

Floodplain Harvesting Action Plan – progress report for Quarter 1 2025

Outcomes for January to March 2025

October 2025



Acknowledgement of Country

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land and pays respect to Elders past, present and future.

We recognise Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' unique cultural and spiritual relationships to place and their rich contribution to society.

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

Floodplain Harvesting Action Plan – progress report for Quarter 1 2025

Published by NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water

dcceew.nsw.gov.au

First published: August 2025

Department reference number: PUB25/606

Copyright and disclaimer

© State of New South Wales through Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water 2024. Information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing, July 2025, and is subject to change. For more information, please visit:

dcceew.nsw.gov.au/copyright

Contents

- Acknowledgement of Country ii
- Overview 4
- Floodplain Harvesting Action Plan deliverables 5
 - Progress to date..... 5
 - In progress and future actions 5
 - Set clear rules for floodplain harvesting and consult with you about them..... 5
 - Ensure rules are followed..... 6
 - Improve floodplain harvesting management over time 7
 - Completed actions 9
 - Use the best available facts, data, and scientific analysis to underpin the licensing framework and explain this work to you..... 9
 - Set clear rules for floodplain harvesting and consult with you about them..... 9
 - Ensure rules are followed..... 10
 - Improve floodplain harvesting management over time 10
- References and relevant links 11

Overview

This report details the department's progress in delivering the Floodplain Harvesting Action Plan (the Action Plan) over Quarter 1: January to March 2025.

The Action Plan, released in September 2019, ensures water taken from floodplains across key areas in the northern Murray–Darling Basin is managed and measured within the legal limits set by the Basin Plan 2012 and by NSW water sharing plans.

The Action Plan commits to:

1. use the best available facts, data and scientific analysis to underpin the floodplain harvesting licensing framework
2. set clear rules for floodplain harvesting
3. ensure rules are followed
4. improve floodplain harvesting management over time.

Integration of floodplain harvesting activities into the water licensing framework improves the management of NSW water resources and provides regulatory certainty for floodplain harvesting water users. By ensuring that floodplain harvesting licenses are exercised within these regulatory controls, we can ensure that floodwaters also remain available to our floodplains, rivers and creeks to support important natural processes.



Image: Floodplain harvesting measurement equipment setup in Moree.

Floodplain Harvesting Action Plan deliverables

Progress to date

As of March 2025, out of 32 actions identified in the Action Plan: 24 have been completed, 6 remain in progress, and 2 are identified as future actions.

Action items listed as in progress at Q4 2024 were progressed into Q1 2025 as the department finalises the rollout of floodplain harvesting in the Namoi Valley.

Future actions will represent the consolidation of floodplain harvesting implementation in the northern valleys with measurement, evaluation, reporting and improvement functions designed to support the framework into the future.

In progress and future actions

Set clear rules for floodplain harvesting and consult with you about them

Table 1: Progress on the second set of actions

Our commitment	Comment	Estimated completion date and status
2.8 Finalise licences and amend water sharing plan and submit water resource plan for reaccreditation	Complete for Border Rivers, Gwydir, Macquarie, and Barwon-Darling valleys. The Namoi water sharing plans were amended 15 November 2024. Namoi Surface Water Resource Plan (WRP) has been updated with floodplain harvesting content and informally reviewed by the Murray–Darling Basin Authority (MDBA). Final entitlement figures will be reflected in WRP and further checked with MDBA prior to submission. The timeframe for this work has now extended into late 2025. WRP submission timing is currently impacted by outstanding content in relation to Indigenous Values and Uses.	Q4 2025, in progress

Ensure rules are followed

Table 2: Progress on the third set of actions

Our commitment	Comment	Estimated completion date and status
3.3 Require licence holders to install telemetry-ready, continuous water-level loggers on all on-farm storages used for floodplain harvesting	It is anticipated this action will be completed in 2026 to align with the primary equipment compliance date for the Namoi Valley. Under these rules, the compliance date for the installation of primary (telemetry enabled) measurement equipment is 12 months from their access licence being credited. To take water in the first 12 months, a secondary device (for example, a gauge board) is the minimum requirement. The primary equipment compliance dates for each valley are: • Border Rivers and Gwydir – 15 August 2023 • Macquarie – 1 March 2024 • Barwon-Darling – 1 April 2024.	Q4 2026, in progress
3.4 Start monitoring and enforcement of the new floodplain harvesting licensing framework through NRAR	Under the floodplain harvesting measurement rules, water can only be taken under a floodplain harvesting access licence when compliant metering equipment is in place. NRAR is responsible for enforcing compliance with these rules. The on-ground compliance monitoring program is continuing across all licensed valleys. Desktop assessments and contact with water users has begun and will continue to determine the levels of compliance. Through conversations NRAR have had with water users, it is evident that some barriers persist including access to dually qualified persons (DQPs) and compliant equipment. NRAR is using remote sensing techniques, including the department's Earth Observation Tool, to assist in identifying water take across the licenced valleys.	Q4 2025, in progress

