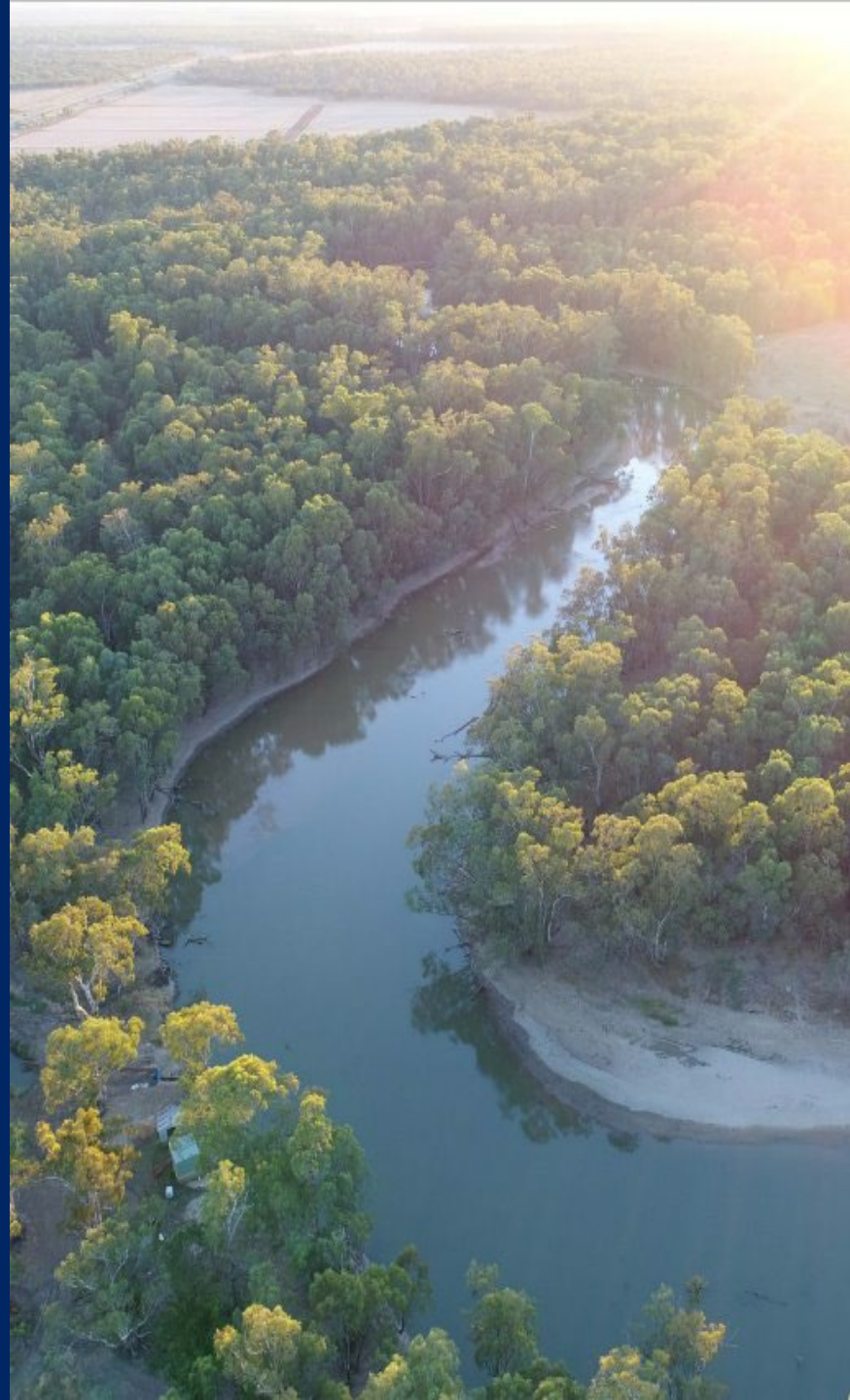


Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water

# Reconnecting River Country Program

## Murrumbidgee Project

21–24 July 2025



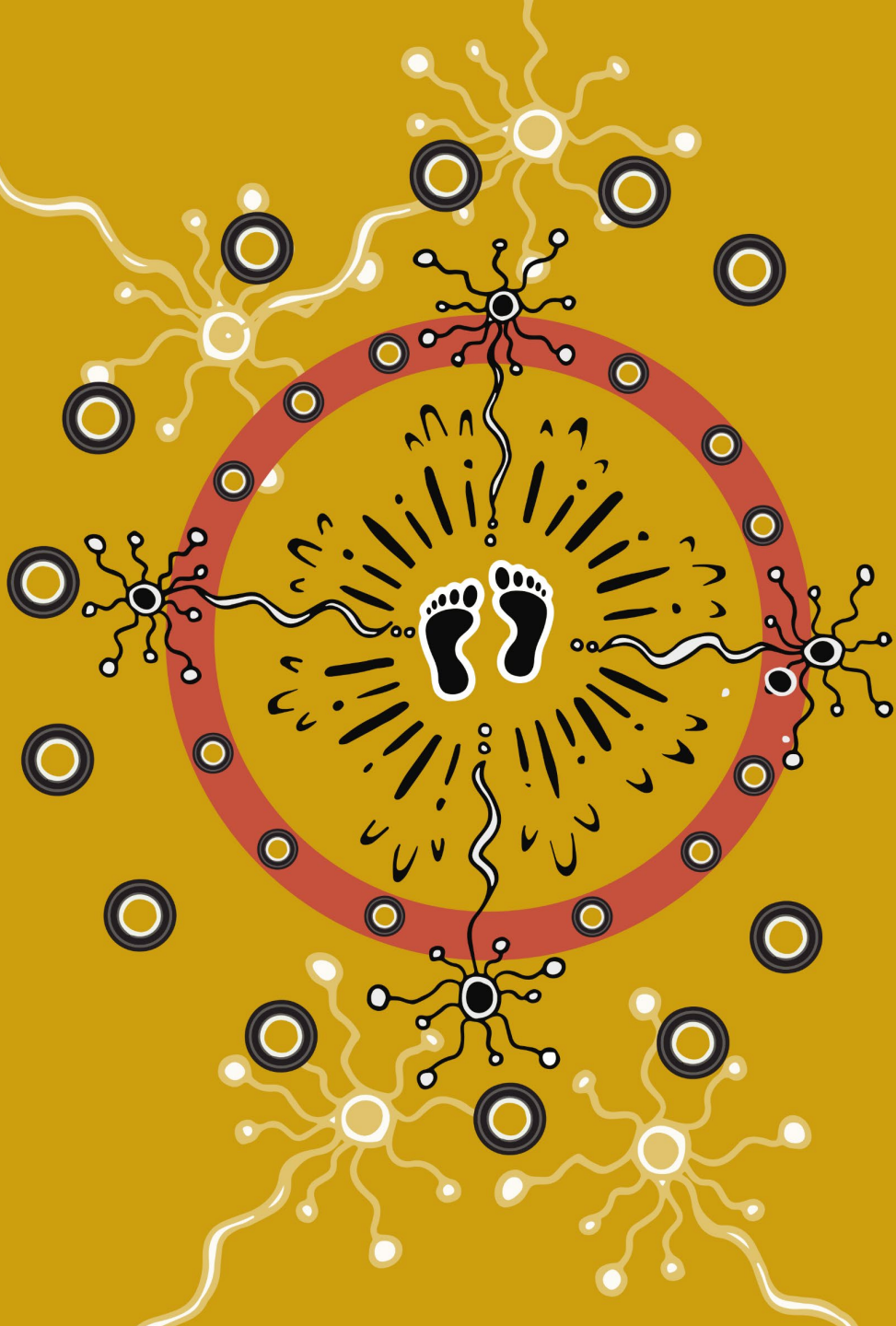
# Acknowledgement of Country

The Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water acknowledges that it stands on Aboriginal land.

