



*Submission Productivity Commission
National Water Reform 2026:
preliminary assessment, interim update*

*By:
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Contents

1	Introduction	2
2	Recommendations	3
3	Summary	4
4	Question Responses	4
4.1	Reform Fatigue	4
4.2	Rules Based Changes and the Risk Assignment Framework	5
4.3	Balancing Environmental and Consumptive use	6
4.4	Review of NSW Water Sharing Plans	7
4.5	Metering and Pricing	9
4.6	Transition to the National Water Agreement	9
4.7	Interception	10
4.8	Water Resource accounting	10
4.9	Aboriginal water interests	11
5	About the GVIA	12
5.1	Our region	12
5.2	Our region's hydrology and geomorphology	14
5.3	What we do	14
5.4	Contacts	15

I Introduction

The Gwydir Valley Irrigators Association (GVIA) is the representative body for water entitlement holders in the Gwydir Valley and welcome the opportunity to provide our feedback to the Productivity Commission on the National Water Reform 2026: preliminary assessment, interim update from the perspective of our region.

This document aims to represent the concerns, views and experiences of our members and the community. Each member reserves the right to express their own opinion and is entitled to make their own submission.

The GVIA and our members, are members of the National Irrigators Council and NSW Irrigators Council and we generally support the submissions made by those organisations. Additionally, we acknowledge and support submissions by Cotton Australia and Border Rivers Food and Fibre.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide our input and perspective.

2 Recommendations

- *State and federal governments be required to perform annual cumulative impact assessments and individual regulatory impact statements for each project, to quantitatively and qualitatively evaluate the impact of water policy reform.*
- *That a published review of the cumulative impact of water reform as recommended by the NSW Auditor-General's June 2026¹ report be implemented federally and in NSW.*
- *That any regulatory changes demonstrate that they are required, reasonable and responsive as detailed in the NSW Better Regulation Principles.*
- *That the default method to re-assign any rights to water be through the market rather than rules-based changes, including any changes that impact on either allocations or reliability.*
- *That risk assignment framework adoption be made a mandatory, rather than optional, condition of water resource plan accreditation in every Basin state;*
 - *That jurisdictions adopt mandatory pre-amendment notification and assessment against Risk Assignment Framework obligations for any change with a measurable effect on entitlement reliability, before that change takes effect.*
- *Request recognition of the achievement of SDL and ESLT across the Murray Darling Basin and acknowledgement that at least 72% of water within the Basin is for environmental purposes*
- *There be increasing focus on supporting the delivery of environmental outcomes from the existing environmental water portfolio through addressing infrastructure issues such as fish passage at Menindee lakes and practical community supported application of constraints management.*
 - *Entitlement holders should not be penalised where government has failed to implement either infrastructure or constraints critical to environmental outcomes.*
- *Request multiple early and regular engagement with targeted stakeholders from irrigated agriculture during the development of options that may result in changes to Water Sharing Plans.*
- *Regulatory Impact Statement (RIS) to articulate the qualitative and quantitative impact of proposed changes across environmental, social, cultural and economic outcomes.*
- *That the Productivity Commission support an independent review of the appropriateness of basing Australia's rural water metering requirements on AS4747 and consider other alternatives.*
- *That the Productivity Commission's final report make it clear any replacement to the NWI must strengthen, rather than dilute, the property right that is applied to water.*

¹ NSW Auditor-General's June 2026 performance audit of water management and regulation

- *NSW to develop a public register that shows all past rules changes that have impacted the consumptive pool.*
- *NSW to publish expected impacts to availability for consumptive water for any prospective rule change.*
- *Support aboriginal water access is achieved through transparent, market-based mechanisms drawing on the existing consumptive pool.*
- *Ensure aboriginal water licences retain their original associated rights, obligations and rules and be subject to the same measurement and enforcement requirements as both Held Environmental Water and General Security entitlement holders.*
- *Ensure stakeholder knowledge is assessed on its own evidential merits, within existing institutions and processes for transparency and collaboration.*

3 Summary

Water Management in Australia has seen significant reform for over 30 years. The Intergovernmental Agreement, National Water Initiative (NWI), Murray Darling Basin Plan (MDBP), NSW non-urban metering to name a few mean that water use in our region is highly regulated, measured and monitored. The Gwydir is one of the most regulated systems in Australia. As a country we are recognised as a world leading authority on water policy.

