

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water

Water Sharing Plan for the NSW Intersecting Streams Unregulated River Water Sources 2024

Background, consultation and changes

February 2026



Acknowledgement of Country



Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water acknowledge 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.

Water Sharing Plan for the NSW Intersecting Streams Unregulated River Water Sources 2024

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Contents

Glossary and abbreviations	5
1 Introduction.....	7
2 Purpose of water sharing plans	8
3 Legislation, policy, and planning framework.....	9
3.1 Water Management Act 2000	9
3.2 Water sharing plans.....	9
3.3 NSW and Commonwealth water policy.....	10
4 Water sharing plan review and replacement process	11
5 The Intersecting Streams 2024 plan.....	12
5.1 Overview.....	12
5.2 Previous plans	15
5.3 Developing the 2024 water sharing plan.....	15
5.4 Public exhibition and finalising the 2024 plan.....	16
6 Changes from the 2011 plan to the 2024 plan.....	17
6.1 Overview.....	17
6.2 General Layout changes.....	17
6.3 Identification of planned environmental water provisions.....	18
6.4 Vision, objectives, strategies, and performance indicators	18
6.5 Updated basic landholder rights estimates and licence share components.....	19
6.6 Prohibition of in-river dams with an exemption for town water supply.....	19
6.7 Protection of significant wetlands.....	20
6.8 Changes to access rules.....	21
6.8.1 Management Zone 1	23
6.8.2 Management Zone 2	23
6.8.3 Management Zone 3.....	23
6.9 Trade provisions	23
6.10 Adaptive management and amendment provisions	24
7 Monitoring, evaluation and reporting	25
8 Areas for further work	26
8.1 Metering and record keeping.....	26
8.2 Long-term average annual extraction limit.....	26
8.3 Cultural flows and improving the involvement of First Nations People in water management.....	27

8.4 Stormwater harvesting	27
8.5 Climate change	27
Appendix A – References and supporting documents	29

Glossary and abbreviations

Term	Definition
AWD	Available water determination
BLR	Basic landholder right
Intersecting Streams 2011 Plan	<i>Water Sharing Plan for the NSW Intersecting Streams Unregulated River 2011</i>
Intersecting Streams 2024 Plan	<i>Water Sharing Plan for the Intersecting Streams Unregulated River 2024</i>
CTP	Cease to pump
DCCEEW	NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, formerly the Department of Planning and Environment
EMU	Extraction management unit A group of water sources; defined for the purpose of managing long-term average annual extraction
LTADEL	Long-term average annual extraction limit The long-term average annual volume of water in an extraction management unit available to be lawfully extracted or otherwise taken under access licences and basic landholder right requirements.
MER	Monitoring, evaluation and reporting
NRC	(NSW) Natural Resources Commission
NSW	New South Wales
PEW	Planned Environmental Water
Share component	An entitlement to a given number of shares of the available water in a specified water source The share component on an access licence certificate is expressed as a unit share. The share component of a specific-purpose access licence (for example, local water utility, major water utility and domestic and stock) is expressed in megalitres/year.

Term	Definition
Third-order or higher streams	‘Stream order’ is used to describe the hierarchy of streams from the top to the bottom of a catchment. To learn more about stream order and the Strahler system for determining stream order: An introduction to Strahler stream order.
TWS	Town Water Supply
WM Act	<i>Water Management Act 2000</i>
Plan	Water sharing plan Generalised term used for any water sharing plan, not specific to a particular plan.

1 Introduction

Water sharing plans were developed for rivers and groundwater systems across New South Wales following the introduction of the *Water Management Act 2000* (WM Act). These plans protect the health of our rivers and groundwater while giving water users perpetual access licences, sustainable resource management, equitable water sharing arrangements, and increased opportunities to trade water.

NSW water sharing plans are valid for 10 years from their start date. The NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (the department) amends water sharing plans throughout their life to ensure they comply with changing legislation and to help carry them out. Near the end of a plan's 10-year term, the Natural Resources Commission formally reviews it to identify any changes that are necessary to deliver better outcomes for all water users, including the environment.

Water in the Intersecting Streams area has previously been managed through the Water Sharing Plan for the Intersecting Streams Unregulated River Water Sources 2011 (Intersecting Streams 2011 Plan). This plan expired on 30 June 2024 and was replaced by the Water Sharing Plan for the Intersecting Streams Unregulated River Water Sources 2024 (Intersecting Streams 2024 Plan).

This document gives high-level background information on the planning process as well as details of changes to management arrangements arising in the new plan, which we will refer to from now on as the Intersecting Streams 2024 Plan.

The Intersecting Streams 2024 plan covers 6 water sources. These are:

- Culgoa River water source
- Mooni River water source
- Narran River water source
- Paroo River water source
- Warrego River water source
- Yanda Creek water source,

You can find links to the plan, maps and rule summary sheets on the [Intersecting Streams 2024 Plan](#) page on the department's website.

The resources in Appendix A give more details of the plan area, its water resources and resource management.

2 Purpose of water sharing plans

Expansion of water extraction across NSW since the 20th century has seen increasing competition between water users (towns, farmers, and industries) for access to water. This has placed pressure on the health and biological diversity of our rivers and aquifers.

In December 2000, the Parliament of NSW passed the WM Act, which has the overall objective to:

‘Provide for the sustainable and integrated management of the water sources of the State for the benefit of both present and future generations’

Water sharing plans play a major role in achieving this objective by providing a legal basis for sharing water between the environment and consumptive water users.

