

# Water engagement roundup webinar

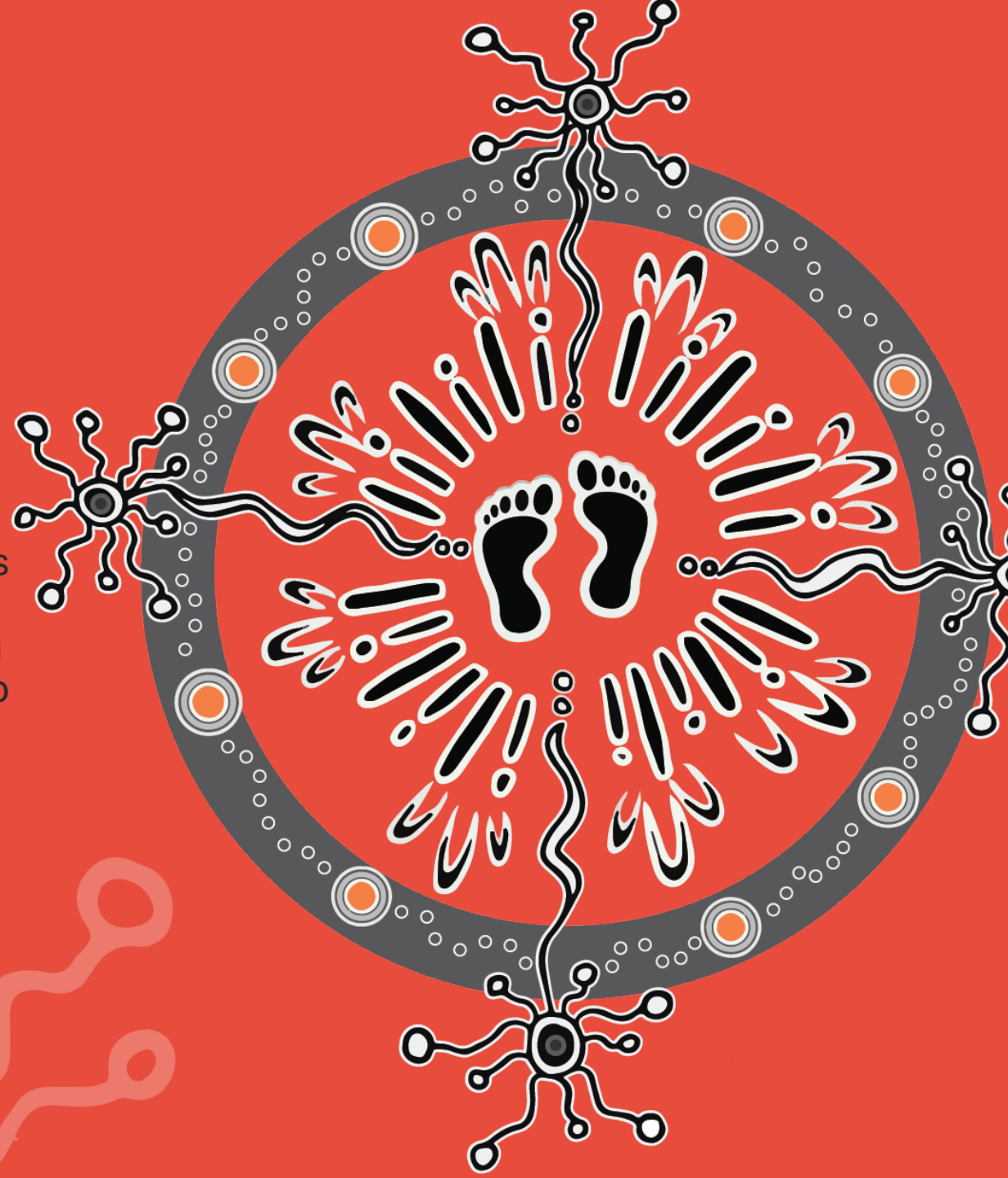
15 November 2023



## Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge that today we meet on many Aboriginal lands.

