

Summary of changes to the Water Sharing Plan for the Gwydir Unregulated River Water Sources

A summary of changes to the Water Sharing Plan for the Gwydir Unregulated River Water Sources.

The Minister for Water, with the agreement of the Minister for the Environment, made a replacement Water Sharing Plan for the Gwydir Unregulated River Water Sources 2026, which replaced the previous 2012 plan. The table below outlines the substantive changes from the previous 2012 plan. In drafting the replacement plan, the plan was also updated to simplify and modernise its drafting, make the intent of its provisions clear, and improve its legal robustness.

Table 1. Summary of changes for the Water Sharing Plan for the Gwydir Unregulated River Water Sources 2026

Reference in 2012 plan	Change in 2026 plan	Basis for change
Part 1 Introduction	The commencement date has been replaced with upon publication on the NSW legislation website.	<p>The commencement date is changed to 2026 to reflect that the plan has been remade rather than amended.</p> <p>This means that the 2012 plan has been repealed, and in line with the <i>Water Management Act 2000</i> (WM Act), section 43, the new plan is in place until the end of June 2036.</p> <p>It should be noted that the plan can be amended, if necessary, within the 10-year term.</p>

Reference in 2012 plan	Change in 2026 plan	Basis for change
<p>Part 1 Introduction</p>	<p>Updated management zones to which the plan applies by adding new management zones.</p> <p>In the Gingham Watercourse Water Source, the new management zone is the Gingham Watercourse Tributaries Management Zone.</p> <p>In the Copeton Dam Water Source, the 3 new management zones are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copes Creek Management Zone, • Copeton Dam Management Zone, and • Gwydir River Management Zone <p>In the Moredun Creek Water Source, the 2 new management zones are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gwydir River and Lower Moredun Creek Management Zone, and • Upper Moredun Creek and Tributaries Management Zone. 	<p>Management zones have been established to allow different management of areas within some water sources. Different access and trade rules may apply to different management zones within the same water source.</p>
<p>Part 1 Introduction</p>	<p>Changed the name of the Gwydir River Trading Zone in the Upper Gwydir River Water Source to Upper Gwydir River Trading Zone.</p> <p>The trading zones are now established in Part 1 of the plan.</p>	<p>The 2012 plan established the ‘Gwydir River Trading Zone’ for trading zones in both the Upper Gwydir River Water Source and the Moredun Creek Water Source.</p> <p>The 2026 Plan changed the name of the trading zone in the Upper Gwydir River Water Source to the “Upper Gwydir River Trading Zone” to eliminate confusion.</p>

Reference in 2012 plan	Change in 2026 plan	Basis for change
<p>Part 2</p> <p>Vision, objectives, strategies and performance indicators</p>	<p>Updated the vision, objectives, strategies and performance indicators to reflect changes to the water sharing plan templates.</p>	<p>The Natural Resources Commission (NRC) recommended review of the plan objectives to strengthen monitoring, evaluation and reporting (MER) of the plan outcomes.</p> <p>Parliamentary Counsel's Office advised that the plan can only contain high-level statements.</p> <p>The new vision, objectives, strategies, and performance indicators deal with similar matters to the 2012 plan objectives but are changed to more clearly distinguish between the environmental, economic, social, and Aboriginal cultural objectives of the plan.</p>
<p>Part 2</p> <p>Vision, objectives, strategies and performance indicators</p>	<p>Additional requirement for monitoring and evaluation of performance indicators included.</p>	<p>These changes arose from the concurrence approval of the 2024 inland unregulated water sharing plans.</p> <p>A monitoring, evaluation and reporting (MER) plan for the plan is to be published by December 2026. The implementation of the plan, including progress against the MER plan, will be publicly reported each year. In year 9 of the plan, the minister will publicly report on the monitoring and evaluation undertaken.</p>
<p>Part 3</p> <p>Bulk Access Regime</p>	<p>This section was removed as it did not provide additional information than that which already exists in the WM Act or elsewhere in the plan.</p>	<p>Parliamentary Counsel's Office has simplified the drafting of water sharing plans.</p>