Water sharing plans are the primary means of carrying out the WM Act. They protect the basic rights of landholders to extract water and seek to balance the sustainable use of water for both economic and environmental outcomes.

3 Legislation, policy, and planning framework

3.1 Water Management Act 2000

The *Water Management Act 2000* (WM Act) is the guiding legislation for water management in NSW. The Act allows for the sustainable and integrated management of water sources. It considers ecologically sustainable development, the protection and enhancement of the environment, and social and economic benefits.

The WM Act sets a maximum initial lifespan of 10 years for water sharing plans, at which point they need to be reviewed and replaced or extended. When deciding whether to extend or replace a water sharing plan, the responsible minister must consider:

- the most recent audit of the water sharing plan conducted under section 44 of the WM Act
- a report from the Natural Resources Commission that reviews (within the previous 5 years) if the water sharing provisions have significantly helped to achieve, or have failed to achieve, environmental, social and economic outcomes, and if those provisions should change.

Under the WM Act, a water sharing plan may be extended for up to 2 years past the expiry date to allow the department to prepare a replacement plan.

You can review the [NSW Water Management Act 2000](#) on the NSW Legislation website.

3.2 Water sharing plans

A water sharing plan sets out locally appropriate rules and management arrangements for specific water sources that align with the principles of the WM Act.

Key elements of water sharing plans include:

- providing water for the environment by protecting a proportion of the water available for fundamental ecosystem health
- protecting the water required to meet basic landholder rights
- setting annual limits on water extractions that ensures security for water users and the environment
- giving water users a clear picture of when and how water will be available for extraction
- giving licence holders flexibility in the way they can manage their water accounts
- specifying the rules for water trading/dealings
- setting the mandatory conditions that apply to licence holders.

You can review the *Water Sharing Plan for the [NSW Intersecting Streams Unregulated River Water Sources 2024](#)* or visit the [water sharing plan pages of the department's website](#).

3.3 NSW and Commonwealth water policy

We are continuously evolving and improving water-related policy and decision-making processes that carry out the legislative framework to ensure effective delivery of our water resource management objectives. We develop plans in line with the principles of the WM Act and the National Water Initiative.

You can find more information on the [National Water Initiative](#) on the Australian Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water website.

The department has also developed a position to provide for better protection for significant wetlands in unregulated water sources. This has been included in the replacement plan, which identifies significant wetlands for protection.

4 Water sharing plan review and replacement process

Under the WM Act, water sharing plans have a 10-year duration.

During the life of the plan, it will undergo an independent review at least twice, as follows:

- The **implementation of the plan** will be audited in the first 5 years of the plan under section 44 of the WM Act.
- The **performance of the plan** will be reviewed in the last 5 years of the plan under section 43A of the WM Act.

The NRC is the independent body that audits and reviews water sharing plans. The section 44 audits aim to identify where improvements are necessary to apply the plan rules. The section 43A review is to determine if the plan is achieving the intended environmental, social and economic outcomes.

The NRC reports the findings of the audits and reviews to the NSW Minister responsible for water, who decides whether to extend a plan for another 10 years or to replace it. If the NRC recommends replacing it, the department considers the commission's recommendations when developing the replacement plan.

More information and links to the reviews of the Intersecting Streams 2011 plan are in section 5.2 of this document.

The then Minister for Water, Property and Housing adopted the NRC's recommendation to replace the Intersecting Streams 2011 plan. To allow time to review and replace the plan, the duration of the current plan was extended by 2 years.

You can find more information on the water sharing plan review and replacement process in the [Replacement Water Sharing Plan Guide \(PDF 2.2 MB\)](#).