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land and water, and we show our respect for Elders past, present and emerging.

We do this through thoughtful and collaborative approaches to our work, seeking to demonstrate our ongoing commitment to providing places in which Aboriginal people are included socially, culturally and economically.

Artist and designer Nikita Ridgeway from Aboriginal design agency – Boss Lady Creative Designs, created the People and Community symbol.



# 1

## Program overview

Michelle Cavallaro  
Director, Reconnecting River Country Program

# Reconnecting River Country Program update

## Murrumbidgee Project

- ✓ Final Business case submitted February 2025
- ✓ Infrastructure NSW Assurance review and Basin Officials Committee demonstrated support that the Project proceed to delivery
- ✓ Australian Government has considered the Final Business Case and confirmed its continuing support for the program's delivery in the Murrumbidgee to Dec 2026
- ✓ Final Business Case Summary to be released
- ✓ Preparing to commence Murrumbidgee project delivery in the coming months (2025)

## MDBA Constraints Roadmap

- ✓ Constraints Relaxation Implementation Roadmap released December 2024
- NSW is actively working with Basin States and Australian Government on next steps

## Murray Project

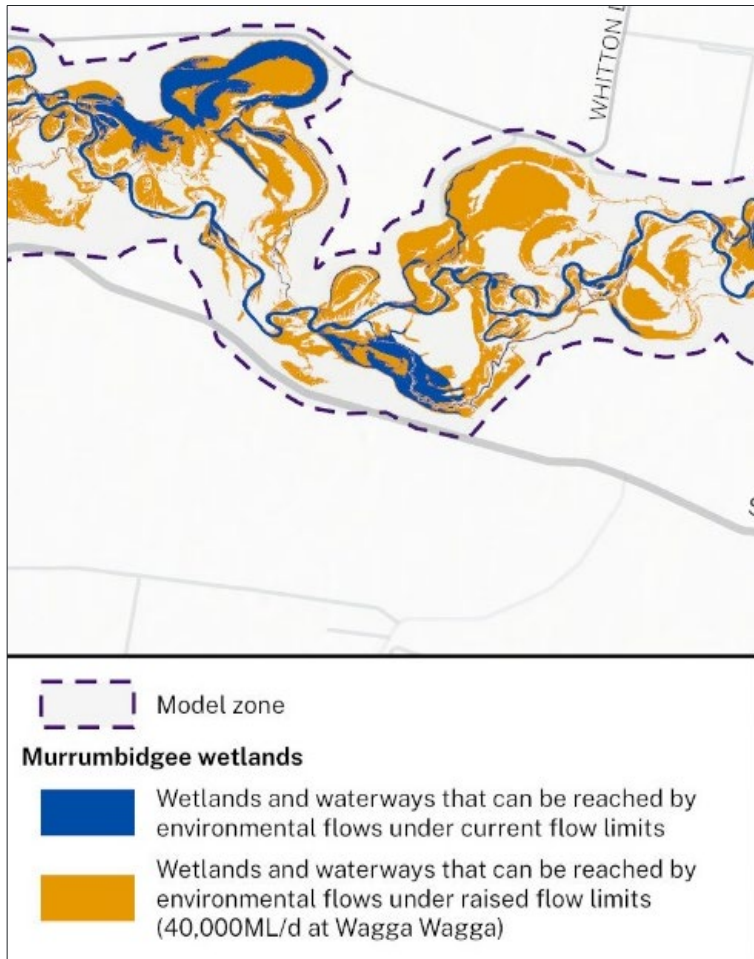
- ✓ NSW funded to progress technical studies for a future Murray Final Business case, including hydraulic modelling, environment benefits and risk assessments and climate change and salinity impact assessments
- Engagement in the Murray program area is paused, pending Constraints Roadmap consideration

# 2

## Final Business Case

Michelle Cavallaro  
Director, Reconnecting River Country Program

# Problem statements and project objectives



## Problem statements

**1** Ecosystem health has declined along the Murrumbidgee River contributed to by river regulation and consumptive water use impacting the frequency of overbank flows connecting low-level wetlands and floodplains

**2** Environmental water recovered to improve the health of river ecosystems is unable to be used above channel capacity as the river operator may not have the authorising environment to release these flows

**3** Current environmental flow limits are constrained to avoid impacts on riparian landholders, public infrastructure and other stakeholders

## Project objectives



**Objective 1: Ecosystem health**  
Protect and support the restoration, connectivity, functionality and long-term resilience of water-dependent ecosystems creating healthier functioning river systems in the Murrumbidgee Valley



**Objective 2: Productive environmental water use**  
Enable the more efficient and effective use of environmental water within the Murrumbidgee regulated river water source



**Objective 3: Mitigate impacts and explore opportunities**  
To fairly and equitably mitigate impacts on riparian landholders and stakeholders from the release of increased environmental flows, and support First nations people to equitably participate in and inform environmental water management



# Recommended solution



- The recommended solution is to increase the upper environmental flow limit to 40,000 ML/day at Wagga Wagga.
- Flows at this level will not commence until after 2031 and are subject to continuing Australian Government support.
- This option demonstrates the best value for money by outperforming the other options across economic, First Nations and environmental indicators.

# Flow limit options considered

Flow limit options	Flow target at Wagga Wagga	+ Risk mitigation buffer	Net present value (\$m)	Benefit cost ratio
Current / Base Case	22,000ML/day	-	-	-
Option 1	32,000ML/day	4,000ML/day	-113	0.8
Option 2	36,000ML/day	4,000ML/day	130	1.3
Option 3	40,000ML/day	5,000ML/day	153	1.3