Our Irrigators are also some of the most water use efficient globally, having invested significant time and effort to ensure efficient use of every megalitre of the limited water resource. As Cotton Australia notes Australian Cotton growers are recognised as being the most water use efficient in the world. Many of the members of the GVIA are industry leaders in the ongoing pursuit of Water Use Efficiency. This commitment helps ensure the survival of our communities, the longevity of industry in our region and the sustainability of the water resource.

Despite this commitment irrigators in our region are continuously facing reforms and reviews, most of which fail to acknowledge the significant efforts of industry. We have now reached a position where we need to consolidate the environmental gains, address the challenges to environmental outcomes, such as water quality issues caused by infrastructure that is not fit for purpose, (for example Main Weir and Weir 32 at Menindee lakes urgently need updating to enable fish passage both upstream and downstream).

4 Question Responses

Reference Questions:

- **Are there any other important developments, reforms or outcomes since 2024 that should inform the final assessment?**
- **What has your experience been with the key updates provided by jurisdictions and what outcomes have been achieved?**

4.1 Reform Fatigue

Water users in the Gwydir have faced intensive regulatory reforms and costs in recent years, these include at a federal level the review of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan, a Menindee Review, changes from the NWI to the NWA (the final version of which is not publicly available) and the review of the Water Act. In addition, in NSW, GVIA members have faced increased water pricing for WaterNSW and Water Administration Ministerial Corporation (WAMC), updates to the NSW non-Urban metering, changes to systems for works classifications, review of the Gwydir floodplain management plans, amendments to Gwydir regulated, and unregulated water sharing plans, the creation of the DCCEEW connectivity program and minimum inflows program, initiation of numeric LTAAELs for unregulated WSP and the development of new sustainable LTAAELs program.

Our organisation is increasingly concerned about the cumulative impacts of reform. The NSW Better regulation principles² are supposed to work collaboratively across government, and jurisdictions, to reduce and remove regulatory barriers to make it easier, and less costly, to do business in NSW. Unfortunately, we are not seeing removal of regulatory barriers, nor an easier or less costly business environment. Many members have had to employ additional staff to navigate the regulatory and complex nature of non-urban metering to ensure that they remain compliant.

Recommendations

- *State and federal governments be required to perform annual cumulative impact assessments and individual regulatory impact statements for all individual water reform project, to quantitatively and qualitatively evaluate the impact of water policy reform.*
- *That a published review of the cumulative impact of water reform as recommended by the NSW Auditor-General's June 2026³ report be implemented federally and in NSW.*
- *That any regulatory changes demonstrate that they are required, reasonable and responsive as detailed in the NSW Better Regulation Principles.*

Reference Questions:

- Which jurisdictions have developed clear triggers for rebalancing environmental and consumptive uses? What triggers have been implemented and are they effective at rebalancing environmental and consumptive uses?
- What improvements to monitoring and evaluation of and reporting on water plans are needed to support adaptive management?
- Have jurisdictions taken effective actions to address the overallocation or overuse of water systems and meet environmental and other public benefit outcomes?
- What major interception activities are not licensed or adequately recorded?

4.2 Rules Based Changes and the Risk Assignment Framework

Our members are increasingly concerned about the implications of and use of rules based changes. We believe that some jurisdictions continue to rely on rules-based changes to amend reliability, access or entitlements, bypassing the market and devaluing the water asset. This

² [NSW Treasury | NSW Government](#)

³ NSW Auditor-General's June 2026 performance audit of water management and regulation

is especially concerning when proposed changes are not supported by appropriate socio-economic assessment, cumulative impact statements or regulatory impact statements. Areas where we have seen this include the 2026 NSW Water Sharing Plans Omnibus Amendment Order, where the active storage trigger governing floodplain harvesting take at Menindee Lakes increased from 195GL to 250GL. There was inadequate consultation, no impact assessment and no transparency in the justification, except for acknowledging there was a need to fix the Pamamaroo inlet regulator at Menindee Lakes, an infrastructure upgrade that has been required for many years. The management of the lakes has changed as a result of not fixing the regulator, resulting in the requirement of additional water to maintain water quality. Additionally, this is linked to the lack of suitable fish passage on Weir 32 and Main Weir at Menindee Lakes. Entitlement holders should not be penalised for failures of this nature.

