

# Water resource plans – December 2020 quarterly report

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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 have developed water resource plans (WRPs). The Murray–Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) is responsible for assessing these WRPs and making a recommendation about their accreditation to the Commonwealth Minister responsible for water (the Minister). The MDBA applies a consistent framework to assess each WRP against Basin Plan requirements. The MDBA has found that some WRPs initially do not meet Basin Plan requirements. In these circumstances we have worked closely with the relevant Basin states to negotiate a way forward, as per the steps in the *Water Act 2007* (the Act), to enable these WRPs to be accredited. Ultimately though, the Minister will make the final decision on WRP accreditation after receiving a recommendation provided by the Authority on whether or not to accredit.

The MDBA has ensured adequate resources are dedicated to the water planning and assessment task. 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 the MDBA website. The MDBA, in undertaking the assessment of submitted WRPs, is required to follow the processes set out in the Act. Within the MDBA, procedures to ensure a robust process include the provision of training modules to all staff associated with WRP assessment. In addition, 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.

The MDBA is also responsible for monitoring and enforcing compliance with WRPs. The MDBA commenced its WRP Compliance Program on 1 July 2020.

The MDBA takes a risk-based approach to ensuring compliance with WRPs using the full range of compliance tools including audits and assurance, reporting and enforcement activity. The initial focus areas for WRP compliance in 2020–21 include:

- sustainable diversion limits and water accounting
- delivery, protection and monitoring of water for the environment
- licence conditions on water access rights.

There are 33 WRP areas in total, 19 for surface water, 19 for groundwater, including five that cover both. Thirteen WRPs have been accredited and are currently operational, including all Queensland, Victorian, ACT and South Australian WRPs.

On 9 April 2020, New South Wales submitted its 11 proposed groundwater WRPs to the MDBA for assessment. The remaining nine proposed surface water WRPs were submitted to MDBA by 30 June 2020.

There is no timeframe set for WRPs to be accredited, however, bilateral agreements were established to ensure key elements of the WRPs were given effect from 1 July 2019 for states where WRPs were not accredited. In the case of NSW, a new [bilateral agreement](#) has been agreed to cover

the 2020-21 water year, as accredited WRPs were not in place by 30 June 2020. Another factor that has affected the submission of NSW WRPs and is having an impact on assessment timeframes are the changes to working arrangements across government and other sectors as a result of COVID-19.

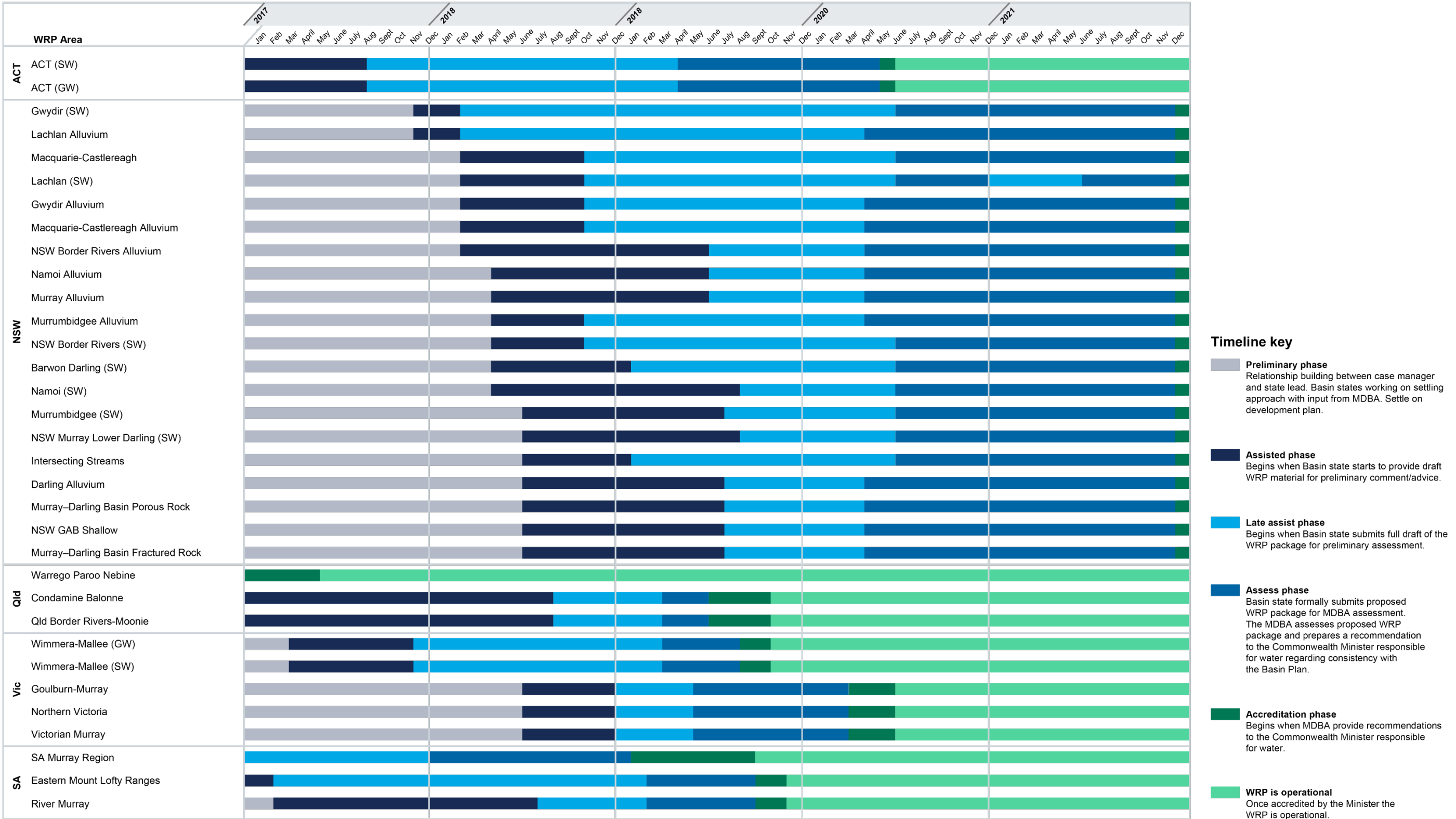
Water management is an evolving process and changes to accredited WRPs are anticipated as new information comes to hand. The MDBA is establishing processes for the assessment and re-accreditation of WRPs within the processes governed by the Act. This will involve a tailored assessment approach that is suited to the scale and complexity of an amendment when determining consistency with the Basin Plan requirements. [WRP amendment guidelines](#) have been developed to guide Basin States in the development of amendments. It is anticipated that Basin states will work closely with the MDBA prior to any amendment being submitted for assessment.