# Benefits evaluation



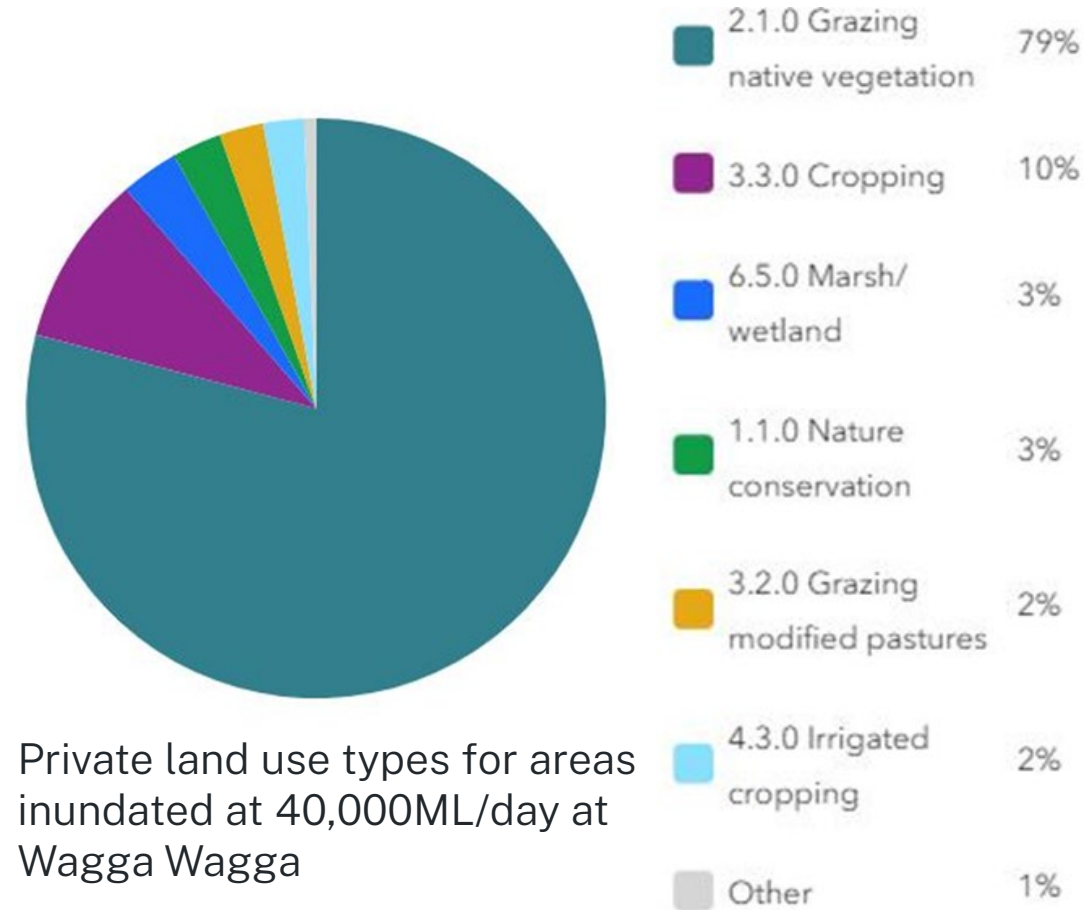
	Option 1 32,000 ML/day	Option 2 36,000 ML/day	Option 3 40,000 ML/day
<b>Contribution to Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment Mechanism offsets*</b>	0GL	5-10GL	10-20GL
<b>Increase in area of wetlands that can receive environmental water*</b>	119%	157%	187%
<b>Increase in area of river red gum forest and woodlands that can receive environmental water*</b>	172%	213%	251%
<b>Increase abundance of Golden Perch*</b>	7%	16%	26%
<b>Private landholder support</b>	80%	77%	72%
<b>First Nations support</b>	Medium	Medium	High

\*Benefits considered are additional to the Base Case of 22,000ML/day

# Assessment of property inundation

Potential property inundation	Option 1 32,000 ML/day	Option 2 36,000 ML/day	Option 3 40,000 ML/day
Proportion of property inundation:			
• less than 10%	74%	68%	63%
• 10-20%	11%	14%	17%
• > 20%	15%	17%	20%
No. of private properties impacted (total)	1,116	1,165	1,205

Under current operations up to 22,000ML/day, 963 properties already experience environment flows



Private land use types for areas inundated at 40,000ML/day at Wagga Wagga

# Proposed measures

- Securing environmental flow easements on private land and public land, where required
- Developing alternative options to easements where landholdings have minimal inundation
- Infrastructure works
- First Nations enabling measures
- Flow notification system





# Alternatives to flow easements

- The program is aware that many landholders do not support easement acquisition.
- The aim is to find a way to secure the flow corridor in the most efficient and effective way.
- While the preferred approach is to secure flow easements, there may be circumstances in which a Deed of Release is more suitable.
- The program is working on alternative options to flow easements for landholdings that are minimally affected.
- Once finalised and approved, the program will communicate these options to stakeholders.

# Phase 1 Implementation (to December 2026)

- Partial delivery to negotiate with the most affected properties
- Establish the legal authorising environment
- Scope works on public lands
- Deliver First Nations measures
- Develop Flow Notification System

Aligns with Basin Plan timeframes and may support higher environmental flows up to Water Sharing Plan limits, after 2026.



# Phase 2 Implementation (2027 to 2031)

Subject to Basin Plan extension and securing Australian Government funding:

- Secure remainder of the flow corridor
- Negotiate with the remaining affected properties
- Construction of infrastructure works
- Continue to deliver First Nations measures

Environmental flows at 40,000ML/day, won't occur until after 2031



# 3

## Landholder Negotiation Scheme

Michael Scotland  
Manager, Policy Reconnecting River Country Program

# Landholder Negotiation Scheme public exhibition

- 16 September – 24 November 2024 (10 weeks)
- Engagement activities included webinars, drop-in sessions and community meetings in Moree, Deniliquin, Wagga Wagga and Darlington Point
- 119 submissions received
- Submissions received from landholders and peak stakeholder groups
- Feedback received on draft LNS Regulation, Negotiation Guidelines, and the Reconnecting River Country and Reconnecting Watercourse Country Programs.

# Landholder Negotiation Scheme



Provides a state-wide framework that NSW Government must follow when negotiating agreements with landholders affected by future environmental water delivery.



Additional protections for landholders through- more time to negotiate (12 months), allowing for mediation and requiring advance flow notifications.



Designed to protect the interests of affected landholders through a fair, consistent and transparent framework.



Is an amendment to the *Water Management (General) Regulation 2018* and supported by statutory Negotiation Guidelines.

Without the LNS, the Just Terms Act is the only alternative process.