Should there be a need to change the balance between water uses, either for consumption, cultural or environmental, they should be achieved through transparent market mechanisms.

4.3 *Balancing Environmental and Consumptive use*

The Murray Darling Basin Plan set Sustainable Diversion Limits (SDL) to ensure that there is an Environmentally Sustainable Level of Take (ESLT). Throughout the Basin this has substantially been achieved as confirmed in Sustainable Level of Take Reporting⁴.

The Gwydir has had more environmental water recovered than required having met the legislative requirements of the Murray Darling Basin Plan of 42,000 megalitres of Long-Term Diversion Limit Equivalence (LTDLE) entitlement for local/instream environmental outcomes and a further 7,600 megalitres for shared contribution to the northern basin. The NSW and Australian Government's hold 54,600 megalitres LTDLE entitlements. Based on IQQM long-term modelling and the volume of water purchased for the environment. This means there is an additional 5,000 megalitres of water owned by Government's (NSW and Commonwealth) above the legislated amount for our region.

The Productivity Commission five-year Basin Plan review of 2019 noted as one of its short term priorities (within 12 months) that Basin Governments should; "Agree on a policy and timeframe for addressing over-recovery (3.1)." This led to their recommendation 3.1 as stated following,

"As soon as practicable, the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder, in co-operation with Basin governments, should develop a process and an appropriate timeframe to return any identified over recovery to consumptive uses in accordance with Sustainable Diversion Limits"

The basin officials committee update to the Murray Darling Basin Ministerial Council Minco 30, in the Progress Update on implementation of Joint Basin Government response to the Productivity Commission inquiry report: Murray–Darling Basin Plan: Five-year assessment published on 2nd July 2023 we note the Original Joint Basin Government Response included the following,

⁴ [Sustainable Diversion Limit Compliance Statement 2024-2025](#)

“The Australian Government has commenced work on policy arrangements and timeframes to address any over-recovery. It is the intention that consultation will be undertaken with communities and stakeholders on the approach, management and handling of any over-recoveries to achieve a balanced outcome. The handling of any over-recoveries will be subject to the finalisation of remaining gap-bridging water requirements and water resource plans.”

Unfortunately, these recommendations were not implemented, and the Water Amendment Bill 2023, proposes to take over recovered water and allocate this to the 450GL. This cannot formally be completed until the Gwydir WRP has been accredited. This change in policy does not mean that the Gwydir is not over-recovered, it means the government has reallocated this water with not positive impacts for the communities of the Gwydir Valley. This water could have been made available for the Aboriginal water purchase strategy, which would have been a significant positive step for our local aboriginal community.

The Water Act Review discussion paper confirms SDL compliance cannot be formally assessed, nor contraventions enforced, in areas without an accredited WRP. This a structural gap in government-administered planning machinery, not a failure of entitlement holders. We request that NSW-DCCEEW publish a transparent, time-bound accreditation plan with regular public reporting. Further, as part of this review, and the Water Act Review, there is a need to address the accreditation of Water Resource Plans to avoid duplication of resourcing and to support more efficient administration.

Recommendations

- ***That the default method to re-assign any rights to water be through the market rather than rules-based changes, including any changes that impact on either allocations or reliability.***
- ***That risk assignment framework adoption be made a mandatory, rather than optional, condition of water resource plan accreditation in every Basin state;***
 - ***That jurisdictions maintain a public, cumulative reliability impacts register, updated annually, covering water sharing plan and operating rule changes; and***
 - ***That jurisdictions adopt mandatory pre-amendment notification and assessment against Risk Assignment Framework obligations for any change with a measurable effect on entitlement reliability, before that change takes effect.***

Reference Questions:

- **Are the environmental and other public benefit outcomes set out in existing water plans consistent with community expectations of planning process? If not, how could current water plan review processes be improved to better reflect community expectations?**
- **Are environmental and other public benefit outcomes effectively specified to facilitate accountability in water management? How could accountability for outcomes be improved?**

4.4 Review of NSW Water Sharing Plans

In NSW, accountability and planning are governed primarily by WSPs which undergo both audits and reviews. WSPs enable the equitable sharing of water between users including

irrigation, town water supply, the environment and aboriginal interests. Additionally, they account for climate variability, this is especially so in northern NSW where there is an ephemeral system characterised by highly variable rainfall, small public storages (4,710GL north vs 17,549 south⁵) and low reliability.