Reference in 2012 plan	Change in 2026 plan	Basis for change
<p>Part 4 Planned Environmental Water Provisions</p>	<p>The environmental water provisions remain in the plan but not in their own part. They have been distributed throughout the plan into Part 4 – Limits to the availability of water and Part 6 – Operation of water allocation accounts and managing access licences.</p> <p>The planned environmental water provisions are identified at the commencement of the relevant section.</p>	<p>Parliamentary Counsel’s Office has simplified the drafting of water sharing plans.</p>
<p>Part 5 Requirements for water Division 1 General</p>	<p>This division was removed as it did not provide additional information than that which already exists in the WM Act or elsewhere in the plan.</p>	<p>Parliamentary Counsel’s Office has simplified the drafting of water sharing plans.</p>
<p>Part 5 Requirements for water</p>	<p>This part is now set out in Part 3.</p> <p>Updated basic landholder rights estimates and licensed water requirements.</p>	<p>The new basic landholder rights estimates reflect updated land use since the 2012 plan commenced.</p> <p>Estimates for licensed water entitlement have been updated based on Water Licensing System data.</p>
<p>Part 6 Limits to the availability of water Division 1 Calculations under this Part</p>	<p>Drafting has been updated, but no material changes have occurred to this Part.</p> <p>This part is now set out in Part 4.</p>	<p>Parliamentary Counsel’s Office has simplified the drafting of water sharing plans.</p>

Reference in 2012 plan	Change in 2026 plan	Basis for change
<p>Part 6</p> <p>Limits to the availability of water</p> <p>Division 2</p> <p>Long-term average annual extraction limits</p>	<p>Provisions have been included to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> determine and publish a numeric long-term average annual extraction limit (LTAAEL) by 31 December 2026. review the LTAAEL by 1 July 2030, considering a sustainable level of take. This work will be undertaken with advice from NRC and consider the outcomes of the Basin Plan review (if completed). review the LTAAEL by 31 December 2031 to consider and adapt to climate change. allow the plan to be amended to give effect to changes to rules as a result of the reviews. allow for reduced available water determinations if an assessment of compliance against the LTAAEL has not been completed require a public statement to be made on why reduced available water determinations have or have not been made. <p>This is now set out in Part 4, Division 2.</p>	<p>These changes arose from concurrence approval of the 2024 inland unregulated water sharing plans.</p> <p>Template changes apply to all 2025 and 2026 inland unregulated replacement water sharing plans and will specify a review of extraction limits having regard to a sustainable level of take and consider climate change to protect the water sources and their dependent ecosystems. The review will also consider cultural, social and economic implications of any extraction limit change.</p> <p>These changes arose from concurrence approval of the plan</p>

Reference in 2012 plan	Change in 2026 plan	Basis for change
<p>Part 6</p> <p>Limits to the availability of water</p> <p>Division 3</p> <p>Long-term average sustainable diversion limit</p>	<p>We updated drafting of the sustainable diversion limit (SDL) provisions.</p>	<p>We have simplified the drafting of SDL provisions, removed unnecessary detail and included references to appropriate sections of the Basin Plan 2012 and the <i>Water Act 2007</i> (Commonwealth).</p>
<p>Part 6</p> <p>Limits to the availability of water</p> <p>Division 4</p> <p>Compliance with extraction and diversion limits</p>	<p>Changes to action following non-compliance to allow available water determinations (AWDs) to be reduced for unregulated river access licences and/or floodplain harvesting (unregulated river) access licences, as determined necessary.</p> <p>This is now set out in Part 4, Division 2.</p>	<p>The 2012 plan specifies that in the instance of extraction exceeding the plan limit, reductions to AWDs should be made to both unregulated river access licences and floodplain harvesting (unregulated river) access licences, equally.</p> <p>The NRC has recommended that this provision be reviewed to reflect the Gwydir Regulated WSP, which allows AWDs to be reduced as necessary.</p>
<p>Part 6</p> <p>Limits to the availability of water</p> <p>Division 5</p> <p>Available water determinations (AWDs)</p>	<p>The 2012 plan required the Minister to make certain AWDs at a certain time. The plan has been changed to require the Minister to consider making AWDs as set out in this Part.</p> <p>This is now set out in Part 4, Division 1.</p>	<p>A water sharing plan provision cannot require the Minister to make certain AWDs at a certain time, as that is fettering the minister’s broad power in section 59 of the WM Act.</p>