The MDBA is also working closely with the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment on the drafting of legislation for minor or non-substantive amendments to WRPs to enable a streamlined accreditation of such amendments.

This quarterly report reflects state-by-state progress as at 30 November 2020.

# Water resource plan timeframes

Water resource plan timeframes, as at November 2020

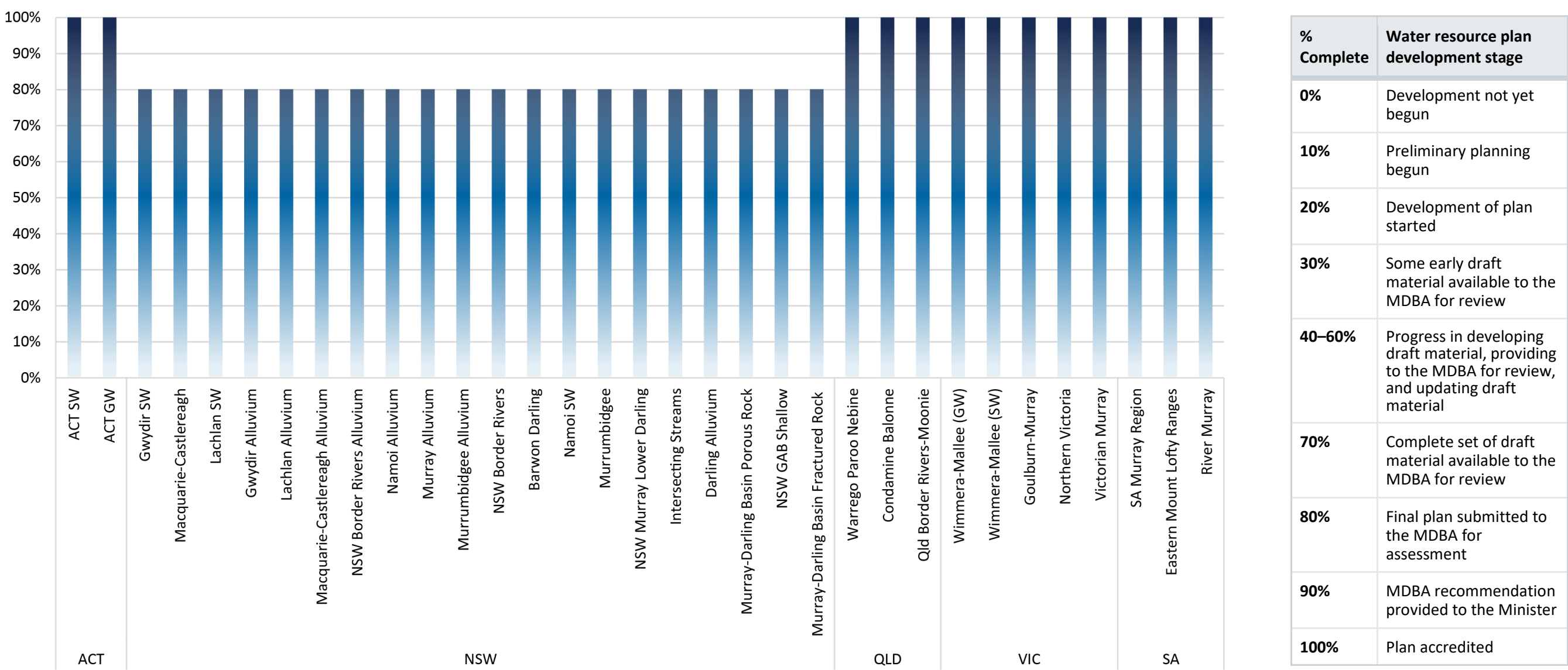


SW = surface water    GW = groundwater

# Progress of water resource plans from development to accreditation

The progress table indicates the current stage of development for each WRP as at November 2020.

