

# Water resource plan – quarterly report

March 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 Murray–Darling Basin Authority is responsible for assessing WRPs and making a recommendation about WRP accreditation to the Commonwealth Minister responsible for water.

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. 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 (as at February 2019). Another plan is currently with the Commonwealth Minister for accreditation decision. There are six plans under formal assessment by MDBA and a further five plans are expected to be submitted for formal assessment by 30 April 2019.

WRP development and assessment is progressing well, however WRP delivery is behind schedule in NSW where 20 of the 33 WRPs are to be prepared. In December 2018 the Murray–Darling Basin Ministerial Council were updated on WRPs and contingencies, and agreed that the key WRP commitments will be in place from 1 July 2019. The Commonwealth now has contingency planning in place for late WRPs.

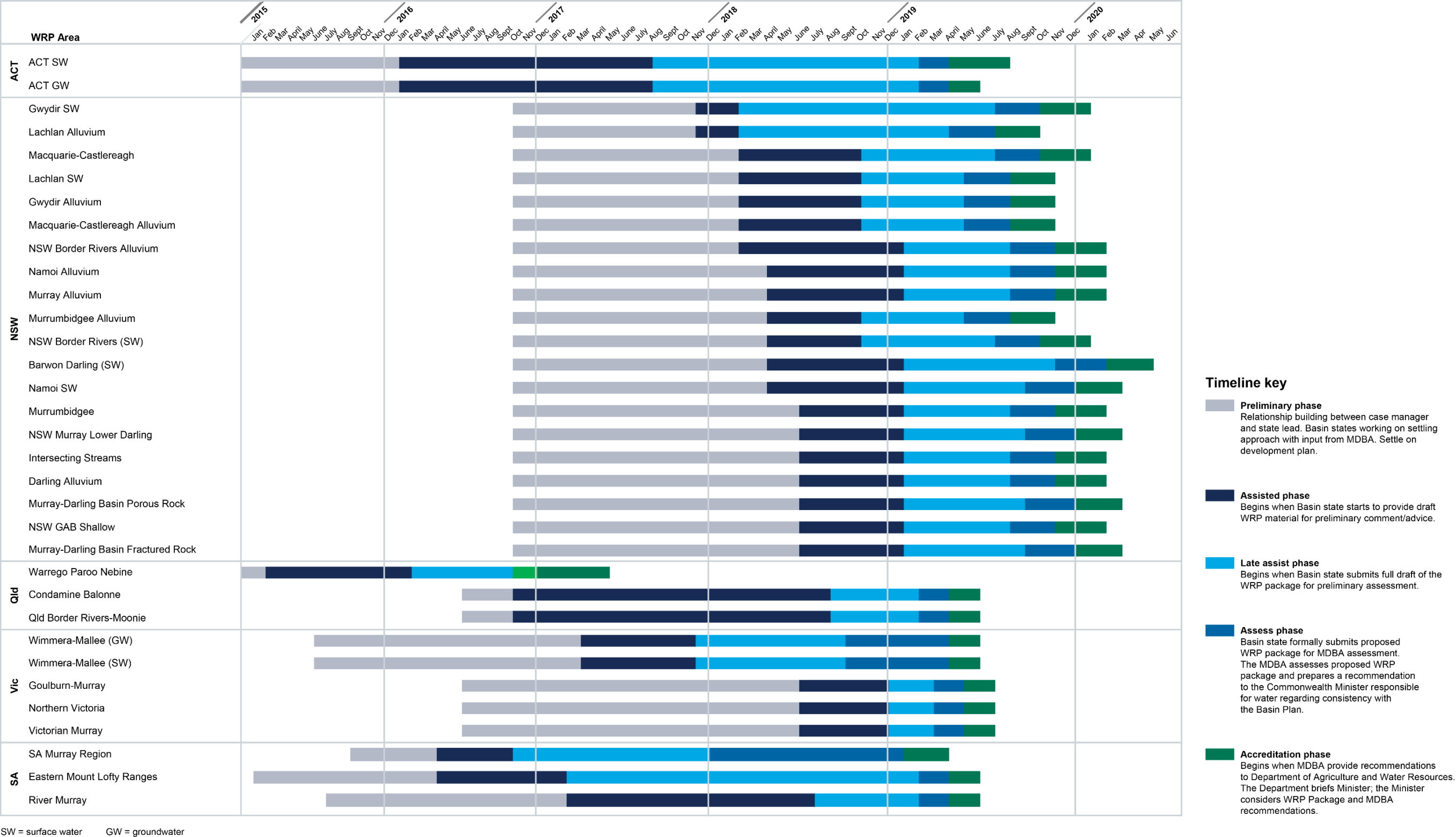
A regulation has been made under the *Water Act 2007 - Water Amendment (Water Resource Plan Accreditation) Regulations 2018* – which sets a deadline for WRP submission by 28 February 2019 and provides for the Commonwealth Minister responsible for water to consider extensions of up to two months or extensions up to ten months. Basin States have taken the opportunity to apply for extensions using this regulation for a number of WRPs. This information is available at <http://agriculture.gov.au/water/mdb/basin-plan>.