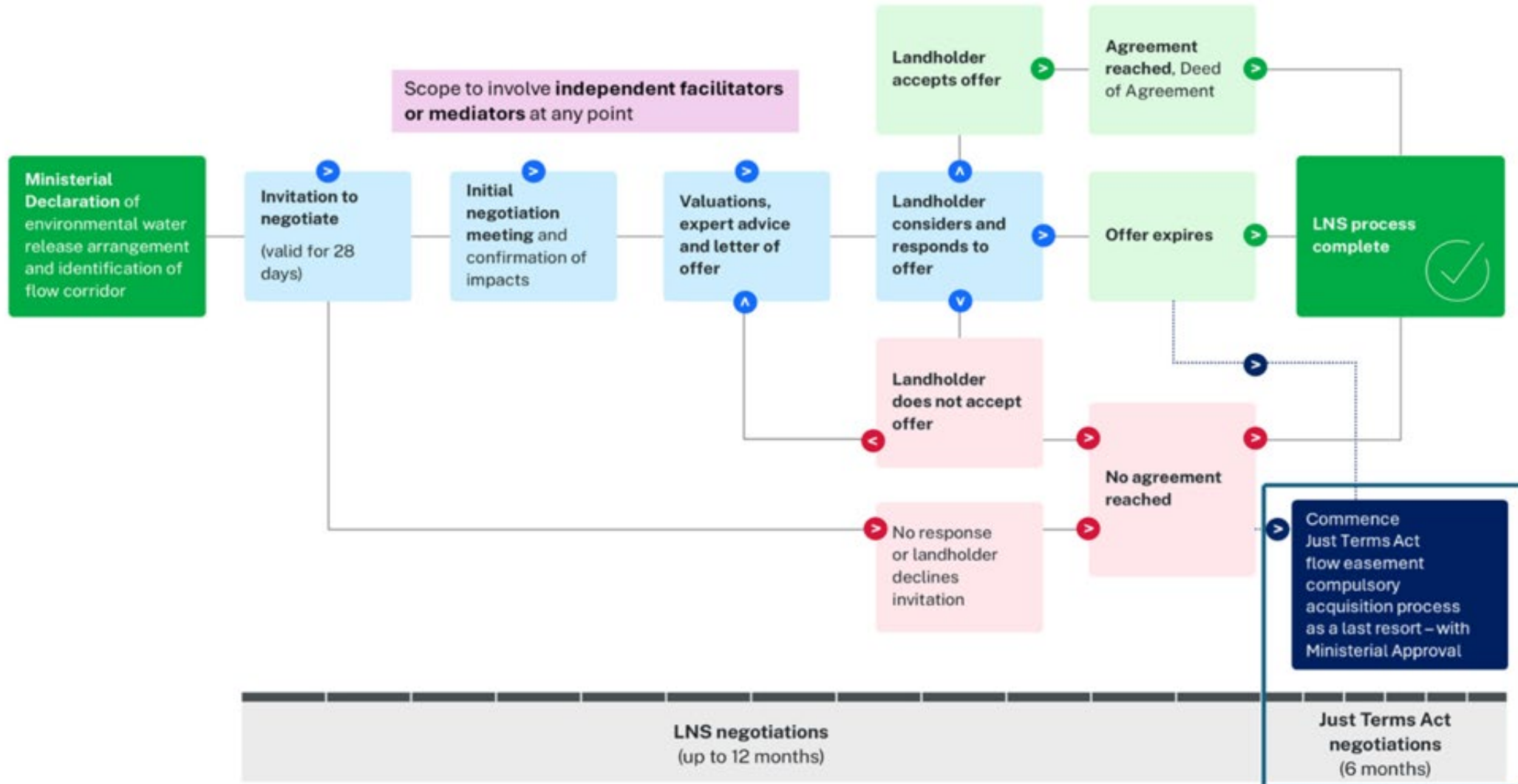


Declaration Order, published in the Government Gazette is required to switch on or apply the LNS in a particular area.



Requires consideration of impacts and compensation and / or mitigation works for affected landholders in line with existing legislation.

To date, no Declaration Orders have been published.



# Declaration Order

- The LNS comes into effect through the Minister publishing a Declaration Order in the NSW Government Gazette that describes:
  - the frequency, timing and duration of the new environmental water release arrangement
  - the area that will be subject to LNS negotiations.
- Declaration Orders are program specific and must be published before negotiations under the LNS can commence.
- Provides information for landholders and property valuers to inform the valuations and the impacts of the flows on the property.
- To date, no Declaration Orders have been published.



# The Declaration Order under the Landholder Negotiation Scheme Regulation applies to enduring environmental releases

## Landholder Negotiation Scheme negotiations timeframe

## Enduring environmental water release arrangement

**Program delivery of negotiations under the Landholder Negotiation Scheme Regulation.** Negotiation aimed at agreements with landholders to acquire an interest in land (e.g. flow easement)

Compensation may include mitigation works in some cases.



**Minister declares an end to all Landholder Negotiation Scheme negotiations**



**Proposed environmental water releases can commence within the terms of the Declaration Order**



**Environmental water managers**

- Order release events



**River operator**

- Notifies affected landholders
- Makes releases



As a last resort, and if approved by the Minister, **compulsory acquisition of an interest in land** may be pursued under the *Land Acquisition (Just Terms Compensation) Act 1991*.

Includes further negotiation aimed at reaching an agreement, and may result in compulsory acquisition.



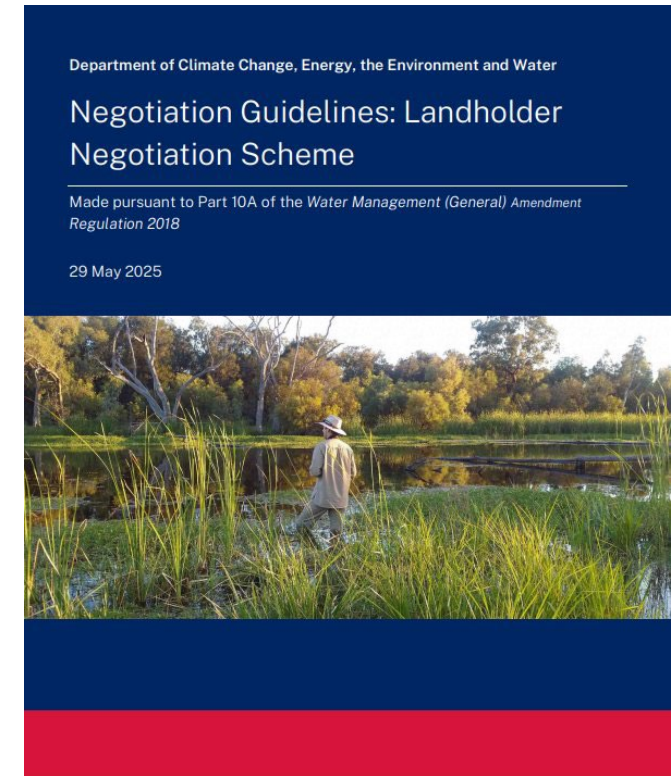
# 4

## Next steps

Michelle Cavallaro  
Director, Reconnecting River Country Program

# Flow corridor delivery to December 2026

- Partial flow corridor delivery focussing on the most affected properties. Aligns with current Basin Plan timeframes and may support higher environmental flows (up to Water Sharing Plan limits) after 2026
- Preparing documentation, processes and systems to support flow corridor delivery
- Declaration Order - Ministerial Gazettal of an area of the flow corridor for negotiations.
- Flow corridor negotiations commence in 2025
- During negotiations, landholders will have a Personal Manager to assist with general enquiries and support and an Acquisition Manager to guide them through the negotiation process.
- Independent mediation and facilitation services will be available to support landholders during the negotiations.
- To support mental health and wellbeing, free and confidential counselling services will be available to landholders.



5

## Related projects

Michelle Cavallaro  
Director, Reconnecting River Country Program

# Mundarlo Bridge Replacement Project status

Project fully funded to construction – December 2026 practical completion

Design development and planning approvals are well progressed

Concept design and hydraulic modelling have been completed

Generally positive engagement with local landholders

Higher bridge heights being investigated based on landholder feedback

Regular consultation and workshops with Junee Shire Council and Cootamundra-Gundagai Regional Council staff



Investigating bridge heights between 2.2m and 3.7m higher than existing bridge, subject to cost and constructability assessment.

# Mundowry Lane Raising Project status

Project is fully funded to construction – December 2026 practical completion.

Design development and planning approvals are well progressed.

Concept design and hydraulic modelling have been completed.

Local landholders have raised concerns over flooding impacts – concerned the road raise could act as a levee.

Concept design is for 2 sections of road raise (including culverts) rather than uniform raise over 1.5 km.

Regular consultation and workshops with Wagga Wagga City Council staff.