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands and we show our respect for elders past, present and emerging through thoughtful and collaborative approaches to our work.



# Welcome

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Meeting outline

Amanda Jones,  
Deputy Secretary

15 Nov 2023



# Agenda

1. The year in review and looking ahead
2. Questions



# Drought preparedness

As of 10 November 2023

## Current NSW water supply situation

- Dams are close to full but are dropping.
- Major rural valleys are in normal river operations.
- Full allocations made to high priority users.
- Most regions have at least 18 months of supply for high priority needs secured (e.g. towns).
- Water supplies can deplete rapidly.
- Cease-to-pump conditions currently apply in some coastal and inland unregulated rivers, but the extent reduced with recent rain.

### GREATER SYDNEY DAM LEVELS

**88%**

-0.2% in the  
last week

### LOWER HUNTER DAM LEVELS

**84.9%**

+0.1 % in last week  
-1.6% 1 month ago

### REGIONAL NSW DAM LEVELS

**86%**

-0.5% in the  
last week

# NSW is better prepared for drought but there is still work to do

## Drought preparations are beginning earlier

- Previous drought - focus didn't start until 2018/2019 when dams were below 50% full.

## Stronger evidence base through the water strategies

- Identify no regrets options that can be brought forward for drought support
- New climate data gives us a better idea of how extreme droughts can be

## Cities and major towns are more resilient – but there is still work to do

- Drought Response Plans in place for Greater Sydney and the Lower Hunter.
- Water conservation has saved 4.23 gigalitres of water in 47 Local Government Areas since April 2022.
- Large scale infrastructure likely to be needed over the long-term, but smaller options are available to manage immediate drought risks.

## Lessons from the last drought:

- Investing in drought readiness is critical
- Multiple indicators are needed to forewarn of drought
- Public communication must be early, coordinated and clear
- There needs to be continued focus on long-term actions to prepare for water shortages outside of drought periods

# Areas of immediate water security concern

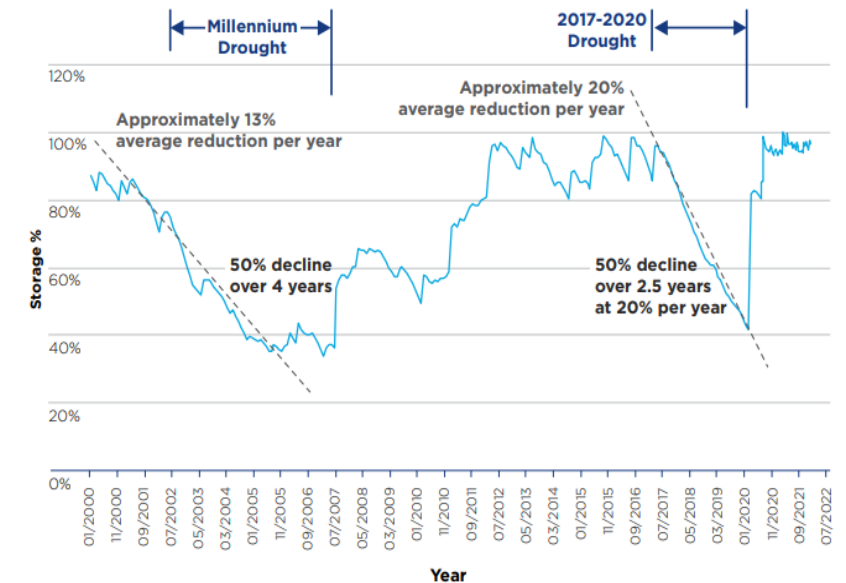
## Greater Sydney

- Water conservation activities continuing and public campaign launched
- Water restrictions - late 2024
- Dams could fall to 30% capacity (critical levels) in late 2026/early 2027
- Expanding Sydney Desalination Plant is quickest option. Construction will take 4-6 years
- ERC approved first phase of planning in August 2023. Streamlining approvals likely needed in drought.

