

Wambool Macquarie-Cudgegong Environmental Water Advisory Group Meeting Summary 13 August 2024 Lazy River Estate Dubbo

On 13 August 2024 the Wambool Macquarie-Cudgegong Environmental Water Advisory Group (EWAG) met in Dubbo.

The group reviewed current conditions and water availability and recommended adjustments to the Macquarie regulated delivery strategy based on the updated data.

They also adopted a watering approach for the Eastern Marshes for this water year, with further discussions around a multi-year strategy to continue.

Macquarie-Cudgegong Water Availability

The Macquarie-Cudgegong valley has experienced favourable rainfall conditions, leading to increased inflows into Burrendong Dam and, to a lesser extent, Windamere Dam. The overall general security water availability stands at a robust 103%. The BoM climate outlook suggests a neutral trend, with a slight possibility of above-average rainfall during spring 2024.

Environmental Watering Events:

The group was provided an update on the watering strategy, including the current water balances, future plans, and challenges.

Cudgegong River

This year marks the second year of discretionary environmental water management in the Cudgegong River. Previously, specific flow conditions were required to trigger the release of environmental water from Windamere Dam ("translucency").

The group reviewed and reaffirmed the key objectives for the Cudgegong River in 2024/2025:

- **Support native fish breeding and recruitment:** Prioritise river specialists and flow generalists, including Murray cod, Freshwater catfish, and northern river blackfish.
- **Enhance river productivity and processes:** Provide small freshes and flow variability.
- **Secure carryover for future years:** Ensure water availability for future use.

To achieve these objectives, a small flow pulse is scheduled for October/November 2024, followed by a period of stable, elevated base flow over the summer. Approximately 9,000 megalitres are planned to be delivered, although this amount may be adjusted based on spring rainfall and the group's established objectives.

Macquarie River

Starting Early - The recent completion of penstock maintenance at Burrendong Dam has allowed for an earlier start to the planned 'Spring Pulse' 2024 environmental water release. This pulse, initially scheduled for mid-September, will now begin in early August pending translucent EWA-driven flows.

During the Burrendong penstock outage, translucent environmental releases would have been triggered. However, due to outflow restrictions, some of this water couldn't be released. This withheld volume has been accounted for and a portion of this total will be added to the Spring Pulse, offsetting the reduced river flow during the maintenance period.

Eastern Marshes Plan - The group has agreed to trial a watering plan for the Eastern Marshes in spring 2024. This plan will include the combining of environmental water releases with other water sources to target Gum Cowal/Terrigal inundation for over 90 days.

It was noted that due to Translucent EWA that water was not available for landholders to call for Stock and Domestic replenishment under the Water Sharing Plan. There is unaccounted water associated with Translucent EWA delivery that would be used instead.

The plan aims to use of all water sourced to maintain flow-dependent vegetation within the inner wetland and floodplain areas, up to around 2,000 hectares in this Marshes subsystem, with results being subject to local rain contributions.

Connecting the Barwon River – A portion of the 'Spring Pulse' environmental water release will flow through the Macquarie Marshes and into the unregulated Lower Macquarie River, which joins the Barwon River between Walgett and Brewarrina.

There is likely strong current demand for unregulated irrigation take in the Lower Macquarie River reach.

Around 500ML/d of held licences and active environmental water allowance will be used through the start of the event to activate active management mechanism to protect around 150ML/d flows through the Lower Macquarie River.

Flow-MER2 Update: Dr Kate Brandis from University of NSW presented an update on the Flow-MER2 program. This five-year monitoring program, funded by the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder (CEWH), aims to evaluate the effectiveness of environmental water in the Murray-Darling Basin (MDB).

Flow-MER2 is being implemented in ten river basins and focuses on four key themes: cultural river flows, native vegetation, waterbirds, and native fish. By studying these areas, the program aims to provide insights into the effectiveness of environmental water and contribute to improved water management practices in the MDB.

NEXT MEETING: Set for 5+6 November in the Marshes/Warren including a field trip.