5 The Intersecting Streams 2024 plan

5.1 Overview

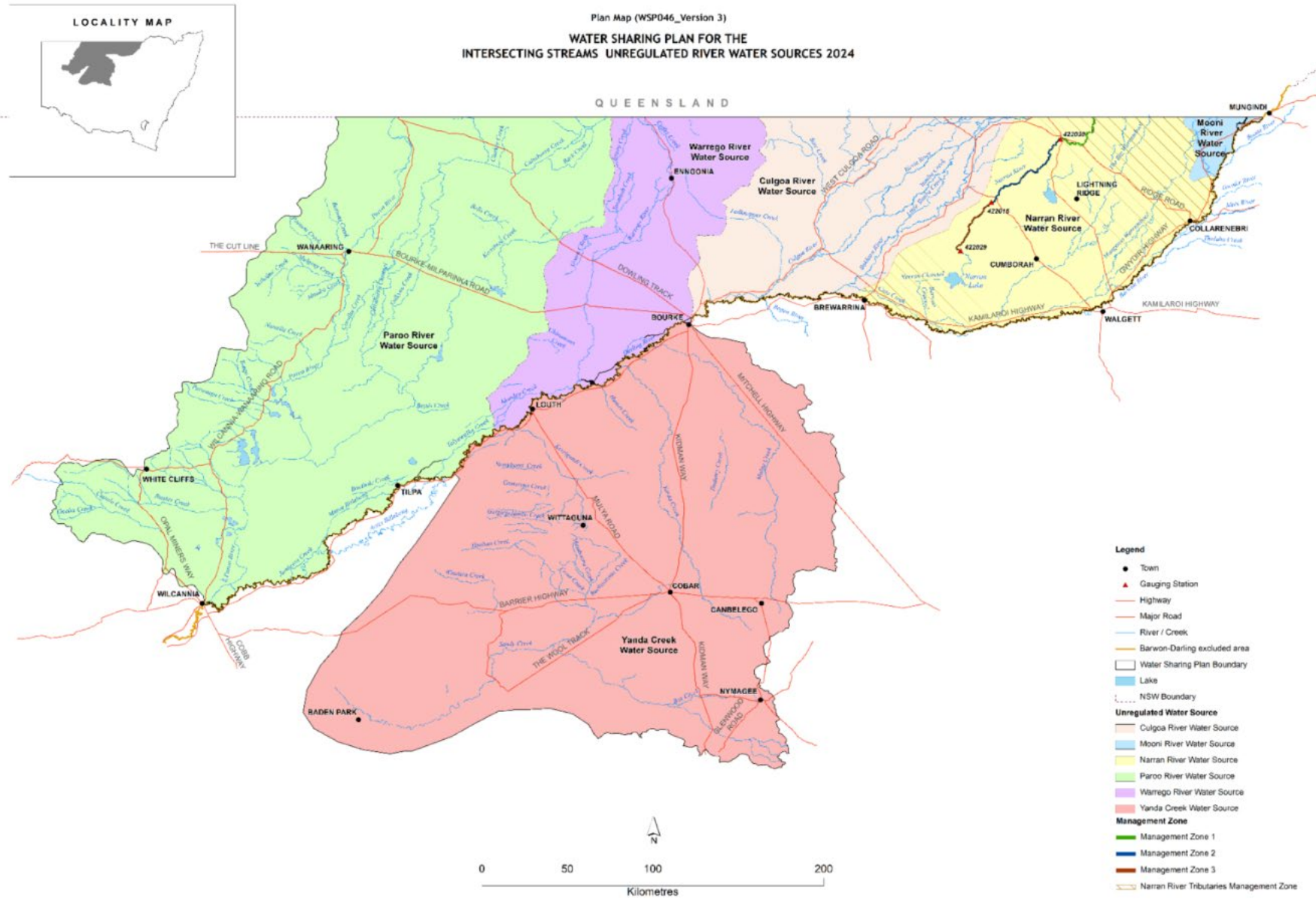
The Intersecting Streams 2024 Plan area is located along the Northern NSW/Queensland border, stretching south to include the catchment of Yanda Creek (Figure 1) and includes the NSW portions of the Mooni River, the Narran River, the Culgoa River, the Warrego River, and the Paroo River catchments. The Yanda Creek catchment exists wholly inside NSW. The six surface water catchments of the plan area cover a total area of 120,431 square kilometres. Localities within the plan area include Lightning Ridge, Goodooga, Enngonia, Hungerford, Wanaaring, White Cliffs and Cobar.

The plan area is characterised by low relief with elevations ranging from 100-300 metres above sea level. The character of the contemporary river channel system and its physical structure is largely influenced by evolution of the drainage networks across the Intersecting Streams catchments. River valley patterns characterise an inland drainage system associated with a depositional area. Drainage networks in these catchments comprise distributary, anabranch, and meandering systems typical of flat riverine plains with some bordering alluvial fans.

The Intersecting Streams water sources of NSW experience a semi-arid climate characterised by hot dry summers and mild dry winters. Temperatures exceed 40°C for short periods during December to February. Frosts are frequent during the winter months. Flooding is a sporadic event and is usually associated with the cyclonic rain depressions in the Queensland portions of the water sources that results in intense rainfalls and flash flooding. Variability in stream flows occur between seasons as well as across the catchment. Between seasons in the wetter months (summer to early autumn) flow can be greater than the drier months (late winter to spring).

Water extraction in the Intersecting Streams is practiced through irrigation, stock, domestic, mining, town water supply, industrial, and recreational purposes. The sandy substrate characteristic of the Intersecting Streams catchments negates most attempts at broad scale crops and pastures, although cotton farming is still a relatively successful enterprise in the eastern water sources, and grazing occurs throughout all the plan area.

Figure 1. Plan area for the Water Sharing Plan for the Intersecting Streams Unregulated River Water Sources 2024



Total licensed entitlement for the plan area is approximately 35,715 ML a year. This entitlement represents average annual *potential* extraction. Reliable estimates of actual water usage across the plan area will be possible when metering of major extraction works is completed.

In addition to licensed extraction, water is also required to meet basic landholder rights (BLR). BLR includes domestic and stock rights, harvestable rights, and native title rights. Domestic and stock rights are rights to take and use water for domestic and stock purposes without a licence. More information on domestic and stock rights is available on the department's [website](#). Harvestable rights allow landholders to capture and store a proportion of the rainfall runoff from their landholding in harvestable rights dams without a water access licence, water supply work approval or water use approval. To learn more about harvestable rights visit the department's [website](#). Native title rights are a right to take and use water without a licence in the exercise of native title rights under a native title determination. Visit the department's [website](#) for more information on native title rights.

Table 1 and Table 2 give details of the potential levels of extraction for BLR and licensed extraction within the Intersecting Streams 2024 Plan area.

Table 1. Requirements for water in the Intersecting Streams plan - Basic landholder rights

Extraction types	Potential extraction (ML/year)
Domestic and stock	1,141
Native title	The amount of water that may be taken in the exercise of native title rights in accordance with the <i>Native Title Act 1993</i> (Cth).
Harvestable rights	On the commencement of the Intersecting Streams 2024 Plan, the amount of water required to satisfy harvestable rights had not been estimated.