## Lower Hunter

- Water conservation communication has started
- Water restrictions - March 2024
- Belmont Desalination Plant is a key drought measure. Work is underway for Planning and NSW Government approval by mid-2024
- Forecast date for commissioning of Belmont Desalination Plant is December 2027.

Greater Sydney storage level profile 2000-2020



# Areas of immediate water security concern

## The major inland centres of Tamworth, Bathurst and Orange

- Supplies can fall to critical levels in 4–6 years.
- Water carting is not an option for these towns due to their size.
- Non-infrastructure actions can be completed within 18 months to improve drought security, but longer-term infrastructure investment is needed.

Actions	Tamworth	Bathurst and Orange
Immediate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Water efficiency measures</li><li>• Potential use of Chaffey Dam</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Water efficiency</li><li>• Rule changes for drought conditions</li><li>• Guidelines for saving water in council dams during extreme droughts</li></ul>
Longer term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Advanced water treatment plant - \$6m for business case</li><li>• Pipelines and alternative storages - \$3m for business case</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fish River Scheme options through water strategy</li></ul>

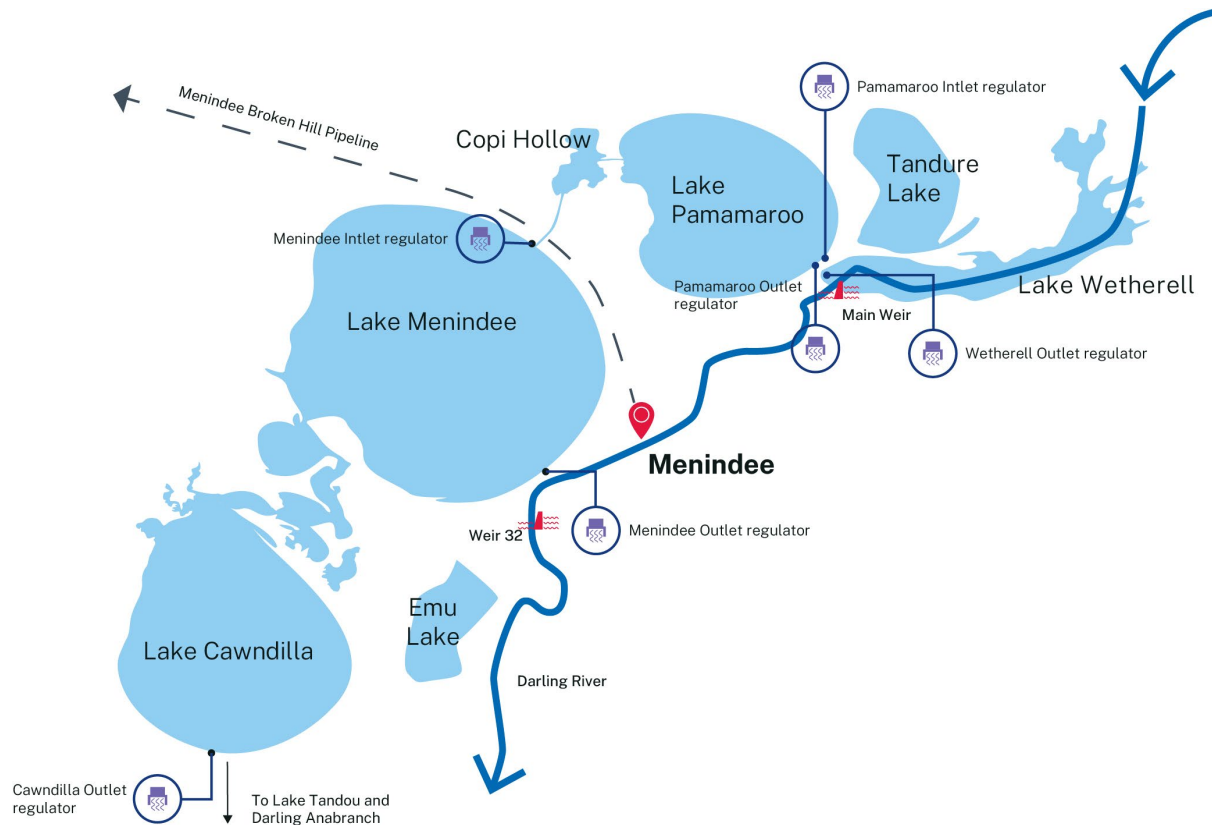


# Areas of immediate water security concern

92 local water utilities (LWU) servicing 1.85 million people in regional NSW.

