



How Environmental Water Advisory Groups work with communities

Water for the Environment

The NSW Government's Water for the Environment program (the program) works closely with the community to deliver water for the environment to priority sites across the state.

Role of the groups

Environmental Water Advisory Groups (EWAGs) draw on the expertise and experience of community members to inform decision-making around the use of water for the environment.

Advisory groups may include environmental water managers, First Nations, irrigators, recreational fishers, landholders, independent scientists, non-government organisations, local government, the Commonwealth Environmental Water Office and a range of partner agencies.

EWAG members are appointed through an application process, with candidates asked to demonstrate how their local knowledge, skills and experience can guide the use of water for the environment in their river catchments.

EWAGs meet regularly and communicate out of session to discuss:

- proposed or upcoming watering events
- any issues or concerns
- results of watering events
- future opportunities.

Members play a key role in sharing information with their communities as well as bringing community views to the discussion. They represent a diversity of stakeholder groups with an interest in the work of the environmental water program.

Where groups have been established so far

EWAGs have been established in 5 key NSW catchments:

- Gwydir
- Macquarie Cudgegong
- Lachlan
- Murrumbidgee
- Murray and Lower Darling-Baaka.

As needs arise, additional EWAGs can be established.



How groups and the department work together

The aim of each advisory group is to bring together a range of knowledge and experience to advise on both planned and held environmental water use.

Before the start of each water year (July to June), each EWAG provides advice on the development of an annual watering plan.

These plans identify the waterways and wetlands that are likely to receive water in the coming year.

The EWAG considers:

- expected availability of water in the coming year
- conditions of the previous year
- current health of the plants and animals in these ecosystems.

EWAGs aim to anticipate short and longer-term opportunities, and identify how to implement various watering actions in order to meet identified environmental objectives.

EWAGs must ensure the advice and reports they produce are consistent with the relevant water sharing plan for their regulated water source.

The partners and how they make decisions about water for the environment

The NSW Water for the Environment program is the lead agency for the delivery of water for the environment in New South Wales. The program has strategic and practical roles in deciding where and when to provide environmental water to rivers, wetlands and floodplains to achieve a range of outcomes for waterbirds, native fish, vegetation, ecosystem services and system connectivity. The program also has a monitoring role.

Decisions about water for the environment are made in collaboration with a range of partners including industry, conservation representatives, government, research institutions and regional communities. Some of the government agencies include:

- The Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder (CEWH) holds the largest portfolio of water for the environment on behalf of the Australian Government. CEWH contributes to environmental watering at sites across the whole Murray–Darling Basin. It also has a monitoring role
- Department of Primary Industries (DPI) Fisheries is the lead agency for the management and protection of NSW fish populations. DPI Fisheries plays a role in research, policy implementation, education and compliance
- NSW Local Land Services work with landholders and communities to improve agricultural productivity and better manage natural resources
- The Water Group in the NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water administers the *Water Management Act 2000* and leads the NSW response to the implementation of the Murray–Darling Basin Plan
- The Murray Darling Basin Authority assists with environmental watering at a whole-of-basin scale and is responsible for the development of a long-term strategy for environmental water across the Basin.

The NSW Government is committed to cooperative management of water for the environment as documented in [Cooperative management of environmental water to improve river and wetland health in NSW](#).

Role of the Snowy Advisory Committee

In the Snowy montane, the Snowy Advisory Committee (SAC) provides vital community and expert input into the pattern of release for environmental flows to the Snowy and montane rivers. The SAC represents Aboriginal, local community and environmental interests, alongside NSW and Victorian government representatives.

In the Snowy montane, the water year runs from 1 May to 30 April.



Cover photo: The NSW Water for the Environment program delivers water for the environment. (Terry Cooke); Page 2: Environmental Water Advisory Groups advise on planned and held environmental water. (DCCEEW); Page 4: Gwydir Wetlands. (John Spencer/DCCEEW).

Published by:

Environment and Heritage, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, Locked Bag 5022, Parramatta NSW 2124. Phone: 1300 361 967; Email: info@environment.nsw.gov.au; Website: www.environment.nsw.gov.au.

ISBN 978-1-923285-16-3; EH 2024/0232; August 2024.