

Water resource plan – 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 are developing water resource plans. The Murray–Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) is working with Basin state governments to have all water resource plans (WRPs) accredited in 2019.

There are 33 WRP areas in total, 19 for surface water, 19 for groundwater and five which cover both. One water resource plan has been accredited and is currently operational (as at August 2018).

There is considerable work ahead to ensure all WRPs are accredited 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 sound WRP assessment framework that includes a range of policy and guidance material to support the preparation and accreditation of WRPs. The MDBA is also working to ensure adequate resources are dedicated to the water planning and assessment task.

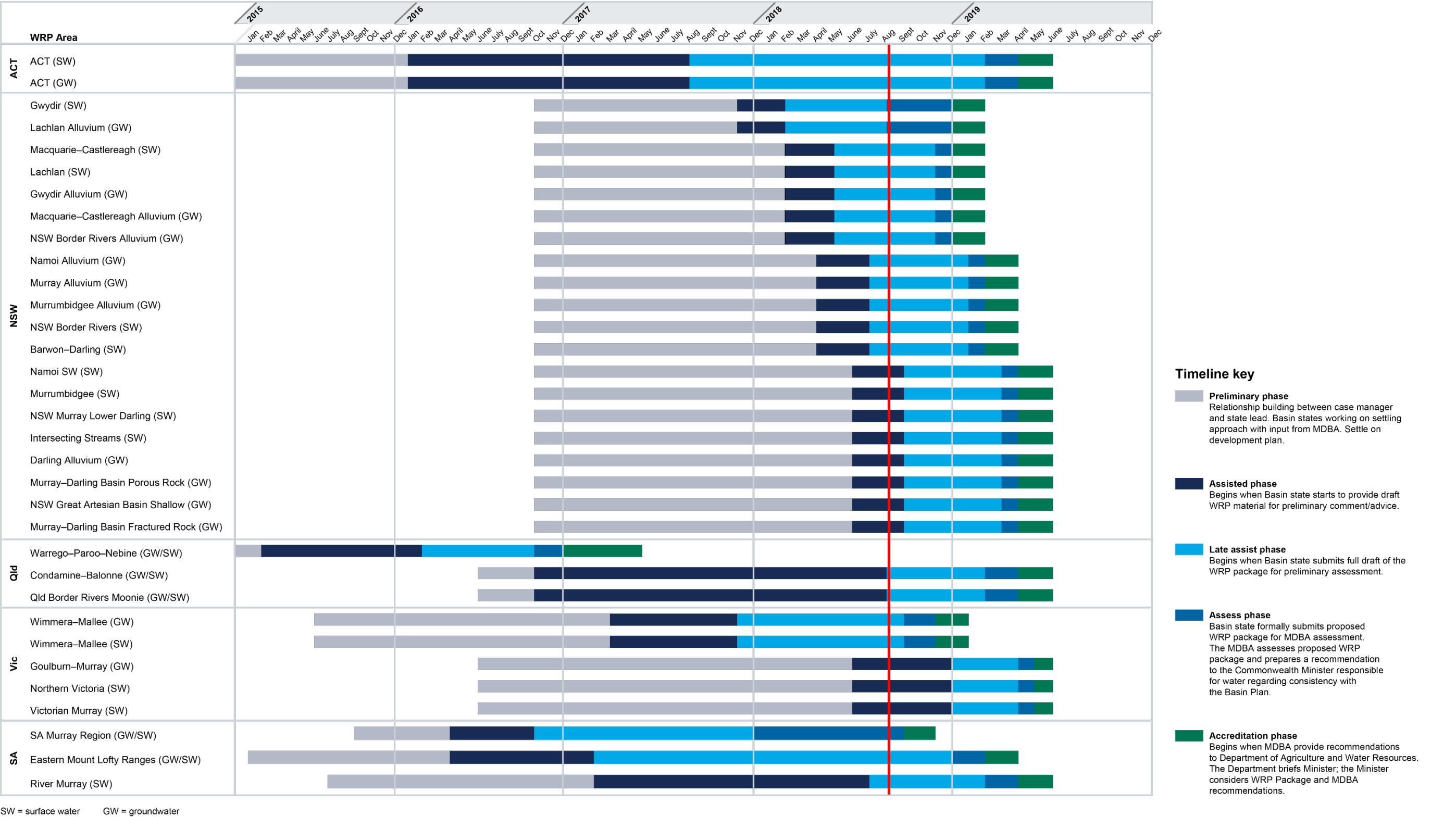
Within the MDBA, procedures to ensure a robust process include the provision of training modules to all staff associated with WRPs and a quality assurance process aimed at providing confidence that due process has been followed and that the assessment outcome is justified.