Every ten years the Natural Resources Commission (NRC) reviews how Water Sharing Plans (WSP) have contributed to environmental, social and economic outcomes, and whether changes may be needed to improve outcomes. Unfortunately, we find that the more recent reviews have focused primarily on environmental outcomes, with high level statements associated with social or economic impacts at best. This has the potential to orientate WSP remakes towards environmental outcomes, at the expense of economic and social outcomes for regional communities. To ensure reviews are conducted appropriately there must be a balanced fully transparent assessment of environmental, social and economic outcomes.

The recommendations by the NRC inform changes or updates to WSPs. Water entitlement holders, the principal stakeholders are provided opportunity to respond to NRC reviews, and the DCCEEW proposed changes, however the information provided to and collated by the NRC is not published publicly until after a final report is provided to the Minister. Data collect by NRC is not transparent and a lack of baseline data makes it difficult for stakeholders to determine if the WSP is achieving all its stated outcomes.

To improve understanding and transparency of regulatory decision making we would support earlier and regular engagement with targeted stakeholders and multiple opportunities for engagement when options are developed and prior to decisions being determined.

In addition, reviews should include regulatory impact statements (RIS) to ensure decision makers can appropriately evaluated proposed changes during this review process. The inclusion of clear cost-benefit analysis to enhance transparency and minimise the exposure of water users to constant changes to access rules. Water user operations are reliant on consistent access to water within their water source and require long term stability in water access rules, this is not appropriately reflected in the current arrangements.

Recommendations

- ***Request recognition of the achievement of SDL and ESLT across the Murray Darling Basin and acknowledgement that at least 72% of water within the Basin is for environmental purposes***
- ***There be increasing focus on supporting the delivery of environmental outcomes from the existing environmental water portfolio through addressing infrastructure issues such as fish passage at Menindee lakes and practical community supported application of constraints management.***
 - ***Entitlement holders should not be penalised where government has failed to implement either infrastructure of constraints critical to environmental outcomes.***

⁵ <https://www.mdba.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/early-insights-paper-2024-10-03.pdf>

- *Request multiple early and regular engagement with targeted stakeholders from irrigated agriculture during the development of options that may result in changes to Water Sharing Plans.*
- *Regulatory Impact Statement (RIS) to articulate the qualitative and quantitative impact of proposed changes across environmental, social, cultural and economic outcomes.*

4.5 Metering and Pricing

Members of the GVAI have actively supported metering for over 20 years and have supported the implementation of telemetry to ensure the integrity of data.

In recent years we have seen a barrage of water reforms, the introduction of additional levels of complexity and duplication of existing systems, NSW is the most over regulated water resource in Australia. The emotional and financial cost for water users has been excessive. There is an overenthusiastic focus on compliance, users have invested significant resources into trying to understand and apply the increasing complex water regulations of NSW. It is time to stop pushing users to the brink and to move attention to government systems to ensure they offer the necessary support for users to adhere to regulation. DCCEE and WaterNSW must be supported to inform, educate and support water users.

Members of the organisation have supported the upgrading of meters to AS4747 standards. We acknowledge the need to have a standard to ensure accuracy. We however are concerned with the ongoing reliability of meters approved under the AS4747 standard. We argue that there is a need for improved flexibility in meter choices. It is imperative that meters are accurate to plus or minus 5%, that they have data loggers and are capable of telemetry, but request that governments broaden the choices, AS4747 meters too frequently fail in the Australian environment and operational conditions. This leads to increasing cost, time and financing, to fix or replace faulty meters.