Table 2. Requirements for water in the Intersecting Streams plan - Licensed extraction

Licensed extraction subcategory	Potential extraction (ML/year)
Domestic and stock	170
Domestic and stock (town water supply)	312
Local water utility	0
Unregulated River	23,083

5.2 Previous plans

Water in the Intersecting Streams 2024 Plan was previously managed through:

- the [Water Sharing Plan for the Intersecting Streams Unregulated River Water Sources 2011](#)

For more information on this plan, refer to:

- the [Intersecting Streams 2011 Plan background document \(PDF 687 KB\)](#)

The Intersecting Streams 2011 Plan was developed using the macro-planning approach and included extensive stakeholder and interagency consultation. Details of the macro-planning approach can be found in the following documents:

- [Macro water sharing plans – approach for unregulated rivers \(PDF 647 KB\)](#)
- [Macro water sharing plans – access and trading rules for pools \(PDF 621 KB\)](#)
- [Macro water sharing plans – the approach for groundwater \(PDF 1.67 MB\)](#).

As of 1 July 2024, the water sources of the Intersecting Streams 2024 Plan are now managed under the Water Sharing Plan for the Intersecting Streams Unregulated River Water Sources 2024.

When access rules in a water sharing plan change, licence holders are required to comply with the existing licence conditions until they are notified of updated licence conditions by receipt of a new Statement of Conditions. For further information see the factsheet – [Complying with new or changed access rules](#).

5.3 Developing the 2024 water sharing plan

The processes that the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water have used in developing the replacement plan are an update on the previous macro-planning approach.

The development of replacement plans now follows the processes described in the [Replacement Water Sharing Plan Guide \(PDF 2.2 MB\)](#).

We continue to use some methods described in the macro-planning approach. This background document will describe the most recent and specific methods used to prepare the Intersecting Streams 2024 Plan.

The department is responsible for implementing the WM Act, including developing water sharing plans for NSW water resources. When drafting the replacement water sharing plan, we considered:

- the [section 44 audits](#) of the *Water Sharing Plan for the Intersecting Streams Unregulated River Water Sources 2011*
- recommendations from the [Natural Resources Commission Review of the Intersecting Streams and Lower Murray-Darling unregulated water sharing plans \(PDF 2.99 MB\)](#)
- updated data, information and science
- the deliberations across government agencies including the Water group and Conservation Programs, Heritage and Regulation Group within the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, Department of Primary Industries' Agriculture and Fisheries branches, Water NSW and the Natural Resources Access Regulator

- consultation with water user representatives.

You can find the [Water Sharing Plan for the Intersecting Streams Unregulated River Water Sources 2024](#) on the department's website.

Details of the changes from the Intersecting Streams 2011 Plan are in Section 6 of this document.

You can find information on the public exhibition of this plan below in Section 5.4 of this document.

5.4 Public exhibition and finalising the 2024 plan

The department exhibited the draft replacement Intersecting Streams 2024 Plan between 4 September 2023 and 13 October 2023.

We held 2 public information sessions to inform the public and get feedback on the draft water sharing plan. These were in the form of an online webinar on 14 September 2023 and a face-to-face session in Lightning Ridge on 19 September 2023. During the public exhibition period, there were 271 unique hits on the plan's public exhibition website. We had phone discussions with 2 members of the public. We received 9 submissions. Issues raised in submissions are summarised in the [What we heard document \(PDF 508 KB\)](#).

In finalising the replacement plan, the department considered submissions as well as further deliberations and input from government agencies including the Water group and Conservation Programs, Heritage and Regulation Group from Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, the Department of Primary Industries' Agriculture and Fisheries divisions, Water NSW and the Natural Resources Access Regulator.

Section 6 of this document details changes from the previous plan to the current plan.

6 Changes from the 2011 plan to the 2024 plan

6.1 Overview

Key drivers for the changes in the Intersecting Streams 2024 Plan were:

- the Natural Resources Commission’s review recommendations
- contemporary water resource policy – some changes to the plan align it with current policy to help improve efficiency and consistency in achieving water resource management objectives across the state
- updated data and knowledge improvements
- consultation on the draft plan, feedback and submissions.

Changes to the plan reflect improved understanding and updated data. They aim to modernise and simplify the water sharing plan to make it easier to read while ensuring provisions are practical to implement and legally accurate.

Changes were made to:

- the general layout of the plan
- identification of planned environmental water provisions
- the vision, objectives, strategies, and performance indicators
- basic land holder rights estimates and access licence share components
- access rules
- prohibit in-river dams in some water sources, with an exemption for town water supply (TWS)
- protection of significant wetlands
- trade provisions for significant wetlands
- inclusion of a new map to identify significant wetland locations in the plan area
- total daily extraction limits
- adaptive management and amendment provisions.

For a summary of issues raised in submissions, regardless of whether they led to a change, please refer to the [Outcomes of public exhibition](#) section of the department’s website and the [What we heard document](#) (PDF 508 KB).

6.2 General Layout changes

There are several structural layout changes in the Intersecting Streams 2024 Plan. We have moved or reworded sections (formerly called clauses), but their intent is the same. Such changes reflect current template styles and provide a more standard and consistent layout across the state’s water sharing plans, as well as making the water sharing plan easier to understand.

For example, we have removed unnecessary notes, as well as moving and consolidating amendment provisions to the amendment part of the plan.

6.3 Identification of planned environmental water provisions

Planned environmental water (PEW) is a key component of water sharing plans. The Intersecting Streams 2011 Plan had discrete sections on planned environmental water that point to other parts of the plan to identify where water is reserved for the environment. This included access rules.

