

Macquarie-Cudgegong Environmental Water Advisory Group

Meeting summary of the update meeting held on 20 November 2025 at Charles Sturt University, Dubbo NSW.

The Wambuul Macquarie–Cudgegong Environmental Water Advisory Group (EWAG) met in Dubbo to review spring environmental watering outcomes and current catchment conditions. The group also considered planned watering events for the remainder of the 2025–26 water year. Members received updates on fish monitoring in the Cudgegong, dam operations and the latest information on the H5N1 bird flu.

Weather and catchment conditions

Rainfall across the catchment for the past 3 months has been below average, whilst temperatures have remained slightly warmer than normal. The Bureau of Meteorology predicts above median rainfall for the December–February summer months, with around average temperatures.

WaterNSW reported that Burrendong Dam water storage peaked at 67% in September 2025 but has since dropped to 56%. Total inflows received to Burrendong Dam since July 2025 were 320 gigalitres (GL). Windamere Dam water storage remained steady at around 90% in 2025.

Wambuul–Macquarie River update

The spring 2025 watering event inundated up to 25,000 hectares (final figure to be confirmed) of the Macquarie Marshes between July and October 2025, with one October snapshot showing 21,512 hectares (ha) inundated. The watering event activated the eastern marshes and inundated roughly 3,000 ha. An unexpected wetland area was inundated on the southern nature reserve located between the Old Macquarie River channel and the Breakaway channel – informally referred to as ‘the Breakback’. This feature may be associated with recent erosion control works upstream and natural changes in flow patterns, though local landholders noted its presence in previous years.

Environmental responses to the flow were positive, with sightings of ibis, brolga, a rare pied heron and the critically endangered Australian Painted Snipe. There is hope for a breeding outcome of the Australian Painted Snipe, with several couples observed in the Mole Marsh in the southern marshes.

There are 2 watering events remaining for the 2025–26 water year. Firstly, the summer native fish flow floor and smoothing event, using up to 10 GL of water. Secondly, an autumn fish dispersal pulse in March 2026, using up to 10 GL of water. Water account balances are in a favourable position. Total use for the 2025–26 water year including translucent environmental water allowance is estimated to be 173 GL with 110 GL to be carried over for future use.

Cudgegong Regulated River update

The Cudgegong River spring productivity pulse was 2.2 GL in size at Rocky Waterhole gauge. The pulse transitioned into a summer elevated baseflow of about 85 ML/day to provide a slightly higher, more stable water level that is ideal for native fish breeding, especially for species like catfish. The baseflow is planned to finish at the start of February 2026 however, if rainfall contributes to river flows, the event may continue until end March 2026.

An update on the Cudgegong River fish monitoring project was provided, with 56 fish tagged in mid-2025. There were detections of fish at 3 of the 7 receivers. Species detected included carp, golden perch, Murray cod and silver perch. Relatively low movement suggests that water temperature may have influenced fish activity, as could be expected. Further monitoring will continue.

H5N1 bird flu presentation

A presentation on the Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza HPAI H5N1 (H5 bird flu) was presented to the group. While Australia is currently free of the virus, vigilance and reporting of unusual bird deaths are essential. H5 bird flu poses a serious global threat to wildlife, with some impact to livestock and human health. Since 2020, H5 bird flu has caused millions of poultry deaths worldwide and affected over 500 wildlife species. Australian native bird species are at risk such as sea eagles, pelicans, vulnerable ducks and bitterns, along with domestic poultry. The virus spreads through contact with wildlife remains and contaminated materials, and can be carried on clothing, footwear and vehicles.

Australia's response focuses on surveillance, cross-agency readiness, wildlife preparedness plans, and community engagement including First Nations cultural considerations. Human transmission is rare, but NSW Health advises the use of PPE and seasonal flu vaccination for added protection. The public is urged not to touch sick or dead birds and report unusual bird sickness or multiple deaths to the Emergency Animal Disease Hotline on 1800 675 888.

Upcoming meeting

The next EWAG meeting will be held on 25–26 February 2026 in Dubbo. Key agenda items will include reviewing summer watering outcomes and planned watering events for the remainder of the 2025–26 water year. The group will also have pre-planning discussions for the 2026–27 water year including discussions on the future structure and representation of the EWAG.