Reference in 2012 plan	Change in 2026 plan	Basis for change
<p>Part 7</p> <p>Rules for granting access licences</p>	<p>This part is now set out in Part 5.</p> <p>Drafting has been updated, but no material changes have occurred to this Part.</p> <p>We have made changes to the Aboriginal cultural specific purpose access licence provisions.</p>	<p>Parliamentary Counsel’s Office has simplified the drafting of water sharing plans.</p> <p>The changes clarify that any secondary or incidental benefit gained from take under an Aboriginal cultural access licence is permitted.</p>
<p>Part 8</p> <p>Rules for managing access licences</p> <p>Division 1</p> <p>Water allocation account management rules</p>	<p>This part is now set out in Part 6.</p>	<p>Parliamentary Counsel’s Office has simplified the drafting of water sharing plans.</p>
<p>Part 8</p> <p>Rules for managing access licences</p> <p>Division 2</p> <p>Daily access rules</p>	<p>Removed provisions for total daily extraction limits and individual daily extraction limits and included an amendment provision.</p>	<p>These rules could serve as effective management tools for certain water sources. Therefore, they may be implemented in the future, provided there is adequate infrastructure and metering in place.</p>

Reference in 2012 plan	Change in 2026 plan	Basis for change
<p>Access rules for Halls Creek Water Source</p>	<p>Increased the cease-to-pump (CtP) to restrict access in the Halls Creek Management Zone when flows are at or less than 2 ML/day at the Halls Creek at Bingara gauge (418025).</p>	<p>The Halls Creek Water Source is considered a stronghold for Freshwater Catfish in the Gwydir unregulated river system and is a key habitat for other important fish species. The water source previously had an access rule of no visible flow at the Bingara gauge (418025).</p> <p>The new access rule is designed to reduce the high risk of zero flows due to extraction and provide better protection to threatened fish species in this key habitat.</p>
<p>Access rules for Rocky Creek, Cobbadah, Upper Horton and Lower Horton Water Source</p>	<p>Increased the CtP to restrict access in the Lower Horton Management Zone when flows are at or less than 5 ML/day at the Horton River at Rider gauge (418015) in the Rocky Creek, Cobbadah, Upper Horton and Lower Horton Water Source.</p>	<p>The water source previously had an access rule of CtP when flows were less than or equal to 4 ML/day at the Horton River at Rider gauge (418015).</p> <p>The new access rule is designed to reduce the high risk of zero flows as a result of extraction and to better protect known populations of threatened fish species in the water source.</p>
<p>Access rules for Myall Creek Water Source</p>	<p>Increased the CtP to restrict access when flows are at or less than 1 ML/day at the Myall Creek at Molroy gauge (418017).</p>	<p>The water source previously had an access rule of CtP when there was no visible flow at the pump site.</p> <p>The new access rule is designed to reduce the high risk of zero and base flows identified in the water source and provide better protection to the known populations of threatened fish species in the water source.</p>

Reference in 2012 plan	Change in 2026 plan	Basis for change
<p>Access rules for Moredun Creek Water Source</p> <p>Gwydir River and Lower Moredun Creek Management Zone, and</p> <p>Upper Moredun Creek and Tributaries Management Zone</p>	<p>Established 2 management zones and increased the CtP rule for the Gwydir River and Lower Moredun Creek Management Zone to restrict access when flows are at or less than 7 ML/day at the Bundarra gauge (418008).</p>	<p>In the most recent drought, the water supply for the town of Bundarra in the Moredun Creek Water Source ran dry. The new access rule increases protection to Bundarra’s town water supply by ensuring the licensed take from the low flows are restricted.</p> <p>This will also improve connectivity during dry times and provide better protection to the known populations of threatened species such as the Bells Turtle and the Eel-Tailed Catfish. Addresses NRC recommendations to improve the protection of town water supply (TWS) impacted by extraction.</p>
<p>Access rules for Copeton Dam Water Source:</p>	<p>Established 3 management zones and increased access rules for 2 of these zones:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copes Creek Management Zone - Increased the CtP to restrict access when flows are at or less than 1 ML/day at the Copes Creek at Kimberly gauge (418005) • Gwydir River Management Zone – Increased the CtP to restrict access when flows are at or less than 7 ML/day at the Bundarra gauge (418008). • Copeton Dam Management Zone – no visible flow at the pump site. 	<p>The entire water source previously had an access rule of CtP when there was no visible flow at the pump site.</p> <p>The new gauge-based access rules in 2 management zones will improve protection of low flows in the water source. This will improve connectivity during dry times and provide better protection to the known populations of threatened species such as the Bells Turtle and the Eel-Tailed Catfish.</p>