The MDBA acknowledges the need for timely feedback to states on their WRPs and works to deliver ongoing advice that aligns with the state's work programs to develop WRP material. When a state provides a complete WRP, a full assessment is completed in around 6 weeks. To date, the MDBA provided feedback to states in this timeframe for the submitted SA Murray Region plan (South Australia) and the Wimmera–Mallee groundwater and surface water plans (Victoria). Notwithstanding this, the resolution of difficult policy matters has, in many cases, been the primary cause of delay.

Overall, WRP delivery is behind schedule, with particular risk in NSW given the large number of WRPs in this state. Cooperative and effective working relationships between Basin states and the MDBA allow timelines to be managed and policy or technical matters to be resolved as soon as possible.

This Quarterly report reflects progress as at 31 August 2018.

Water resource plan timeframes



Note: The WRP timeframes reflect current timeframes as at August 2018. 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.

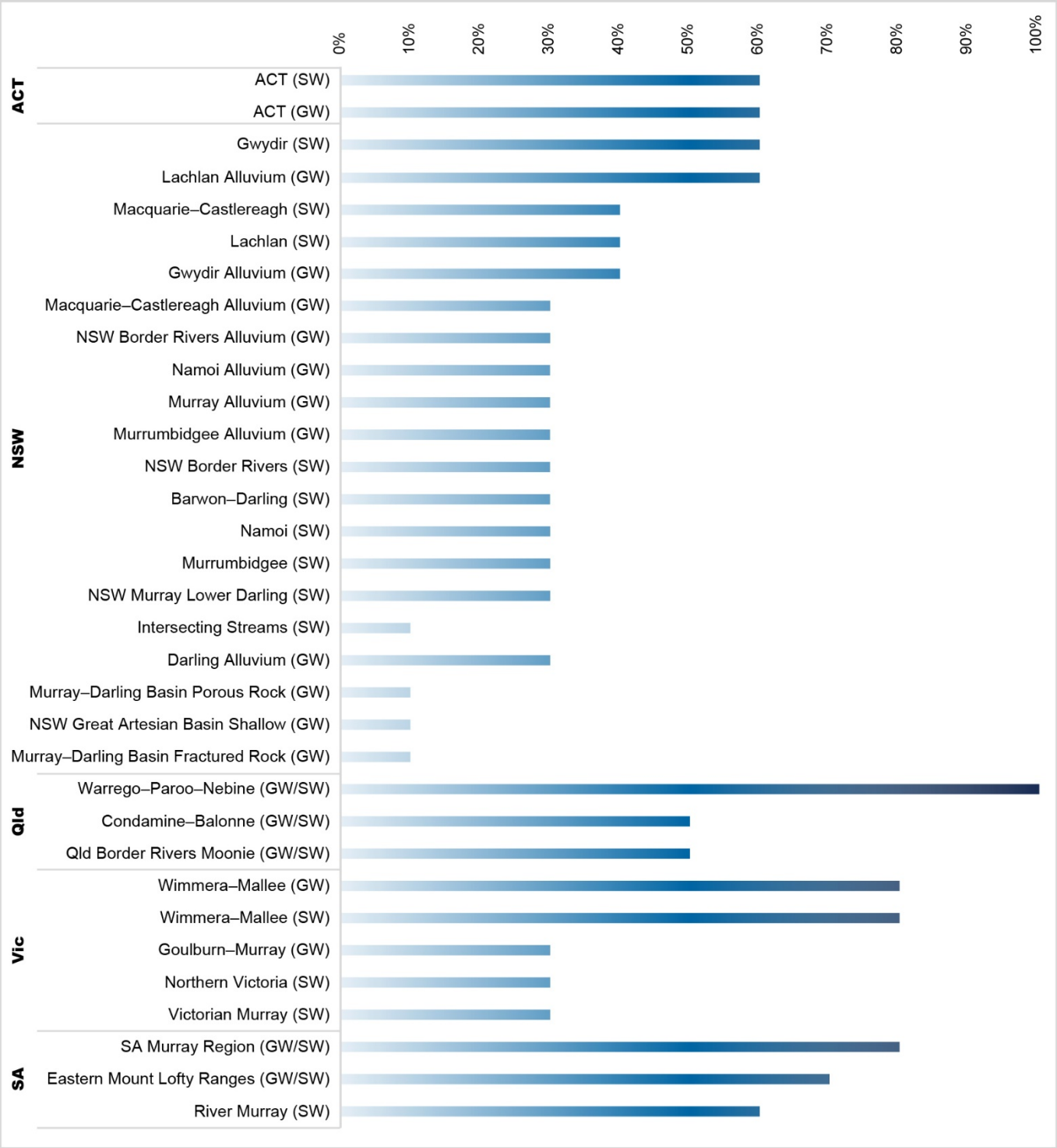
New South Wales is in discussions with the MDBA on managing risks to WRP delivery given some of the delays to date.