Instead of having a separate section on PEW, the Intersecting Streams 2024 Plan includes rules associated with planned environmental water in the relevant sections. Wherever a clause or section of the plan relates to PEW, a note is included, pointing to the relevant section of the WM Act.

6.4 Vision, objectives, strategies, and performance indicators

Part 2 of the Intersecting Streams 2024 Plan describes the vision and objectives. The plan's vision encompasses the overall aim of the plan. The vision of the plan is to provide for the:

- health and enhancement of the water sources and their water-dependent ecosystems
- continuing productive extraction of water for economic benefit
- spiritual, social, customary and economic benefits of water to Aboriginal communities
- social and cultural benefits to urban and rural communities resulting from water.

The objectives of the Intersecting Streams 2024 Plan are to:

- protect and, where possible, enhance and restore the condition of the water sources and their water-dependent ecosystems
- maintain and where possible, improve access to water to optimise economic benefits for agriculture, water-dependent industries and local economies
- maintain and where possible, improve the spiritual, social, customary and economic values and uses of water by Aboriginal people
- provide access to water to support water-dependent social and cultural values.

We have included more detailed and SMART (specific measurable, achievable, realistic and timely) objectives in the Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting (MER) plan for the Intersecting Streams 2024 Plan. These will clearly link objectives, strategies and performance indicators. This addresses the Natural Resources Commission's recommendation to strengthen MER of the plan outcomes.

We added a requirement for the Minister to prepare a monitoring, evaluation and reporting (MER) plan. The MER plan is to be published by 30 June 2025 and each year the Minister is to publicly report on the implementation of the water sharing plan, including progress against the MER plan. Additionally, evaluation reporting is to be undertaken by year 9 of the water sharing plan.

The annual reporting will provide transparency on the implementation of the MER activities, while the reporting in year 9 of the plan will provide transparency on how the plan's vision, objectives, strategies and performance indicators are being met.

6.5 Updated basic landholder rights estimates and licence share components

We have updated the estimate of extraction of water under BLR contained in Part 3 of the plan.

Since the development of the first water sharing plans, which began before 2003, numerous methods have been followed to estimate water requirements for domestic and stock BLR. These methods were superseded in 2010 by a standard NSW approach to support the development of surface and groundwater macro-water sharing plans.

We adopted the same method used in the development of macro-water sharing plans for estimating the water requirements of domestic and stock BLR. This method is in Appendix 5 of the [Replacement Water Sharing Plan Guide \(PDF 2.2 MB\)](#).

The revised estimates may differ from those in the Intersecting Streams 2011 Plan because of changes in land use, population density and the availability of more accurate spatial data.

The updated water access licence share components (water entitlements for each water source) are listed in Part 3 of the Intersecting Streams 2024 Plan.

6.6 Prohibition of in-river dams with an exemption for town water supply

Water sharing plans contain specific rules relating to the construction and operation of in-river dams including those built for town water supply (TWS).

Current policy prohibits the construction of new in-river dams in third or higher order streams in water sources identified as having high instream value or where such a prohibition is already in place in the current water sharing plan. Interagency discussions as part of plan replacements questioned the appropriateness of the current policy on in-river dams. The policy also restricts opportunities to improve TWS security.

The department has committed to work with agencies to refine the policy to better manage where in-river dams can be applied for and develop guidelines for how those applications are to be assessed. For the Intersecting Streams 2024 Plan, in-river dams on third or higher order streams are prohibited in all water sources excluding Yanda Creek water source.

The prohibition of in-river dams for water sources identified as having high environmental value remains but we have allowed an exemption to the rule which would apply for new in-river dams built for TWS purposes only. Permitting applications for instream in-river dams for town water supply does not mean new dams are approved to proceed. An application for works approval is still required. Each application is assessed on its merit and may or may not be approved on this basis.

For the Intersecting Streams 2024 Plan this means that applications for in-river dams for TWS purposes only is now permitted in the following water sources:

- Culgoa River Water Source
- Mooni River Water Source
- Narran River Water Source
- Paroo River Water Source

- Warrego River Water Source.

The Yanda Creek Water Source recorded a low instream value, so in-river dams on streams of third-order or higher remain permitted.