Reference in 2012 plan	Change in 2026 plan	Basis for change
<p>Access rules for Tycannah Creek Water Source</p>	<p>Increased the CtP to restrict access when flows are at or less than 2 ML/day at the Tycannah Creek at Horseshoe Lagoon gauge (418032)</p>	<p>The water source previously had an access rule of CtP when there was no visible flow at the pump site.</p> <p>The new gauge-based access rules will improve protection of low flows in the water source. This will improve connectivity during dry times and provide better protection to the known populations of threatened fish species.</p>
<p>Access rules for Thalaba Creek and Mehi River water sources</p>	<p>Included provisions to protect replenishment flows specified in the regulated river water sharing plan for domestic and stock purposes from unregulated river extraction in the Thalaba Creek and Mehi River water sources.</p>	<p>The previous plan was silent on protecting replenishment flows from the regulated water source delivered into unregulated areas.</p> <p>The new provisions will prohibit the take of replenishment flows from licensed extraction once they enter the Thalaba Creek and the Mehi River Water Sources.</p>

Reference in 2012 plan	Change in 2026 plan	Basis for change
<p>Part 9</p> <p>Rules for water supply works approvals</p> <p>Division 1</p> <p>Rules applying to the granting or amending of water supply work approvals</p>	<p>Prohibits new water supply works within or within 3km upstream of a declared Ramsar or within WSP prescribed wetlands, unless no more than minimal harm can be determined in accordance with the published minimal harm guidelines.</p> <p>Prohibits new water supply works within WSP prescribed wetlands identified in the prior water sharing plan.</p> <p>The rule will not apply to replacement works, works constructed or administered by WaterNSW or works that are part of a government program..</p> <p>WSP prescribed wetlands are displayed on a map.</p> <p>This part is now set out in Part 7.</p>	<p>This rule aims to protect internationally, nationally and regionally significant wetlands (WSP prescribed wetlands) from the impacts of increased surface water extraction by restricting new development and extraction in and near these important environmental assets.</p>

Reference in 2012 plan	Change in 2026 plan	Basis for change
<p>In-river dams</p>	<p>Prohibits the granting and amending of water supply work approvals for in-river dams on third or higher order streams in 7 additional water sources -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gil Gil Creek Water Source • Moredun Creek Water Source • Moree Water Source • Myall Creek Water Source • Thalaba Creek Water Source • Tycannah Creek Water Source and • Upper Gwydir River Water Source. <p>An exemption for town water supply purposes and replacement water supply works will apply to all specified water sources.</p>	<p>This provision applies to water sources with high instream value or that are already restricted from granting or amending a water supply work approval for an in-river dam on a third or higher order stream in the plan.</p> <p>The Gwydir Water Resource Plan Risk Assessment 2019 identified 7 additional water sources with high instream value that were not previously listed.</p> <p>The exemption for town water supply will enable towns the flexibility to improve their water security and reliability, if required, and it recognises the priority actions in the NSW Water Strategy relating to town water supply.</p>
<p>Works in off-river pools</p>	<p>Prohibits the granting or amending of water supply work approvals in off-river pools unless no more than minimal harm can be determined in accordance with the published minimal harm guidelines.</p> <p>The rule will not apply to replacement works.</p>	<p>This provision is intended to protect the environmental values associated with off-river pools and ensure consistency across all inland unregulated river water sharing plans.</p>

