

# Water resource plans – November 2021 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.

Aboriginal people should be aware that this publication may contain images, names or quotations of deceased persons.

# 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 sustainable diversion limits are not exceeded over time. They also protect water for the environment, cultural values and uses and water quality.

Basin state governments are responsible for developing water resource plans (WRPs). The Murray–Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) assists states in developing this material and is responsible for assessing WRPs and making an accreditation recommendation to the Commonwealth Minister responsible for water (the Minister). Ultimately the Minister will make the final decision on WRP accreditation.

The MDBA applies a consistent framework to assess each WRP against Basin Plan requirements and has ensured resources are dedicated to the water planning and assessment task. The MDBA is required to apply and follow the processes set out in the *Water Act 2007* (Cth) (the Act) in undertaking this task.

The MDBA uses a WRP assessment framework that includes a range of policy and guidance materials to support the preparation and accreditation of WRPs. The [WRP assessment framework](#) was published in October 2018 on the MDBA website. In addition, an external provider has been contracted to undertake a process review aimed at providing confidence that due diligence arrangements have been followed and that the assessment recommendation is justified.

Bilateral agreements were established to ensure key elements of WRPs were given effect from 1 July 2019 for states where WRPs were not accredited. In the case of NSW, a new [bilateral agreement](#) was agreed in July 2020, as accredited WRPs were not in place by 30 June 2020. In June 2021 NSW and MDBA agreed to amend the existing agreement to ensure new or improved information, methods or models can be applied, through agreement, in particular WRP areas.

## Adapting to future change

Water management will continue to evolve and change over time. The MDBA anticipates amendments to accredited WRPs as a result of new information coming to hand, reviews and changes to state legislation.

The MDBA has established processes to support the assessment and re-accreditation of WRPs consistent with the requirements of the Act. This involves a tailored assessment approach that is suited to the scale and complexity of the amendment. [WRP amendment guidelines](#) have been developed to guide Basin States in the development of amendments and are available on the MDBA website. Regulations are also in place to enable the streamlined accreditation of minor or non-substantive amendments to WRPs. A minor or non-substantive amendment is an amendment that

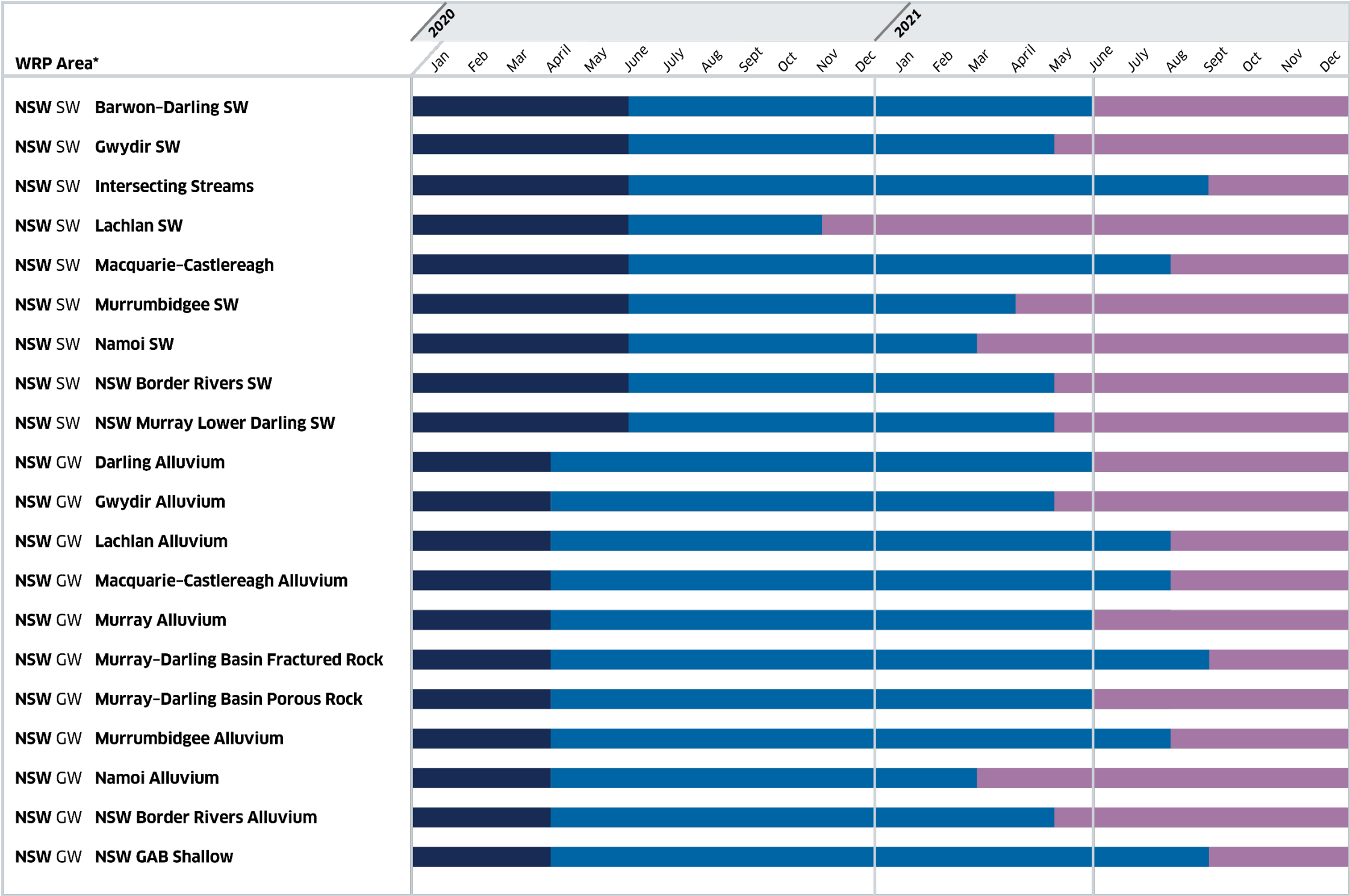
does not alter the substance of the WRP or affect rights or obligations and can include correcting errors of spelling, punctuation or grammar; or updating references to a law.