Improve floodplain harvesting management over time

Table 3: Progress on the fourth set of actions

Our commitment	Comment	Estimated completion date and status
4.1 Collect floodplain harvesting diversion data by implementing the Floodplain Harvesting Measurement Strategy	Measurement requirements for floodplain harvesting are in place for the Border Rivers, Gwydir, Macquarie and Barwon-Darling valleys. Diversion data is collected via a combination of primary and secondary device measurement equipment where installed. Collection of data in the Namoi will commence once the licensing framework is implemented and works approval holders have installed their metering equipment.	Q2 2026, in progress
4.5 Invest in robust monitoring and evaluation programs to better understand the hydrological and ecological effects of floodplain harvesting	Monitoring, evaluation, and reporting (MER) is underway to better understand the hydrological and ecological effects of floodplain harvesting. This monitoring is reported within the department's <u>Environmental Outcomes Monitoring and Research Program</u>. A detailed technical report on changes to floodplain pool inundation and diversion impacts is in review. Additional resources are required to maintain this as long-term MER in the northern Murray–Darling Basin. Expansion to the southern Murray–Darling Basin will require substantial additional investment. Measurement data from licensing and measurement of floodplain harvesting will provide important new data for monitoring and evaluating the hydrological and ecological effects of floodplain harvesting. The expected completion date has been updated to provide additional time to collect actual floodplain extraction data.	Q3 2025, in progress

Our commitment	Comment	Estimated completion date and status
4.6 Recalibrate models using floodplain harvesting measurement data	3-5 years of measurement data is required for this recalibration. A review was conducted in 2024 on the progress of metering of floodplain harvesting take which found that there was insufficient data available to commence this action. Until further funding is available, completion of this action will be integrated into business-as-usual activities for delivery over an extended timeframe.	Future action
4.7 Improve model capability by explicitly representing flows from the floodplain to the river using all new data and information collected	This action is about a year behind the intended schedule. On 16 June 2023, the department received a draft report on the return flow stages for the first of 3 stages. A further report is expected in Q2 of 2025. Until further funding is available, completion of this action will be integrated into business-as-usual activities for delivery over an extended timeframe.	Future action
4.8 Review water sharing rules and amend them as necessary to improve the management of floodplain harvesting over time, based on improved data and information	In July 2024, the Connectivity Expert Panel (the panel) provided independent advice to the Minister for Water on changes that could be made to water sharing plans to improve outcomes in the Barwon-Darling. The report reflects the views of the panel and is not government policy. As a first step, the government is conducting detailed analysis of the panel's proposed flow targets to fully understand the potential benefits and impacts. Before any decisions are made, the department will brief the Minister and government. This is expected to occur mid-2025, after which we will release the results of the analysis and consult with stakeholders to discuss key findings and seek their input. Next steps will consider including water sharing plan amendments to improve connectivity, which will be consulted on before implementation.	2026, in progress

Completed actions

Use the best available facts, data, and scientific analysis to underpin the licensing framework and explain this work to you

Table 4: List of actions delivered under commitment 1

Our commitment	Completion date
1.1 Report on how sensitivity and uncertainty in the model has been treated by the department and how much it affects users	Q4 2019
1.2 Report on the significance of additional rainfall runoff due to irrigation and how this is being managed	Q4 2019
1.3 Write to individuals to explain the parameters that we will use to work out their licence entitlements	Q4 2020
1.4 Publish valley-based model build report	Q4 2022
1.5 Publish valley-based model scenario report	Q4 2022
1.6 Publish valley-based environmental benefit reports	Q4 2022
1.7 Hold a workshop with peak water user groups in northern NSW valleys to provide information about how the modelling approach applied to individual farms is supported by sensitivity testing	Q3-Q4 2019
1.8 Hold workshops with stakeholders to explain the model build, model scenario and environmental assessment reports on a valley-by-valley basis	Q4 2022

Set clear rules for floodplain harvesting and consult with you about them

Table 5: List of actions delivered under commitment 2

Our commitment	Completion date
2.1 Publish all independent reviews about policy implementation	Q3 2019
2.2 Release a response to each recommendation of the Independent Review of NSW Floodplain Harvesting Policy Implementation	Q3 2019
2.3 Release a guideline about how the department is implementing the policy	Q3 2019
2.4 Release proposed water sharing plan and water resource plan rule changes for floodplain harvesting	Q1 2023

Our commitment	Completion date
2.5 Hold workshops with stakeholders to explain the guideline	Q3 2019
2.6 Hold workshops with stakeholders about proposed water sharing plan and water resource plan rule changes	Q1 2023
2.7 Release draft entitlements for comment	Q2 2023

Ensure rules are followed

Table 6: List of actions delivered under commitment 3

Our commitment	Completion date
3.1 Meet <u>Compliance Compact</u> obligations by publishing a program for improved measurement of floodplain harvesting	Q2 2019
3.2 Release the final Floodplain Harvesting Measurement Policy	Q4 2019
3.5 Develop a best-practice guideline for floodplain harvesting measuring in partnership with Queensland and Murray–Darling Basin Authority	Q4 2022
3.6 Implement best practice guidelines	Q1 2024
3.7 Support the development of technologies that enable better auditing and compliance of floodplain harvesting, including through the department's Water Technology Pilot Program	Q3 2019
3.8 Encourage NRAR to address unapproved flood works on a risk basis to improve outcomes for the environment and downstream water users	Q1 2022

Improve floodplain harvesting management over time

Table 7: List of actions delivered under commitment 4

Our commitment	Completion date
4.2 Consider opportunities to expand the river gauging network to improve the quantification of return flows from the floodplain to the river	Q3 2024
4.3 Continue to invest in remote sensing to improve our understanding of flood flow breakouts and return flows from the floodplain to the river	Q4 2023
4.4 Undertake modelling to assess the effects of climate change on floodplain harvesting, as well as on downstream water users and the environment	Q3 2021

References and relevant links

More information on the Floodplain Harvesting Action Plan and previous quarterly reports is available on the department's website at:

water.dpie.nsw.gov.au/our-work/floodplain-management/Floodplain-harvesting-licensing/floodplain-harvesting-action-plan