

Flow management in the Northern Connected Basin

A multi-river approach to support wildlife



Photo: Macquarie Marshes (John Spencer/DPIE)

Healthy rivers are the lifeblood of the Murray–Darling Basin. A coordinated approach to river management ensures efficient use of available water to achieve a balance of the best possible social, economic and environmental outcomes.

The rivers and wetlands of the Northern Connected Basin share a range of ecological values which can be influenced by the careful management of water for the environment.

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What is the Northern Connected Basin?

The Northern Connected Basin is a network of rivers that feed into the Barwon and Darling rivers.

The network includes the Bogan, Macquarie–Castlereagh, Namoi, Gwydir, Macintyre, Condamine, Balonne, Warrego and Paroo rivers, and their catchments.

The character of each river ranges from the intermittent flows of the Paroo, which connects only occasionally with the Darling River, to the more reliable flows of the Macintyre, which contributes a significant proportion of flows entering the Barwon River.



Why is a system-wide approach important?

A healthy river system supports the people, plants and animals that call this region 'home'.

Healthy rivers mean cleaner water supplies, richer floodplain soils, stronger native fish populations, and a more diverse range of native plants and animals, including birds, frogs, mammals and beneficial insects.

As a connected river system, events in one area can have a significant impact on environmental, economic and social outcomes in another.

Native fish move between river systems throughout their lifetimes, feeding and breeding along particular reaches, and migrating, sometimes hundreds of kilometres, through multiple rivers, creeks and wetlands.

Waterbirds travel hundreds, sometimes thousands, of kilometres between wetlands and rivers in pursuit of healthy habitat, food and breeding sites.

The movement of water across the floodplains releases vital nutrients that energise the aquatic food web to provide food for animals and essential elements for plants.

A thriving river system has benefits for agriculture, tourism, recreational fishing, public health and the liveability of inland communities.

Who decides how water is managed?

Environmental water managers, river operators, scientists and community representatives are all involved in the management of river systems in the Northern Connected Basin.

This helps to ensure a healthy balance of social, economic and environmental outcomes.

A coordinated approach by government agencies on both sides of the NSW–Queensland border allows water managers to achieve better results, aligning outcomes at individual sites with the

overall basin strategy for a healthier and more productive Northern Connected Basin.

What are the main aims in the Northern Connected Basin?

Under the Murray-Darling Basin Plan, water managers are targeting four main outcomes:

1. river flows and connectivity
2. native vegetation
3. waterbirds
4. native fish.

Water managers work with a range of state and Commonwealth agencies to enhance the effects of existing system flows by adding environmental flows and occasionally creating events that consist entirely of water for the environment.

Where is the process up to?

The NSW Government is developing Long Term Water Plans for nine river catchments in NSW. These plans draw on local, traditional and scientific knowledge to achieve outcomes for each catchment.

Water Resource Plans are also being prepared by the NSW Government that set out the rules for all water users across the state.

The plans will work together, enabling water managers to plan their water use strategically and achieve outcomes that benefit the Northern Connected Basin and beyond.

Work is ongoing to achieve a balance that will provide positive outcomes now and into the future for all river users.

Photos, left to right: Catfish, Gunther Schmida; Marsh club rush, Daryl Albertson/DPIE and Australian painted snipe, Mick Todd/DPIE.

Published by
Environment, Energy and Science
Department of Planning, Industry and Environment
4 Parramatta Square, 12 Darcy Street, Parramatta NSW 2150
EES2019/0605 ISBN 978-1-925753-67-7
May 2018; updated October 2019