It is anticipated that Basin states will work closely with the MDBA prior to any amendment being submitted for assessment.

This quarterly report reflects state-by-state progress as at 30 November 2021.

# Water resource plan timeframes

Water resource plan timeframes, as at November 2021



SW = surface water    GW = groundwater

\* All other state WRPs are accredited and operational. For accreditation timelines see previous quarterly reports.

\*\* NSW resubmission timeframes are subject to agreement between ministers.

**Timeline key\*\***  
(Note, timeframes are not set)

- Assist phase**  
Begins when State submits full draft of the WRP package for preliminary assessment.
- Assess phase**  
Begins when State formally submits proposed WRP package for MDBA assessment.
- WRP withdrawn**  
WRP withdrawn pending resubmission. Date of resubmission pending.

## New South Wales progress update

### Behind schedule

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.

The MDBA worked through the assessment of NSW proposed WRPs using the same WRP assessment framework and level of effort applied for WRPs now in operation in all other states and territory. 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 assessment of all 20 NSW WRPs is now complete, including formal advice from the Northern Basin Aboriginal Nations (NBAN) and the Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations (MLDRIN) on the adequacy of the Aboriginal values and uses content of the proposed WRPs.

The assessment of these plans identified potential inconsistencies with Basin Plan requirements. As a result, the Authority has notified NSW consistent with the processes set out in the Act. In response, NSW has withdrawn all 20 WRPs (refer to Water Resource Plan timeframes chart above) and advised they will be amended to make them consistent with the Basin Plan before resubmitting them for assessment. This is not unexpected; 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.

The timing and process for resubmitting WRPs that have been withdrawn is provided for in the Act and is a matter that may be negotiated between Ministers.

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 possible.

## Operational and accredited water resource plans

There are 33 WRP areas in total, 14 for surface water, 14 for groundwater, as well as five that cover both. Thirteen WRPs have been accredited and are operational, including all Queensland, Victorian, ACT and South Australian WRPs. Accredited water resource plans can be viewed on the [MDBA's website](#).

Water resource plan area	Commencement date
<b>Australian Capital Territory</b>	
Australian Capital Territory (surface water)	June 2020
Australian Capital Territory (groundwater)	June 2020
<b>Queensland</b>	
Border Rivers–Moonie (groundwater/surface water)	September 2019
Condamine–Balonne (groundwater/surface water)	September 2019
Warrego–Paroo–Nebine (groundwater/surface water)	June 2017
<b>South Australia</b>	
Eastern Mount Lofty Ranges (groundwater/surface water)	November 2019
South Australian Murray Region (groundwater/surface water)	August 2019
South Australian River Murray (surface water)	November 2019
<b>Victoria</b>	
Goulburn–Murray (groundwater)	June 2020
Northern Victoria (surface water)	June 2020
Victorian Murray (surface water)	June 2020
Wimmera–Mallee (groundwater)	September 2019
Wimmera–Mallee (surface water)	September 2019

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**Office locations – First Nations Country**

**Adelaide** – *Kurna*

**Canberra** – *Ngunnawal*

**Goondiwindi** – *Bigambul*


**Griffith** – *Wiradjuri*

**Mildura** – *Latji Latji*

**Murray Bridge** – *Ngarrindjeri*

**Toowoomba** – *Jarowair and Wakka Wakka*

**Wodonga** – *Dhudhuroa*

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