# For more information

## Final Business case summary:

[https://water.dpie.nsw.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0005/636773/fbc-rrcp-murrumbidgee-project.pdf](https://water.dpie.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/636773/fbc-rrcp-murrumbidgee-project.pdf)

## What We Heard Report:

[https://water.dpie.nsw.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0018/630513/lms-regulation-what-we-heard-report.pdf](https://water.dpie.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0018/630513/lms-regulation-what-we-heard-report.pdf)

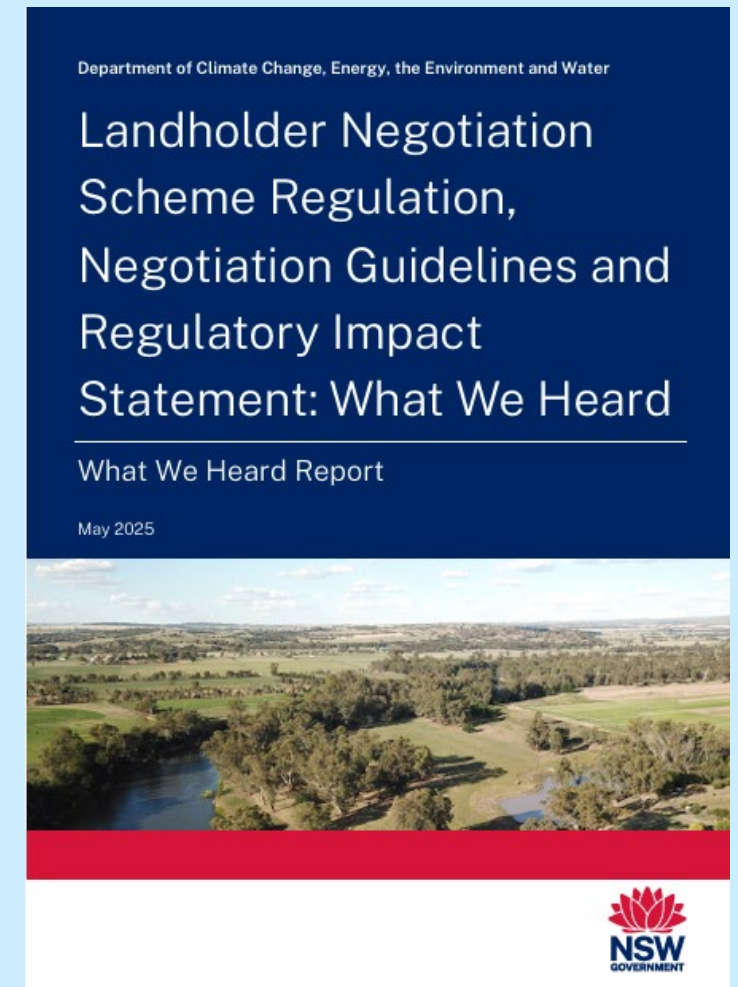
## Contact us:

visit: [water.dpie.nsw.gov.au/reconnecting-river-country-program](http://water.dpie.nsw.gov.au/reconnecting-river-country-program)

visit: [water.nsw.gov.au/landholder-negotiation-scheme](http://water.nsw.gov.au/landholder-negotiation-scheme)

email: [water.enquiries@dpie.nsw.gov.au](mailto:water.enquiries@dpie.nsw.gov.au)

phone: 1300 081 047



# Questions

# Gauge boards and flow hydrographs

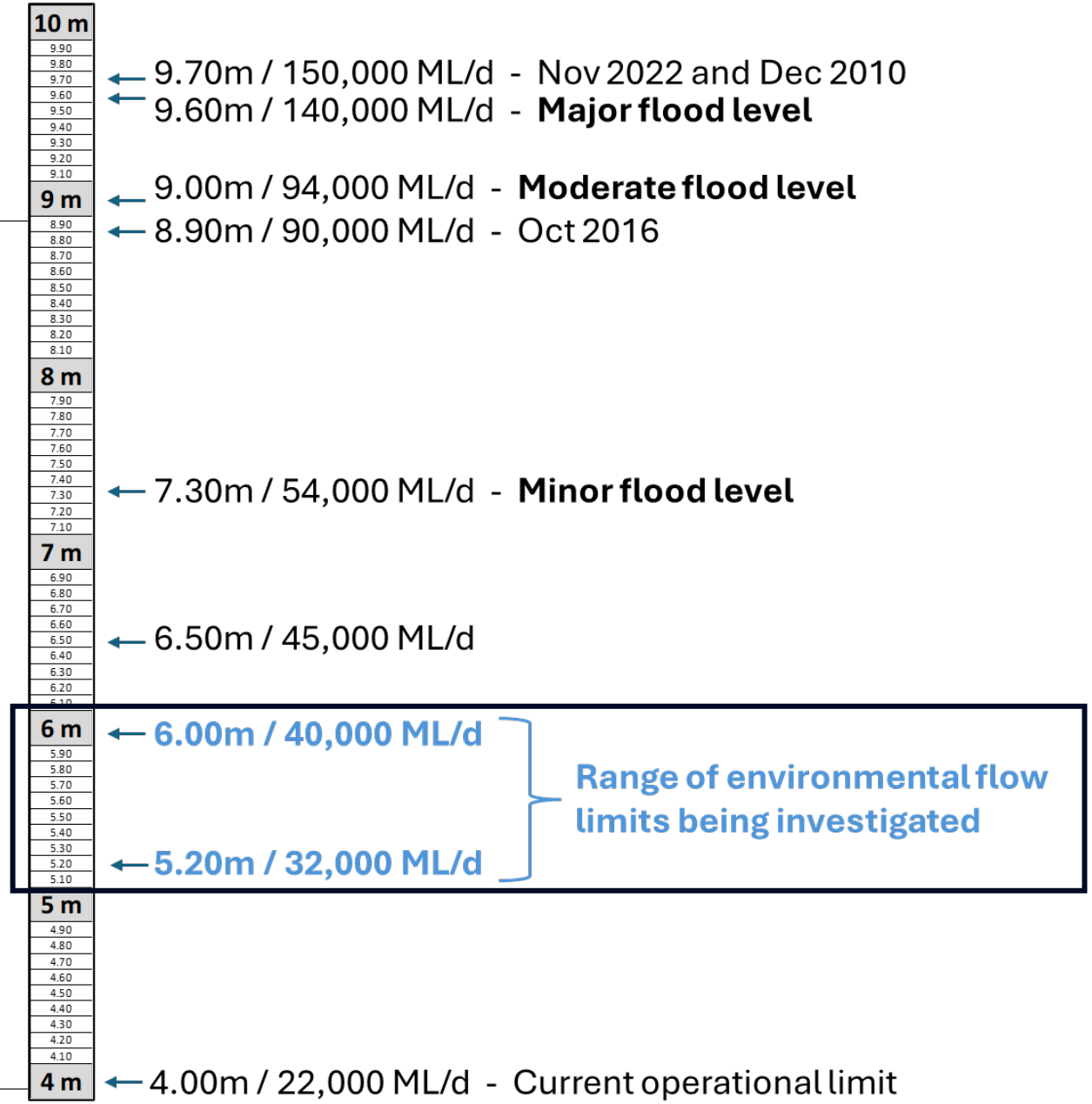
# Flow limit options considered

Flow limits between 32,000 to 40,000 ML/d at Wagga Wagga being considered.