- 107 regional towns with extreme or very high water security risks.
- **Immediate actions:**
  - Standing up a drought team to map out gaps and monitoring drought risks
  - Town Water Risk reduction program
- **Work underway for sustainable service models:**
  - DPE Water is developing a strategic business case for western NSW
  - Productivity Commission review of funding models for LWUs
  - NPP for strategic business case for the replacement of the Safe and Secure Water Program.

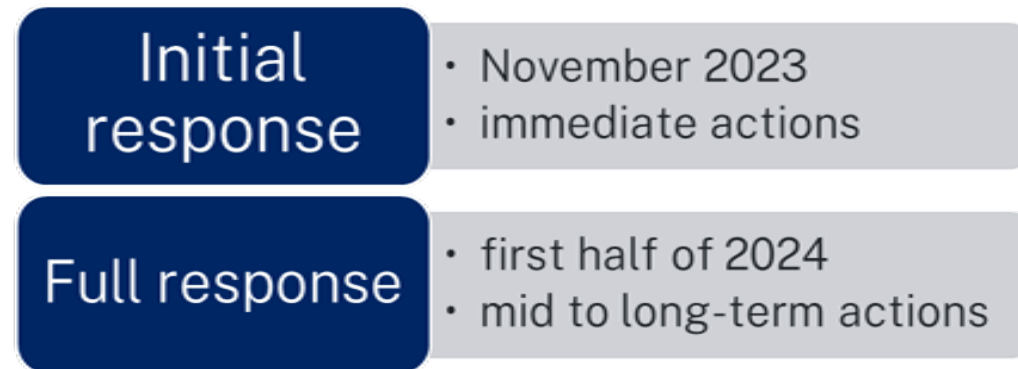
# Areas of immediate water security concern



## Menindee Lakes

- **Water is depleting:**
  - Current capacity -1,315 GL (76%)
  - 480GL capacity –NSW drought operations ~ February 2024
  - 195GL (active) capacity -12 months of water remaining ~ April 2024.
- **High risk of further mass fish deaths** in coming months -water quality is dropping
- **Response to Chief Scientist and Engineer’s review** on mass fish deaths:
  - Initial response –released on 10 November - immediate solutions for this summer
  - Detailed response –to be released by mid 2024

# Actions underway to address fish deaths



- **Water releases** are continuing to improve water quality and reduce fish deaths but we will need to reduce water early next year to save remaining water for human needs.
- **Expert panel:** Setting up an expert panel to provide advice on when to restrict irrigation access upstream
- **Data:** Installing real time water quality monitors
- Temporary **fish passage** investigations
- Trialling new **nano bubble technology**
- **Fish relocation** and carp removal
- More **real time data** –buoys
- **New role** based in far west

# Regional Water Strategies



Regional water strategies identify critical challenges that we need to tackle over the coming decades and outline the actions that we will undertake to respond to those challenges.

NSW Government has harnessed the latest climate data and worked with the community to build a plan that will meet the region's water needs for at least the next 20 years.

Murray and Murrumbidgee – underway and will see us finalise the entire suite



# Responding to climate change

- NSW Government taking action to tackle climate change. In the water sector, the first step has been to develop and use new water related climate data in the development of long-term strategies to better understand the current and future water risks to communities
- The next steps are to embed this new climate data in operational, policy and infrastructure decisions.
- There is a legal requirement to review the drought of record in the Border Rivers Water Sharing Plan by 2026. Other inland plans are also being amended to include a similar requirement
- A review of water allocation decisions has commenced for the regulated Border Rivers
- New climate data being used that will also inform review of all inland regulated system allocations