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 August 2018.

Progress of water resource plans - August 2018



SW = surface water GW = groundwater

% Complete	Water resource plan development stage
0%	Development not yet begun
10%	Preliminary planning begun
20%	Development of plan started
30%	Some early draft material available to the MDBA for review
40–60%	Progress in developing draft material, providing to the MDBA for review, and updating draft material
70%	Complete set of draft material available to the MDBA for review
80%	Final plan submitted to the MDBA for assessment
90%	MDBA recommendation provided to the Minister
100%	Plan accredited

State-by-state progress development report

This report is MDBA's assessment of WRP development as at August 2018.

The pie charts 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:

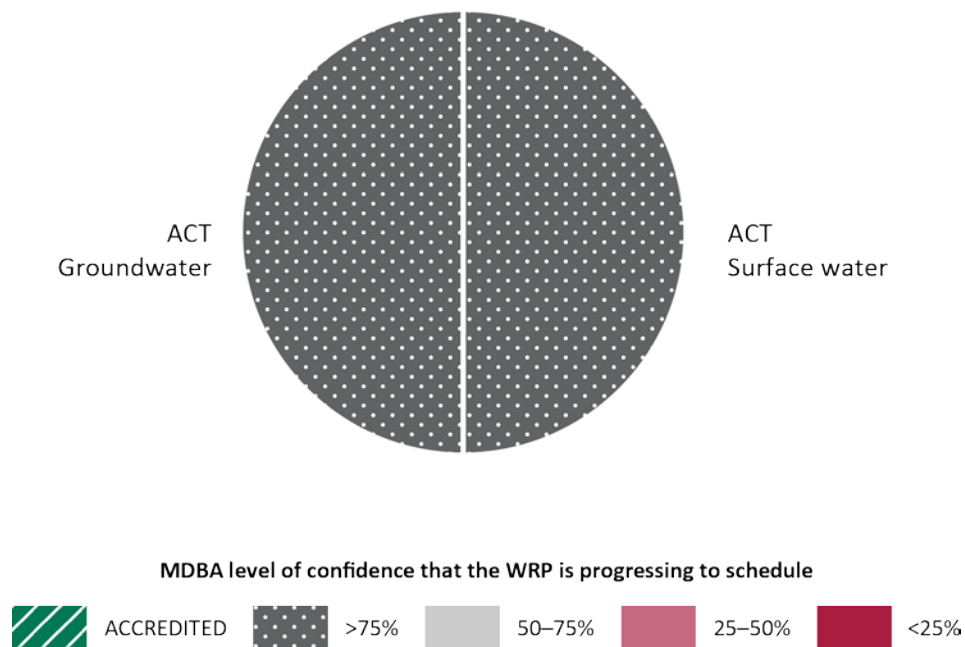
- >75% confidence: indicates the state is making good progress
- 50–75% confidence: indicates the state is making progress
- 25–50% confidence: indicates the state is making some early progress
- <25% confidence: indicates that so far the state has made limited progress.