Wagga Wagga gauge location

## Wagga Wagga gauge

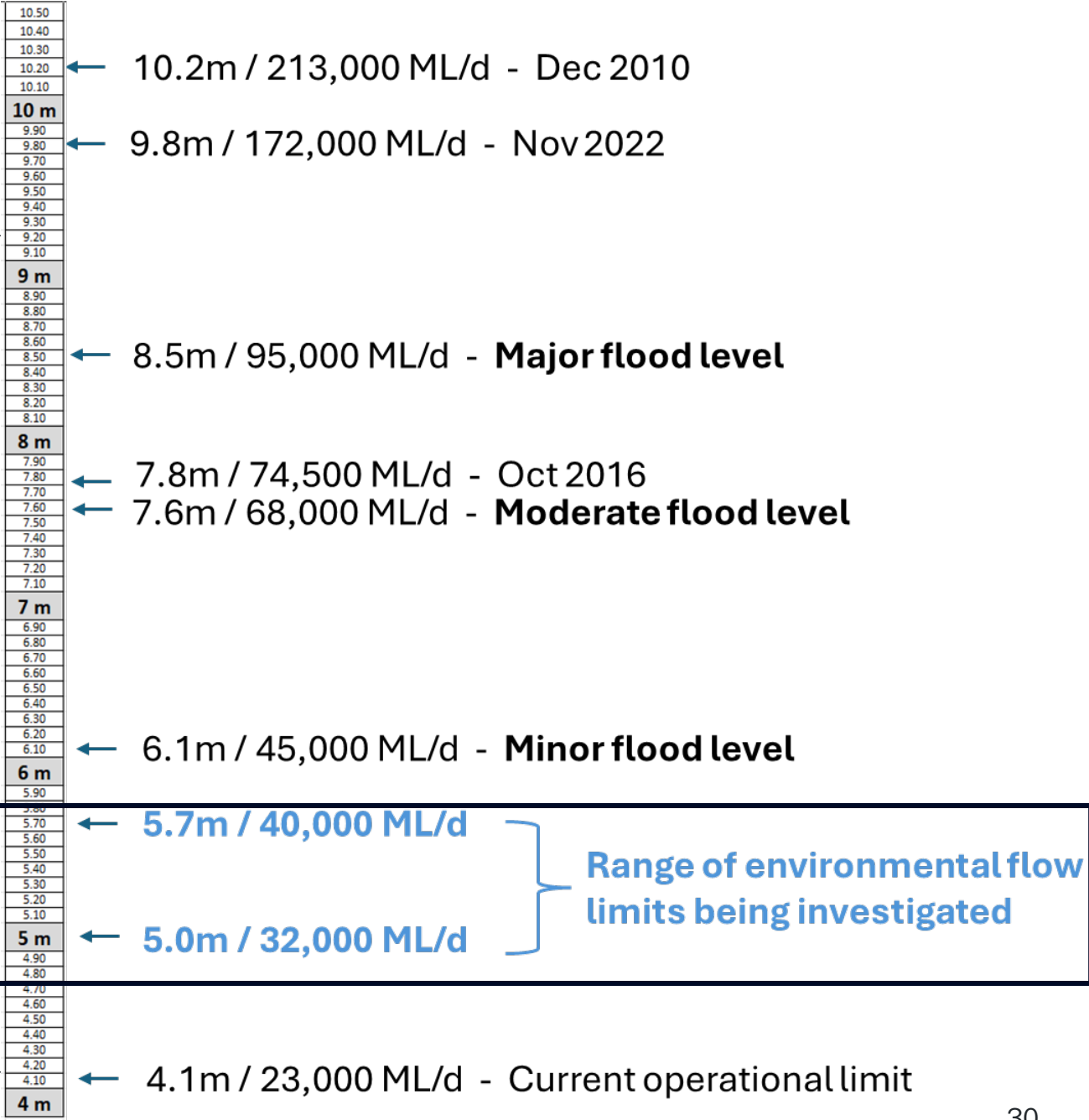


# Gundagai gauge

## Corresponding flows and levels



Gundagai gauge location

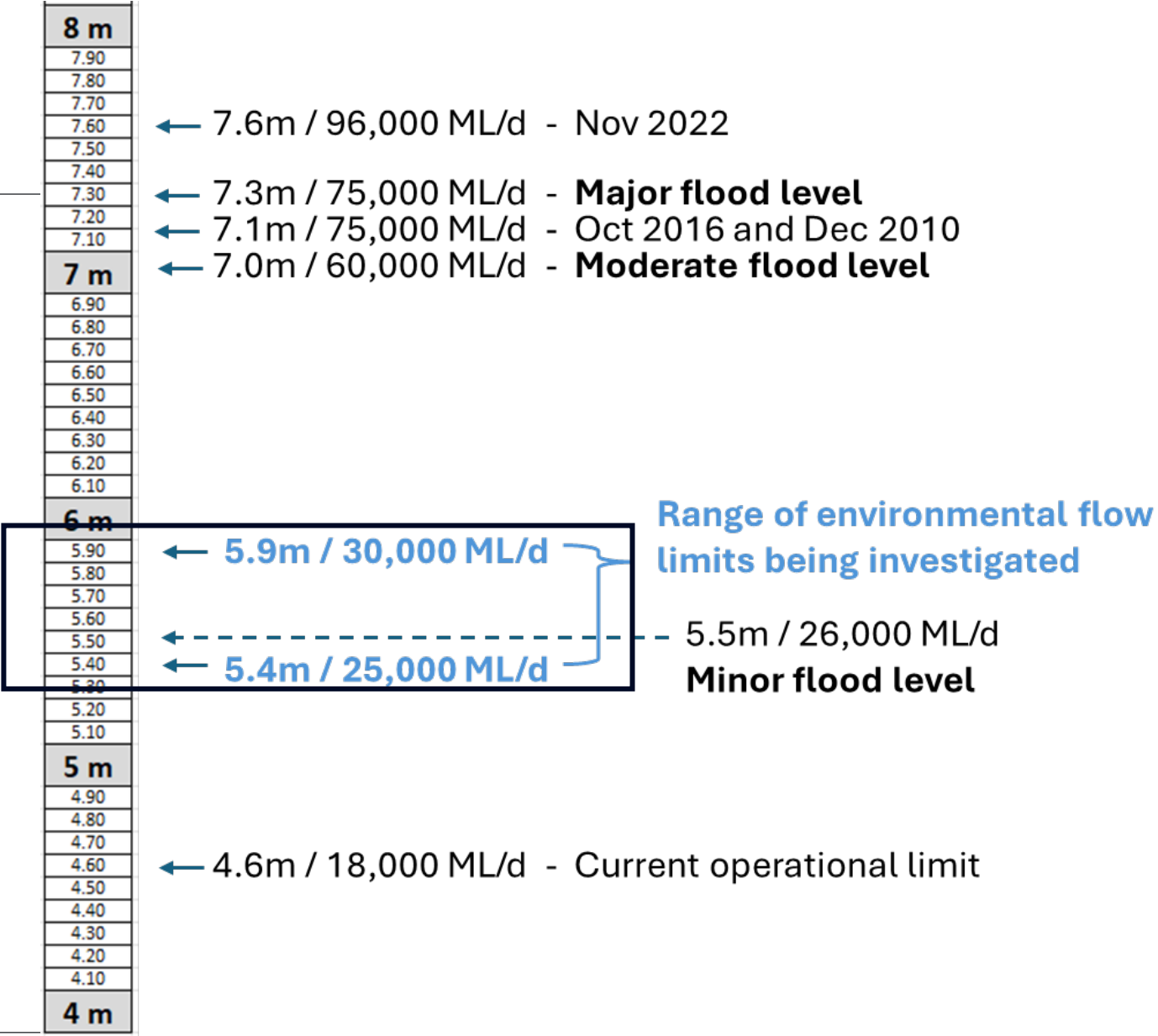


# Darlington Point gauge

## Corresponding flows and levels



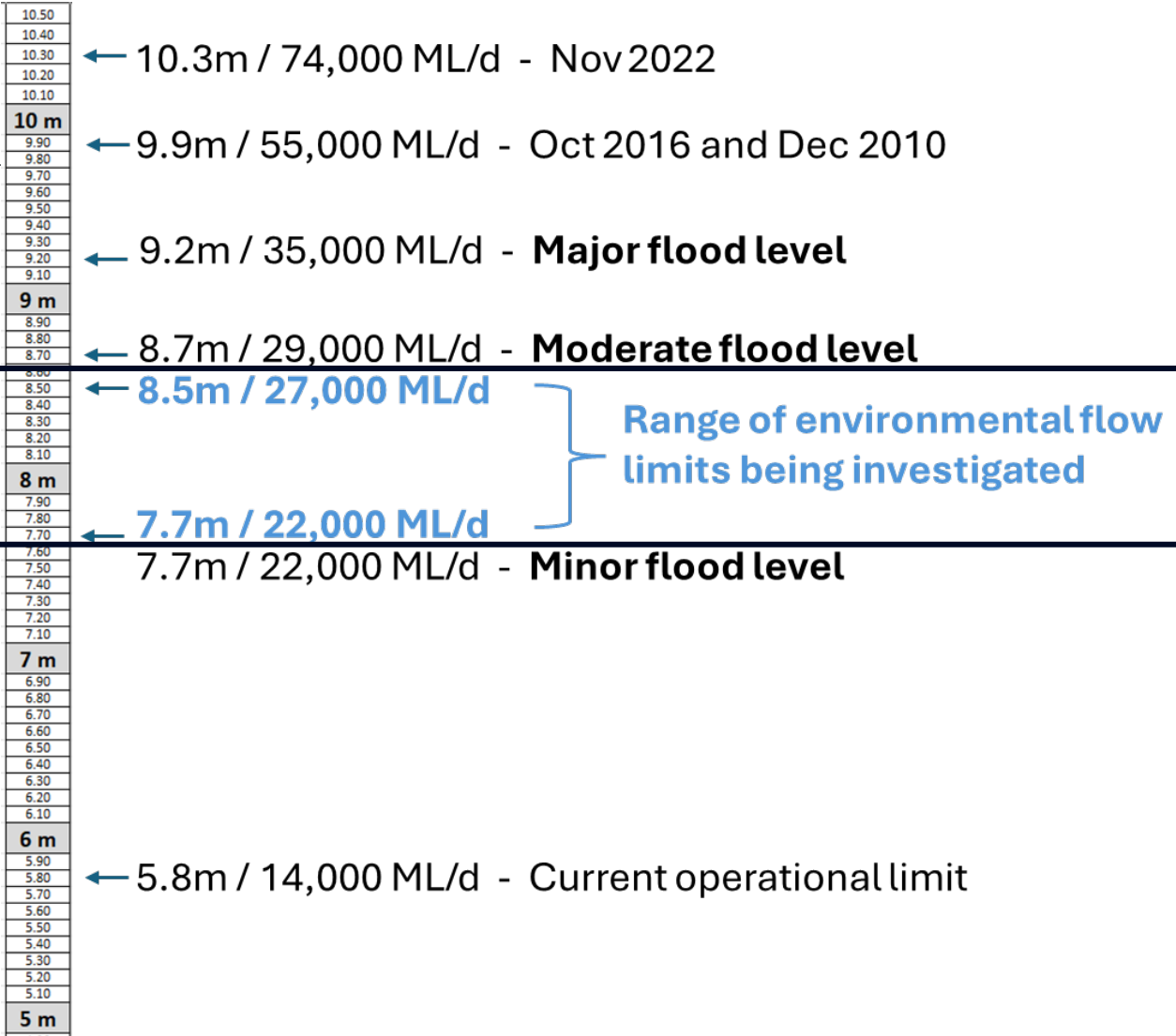
Darlington Point gauge location



# Hay Weir (downstream) gauge Corresponding flows and levels



Hay weir (downstream) gauge location

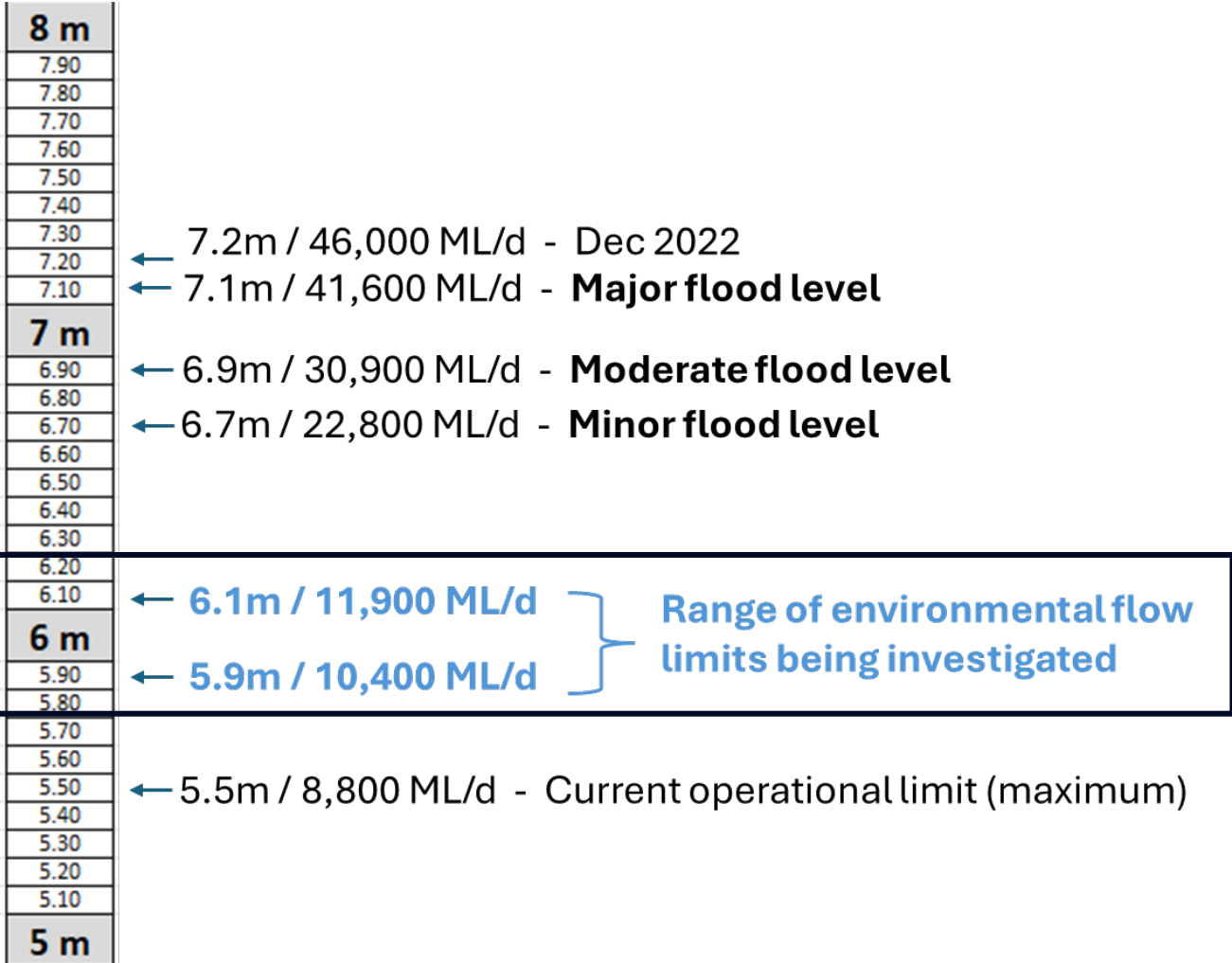