Consistent with 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. 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 some plans will not be submitted in time to 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 MDBA will recommend WRPs to the Minister for accreditation.

This quarterly report reflects state-by-state progress as at 28 February 2019.

# Water resource plan timeframes



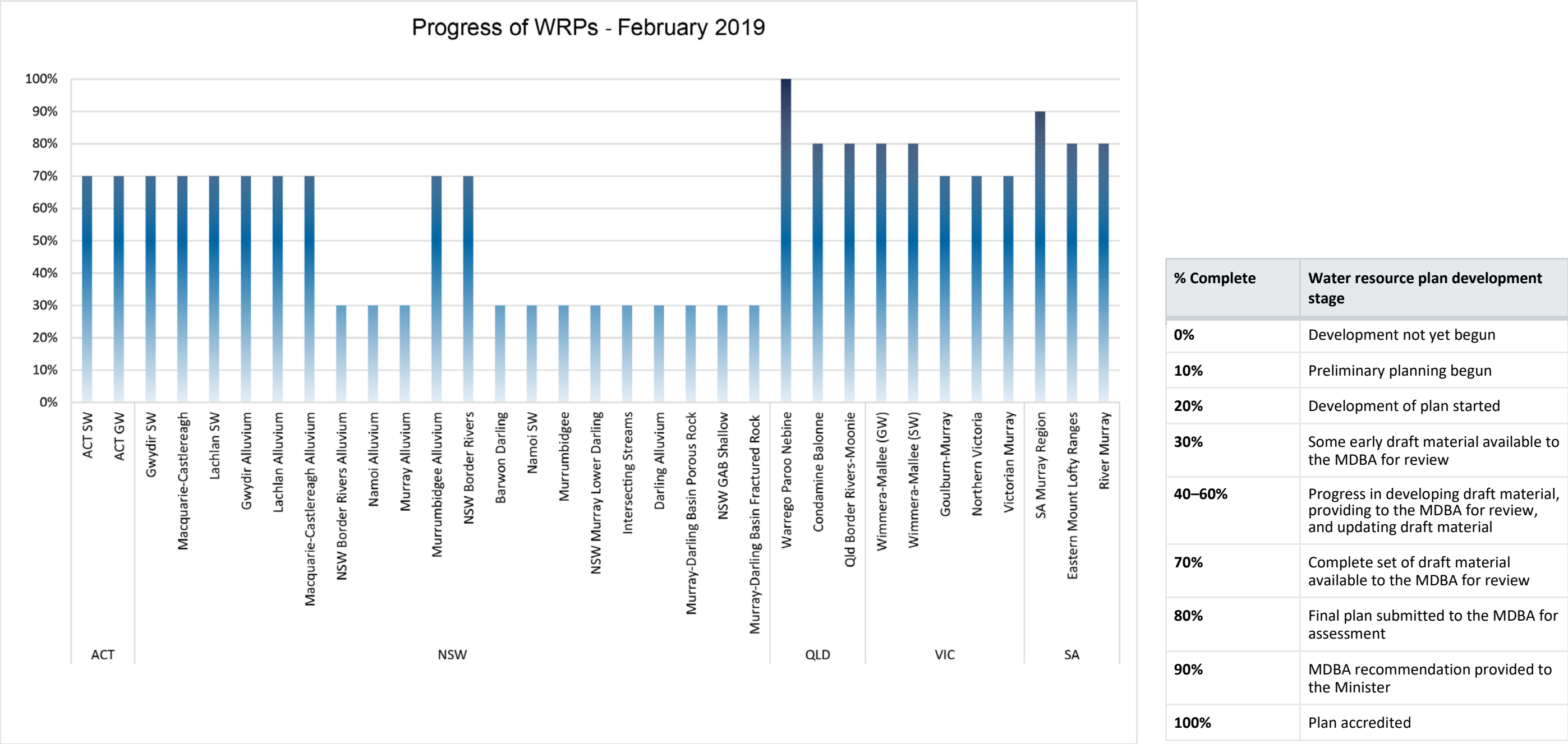
Note 1: The WRP timeframes reflect current timeframes as at February 2019. This is an updated approach compared to the MDBA quarterly report in May 2018, which showed project planning timeframes as proposed by Basin state governments in early 2017.