Australian Capital Territory

Progressing to schedule

2 plans under development

The Australian Capital Territory and the MDBA continue to work closely to update documents for the surface water WRP and the groundwater WRP. Relevant amendments to Australian Capital Territory legislation is progressing and on track to be finalised ahead of incorporation into the draft WRPs in late 2018. The final WRPs are on track to be submitted to the MDBA for assessment in early 2019. Options for managing issues such as finalisation of the Australian Capital Territory Shared Reduction Amount and cross-border issues with New South Wales are being progressed in a timely way so the outcomes can be reflected in the WRPs in late 2018.



New South Wales

Behind schedule

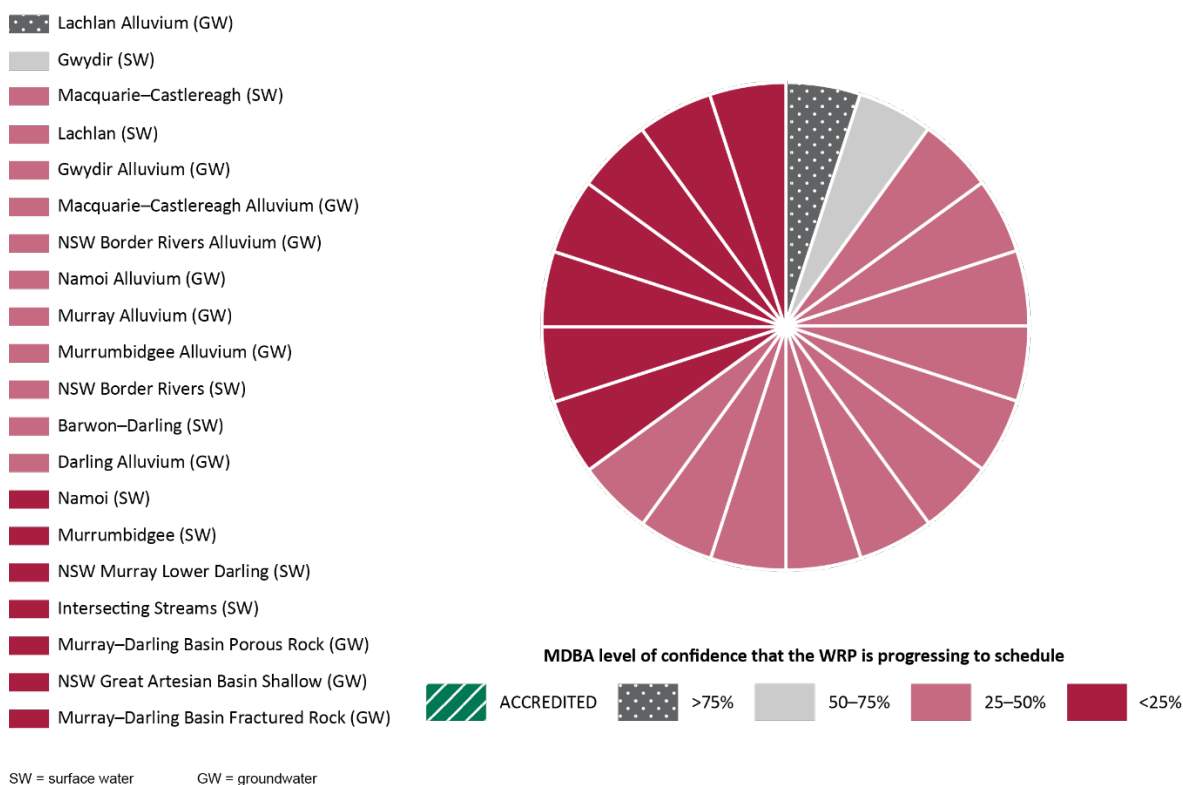
20 plans under development

New South Wales is well behind WRP development timelines and as a result is currently reporting that there are risks to the timely development of seven WRPs. Time remaining to develop and accredit the 20 NSW WRPs is limited and the MDBA remains concerned about the large volume of work that needs to be completed.

NSW is investing substantial effort in the water planning task and has made considerable 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.