# Non-urban metering review

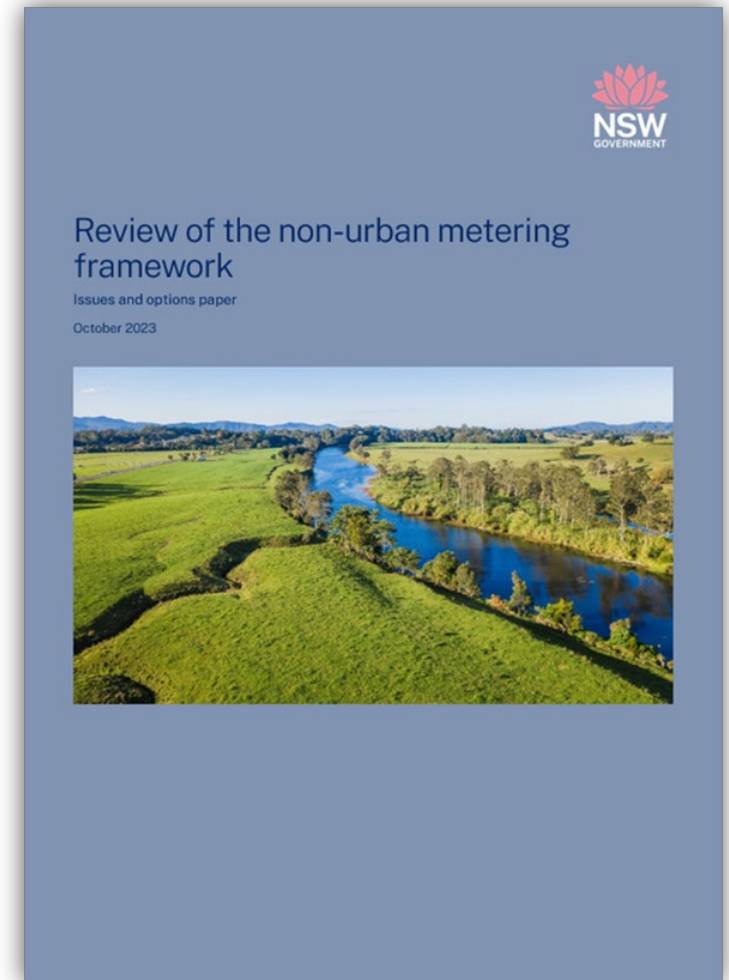
## Non-urban metering framework review:

- accelerate implementation
- make the rules easier to understand and comply

Public consultation has commenced and ends Sunday 26 November.

## Next steps:

- “What we heard” report
- Recommendation report before end of the year



# Coastal harvestable rights

## Policy changes in 2023

- Harvestable rights limit for coastal-draining catchments was returned to 10% of rainfall runoff in September (from 30%, which applied from May 2022)
- Minor updates were made to the harvestable rights Orders for coastal-draining and central-inland draining catchments to make the rules easier to understand

## Next steps

- The department is progressing work to understand what levels of water extraction are sustainable on the coast
- Actively engage water users, communities and other stakeholders in the work to understand sustainable extraction on the coast
- Natural Resources Commission has identified the need for setting sustainable coastal extraction through water sharing plan reviews since 2018



# Forward approach to coastal water management

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- In the Basin we have:
  - sustainable diversion limits, set out in the Basin Plan
  - a general understanding of entitlements versus extraction
  - more extensive and robust hydrological models
- Understanding these elements on the coast is fundamental to support all robust water management decisions, not just coastal harvestable rights

# Forward approach to coastal water management

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- In coastal water sharing plans, the long-term average annual extraction limit has historically been specified as:
  - the sum of licence shares, plus
  - estimated basic landholder rights.
- Regional Water Strategies for the coast call out the need to define sustainable levels of extraction for surface water and groundwater sources, as does the NRC
- Sustainable levels of extraction support the *NSW Water Management Act 2000* principles for ecological sustainability and protection of water sources, to maximise the economic and community benefits derived from water.