Recommendation

- *That the Productivity Commission support an independent review of the appropriateness of basing Australia's rural water metering requirements on AS4747 and consider other alternatives.*

4.6 Transition to the National Water Agreement

It is our understanding that the Federal Government has signed the new National Water Agreement (NWA), but that to date NSW nor other states have signed. In addition, we are concerned that there is no public transparency of the final NWA to be signed or how it may or may not impact this enquiry.

In addition, as noted in the interim update, that a new agreement possibly risks weakening the detailed, enforceable commitments of the 2004 National Water Initiative (NWI) without replacing them with equally robust provisions. Any transition to a new agreement should preserve, not dilute, the recognition of water as a property right and the primacy of market-based mechanisms for reassigning water between consumptive and environmental use.

Recommendation:

- *That the Productivity Commission's final report make it clear any replacement to the NWI must strengthen, rather than dilute, the property right that is applied to water.*

4.7 Interception

The licencing of Floodplain harvesting has been a long and arduous journey for all involved. The majority of the licencing of this recognised form of take has been completed, and quantitative entitlements are now in existence throughout most of northern NSW. The licencing of floodplain harvesting in the Gwydir reduced access by 52,000ML, flows that are now a part of the environmental resource in our valley.

The licencing framework is complex, and the implementation of measurement has been problematic with limited availability of Duly Qualified Persons, suitable meters, surveyors and no framework to install point of intake measurement until recently. Throughout the process we have worked in partnership with WaterNSW and NSW DCCEEW to facilitate a path to compliance. Over the past year we have seen significant progress, despite the regulatory requirement to classify every single work associated with a Floodplain Harvesting Entitlement. This additional requirement has stretched the resources of WaterNSW and users.

Forms of take under 'interceptions' in NSW include water that is intercepted before reaching the watercourse, primarily farm dams and forestry. Take is modelled and included in resource assessments in NSW. Measurement of this form of take has improved significantly⁶; while uncertainties remain, current models are well calibrated and accurately capture runoff volumes.

In NSW, projects are focussed on reviewing long-term annual average extraction limits (LTAAEL). To establishing a numeric LTAAEL for all NSW WSPs, NSW-DCCEEW is undertaking an assessment of different forms of take, including interception activities. This interception data is incorporated into resource assessments in NSW and is recorded in all data for water take.

4.8 Water Resource accounting

Reference Questions:

- **Is information about how to access water allocations provided in a timely, transparent and easy to understand way that enables entitlement holders to make informed water-use decisions? How could the provision of information be improved?**
- **What additional information, if any, about planned or rules-based environmental water would increase public and investor confidence in reporting on water available for consumptive use or for environmental and other public benefits?**

We believe that NSW has worked proactively to ensuring equal and public access to water allocation announcements. However, in some catchments and jurisdictions it is less transparency on how water allocations are determined.

⁶ [Runoff dam impacts in the Murray-Darling Basin: Ground truthing options identification and assessment](#)

For the Gwydir publicly available information on the Water Resource Assessment process including monthly Water Allocation Statements, fact sheets on the water allocation methodology and the regular updates provided in the WaterNSW Customer Advisory Group (CAG) meetings, make it relatively easy to make a reasonably accurate estimation of a likely allocation announcement. The NSW Environmental Water holder has also initiated updates on environmental water use.

Changes to the consumptive pool are often driven by rules-based changes within WSPs in NSW. General Security and Held Environmental Water users are the last to be allocated water, so they are most at risk of bearing the impacts of management changes. An example is the creation of a special purposes access licences (SPAL), which can be made under Ministerial discretion. SPALs create high-priority access licences, that reduce the volume of water available to lower priority users.

The impact of these changes are not well publicised, we refer again to the NSW 2026 Omnibus Order made by the NSW Minister for Water which changed access rules for floodplain harvesting (FPH). The changed trigger will reduce opportunities and availability for FPH. To date, NSW has not published information about this change to inform users on reductions to reliability of entitlements.

Recent changes to cease to pump (CTP) triggers in the Gwydir unregulated WSP have limited water access, but we have not been provided published data on the known impacts to the consumptive pool, noting that those most impacted are small uses with entitlements under 50ML.