6.7 Protection of significant wetlands

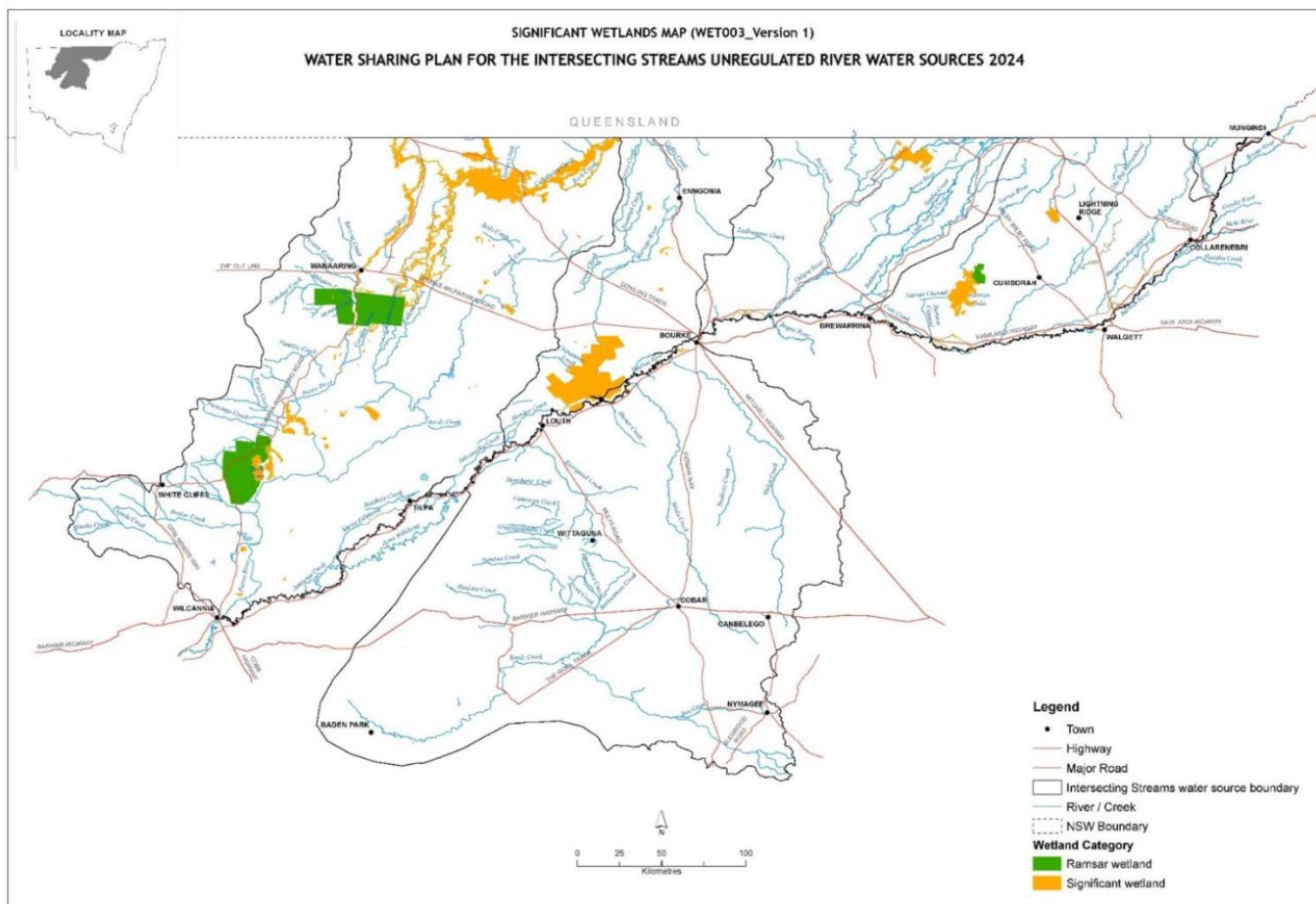
In their review of the inland unregulated water sharing plans, the NRC recommended that the protection for significant wetlands be improved when plans are replaced. Significant wetlands may include internationally (Ramsar), nationally and regionally significant wetlands within the plan area. For some plans this recommendation has been broadened to include culturally significant wetlands. The department has committed to consider options to improve protection of significant wetlands during the plan replacement process.

The installation of pumps and impounding structures as well as the volume of entitlement that can be taken from wetlands, pose risks to maintaining the ecological character of significant wetlands. Rules are included to manage the impacts of these activities for those wetlands identified in the plan.

Part 7 of the Intersecting Streams 2024 Plan prohibits new or amended surface water supply works being constructed in significant wetlands unless it can be demonstrated that they will cause no more than minimal harm. For Ramsar-listed wetlands, no new or amended works can be constructed within 3 km upstream of, or within, that wetland. These rules do not apply to replacement water supply work approvals. Significant wetlands in the Intersecting Streams 2024 Plan are identified by a significant wetlands map produced by the department (Figure 2), which is also available on the department's [website](#).

Part 8 of the Intersecting Streams 2024 Plan includes restrictions to trades into and above these significant wetlands to minimise the impacts of new extraction on these significant areas. Trade within these wetlands between existing licences/works will be permitted subject to assessment. This is consistent with current rules in the Border Rivers and Gwydir unregulated valleys to protect significant wetlands.

Figure 2. Significant wetlands map for the Intersecting Streams 2024 Plan



6.8 Changes to access rules

Based on a review of access rules, there have been several changes in the Narran River Water Source (refer to Table 3). The access rules are in Part 6 and Schedule 1 of the Intersecting Streams 2024 Plan. We have also simplified the name of the management zones in the Narran River Water Source (the 2011 plan duplicated the word 'zone' in the names of each management zone).

Table 3. Access rules for Management Zones of the Narran River Water Source in the Intersecting Streams 2024 Plan.