NSW pilot plans – Gwydir surface water and Lachlan Alluvium are progressing. The MDBA received a near-complete package of draft material for the Lachlan Alluvium on 19 July 2018 and is currently providing feedback. NSW intends to release both of their pilot WRPs for public exhibition in the coming months. Public release of the pilot surface water and groundwater plans will provide valuable insight into how NSW intend to address WRP requirements in remaining WRPs.

Any further delays to the delivery of pilot WRPs will threaten the timely development of all subsequent NSW WRPs. Given the heightened risk of NSW not meeting agreed timeframes, the MDBA has commenced contingency discussions with NSW. A complex set of policy issues addressing key areas of water reform, including floodplain harvesting and finalising planning assumptions, also need to be settled to enable the completion of NSW WRPs.



Queensland

Progressing to schedule

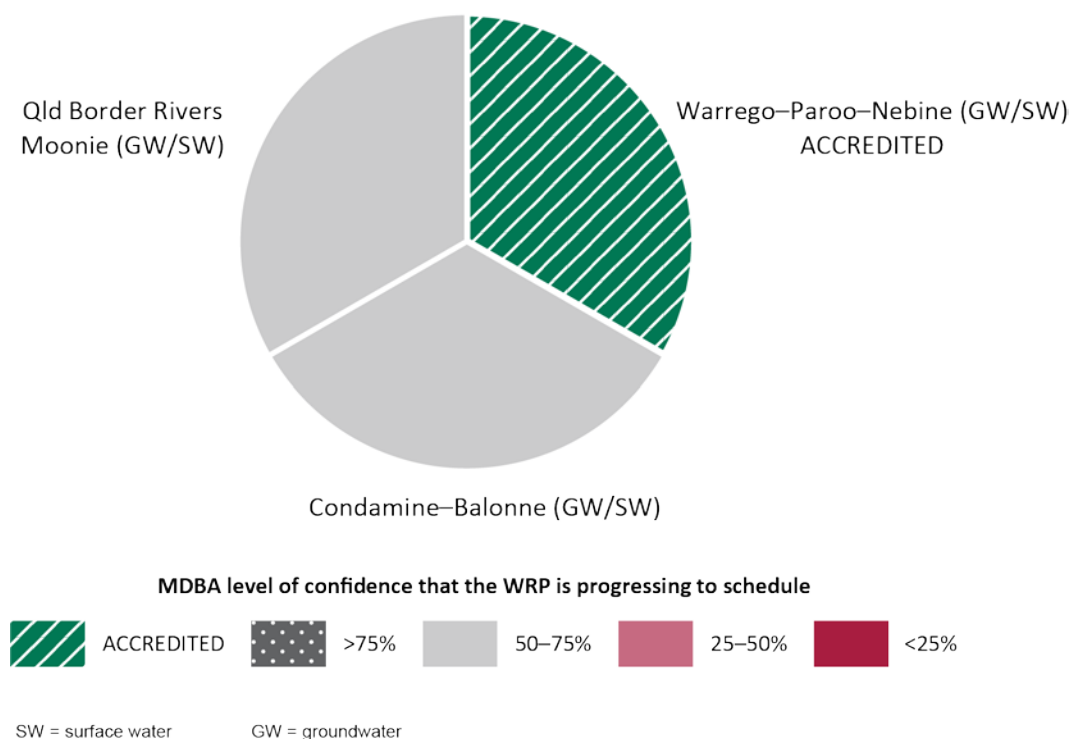
1 plan accredited

2 plans under development

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, are being developed in parallel and scheduled for accreditation in June 2019. On 11 April 2018, Queensland released draft statutory water plans and supporting documents for stakeholder consultation, including a formal submission period through to 1 June 2018. Draft Healthy Waters Management Plans were also released in April for consultation. The MDBA provided assessment reports to Queensland for both plans on 8 June 2018.