# Water resource plans update

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NSW is responsible for 20 of 33 WRPs

NSW has submitted 17 out of the 20 WRPs (Namoi and Gwydir surface water still to be submitted). The Barwon Darling WRP will be resubmitted within two weeks

To date 9 of the 18 WRPs have been accredited

- 8 groundwater and 1 surface water

Expect the remaining 9 WRPs to be accredited progressively over the coming months

Namoi and Gwydir WRPs will be submitted when content related to Aboriginal outcomes and values is agreed with the Gomeroi Native Title claimants

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# Basin Plan – Commonwealth Government Restoring Our Rivers Bill

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- The Commonwealth's Bill provides for:
  - more time and flexibility to deliver SDLAM projects
  - more time to deliver the 450 GL program and expansion of the options to recover this water including through purchase
  - new accountability measures
  - restoration of transparency, trust and confidence to Basin water markets

## Next steps

- Basin jurisdictions are preparing for implementation of the Bill if passed
- NSW is developing an alternatives to buybacks plan to outline how we'll deliver the Basin Plan and reduce buybacks in NSW

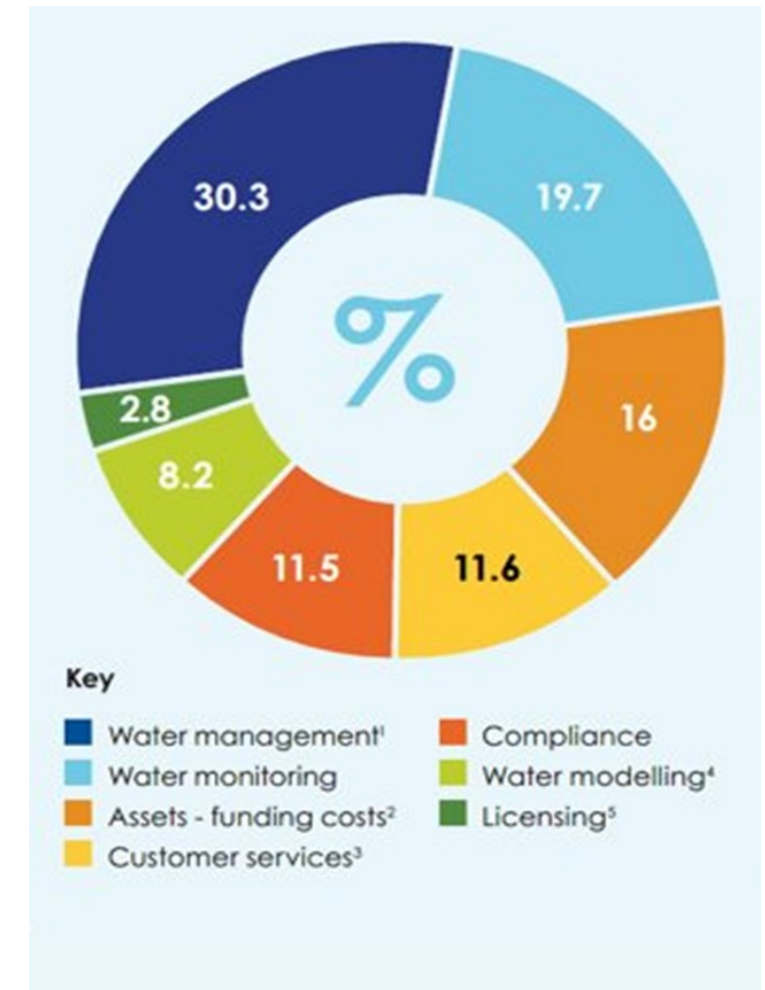
# Pricing proposal for water management services

We are undertaking significant consultation on our pricing proposal (1,188 licence holder surveys, stakeholder interviews, online working groups across 4 regions)