# Balranald Weir (downstream) gauge

## Corresponding flows and levels



Balranald weir (downstream) gauge location



# Frequency of proposed environmental flows

Hypothetical example for 40,000 ML/d flow limit option, 1990 to 2022



## Wet years

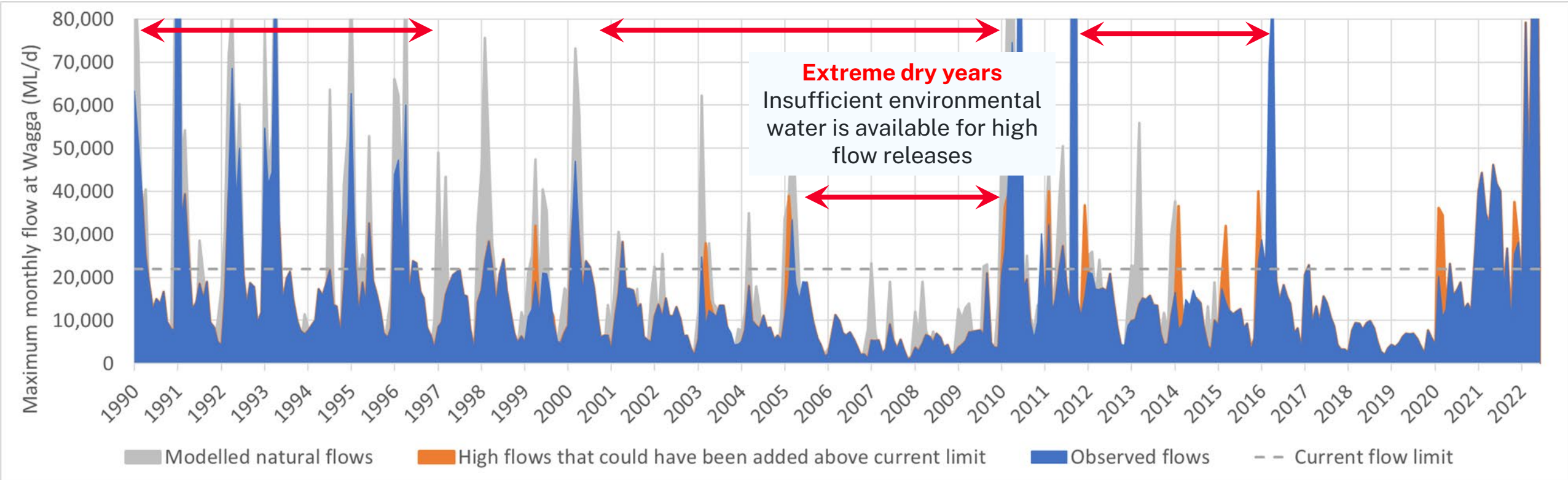
Few or no high flow releases required as environmental water needs are largely met by existing flows.

## Dry years

High flow releases could reduce the length of dry spells and ensure wetlands and critical habitats are not irreversibly damaged by extended drought