Management zone	Intersecting Streams 2011 plan access rule	Intersecting Streams 2024 plan access rule	Decision drivers
Management Zone 1	Cease to pump (CTP) at Narran River at New Angledool No. 2 gauge (422030) VLF: $\leq 0.45\text{m}$ (17th percentile)	Cease to pump (CTP) at Narran River at New Angledool No. 2 gauge (422030) VLF: $\leq 170\text{ML/day}$ (17th percentile)	The previous rule could not be implemented because it was linked to a decommissioned river gauge. Unregulated River Entitlement: 1,198 ML Domestic and Stock Entitlement: 0 ML Domestic and Stock (TWS) Entitlement: 0 ML
Management Zone 2	Cease to pump (CTP) at Narran River at Wilby Wilby gauge (422016) VLF: $\leq 1.18\text{m}$ (21st percentile)	Cease to pump (CTP) at Narran River at Wilby Wilby gauge (422016) VLF: $\leq 115\text{ML/day}$ (21st percentile)	WaterNSW recommended access rules be set as a daily flow volume rather than a height at the gauge. Unregulated River Entitlement: 4,131 ML Domestic and Stock Entitlement: 16 ML Domestic and Stock (TWS) Entitlement: 0 ML
Management Zone 3	Cease to pump (CTP) at Narran River at Narran Park gauge (422029) VLF: $\leq \text{No visible flow}$ (17th percentile)	Cease to pump (CTP) at Narran River at Narran Park gauge (422029) VLF: $\leq 10\text{ML/day}$ (16th percentile)	Ramsar-listed Narran Lakes. Improve protection for low flows. Improve access for BLR. Unregulated River Entitlement: 2,550 ML Domestic and Stock Entitlement: 23 ML Domestic and Stock (TWS) Entitlement: 0 ML

6.8.1 Management Zone 1

The Intersecting Streams 2011 Plan Cease to pump (CTP) rule was less than or equal to 0.45m at the New Angledool No. 2 gauge (422030). This rule could not be implemented because the CTP trigger of 0.45m related to another (decommissioned) gauge further upstream.

6.8.2 Management Zone 2

WaterNSW prefers to use daily flow volume readings rather than heights at the gauge for access rules moving forward. 115ML/day is estimated to be equivalent to 1.18m at the Wilby Wilby gauge.

6.8.3 Management Zone 3

Within the Narran River water source, there are very high ecological values including the inclusion of the Narran River in the Lower Darling River Endangered Ecological Community. See the recommendation made by the Fisheries Scientific Committee to list this ecosystem as an endangered ecological community [here](#).

Ecological studies illustrate that maintaining very low flows and avoiding cease to flow periods are important for maintaining instream biodiversity. There are also socio-economic benefits in retaining stream flows for basic landholder rights and town water supply. The previous access rule (visible flow at the gauge) did not provide protection for low flows/end of system flow to Narran Lake (internationally significant Ramsar listed wetland). The new access rule of 10ML/day at Narran Park gauge will improve protection for low flow while also providing water for basic landholder rights.

Protecting a portion of low flows will impact on water users' ability to access their entitlement. The nature of this river system is boom and bust. When water flows, it is usually in large volumes for short periods of time followed by no flow at all. Flow analysis undertaken to support rule change in the Narran River Management Zone 3 indicated the river flows (on average) once per year for an average of 52 days and flows increase rapidly reaching an average of 589ML/day within the first 24hrs of a flow event. This rule change may decrease opportunity to access entitlement on average 6 days per year compared to the previous rule in this management zone.

6.9 Trade provisions

The Intersecting Streams 2011 Plan contained detailed provisions about interstate trade being prohibited unless administrative arrangements were in place in Queensland that had been agreed to and implemented by both states.

The Intersecting Streams 2024 Plan has simplified the drafting of this section, and it now states that dealings under 71U and 71V are prohibited (see Part 8, section 44 and 45). This is because interstate trade is governed by the WM Act.

Trade between water sources and management zones remains prohibited (as it was in the Intersecting Streams 2011 Plan) and trade within water sources is permitted, subject to assessment.

6.10 Adaptive management and amendment provisions

Adaptive management means changing things in response to new information. During the life of a water sharing plan, this information may come from data collection and monitoring or from some other improvement in understanding. Such information could include socio-economic studies, hydrological modelling, ecological studies and information about Aboriginal cultural sites.

Adaptive management is a requirement of both the WM Act and the National Water Initiative. The WM Act allows for changes to a water sharing plan during its life if it is in the public interest. The plan also allows for amendments during its life as described in Part 10 of the plan.

Examples of adaptive environmental water provisions in the Intersecting Streams 2024 Plan include the ability to amend:

- Long-term Average Annual Extraction Limits (LTAAELs) to base them on a proportion of flow if more information becomes available
- management so we can carry out Native Title determinations
- management so we can protect Aboriginal cultural sites that depend on water.

7 Monitoring, evaluation and reporting

Monitoring, evaluation and reporting are key components to adaptive management. They ensure that water sharing plans are effective in meeting their objectives.

Comprehensive MER programs are resource-intensive and long term. We must prioritise areas where there is a high risk of water extraction affecting environmental assets or where the demand for water is greater than the volume of water available.

The department is working on a project that will prioritise water sources for MER activities, based on risk in areas that have high levels of extraction, ecological value or stakeholder needs. The MER plan is a framework specifically designed for the water sharing plan and will follow established guidelines.

The MER plan will be published by 30 June 2025 and under new provisions in the plan, each year the Minister will publicly report on the implementation of the water sharing plan, including progress against the MER plan. The department will also conduct evaluation reporting by year 9 of the water sharing plan's term.

8 Areas for further work

8.1 Metering and record keeping

The NSW Government's [non-urban water metering framework](#), initiated in December 2018, aims to ensure the fair and equitable sharing of water among users, enhancing transparency and efficiency in water management across the state. The framework's implementation was staged to allow water users, suppliers, and installers sufficient time to achieve compliance. The NSW Government has recently completed a review of the non-urban metering rules and has updated the *Water Management (General) Regulation 2018* to make compliance quicker, easier and more cost effective.