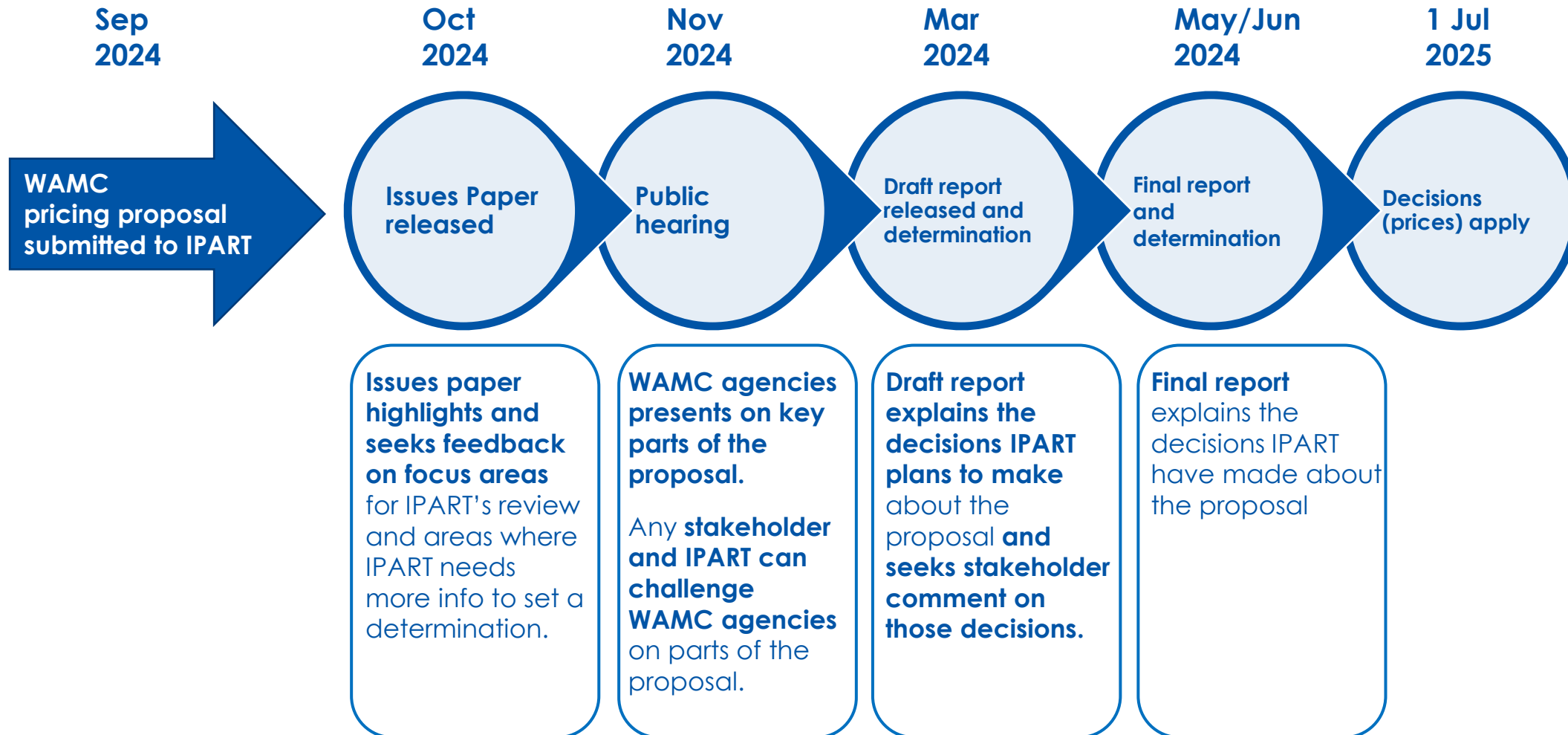
## Key improvements we are investing in:

- an enhanced customer portal to manage customer's water-related data
- improving the extent of the water monitoring network
- greater availability of the water modelling and data that informs decision-making.