The next steps for plan development are progressive submission and review of the WRP indexes and supporting documents. Near complete draft WRPs were submitted in August 2018, with final WRPs expected to be ready for assessment by the end of February 2019. The MDBA is continuing to work with Queensland on the progressive development of 'accreditation ready' WRP material. Workshops for the detailed consideration of SDL methods, risk mitigation strategies and index structure are underway.



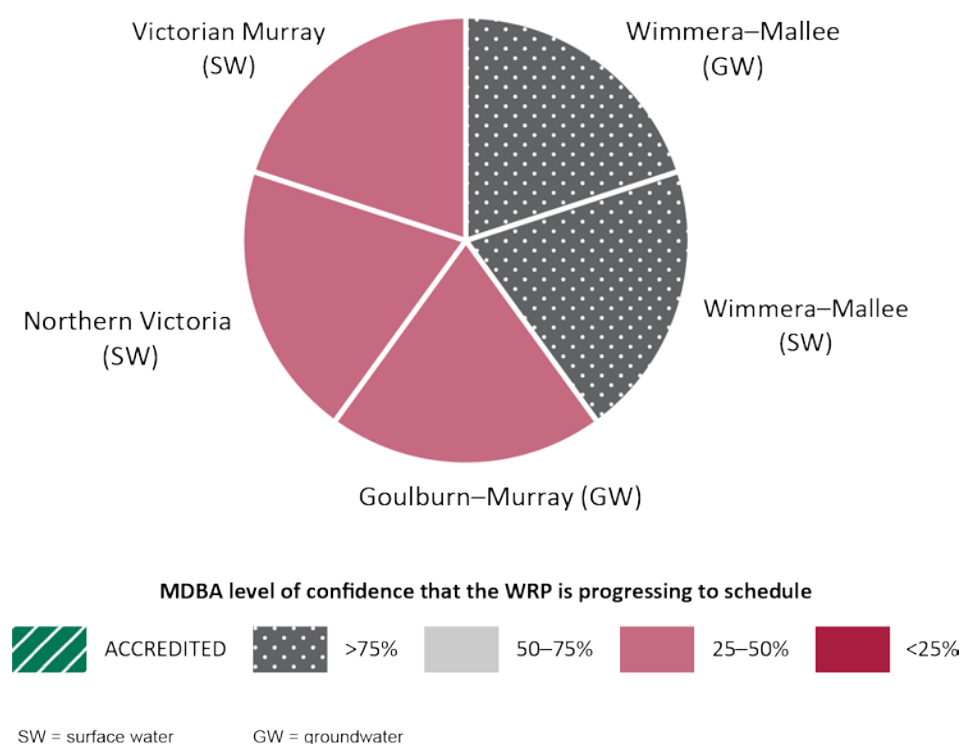
Victoria

Progressing to schedule

5 plans under development

Victoria submitted the proposed Wimmera–Mallee surface water and groundwater WRPs to the MDBA for assessment on 29 June 2018. The MDBA has begun its assessment of these WRPs and will remain in contact with Victoria about the assessment.

The remaining Victorian WRP areas will be submitted as a single ‘Northern Victoria’ package, with a full draft to be completed in consultation with the MDBA by the end of 2018, and final submission in April 2019. Victoria is actively developing the first draft of this WRP package. While recent focus has been on the Wimmera–Mallee WRPs, strategies to streamline the development and assessment of the remaining Victorian WRPs are being discussed with the MDBA to ensure that it meets Basin Plan requirements and timelines. A detailed work plan for development of the Northern Victorian package has been provided to the MDBA.