Reference in 2012 plan	Change in 2026 plan	Basis for change
<p>Part 10</p> <p>Access licence dealing rules</p>	<p>This part is now set out in Part 8.</p> <p>Prohibits trades into WSP prescribed wetlands.</p> <p>Prohibits trades into or within 3 km upstream of a Ramsar listed wetlands.</p> <p>Prohibits trade into WSP prescribed wetlands from the prior water sharing plan.</p> <p>Prohibits the nomination of works into a WSP prescribed wetland, a Ramsar wetland or within 3 km upstream of a Ramsar-listed wetland unless no more than minimal harm can be determined in accordance with the published minimal harm guidelines. The rules allow for trade within the same Ramsar wetland, or within the same WSP prescribed wetland.</p>	<p>This rule aims to protect internationally significant wetlands and WSP prescribed wetlands from the impacts of increased surface water extraction by restricting new development and extraction in and near these important environmental assets.</p> <p>These rules are consistent with not allowing new works in or near internationally significant wetlands or within WSP prescribed wetlands.</p>
<p>Trades in Boorolong Creek, Mackenzies Flat and Mosquito Creek water sources</p>	<p>Permits limited trade into the Boorolong Creek Water Source up to 266 ML (an additional 35 ML).</p> <p>Permits limited trade into Mackenzies Flat Water Source up to 135 ML (an additional 18 ML).</p> <p>Permits limited trade into the Mosquito Creek Water Source up to 48 ML (an additional 10 ML).</p>	<p>Boorolong Creek, Mackenzies Flat and Mosquito Creek water sources have medium or low hydrological stress and medium or low environmental value.</p> <p>Permitting limited trade into these water sources is consistent with the Access Licence Dealing Principles.</p>

Reference in 2012 plan	Change in 2026 plan	Basis for change
<p>Trades in off-river pools</p>	<p>Prohibits trades into off-river pools.</p> <p>An exemption related to the assignment of allocations is provided for access licences where history of prior trade can be demonstrated.</p> <p>Prohibits the nomination of works on off-river pools unless no more than minimal harm can be demonstrated in accordance with the published minimal harm guidelines.</p>	<p>This provision is intended to protect the environmental values associated with off-river pools and ensure consistency across all inland unregulated river water sharing plans.</p>
<p>Part 11 Mandatory conditions</p>	<p>Updated in line with the current water sharing plan template.</p> <p>This part is now set out in Part 9.</p>	<p>The work approval conditions have been updated to align with the Non-Urban Water Metering Framework and the water sharing plan template drafted by the Parliamentary Counsel’s Office. The non-urban metering policy was rolled out in the inland northern region on 1 December 2021.</p>
<p>Part 12 Amendment of this Plan</p>	<p>Simplified amendment provisions.</p> <p>This part is now set out in Part 10.</p>	<p>Amendment rules have been limited to those that are possible under the WM Act, where there is a policy is being developed that is well advanced that will require a change to the water sharing plan or where an administrative change is required.</p> <p>This does not prohibit amendment of the plan if it is in the public interest to do so in accordance with section 45 of the Act.</p>

Reference in 2012 plan	Change in 2026 plan	Basis for change
<p>Part 12</p> <p>Amendment of this Plan</p>	<p>Establishes additional amendments to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • review access rules after year 3 in the following areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Moree Water Source – Upper Horton Management Zone of the Rocky Creek, Cobbadah, Upper Horton and Lower Horton Water Source. • allow changes associated with the government’s response to the Connectivity Expert Panel’s Final Report • review access rules by 2027 in the following management zones: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Gwydir River Management Zone in the Copeton Dam Water Source – Gwydir River and Lower Moredun Creek Management Zone in the Moredun Creek Water Source. 	<p>An amendment provision has been added for high-risk water sources where more data is required to make a suitable change after year 3 based on new information.</p> <p>An amendment to facilitate the Implementation Program developed to improve connectivity in the Northern Basin.</p> <p>An amendment provision added for the purpose of improving protection of water dependent ecosystems and connectivity between 2 water sources immediately upstream of Copeton Dam.</p>

