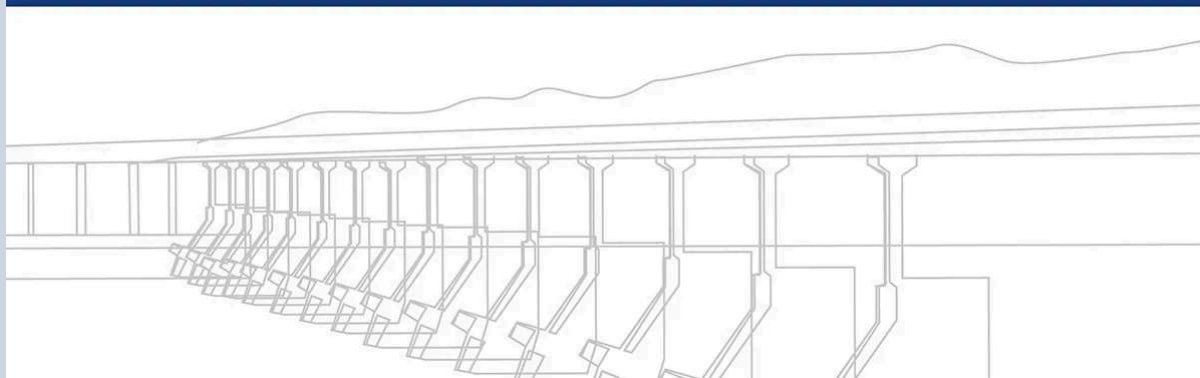




Dams Safety

Dams Safety Focus



29 October 2025



Message from the CEO

Welcome to the latest issue of *Dams Safety Focus*, our eNewsletter providing up-to-date information to help declared dam owners, and their consultants and contractors, manage their dams' safety.

I am pleased to introduce the [2025 Dams Safety NSW Strategic Objectives](#), which took effect on 1 July 2025. This document sets a clear direction for the next stage of our agency's development and reflects both the challenges and opportunities ahead.

The new objectives were developed to address several key priorities:

- Clarify our long-term direction and how we will deliver public value over the next five to ten years.

- Strengthen transparency and accountability following commencement of the Dams Safety levy.
- Reflect evolving risks and priorities, including the growing awareness of climate variability, legacy infrastructure challenges, and the community's expectations of safe dams.
- Recognise our growth and maturity since our establishment on 1 November 2019.
- Build organisational capability to ensure we are fit for the next phase of our maturity.

Together, these priorities position us to continue delivering on our purpose with clarity, accountability, and confidence in the years ahead.

Chris Salkovic
CEO, Dams Safety NSW

Must my declared dam's risk rating be below the safety threshold?

We are often asked by dam owners and consultants whether owners need to take actions and measures to bring their dam below the safety threshold. **The answer is "no, you do not", but you do have to reduce risks So Far As Is Reasonably Practicable (SFAIRP)**, which may result in reducing risks to a level below the safety threshold.

Dams Safety NSW has a [guidance note](#) to help consultants and dam owners understand what SFAIRP entails and what is needed to demonstrate it. In its simplest form, SFAIRP means a dam owner has taken every possible measure to eliminate or minimise a dam failure risk, unless the cost, time, or effort involved is grossly disproportionate to the potential harm prevented.

All declared dams - whether above or below the safety threshold - need to reduce risks so far as is reasonably practicable. If your dam's risk rating exceeds the safety threshold, you must notify Dams Safety NSW as soon as you become aware of it. Dams above the safety threshold are monitored closely by Dams Safety NSW to ensure they have risk reduction action plans in place and are making acceptable progress against those plans. Additionally, regular reports on the progress of dam owner remedial works and actions on dams above the safety threshold are provided to the Dams Safety NSW Board.

A bit of background

As part of the risk report process, the highest societal risk rating for each dam needs to be calculated and plotted on the diagram shown in the [gazetted methodology](#), where it will fall either above or below a line called the safety threshold. The [safety threshold](#) is a benchmark for assessing the level of risk to public safety. NOTE: there are two safety thresholds; one for existing dams and the other for new/proposed dams, anticipating that contemporary understanding of dam design and construction should lead to less risk of failure.



Understand your dam safety plans – even if a consultant has prepared them

Many dam owners engage consultants to prepare key documents to meet the requirements of the Dams Safety Act and Regulation. These documents may include dam safety management systems, operations and maintenance plans or emergency plans. But dam owners are responsible for all of these documents. They must make sure their staff are familiar with - and trained in using - these plans and systems.

Staff should know where to find relevant documents, and understand their roles and responsibilities as outlined in them.

Under the asset management system ISO 55001, dam owners are responsible for ensuring that people doing work that affects the dam have the appropriate education, training or experience and have been evaluated for competency.

There are also requirements in ISO 55001 to keep documented evidence of competency and periodically review competency needs.

Taking the time to ensure everyone understands dam-related documents will increase the chance of their successful implementation.



Use the NSW Planning Portal to find developments affecting your dam

New developments within a declared dam's inundation zone can change its consequence category by increasing the number of people at risk. To stay informed about proposed developments, dam owners can set up alerts through the NSW Planning Portal. It's a simple two-step process.