Furthermore, there is no register that outlines the cumulative impacts from rules changes, we believe that states have an obligation to provide, in clear terms, all water access impacts of rule changes for both environmental and consumptive users. These should be articulated during consultation, and on a public register if brought into effect. Such a resource would improve confidence in water reporting.

Additionally, under the NWI, governments may be obliged to compensate users if access is reduced beyond a certain threshold within the life of a WSP. However, while there is no public record of the cumulative impacts of changes users and agencies will be unaware of how much water has been removed. This prevents stakeholders from recognising when the government as an obligation to provide compensation. This is a fundamental step in increasing transparency of water management.

Recommendations

- ***NSW to develop a public register that shows all past rules changes that have impacted the consumptive pool.***
- ***NSW to publish expected impacts to availability for consumptive water for any prospective rule change.***

4.9 Aboriginal water interests

Reference Questions:

- **What progress, if any, have jurisdictions made in enhancing protection for and recognition of Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property in water management?**
- **What changes can jurisdictions make to better incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges in water management?**

- **Which changes to governance arrangements, if any, have led to shared decision making and increased Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation in planning processes?**
- **How have governance changes improved the recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander water interests and rights in water management and planning?**

We support the general principle that aboriginal knowledge should be recognised and protected within existing institutions and processes, they should be recognised as an equal stakeholder when it comes to water policy decisions, and unless specific indigenous water allocation reserves are already in place, then any additional water allocated to indigenous Australian should be through the water market.

We support partnership-based approaches, that build genuine collaboration with aboriginal people without displacing the existing entitlement framework. Decisions should continue to be made openly and collaboratively, with stakeholder knowledge assessed on its own evidential merits.

Any comments associated with governance arrangements for aboriginal people is most appropriately address by themselves.

We note that aboriginal water access should occur through transparent, market-based mechanisms drawing on the existing consumptive pool. This approach will protect the water purchased under the Aboriginal Strategic Water Purchase Framework, as well as water interests of Environmental Water Holders and consumptive users.

Recommendations

- *Support aboriginal water access achieved through transparent, market-based mechanisms drawing on the existing consumptive pool.*
- *Ensure aboriginal water licences retain their original associated rights, obligations and rules and be subject to the same measurement and enforcement requirements as both Held Environmental Water and General Security entitlement holders.*
- *Ensure stakeholder knowledge is assessed on its own evidential merits, within existing institutions and processes for transparency and collaboration.*

5 About the GVIA

5.1 Our region

The Gwydir Valley Irrigators Association (GVIA) represents more than 450 water entitlement holders in the Gwydir Valley, centred around the town of Moree in North-West New South Wales. Our mission is to build a secure future for members, the environment and the Gwydir Valley community through irrigated agriculture.

The Moree Plains Shire region alone is highly dependent on agriculture and irrigated agriculture for economic activity contributing over 72% of the value of gross domestic product

(cotton is around 60%), employing 20-30% of the population and accounting for almost 90% of exports from the Shire⁷.

The 2011 agricultural census estimates that the total value of agricultural commodities for the Moree Plains Shire region was \$911,951,079 up from \$527,744,851 in the 2005-06 census. This is an estimated 7.83% of NSW's total agricultural production from a 1,040,021Ha principally used for agricultural crops⁸.

The Gwydir is characterised as having low water reliability with most water held as general security water with a reliability of 36% (i.e. in the long-term just over a third of entitlement can be accessed). Supplementary water entitlement is somewhat more reliable with 55% but accounts for less than a quarter of the total volume. Groundwater reliability is considered 100% but there is less than 30,000ML available. Floodplain harvesting licences were issued in 2022, significantly reducing access for the region, and contribute almost a quarter of the water use in the region over the long term. However, access is episodic, in line with moderate to major floods.

The Gwydir has had more environmental water recovered than required by the Murray Darling Basin Authority modelling and legislation. There is an additional 5,000 megalitres of water owned by Government's above the legislated amount for our region⁹.

As a result of water reform, only approximately 19% of the total river flows are available for diversion for productive use¹⁰. This equates irrigators holding 575,000ML from regulated entitlement (high security, general security and supplementary water) and 28,000ML available from groundwater aquifers.