Note: The Victorian Murray, Northern Victoria and Goulburn–Murray WRPs will be submitted in the Northern Victorian package.

South Australia

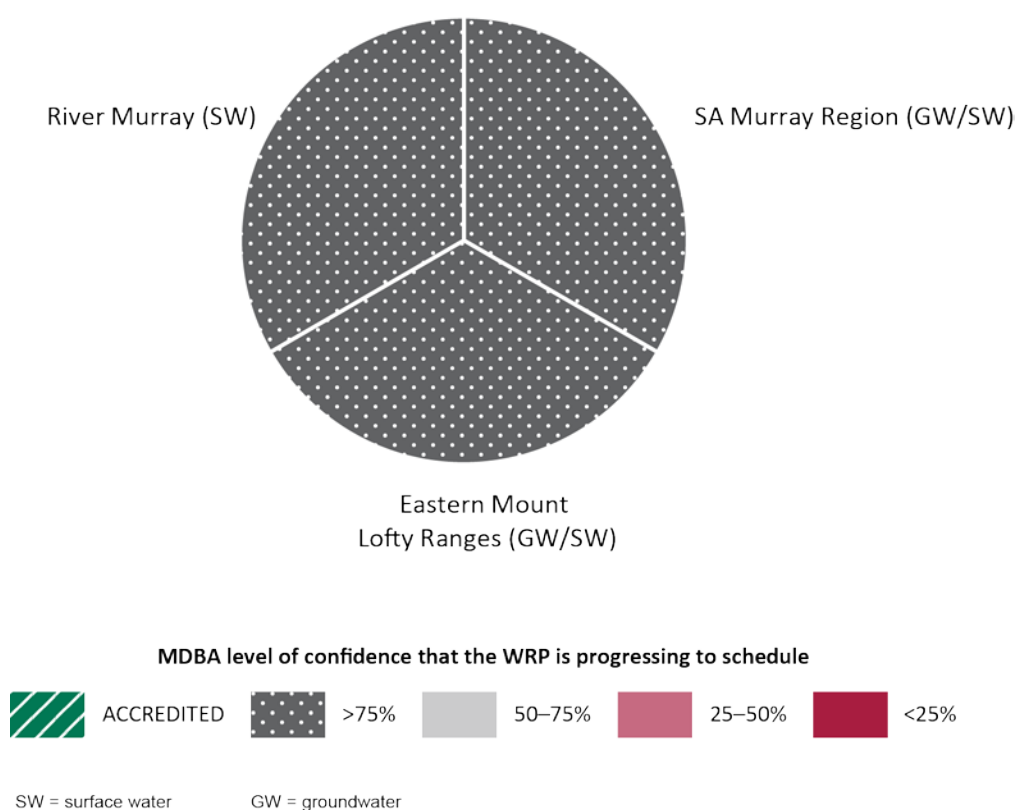
Progressing to schedule

3 plans under development

South Australia submitted its pilot WRP (South Australia Murray Region) for assessment and accreditation on 8 January 2018, and is working with the MDBA to make minor adjustments to the WRP so that it can progress through the final stages of the process.


South Australia provided the MDBA with a first draft of the River Murray WRP for review in July 2018. South Australia also released its state Water Allocation Plan for the River Murray for public consultation in July 2018. This state plan will form an important part of the SA River Murray WRP. South Australia is working closely with the MDBA to finalise planning assumptions for the River Murray and to agree a method for determining water take consistent with the Basin Plan.


South Australia is progressing the draft Eastern Mount Lofty Ranges WRP and continues to work with the MDBA as the development and review of the draft continues. It is anticipated that South Australia will submit the Eastern Mount Lofty Ranges WRP for assessment in December 2018. South Australia and the MDBA are in regular contact to ensure that the concurrent development of the South Australian WRPs will deliver all WRPs on time.




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