

Water resource plans – quarterly report

September 2019

Published by the Murray–Darling Basin Authority
MDBA publication no: 48/19
ISBN (online): 978-1-925762-53-2



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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 submitted WRPs will necessarily be accredited. During the assessment phase the MDBA has found that some WRPs do not meet Basin Plan requirements. The MDBA is working closely with Basin states to negotiate a way forward, as per the steps in the Water Act, to enable these WRPs to be accredited. Ultimately, though, the Minister will make the final decision on WRP accreditation after a recommendation provided by the Authority on whether to accredit.

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. Two WRPs have been accredited and are currently operational. Four plans have been provided to the Commonwealth Minister responsible for water for an accreditation decision and there are seven plans with the MDBA for assessment and recommendation decision.

The development of WRPs by states and assessment of submitted plans by the MDBA is progressing well. WRPs are on track to be assessed for accreditation recommendations for all Basin states in 2019, with the exception of New South Wales (NSW). NSW is proposing to submit all WRPs by the end of 2019 (consistent with Division 2.1A of the *Water Regulations 2008*). It will be important that all 33 WRPs are accredited ahead of the 2020-21 water year, especially for the implementation of key elements of the Basin Plan.

While challenging, there is a chance the 19 NSW WRPs submitted in late December 2019 could be assessed and ready for an accreditation decision by 30 June 2020. Successful accreditation depends upon quality WRPs being brought forward by NSW.

In early 2019 a regulation was made under the *Water Act 2007 - Water Regulations 2008*, 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 and South Australia also requested extensions for the submission of their WRPs until the 31 December 2019. These requests were granted by the Commonwealth Minister responsible for water in July. Information on all extensions is available at the [Department of Agriculture website](#).

Consistent with a Murray–Darling Basin Ministerial Council decision in December 2018, all Basin state and territory governments entered into bilateral 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. These bilateral agreements have been published on the [MDBA website](#).

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, were submitted they were not 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. WRPs 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.

Basin governments have agreed a new schedule to the Intergovernmental Agreement on implementing the Basin Plan that sets out how they intend to implement measures to maximise environmental outcomes in the northern Basin. Some of these arrangements will appear in WRPs.

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

Water resource plan timeframes



Timeline key

- Preliminary phase**
Relationship building between case manager and state lead. Basin states working on settling approach with input from MDBA. Settle on development plan.
- Assisted phase**
Begins when Basin state starts to provide draft WRP material for preliminary comment/advice.
- Late assist phase**
Begins when Basin state submits full draft of the WRP package for preliminary assessment.
- Assess phase**
Basin state formally submits proposed WRP package for MDBA assessment. The MDBA assesses proposed WRP package and prepares a recommendation to the Commonwealth Minister responsible for water regarding consistency with the Basin Plan.
- Accreditation phase**
Begins when MDBA provide recommendations to Department of Agriculture and Water Resources. The Department briefs Minister; the Minister considers WRP Package and MDBA recommendations.