The new metering rules require water users to assess their compliance requirements using their total entitlement and work size. Large water users must comply with the highest metering standards whilst smaller water users now have less prescriptive metering requirements. There are also measurement/metering obligations for water users that take overland flow that are aligned with the floodplain harvesting measurement requirements.

Water users are encouraged to consult the department's [non-urban metering website](#) for detailed information and updates. To verify individual access licence details, please refer to the [WaterNSW Water Register](#).

Water use information obtained through the water metering program may provide a useful indicator of actual water usage. Water sharing plans have to date been largely developed using licenced entitlement because estimates of actual water usage have until now been unreliable. Future water sharing plans will be able to incorporate actual water usage when assessing risks and developing rules.

8.2 Long-term average annual extraction limit

In NSW all water sharing plans include long-term average annual extraction limits (LTAAELs). These limits are designed to protect water resources, dependent ecosystems, and communities from the impacts of over-extraction in the longer term.

Assessment of LTAAEL compliance for inland unregulated water sources will use metering data once 3-5 years of metering data is available. Prior to then, the department will use remote sensing to undertake a risk assessment to determine if there is a risk of extraction being exceeded in unregulated water sources. When the non-urban metering requirements are implemented, metering data will cover up to 90% of water take across NSW. The department will develop a method to fill the remaining gaps in metering data for LTAAEL compliance purposes.

Additionally, we added a requirement for the Minister to review the numerical LTAAEL, including seeking the advice of the NRC. The review requirements will help ensure that the LTAAEL reflects a sustainable level of take.

We also added a requirement for the Minister to consider the 'minimum inflow' review and enabled amendments to be made to the plan based on that review. The requirement to consider the 'minimum inflow' review will ensure that the findings of the review can be used to inform the rules in this plan.

8.3 Cultural flows and improving the involvement of First Nations People in water management

The department will work toward priorities in the State Water Strategy. Priority 2 of the State Water Strategy is to recognise First Nations/Aboriginal People's rights and values and increase access to and ownership of water for cultural and economic purposes.

The NSW Government recognises First Nations/Aboriginal People's rights to water and our aim is to secure a future where water for First Nations/Aboriginal People is embedded within the water planning and management regime in NSW, delivering cultural, spiritual, social, environmental and economic benefit to communities.

Actions under the State Water Strategy include:

- strengthening the role of First Nations/Aboriginal People in water planning and management
- developing a state-wide Aboriginal water strategy
- providing for Aboriginal ownership of and access to water for cultural and economic purposes
- working with First Nations/Aboriginal People to improve shared water knowledge
- working with First Nations/Aboriginal People to maintain and preserve water-related cultural sites and landscapes.

The department is committed to providing greater opportunities for Aboriginal water management and participation in water sharing. A new Aboriginal water directorate has been established within the department and work is progressing on an Aboriginal Water Strategy which will identify the ways in which we can achieve the priorities under the State Water Strategy. The department is also in the process of establishing Regional Aboriginal Water Advisory Committees in each of the NSW water regions and piloting some cultural watering plans in various parts of NSW.

8.4 Stormwater harvesting

The department is developing a stormwater harvesting policy to determine the best way to manage stormwater extraction to maximise the benefits of reusing stormwater and reducing erosion of water ways while ensuring adequate water is available for the environment and water users who rely on it.

8.5 Climate change

Australia has a highly variable climate, and rainfall is especially variable. This makes it vital that we understand as much as we can about our climate to better manage our water supplies. The frequency and duration of wet and dry events determine how much water we have available. NSW is already experiencing trends of higher average temperatures and reduced cool season rainfall. There are indications from climate models that drought conditions may become more frequent and severe, and last longer.

Higher demand from a growing population with reductions in water supply will increase water scarcity, putting more pressure on all users, including the environment (Productivity Commission,

National Water Reform Issues Paper, May 2020, p.2). We must collectively improve our understanding of these risks to better manage water supply and ensure that our operational, planning and future development decisions take future water reliability and security into account.

The department has developed river models that incorporate stochastic long-term data to help guide regional water strategies. We can use these models to inform water sharing decisions as they are developed across the state. For example, as we develop the sustainable LTAAELs, we will consider the future effects of climate change.

Priority 4 of the NSW Water Strategy is to increase resilience to changes in water availability (variability and climate change). The 2021/22 action plan looks to improve and apply our understanding of climate variability and change. This includes work to determine a methodology and progressively incorporate climate risk data into water sharing plan and environmental water management decision making.

Additionally, the department will consider the outcomes of a current work program informing maintenance of water supply in inland regulated river systems. This is a key piece of work in relation to climate considerations within plans.

Appendix A – References and supporting documents

- [Intersecting Streams Water Sharing Plan Public Exhibition page](#) contains the ‘what we heard’ document and published submissions
- [NSW Legislation website](#) contains NSW legislation, including the WM Act
- [National Water Initiative](#)
- [Water Sharing Plan for the Intersecting Streams Unregulated River Water Sources 2024](#)
- The [background document and rule summary sheets](#) for the Intersecting Streams 2024 plan
- [Intersecting Streams 2024 plan map and significant wetlands map](#)
- Details of the macro planning approach:
 - [Macro water sharing plans – approach for unregulated rivers \(PDF 647 KB\)](#)
 - [Macro water sharing plans – access and trading rules for pools \(PDF 621 KB\)](#)
 - [Macro water sharing plans – the approach for groundwater \(PDF 1.67 MB\)](#).
- The Natural Resources Commission’s [Review of the Intersecting Streams water sharing plan](#)