Reference in 2012 plan	Change in 2026 plan	Basis for change
Dictionary	This is now set out in Schedule 4 with updated terminology.	<p>To add new terms consistent with the WSP template and remove unnecessary terms.</p> <p>A definition of prescribed wetlands has been added to cater to the new rules included in the plan for protection of wetlands.</p> <p>A definition of minimal harm guideline has been added to cater for the new rules included in the plan for the protection of wetlands and off-river pools</p> <p>Definitions that refer directly to the Basin Plan 2012 definitions, such as annual actual take and annual permitted take, have been removed.</p>
Schedule 1	Schedule 1 now contains a flow classes table with access rules.	<p>Relates to changes in access rules in some water sources from no visible flow to gauge based low flow access rules.</p> <p>The table details the relevant water source, management zone, flow class, flow threshold and flow reference point.</p>
Schedule 1 Flow classes	The flow class table has been updated to include new access rules for Copeton Dam, Halls Creek, Moredun Creek, Myall Creek and Tycannah Creek water sources and the Lower Horton Management Zone within the Rocky Creek, Cobbadah, Upper Horton and Lower Horton Water Sources.	Updated Flow Classes table to align with new access rules.

Reference in 2012 plan	Change in 2026 plan	Basis for change
<p>Flow class for Gingham Watercourse Water Source - Lower Gingham Watercourse Management Zone</p>	<p>Changed the wording of A Class access rule to be equal to or more than 175 ML/day at the Gingham Bridge gauge at any time, or equal to or more than a total of 4000 ML/year at the Gingham Bridge gauge over the previous 12 months, or a visible flow in the Gingham Watercourse at Morialta Road.</p>	<p>This rule change has been made to correct an error. The change now aligns with amendments made to the wording of the Very Low Flow class in the Flow Class table of the previous plan.</p>
<p>Schedule 1A Access licences used to take surface water exempt from the access rule in clause 43(5)</p>	<p>This has been removed.</p>	<p>There are no licences that are permitted to draw down pools.</p>
<p>Schedule 2 Access rules for unregulated river access licences subject to clause 43(8)</p>	<p>These are now located in Table A of Schedule 3; Access licences and approvals subject specified cease to take conditions.</p>	<p>Drafting updated to reflect the current template. Updated Water Act 1912 licence numbers with WM Act Water Access Licence numbers.</p> <p>Cancelled licences (if any) have been removed.</p>
<p>Schedule 3 Access licences used to take surface water exempt from cease to pump rules</p>	<p>These are now located in Schedule 2.</p> <p>Access licences exempt from cease to pump rules</p> <p>Table A lists licences other than for town water supply</p> <p>Table B lists local water utility access licences and access licences of subcategory town water supply</p>	<p>Drafting updated to reflect the current template.</p> <p>Updated Water Act 1912 licence numbers with WM Act Water Access Licence numbers.</p> <p>Cancelled licences (if any) have been removed.</p> <p>New licences (if any) have been added.</p> <p>Licences no longer exempt (if any) have been removed.</p>

Reference in 2012 plan	Change in 2026 plan	Basis for change
<p>Schedule 4 Significant identified lagoons and wetlands</p>	<p>List of significant identified lagoons and wetlands removed.</p> <p>Wetlands previously listed in this Schedule are displayed on a WSP Prescribed Wetland Map and identified as WSP prescribed wetlands from prior WSP.</p>	<p>The mapping and associated rules aim to protect Ramsar, nationally and regionally significant wetlands from the impacts of increased surface water extraction by restricting new development and extraction in or upstream of these key assets.</p>
<p>Schedule 5 Upland wetlands of the drainage divide of the New England Tablelands Bioregion endangered ecological community</p>	<p>The List of Upland wetlands of the drainage divide of the New England Tablelands Bioregion endangered ecological community has been removed.</p> <p>Wetlands previously listed in this Schedule are displayed on a WSP Prescribed Wetland Map and identified as WSP prescribed wetland from prior WSP.</p>	<p>The mapping and associated rules aim to protect Ramsar, nationally and regionally significant wetlands from the impacts of increased surface water extraction by restricting new development and extraction in or upstream of these key assets.</p>
<p>Schedule 6 Office</p>	<p>Removed the list of office locations from the plan.</p>	<p>The list of offices to send notifications to is no longer relevant or required.</p>