Progress of WRPs – November 2020



# State-by-state progress development report

This report is MDBA's assessment of WRP development as at 30 November 2020.

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.

# New South Wales

## Behind schedule

### **Twenty plans with the MDBA for assessment**

New South Wales (NSW) is well behind initial WRP development timelines.

NSW submitted 11 proposed groundwater WRPs to the MDBA for formal assessment on 9 April 2020 and the remaining nine surface water WRPs were submitted to MDBA for assessment by 30 June 2020. This was a significant step forward in the accreditation process of NSW WRPs and reaffirmed NSW commitment to the Basin Plan.

The MDBA is currently working through the assessment of the 20 proposed WRPs using the same WRP assessment framework and level of effort applied for WRPs now in operation in all other states. This includes assessment of issues such as the protection of planned environmental water and accounting for forms of take and interception activities (such as floodplain harvesting).

The Authority has considered the proposed WRP for the Lachlan (surface water) WRP area and identified potential inconsistencies with Basin Plan requirements. In November 2020, the Authority notified NSW of the potential inconsistencies consistent with the processes set out in the Act. In response, NSW has withdrawn the proposed Lachlan WRP and advised it will amend the proposed WRP to make it consistent with the Basin Plan before resubmitting the WRP for accreditation. This process is not unique to NSW. All other Basin States have had inconsistencies identified with their initial WRP submissions and changes have been required before they could be accepted for accreditation.

Consistent with all assessments conducted to date, the MDBA is seeking the advice of Northern Basin Aboriginal Nations (NBAN) and Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations (MLDRIN) in relation to the 'Indigenous values and uses' component of each WRP. This advice is expected to take time as it requires engagement with First Nations across all 20 WRP areas and timeframes for consultation are affected by the COVID-19 pandemic border and movement restrictions. The health and safety of First Nations is a priority and risks associated with COVID-19 must be carefully managed. With the easing of many restrictions throughout the Basin, NBAN and MLDRIN have commenced workshops to complete First Nation assessment of WRPs. To date, workshops have been held for three WRP areas in NSW. The MDBA continues to work closely with NBAN and MLDRIN to ensure the assessment phase provides the necessary time and support to complete First Nation engagement on the 'Indigenous values and uses' components.

Notwithstanding the unavoidable delays associated with COVID-19, the work required to complete the assessment is an essential part of implementation of the Basin Plan. Therefore, the MDBA is giving high priority to this work and devoting additional resources to get the task completed as quickly and efficiently as is feasible.

Aside from the unavoidable COVID-19 related delays noted above, the assessment timelines are also a function of the quality of each WRP. As with other state WRPs, the proposed NSW WRPs are large complex documents. During the assessment phase the MDBA may find that some WRPs do not meet



Basin Plan requirements. In such cases, the MDBA will work closely with NSW through the requirements of s 63(4) of the Water Act 2007, which may result in NSW being required to withdraw and resubmit a WRP. This is not unexpected and the MDBA is committed to working cooperatively with NSW to complete the assessment task as quickly as possible.

Water resource plan	Percentage of confidence plan is progressing to revised schedule*
Gwydir (SW)	80%
Macquarie–Castlereagh (SW)	80%
Lachlan (SW)	80%
Gwydir Alluvium	80%
Lachlan Alluvium	80%
Macquarie–Castlereagh Alluvium	80%
NSW Border Rivers Alluvium	80%
Namoi Alluvium	80%
Murray Alluvium	80%
Murrumbidgee Alluvium	80%
NSW Border Rivers (SW)	80%
Barwon–Darling (SW)	80%
Namoi (SW)	80%
Murrumbidgee (SW)	80%
NSW Murray Lower Darling (SW)	80%
Intersecting Streams (SW)	80%
Darling Alluvium	80%
Murray–Darling Basin Porous Rock	80%
NSW GAB Shallow	80%
Murray–Darling Basin Fractured Rock	80%

SW = surface water

\* NSW confidence ratings are based on the revised submission schedule agreed between the Commonwealth and NSW that has seen all 20 proposed WRPs submitted for assessment by 30 June 2020.

# Australian Capital Territory

## Completed on schedule

### Two plans accredited

All ACT WRPs are now accredited and operational.

Water resource plan	Percentage of confidence plan is progressing to schedule
ACT (SW)	100%
ACT (GW)	100%

# Queensland

## Completed on schedule

### Three plans accredited

All Queensland WRPs are now accredited and operational.

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

# Victoria

## Completed on schedule

### Five plans are accredited

All Victorian WRPs are now accredited and operational.

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

GW = groundwater

## South Australia

### Completed on schedule

#### Three plans accredited


All South Australian WRPs are now accredited and operational.


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


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