WAMC Initial modelling indicates increased costs in the period 2025-30



# Overview of IPART's review timeline for pricing proposal



*This is just a summary – you can read more information on IPART's review timeline in their [Handbook for Water Regulation July 2023](#)*

# Section 10 review –implementing principles of the *Water Management Act 2000*

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- Section 10 of the Water Management Act 2000 requires the government undertake a review every 5 years focused on ensuring the principles of the Act are being considered in decision-making processes.
- A review focusing on the period of July 2017 –December 2022 was completed in 2023.
- To ensure robustness of the review, the Natural Resources Commission (NRC) was invited to participate as an independent voice. The NRC supported the findings and provided some additional recommendations.
- The Department has responded to all recommendations and suggested actions from both the review and the NRC with corrective actions

# Creation of the Department of Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water in 2024

- As part of a Machinery of Government change the new Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) will commence 1 January 2024
- The new Department will encompass the Water Group, Environment and Heritage Group and the EPA within the current DPE as well as the Office of Energy and Climate Change from Treasury (including Energy Co)
- Recruitment for the new Secretary of DCCEEW is being managed by the Premier's Department





# Priorities for 2024

Aboriginal Water  
Program

Murray & Bidgee  
RWSs & plan to  
action all RWS  
priorities

Northern  
Connectivity –  
response to  
Panel

IPART pricing  
submission

Full response to  
OCSE fish death  
report

Deliver Basin  
Plan – SDLAM &  
NBTK

Drought  
preparedness

Support for  
LWUs and extend  
or  
replace SSWP

Progress  
expansion of  
desalination for  
Sydney

Improve  
engagement with  
all stakeholders

Deliver Wilcannia  
program & other  
regional projects

Climate risk in  
WSPs and  
accreditation of  
all WRP

# Q&A

Please type your questions in the chat

Amanda Jones, Deputy Secretary



# Current and ongoing engagement

Visit <https://water.dpie.nsw.gov.au/have-your-say>



**Region:** Various

From: 26 September 2023 10:00 AM  
To: 15 November 2023 4:00 PM

**Floodplain management plans  
First Nations -  
Engagement sessions**



**Region:** Murray

From: 9 October 2023 12:00 AM  
To: 17 November 2023 11:59 PM

**Murray Unregulated  
River Water Sources -  
Exhibition**



**Region:** Murrumbidgee

From: 19 October 2023 12:00 PM  
To: 19 November 2023 11:59 PM

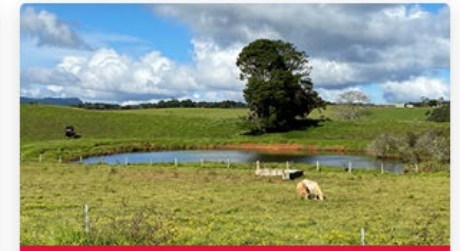
**Murrumbidgee  
Regional Water  
Strategy - Webinar and  
survey**



**Region:** Murray

From: 19 October 2023 12:00 PM  
To: 19 November 2023 11:59 PM

**NSW Murray Regional  
Water Strategy -  
Webinar and survey**



**Region:**

From: 22 August 2023 12:00 AM  
To: 21 November 2023 11:59 AM

**Domestic stock rights  
review - Survey**



**Region:** All

From: 30 October 2023 12:00 AM  
To: 26 November 2023 11:59 PM

**Non-urban water  
metering review**



**Region:** Western

From: 13 November 2023 12:00 AM  
To: 27 November 2023 12:00 AM

**Applications for  
funding under the Off-  
farm Efficiency  
Program**



**Region:** Macquarie-Castlereagh

From: 8 November 2023 12:00 AM  
To: 30 November 2023 12:00 AM

**Nyngan to Cobar  
Pipeline Project –  
Drop-in sessions**



**Region:** Border Rivers

From: 6 November 2023 12:00 AM  
To: 17 December 2023 11:59 PM

**Border Rivers  
Unregulated River  
Water Sharing Plan -  
Exhibition**

# Round up survey 2023

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We really appreciate your opinions on the 'Engagement Round up' and are open for ideas on how to run these next year.

We will send out a recording of this webinar together with a survey that will inform the delivery of the Round up in 2024.



# Thank you

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Department of Planning and Environment

More info on all of our programs:

<https://water.dpie.nsw.gov.au>

Feedback to Department's service:

<https://www.dpie.nsw.gov.au/contact>

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