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 for assessment by 31 December 2019.

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



# State-by-state progress development report

This report is MDBA's assessment of WRP development as at February 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

### 2 plans under development

The Australian Capital Territory and the MDBA have worked closely and have now prepared final draft documents for the surface water and groundwater WRPs. Relevant amendments to Australian Capital Territory legislation are being finalised and incorporated. The WRPs are on track for accreditation in 2019. There have been delays in finalisation of the Australian Capital Territory Shared Reduction Amount and the surface water modelling package. While these issues are being progressed, the Australian Capital Territory considered contingency planning, and subsequently applied for a two-month extension in February 2019. This has been granted by the Minister, meaning final submission of the WRPs is due by 30 April 2019. The extension also provides additional time in the case a submitted WRP requires further work, in order to meet Basin Plan requirements.

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

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 still need to resolve a number of complex policy implementation issues to enable the accreditation of NSW WRPs. These include an independent review of floodplain harvesting volumes in NSW, 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.

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. 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.

Given the WRP submission extension request of NSW to the Commonwealth Minister responsible for water, on 28 February 2019 the MDBA and NSW signed a [bilateral agreement](#) to bring key Basin Plan commitments into effect 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. The agreement includes actions that give effect to the sustainable diversion limits from 1 July 2019.

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). MDBA's initial review of these WRPs is almost complete, and advice is expected to be returned to NSW in March 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	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

# Queensland

## Progressing to schedule

**1 plan accredited**

**2 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 for assessment on 28 February 2019. This followed the Queensland Minister's approval of the statutory water plans on 22 February in conjunction with the Queensland Department approved water management protocols and other statutory instruments.

Queensland WRPs appear to be on track for accreditation by mid-2019. However, in considering contingency planning, Queensland applied for a two-month extension in February 2019. This has been granted by the Minister, meaning final submission of the WRPs can be as late as 30 April 2019. The additional time may be used by Queensland in the event a submitted WRP requires further work in order to meet Basin Plan requirements.

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

**2 plans submitted for assessment**

**3 plans under development**

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 the amended WRPs that were submitted on 22 February 2019. The Wimmera–Mallee WRPs appear to be on track for accreditation by mid-2019.

The remaining Victorian WRPs will be submitted as a single package called ‘Victoria’s North and Murray WRP’. As part of the states and MDBA WRP assist phase work, a full draft of this package was provided to the MDBA on 20 December 2018. Victoria closed public consultation on the draft WRP package on 18 March 2019. A detailed work plan for development of the Victoria’s North and Murray WRP package has been provided to the MDBA. In considering contingency planning, Victoria applied for a two-month extension in February 2019. This has been granted by the Minister, meaning final submission of Victoria’s North and Murray WRP is due by 30 April 2019.

Water resource plan	Percentage of confidence plan is progressing to schedule
Wimmera-Mallee (GW)	90%
Wimmera-Mallee (SW)	90%
Goulburn-Murray	70%
Northern Victoria	70%
Victorian Murray	70%

SW = surface water, GW = groundwater

# South Australia

## Progressing to schedule

### 1 plan with Minister for accreditation decision

### 2 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.

As part of the state and MDBA WRP assist phase work, SA provided the MDBA with a first draft of the River Murray WRP for review in July 2018. SA completed public consultation on its state Water Allocation Plan for the River Murray in September 2018, which forms an important part of the South Australian River Murray WRP. They also provided a final draft of the Eastern Mount Lofty Ranges WRP to MDBA in October 2018.


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. The South Australian WRPs are on track for accreditation by mid-2019, however, in considering contingency planning, SA has sought a two-month extension for 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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**Office locations**

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