## Moderate years

High flow releases would supplement existing flows to support condition and recruitment of native plants, animals and fish



Maximum monthly flows in the Murrumbidgee River Wagga Wagga gauge

# Frequency of proposed environmental flows

Hypothetical example for 40,000 ML/d flow limit option, 1990 to 2022

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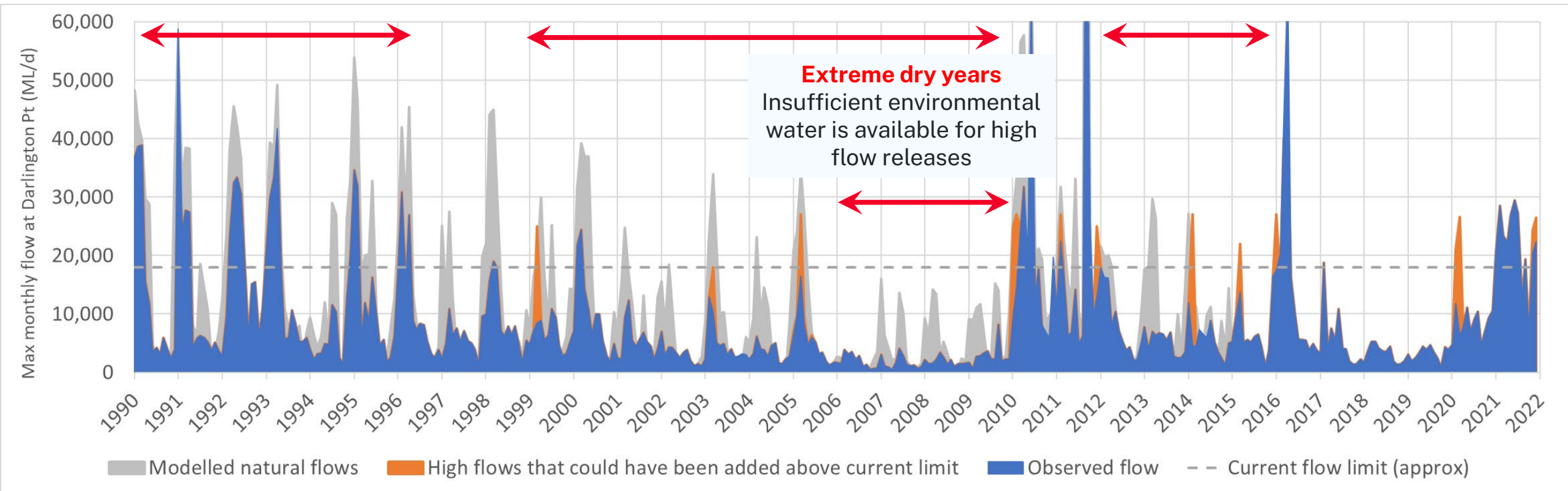
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Maximum monthly flows in the Murrumbidgee River Darlington Point gauge