation issues to enable the accreditation of NSW WRPs. These include commitments that will allow SDL accounting to take effect from 1 July 2019, having pre-requisite policy measures in place by 30 June 2019, and the protection of environmental water in the northern NSW catchments. NSW and ACT governments are also committed to working together to establish trade arrangements in the upper Murrumbidgee. As part of the development and implementation of NSW's Floodplain Harvesting Policy, an independent review was completed on the modelling and implementation of the policy. NSW released the [draft report of the independent review](#) in April 2019.

The MDBA acknowledges that NSW is investing substantial effort in the water planning task and has made solid progress since the last quarterly report. The MDBA also acknowledges the high level of cooperation with NSW and continued collaborative approach to progress WRPs including through regular workshops to resolve key issues rapidly. This is particularly the case regarding development of the Lachlan Alluvium WRP, where the WRP is well developed and NSW will be able to submit this to MDBA for formal assessment in coming months.

There are a number of independent reviews that have been, or are being undertaken in response to the December 2018–January 2019 fish deaths incidents. NSW has advised the MDBA that the additional work generated by the reviews are having some impacts on delivery timeframes, especially the bringing forward of the Barwon–Darling water sharing plan review by the Natural Resources Commission. These reviews as well as the NSW state elections and further work on Traditional Owner consultation has led to a slip in the expected timeframes for delivery of the WRPs.

To manage this slippage, on 28 February 2019 the MDBA and NSW signed a [bilateral agreement](#) to bring key Basin Plan commitments into effect from 1 July 2019. NSW is progressing with the requirements of the bilateral agreement and reporting on each agreed milestone. The agreement includes actions that give effect to the sustainable diversion limits from 1 July 2019. This agreement promotes transparency and gives 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 completed public exhibition of its pilot plans in November 2018 – Gwydir surface water and Lachlan Alluvium WRPs. The MDBA subsequently provided NSW feedback on the pilot WRPs and understands that NSW is updating the documents to ensure they are consistent with the Basin Plan requirements.

NSW public exhibition is complete for a further six draft WRPs: Macquarie–Castlereagh Alluvium (closed 14 December 2018), Gwydir Alluvium (closed 21 December 2018), Murrumbidgee Alluvium

(closed 4 January 2019), Macquarie–Castlereagh surface water (closed 1 February 2019), Lachlan surface water (closed 1 February 2019) and NSW Border Rivers (closed 1 February 2019). The Murrumbidgee Surface Water WRP is scheduled for public exhibition in early June. MDBA's initial review of these WRPs is almost complete, and will be completed when the remaining issues identified in the assessment of the Gwydir WRP and Lachlan Alluvium WRP that are common to all NSW surface water and groundwater WRPs have been resolved.

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	80%
Macquarie–Castlereagh Alluvium	70%
NSW Border Rivers Alluvium	30%
Namoi Alluvium	30%
Murray Alluvium	30%
Murrumbidgee Alluvium	70%
NSW Border Rivers (SW)	70%
Barwon–Darling	30%
Namoi (SW)	30%
Murrumbidgee (SW)	30%
NSW Murray Lower Darling	30%
Intersecting Streams	30%
Darling Alluvium	30%
Murray–Darling Basin Porous Rock	30%
NSW GAB Shallow	30%
Murray–Darling Basin Fractured Rock	30%

SW = surface water

\* NSW confidence ratings are based on timeframes subject to the WRP submission extension request of NSW to the Commonwealth minister, and MDBA and NSW finalising a WRP submission plan that will enable all NSW WRPs to be submitted by 31 December 2019.

# Queensland

## Progressing to schedule

**One plan accredited**

**Two plans submitted for assessment**

Queensland is currently the only state with a fully accredited WRP – the Warrego–Paroo–Nebine.

Queensland's remaining two WRPs, Condamine–Balonne and Queensland Border Rivers–Moonie, were formally submitted to the MDBA for assessment on 28 February 2019, with WRPs amended and re-submitted on 23 April 2019. This followed the Queensland Minister's approval of the statutory water plans on 22 February in conjunction with the Queensland Department's approved water management protocols and other statutory instruments. MDBA has completed its assessment and will provide them to the Minister for an accreditation decision. All Queensland WRPs are on track for accreditation 2019.

Water resource plan	Percentage of confidence plan is progressing to schedule
Warrego–Paroo–Nebine	100%
Condamine–Balonne	90%
Qld Border Rivers–Moonie	90%

# Victoria

## Progressing to schedule

### Five plans submitted for assessment

Victoria submitted the proposed Wimmera–Mallee surface water and groundwater WRPs to the MDBA for assessment on 29 June 2018. Advice from the Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations, supported by both the MDBA and Victoria, saw more detailed First Nations consultation undertaken for these plan areas. The additional consultation was completed in December 2018, and included in amended WRPs that were submitted on 22 February 2019.

The Goulburn–Murray WRP, Northern Victoria WRP and Victorian Murray WRP were submitted to the MDBA as a single package called ‘Victoria’s North and Murray WRP’ on 30 April 2019. The MDBA is currently assessing these plans and they look to be on track for accreditation in 2019.

Water resource plan	Percentage of confidence plan is progressing to schedule
Wimmera-Mallee (GW)	90%
Wimmera-Mallee (SW)	90%
Goulburn-Murray	90%
Northern Victoria	90%
Victorian Murray	90%

SW = surface water, GW = groundwater

# South Australia

## Progressing to schedule

### One plan with Minister for accreditation decision

### Two plans submitted for assessment

South Australia (SA) submitted the South Australian Murray Region WRP for assessment and accreditation on 8 January 2018. This WRP has been assessed by the MDBA and an accreditation recommendation was provided to the Commonwealth Minister responsible for water on 5 February 2019. The Commonwealth Minister will consider the proposed WRP and recommendation and make a decision on whether to accredit.


The Eastern Mount Lofty Ranges WRP was submitted to the MDBA for assessment on 26 February 2019, and the South Australian River Murray WRP was submitted to the MDBA for assessment on 28 February 2019. For contingency planning purposes, SA has sought a further extension for these WRPs until 31 December 2019 in case any element of the WRPs needs to be resubmitted to address any concerns raised during the MDBA's assessment process. The MDBA is currently undertaking its assessment of these WRPs.


Water resource plan	Percentage of confidence plan is progressing to schedule
South Australian Murray Region	100%
Eastern Mount Lofty Ranges	90%
River Murray	90%


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