Step 1: Set up an account on the NSW Planning Portal

<https://www.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/>

Step 2: Subscribe for notifications <https://www.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/major-projects/services/subscribe-notifications>

You can choose to receive updates about a specific project, all projects within a local government area, or projects by category, such as energy or transport projects. A short [video](#) walks you through the steps.



Rapidan Dam in Minnesota, US, partially failed on June 24, 2024, leading to significant community and ecological impacts, including the release of millions of cubic yards of sediment into the Blue Earth River.

Learning from dam safety incident databases

Australia is in the enviable position of having had relatively few dam failures. Many other countries, with more dams, experience failures on a much more regular basis. We can gain valuable insights from these experiences to learn how to avoid similar situations here, and keep our dams safe.

The US Dam Failures and Incidents [database](https://damsafety.org/Incidents), created by the US Association of Dam Safety Officials, has information on more than 1000 dam failures and incidents that have occurred in the United States. You can search the incident database (<https://damsafety.org/Incidents>) or visit the Dam Failures website (<http://www.damfailures.org/>) to read case studies about the underlying causes of dam failure and how these can be minimised in the future.

The UK Reservoir Incidents Knowledge Base ([RIK](https://www.rik.gov.uk/)) shares dam safety incidents and near misses that affected, or could have affected, the safety of dams, pipes or valves. Reports to relevant regulators are uploaded to the regulator and anonymised to encourage sharing of incidents.

Both databases allow users to search by dam type (e.g. concrete, earthfill), use (e.g. water, tailings) and failure mode. Thus, users can learn from plausible failure modes for their dam, as well as less common occurrences.

Book a DSNSW education session – learn about declared dam safety requirements

Are you a declared dam owner looking to better understand your responsibilities?

Our capability team offers free education sessions that outline the high-level requirements of owning and operating a declared dam.

Sessions are approximately one-hour long, and are offered either online or face-to-face at the dam owners' site. You can request an education session by emailing us at info@damsafety.nsw.gov.au.

Given the general overview nature of the content presented in the education sessions, they are best suited to new owners, new staff members or those with little existing knowledge of dams safety laws.



ENROL NOW: online embankment and concrete dam surveillance courses

Dams Safety NSW has collaborated with TAFE NSW to deliver 2 three-hour online courses. They are both available on TAFE NSW's online learning platform.

[Surveillance of EMBANKMENT dams - routine inspections](#) The course will help NSW dam owners understand the activities involved in conducting routine visual

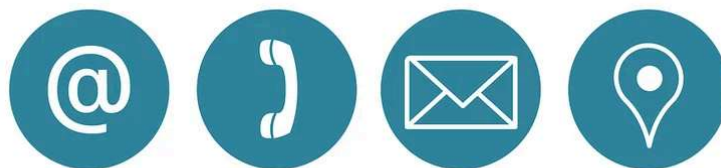
inspections of embankment dams.

Surveillance of CONCRETE dams - routine inspections This course will help NSW dam owners understand the activities involved in conducting routine visual inspections of concrete dams.

It is recommended that participants have at least 6 months' experience inspecting dams before attempting the courses.

PLEASE NOTE: successfully completing these courses does not mean you are a 'competent person'. You can choose to be assessed for competency against the National Water Training Package unit of competency '**NWPCAD011 - inspect and report on embankment dam safety**' or **NWPCAD010 – Inspect and report on concrete dam safety**, for an additional fee.

Contact Dams Safety NSW for more information about eligibility requirements for competency assessments by emailing us at **info@damsafety.nsw.gov.au**.



Do you have a new contact person for your dam?

Notify DSNSW - it's the law

If you have a new contact person for your declared dam, or their details have changed, you are legally required to notify Dams Safety NSW within 14 days.

Maintaining up-to-date details for a contact person for DSNSW ensures that the Dams Safety Act and regulation can be administered efficiently and safely.

Dam owners need to notify Dams Safety NSW of changes to contact details within 14 days by completing this [online form](#), emailing us at **info@damsafety.nsw.gov.au**, or calling **(02) 9842 8073**.



Report an incident

Serious incidents or injuries that occur at, or in relation to, a declared dam must be reported to Dams Safety NSW as soon as possible after the incident by calling **0403 681 645 (24 hours/7 days a week)**.

A written report of an incident in a form approved by Dams Safety NSW must be given to Dams Safety NSW no later than 72 hours after the incident, even if an oral report of the incident has already been given. **[Click here to complete the online incident report form.](#)**

Examples of the types of incidents you should report to DSNSW include:

- Risk of or actual failure of the dam
- Death or serious injury of persons related to the dam and its operations
- A security incident that has or may affect the safety of the dam
- An incident related to dam safety that is reasonably likely to cause concern to members of the public

If you are not sure if an incident meets the reporting requirements in clause 19 of the Dams Safety Regulation, it is recommended that declared dam owners report the incident.

Even if you have already made an oral report, email any additional information to **incident@damsafety.nsw.gov.au**

Reporting incidents to DSNSW is required by law. The information helps us monitor action taken by dam owners to resolve issues at dams. It also helps us track issues related to dam safety to inform our policies and programs.

Contact us

Dams Safety Focus is our newsletter on dam safety in NSW. If you have any questions or feedback contact us at:

Dams Safety NSW

Phone: (02) 9842 8073

Email: info@damsafety.nsw.gov.au

[Visit our website - Dams Safety NSW](#)

Dams Safety NSW, Locked Bag 5022, Parramatta, NSW 2124

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