Reference in 2012 plan	Change in 2026 plan	Basis for change
<p>Appendix 1</p> <p>Overview of the Plan Map</p>	<p>This is now shown on the plan map.</p> <p>Updated the plan map and legend.</p> <p>The Upper Gingham Watercourse Management Zone has been realigned to follow the main low-flow channel, replacing the former flood-runner alignment to match the true watercourse.</p> <p>Added management zones for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gingham Watercourse Tributaries Management Zone • Copes Creek Management Zone • Copeton Dam Management Zone • Gwydir River Management Zone • Gwydir River and Lower Moredun Creek Management Zone, and • Upper Moredun Creek and Tributaries Management Zone. <p>Changed the name of the Gwydir River Trading Zone in the Upper Gwydir River Water Source to Upper Gwydir River Trading Zone.</p>	<p>Aligns with changes to the following water sources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gingham Watercourse Water Source • Copeton Dam Water Source • Moredun Creek Water Source.
<p>Appendix 3</p> <p>Overview of the management zones covered by this Plan</p>	<p>This has been removed.</p>	<p>Management zones are shown on the plan map.</p>

Reference in 2012 plan	Change in 2026 plan	Basis for change
<p>Appendix 3A and 3B</p> <p>Overview of Gwydir Management Zone A and Gwydir Management Zone D and</p> <p>Overview of Gwydir Valley Floodplain</p>	<p>These have been removed.</p>	<p>Shown in Appendices to the Floodplain Management Plan for the Gwydir Valley Floodplain 2016.</p>
<p>Appendix 4</p> <p>Access licences subject to cease to take conditions specified in clause 43(6)</p>	<p>These are now in Schedule 3, Table B; and licence numbers have been updated.</p> <p>Licences listed in this Appendix from the Halls Creek Management Zone and Myall Creek Water Source have been removed.</p>	<p>Updated Water Act 1912 licence numbers with WM Act Water Access Licence numbers.</p> <p>Cancelled licences (if any) have been removed.</p> <p>New licences (if any) have been added.</p> <p>Licences listed in the Halls Creek Management Zone, Myall Creek Water Source and some in the Gwydir River and Lower Moredun Creek Management Zone have been removed as they are now subject to a gauge-based access rule that is more stringent than the no visible flow or previous relevant conditions listed in the previous plan.</p>

Reference in 2012 plan	Change in 2026 plan	Basis for change
Not applicable	Add WSP Prescribed Wetlands Map Include a new map to show internationally significant (Ramsar) and WSP prescribed wetlands that are subject to new protections under the Plan, and to identify the location of WSP prescribed wetlands from prior WSP.	The mapping and associated rules aim to protect Ramsar, nationally and regionally significant wetlands, from the impacts of surface water extraction by restricting new development and extraction in or upstream of these key assets.

Why we have made these changes

The Water Sharing Plan for the Gwydir Unregulated River Water Sources 2012 was due to expire on 30 June 2023. The plan was extended for a period of up to 2 years to give the department time to replace it. This was in line with the recommendation of the Natural Resources Commission’s review of the 2012 plan.

The process for changing water sharing plans

As well as the approval of the Minister for Water, replacing a plan requires the agreement of the NSW Minister for Environment (known as ‘concurrence’). Consistent with section 9 of the *Water Management Act 2000* (the WM Act), when replacing a water sharing plan, the ministers must:

- take all reasonable steps to promote the water management principles of the WM Act and
- give priority to the principles relating to water sharing according to the order they are set out in under section 5 (3) of the WM Act.

The water sharing management principles under s5(3) of the WM Act are (in their order of priority):

- a. sharing water from a water source must protect the water source and its dependent ecosystems
- b. sharing water from a water source must protect basic landholder rights
- c. sharing or extracting water under any other right must not prejudice the principles set out in points a) and b).

A draft replacement plan was placed on public exhibition from 4 November 2024 to 10 January 2025, and until 2 February 2025 for comments specific to the proposed wetlands in the plan. During public exhibition, a face-to-face public information session and a webinar were held. There were 62 submissions received on the draft plan.

Additional targeted consultation was conducted for the Copeton Dam, Moredun Creek and Tycannah Creek water sources between 4 September and 15 October 2025 where different access rules were proposed and discussed. Changes were made to the proposed access rules in these water sources as a result of the consultation.

The department's Water Group worked with colleagues in the department's Conservation Programs, Heritage, and Regulation Group to develop the replacement plan before submitting the plan for the agreement and approval of the ministers.

More information

To read the Water Sharing Plan for the Gwydir Unregulated River Water Sources 2026 and supporting information, visit the department's [water sharing plans status](#) website.