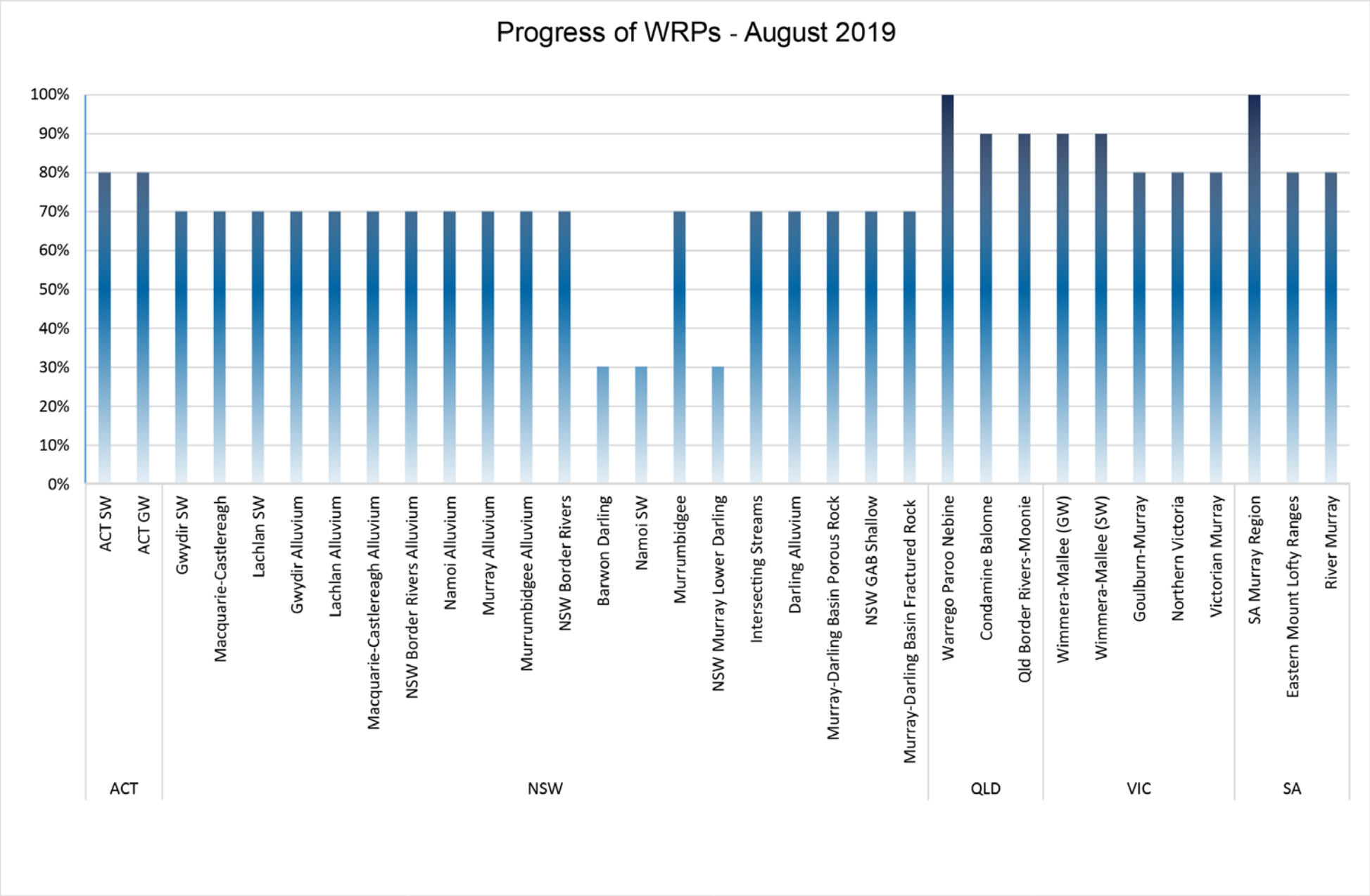
SW = surface water GW = groundwater

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

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 2019.



% 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 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 documents for the ACT surface water and ACT groundwater WRPs. After seeking a two-month extension in February, the ACT submitted the proposed WRPs on 30 April 2019. The MDBA is currently assessing the material provided against Basin Plan requirements.

Water resource plan	Percentage of confidence plan is progressing to schedule
ACT (SW)	70%
ACT (GW)	70%

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. In July 2019, the Commonwealth Minister granted NSW an extension for the submission of all WRPs to the MDBA by 31 December 2019.

Based on previous timelines provided by NSW officials, the first pilot WRP (Lachlan Alluvium) was due to be submitted in July 2019. Due to unforeseen circumstances, NSW have not yet submitted their pilot WRP.

The updated timelines shown on page 3 represent NSW's most recent proposed submission dates. This will see the great majority of NSW WRPs submitted at the end of 2019, posing a very challenging timeframe for the Commonwealth to assess and accredit these WRPs, and have transparent water management arrangements in place before the end of this water year (30 of June 2020).

The MDBA continues to work cooperatively with NSW in the development of its plans and to assist in the resolution of issues. Nonetheless there are still a number of complex policy implementation matters that need to be resolved to enable the accreditation of their WRPs. The outstanding issues include floodplain harvesting and the protection of environmental water in the northern NSW catchments. Likewise, completion of appropriate Traditional Owner consultation remains an ongoing issue with all NSW WRPs.

The NSW and ACT governments are also committed to working together to establish trade arrangements in the upper Murrumbidgee catchment.

The bilateral agreement signed by the MDBA and NSW brought key Basin Plan commitments into effect on 1 July 2019 – namely the sustainable diversion limits. The agreement promotes transparency, giving 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 is progressing with the requirements of the bilateral agreement and reporting on each agreed milestone.

NSW public exhibition is complete for 17 draft WRPs: one is currently open for public exhibition; and the remaining two are scheduled to be released over the coming months. Of some concern is that the Barwon–Darling WRP has not been exposed for public consultation at this point. While this is a result of NSW's need to account for the Natural Resources Commission's findings, it does present significant compressed exposure timelines for a very high profile plan area.

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

SW = surface water

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

* This progress is based on the updated schedule.

Queensland

Progressing to schedule

One plan accredited

Two plans with the Minister for an accreditation decision

Queensland's Warrego–Paroo–Nebine WRP is fully accredited.

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 provided them to the Minister for an accreditation decision on 17 June 2019. All Queensland WRPs are on track for accreditation in 2019.

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

Victoria

Progressing to schedule

Two plans with the Minister for an accreditation decision

Three 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. In May 2019 Victoria was informed of the progress of the MDBA's assessment under s63 of the Water Act. On 3 July 2019, Victoria withdrew the version of both the surface water and groundwater WRPs submitted in February and submitted new versions. The MDBA has completed its assessment of both Wimmera–Mallee WRPs and provided them to the Minister for an accreditation decision on 23 August 2019.

The Goulburn–Murray, Northern Victoria and Victorian Murray WRPs 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.

Water resource plan	Percentage of confidence plan is progressing to schedule
Wimmera–Mallee (GW)	100%
Wimmera–Mallee (SW)	100%
Goulburn–Murray	70%
Northern Victoria	70%
Victorian Murray	70%

SW = surface water, GW = groundwater

South Australia

Progressing to schedule

One plan accredited

Two plans submitted for assessment

South Australia submitted the South Australian Murray Region WRP for assessment and accreditation on 13 November 2018. This WRP was assessed by the MDBA and an accreditation recommendation was provided to the Commonwealth Minister responsible for water on 5 February 2019.


The Minister accredited this WRP on the 20 August 2019.


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. South Australia was granted a further extension for these WRPs until 31 December 2019 to address a small number of inconsistencies in the WRPs. Both WRPs were withdrawn and resubmitted to the MDBA on the 14 August 2019. 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	100%
South Australian River Murray	100%

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