Changes in water availability either through climate or government policy has a direct impact on the productivity of the region and the local economy. Analysis by the Murray Darling Basin Authority highlighted this relationship during the northern review and revealed that for both Moree and Collarenebri social and economic indicators declined through 2001 to 2011 including education, economic resources and disadvantage, resulting in an estimated 200 jobs lost due to the implementation of the Basin Plan in the region¹¹. We are currently seeing this impact play out with ongoing social issues in our region.

⁷ Cotton Catchment Communities CRC Communities and People Series 2009

⁸ 2010 2011 Agricultural Census Report – agdata cubes, 71210D0005-201011 Agricultural Commodities, Australia

⁹ The Gwydir Valley has met the legislative requirements of the Murray Darling Basin Plan of 42,000 megalitres of LTDLE entitlement for local/instream environmental outcomes and a further 7,600 megalitres for shared contribution to the northern basin. The NSW and Australian Government's hold 54,600 megalitres LTDLE entitlements. Based on IQQM long-term modelling and the volume of water purchased for the environment

¹⁰ Based on IQQM long-term modelling and the volume of water purchased for the environment

¹¹ Refer to the Murray Darling Basin Authorities Socio Economic condition reports, Social and Economic Analysis of the Moree Community, 2009. Cotton Catchment Communities CRC

5.2 Our region's hydrology and geomorphology

The Gwydir River is an inland terminal river network classified as “tributary” network by the Murray Darling Basin Commission during water sharing plan development. The rivers become a series of branching channels that distribute flows across large areas especially during floods (MDBC, 2007a). This distribution of water represents the watercourse areas of Gwydir Wetlands. There are four parcels of land within the Gwydir Wetlands listed under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (MDBA, 2010c).

This natural geomorphology means the Gwydir River under natural conditions would have a very low ability to contribute to surrounding catchment inflows. The State of The Darling Interim Hydrology report puts the average percentage flow of the Darling River from the Gwydir River to be 12%, although updated estimates have this percentage between 8- 7% as reported in the Independent Assessment of the 2018-19 Fish Deaths in the Lower Darling. The low contribution, which is consistent with other terminal wetland systems, is a result of most of the water within the system flowing naturally towards the terminal wetlands and watercourse.

The natural hydrology has been altered via modification of the river and operations with an increase in end-of-system connectivity. This channelisation and re-regulation occurred throughout the last century to initially deliver regular stock and domestic water supplies to users and then to deliver irrigation water more efficiently. Flows are now regulated down the Mehi, Moomin and Carole, which can now join the Barwon River. However, even with these modifications there remains limited capacity to move water through these systems with channel constraints limiting the daily flows.

5.3 What we do

The GVIA's mission is to build a secure future for our members, the environment and the broader Gwydir Valley community through irrigated agriculture, we do this together by making every drop count in the river or the aquifer, on-farm, for the environment, or for our community¹².

GVIA members hold entitlements within the Gwydir regulated and unregulated surface water areas, in addition to groundwater resources. All of which are managed through water sharing plans, which have been progressively developed since early 2000.

The GVIA organisation is voluntary, funded by a nominal levy, cents/megalitre on regulated, unregulated and groundwater water entitlement. The levy is paid and supported on average by 85% of the eligible entitlement (excludes NSW and Commonwealth entitlement).

[630-nbr-community-profile-moree-hr.pdf \(mdba.gov.au\)](https://www.mdba.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/630-nbr-community-profile-collarenebri.pdf)

<https://www.mdba.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/630-nbr-community-profile-collarenebri.pdf>

¹² For more information, see our corporate video on <https://vimeo.com/177148006>

The Association's primary activities revolve around negotiating with government at a Federal, State and Local level to ensure equality and the rights of entitlement holders are maintained and respected. The core activities of the Association are funded entirely through the voluntary levy, the Association does undertake programs to maintain and improve the sustainability of members on-farm activities, which can be funded by government or research corporations.

The Association is managed by a committee of a minimum 11 entitlement holders and employs a full-time executive officer and a part-time administrative assistant, as well as hosting a Project Officer funded through the Cotton Research and Development Corporation, the Gwydir Valley Cotton Growers Association and the GVIA.

5.4 *Contacts*

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