

Macquarie Cudgegong Environmental Water Advisory Group

Meeting summary of the Macquarie Cudgegong Environmental Water Advisory Group meeting held on 25 August 2026 in Dubbo NSW.

Overview

The meeting focused on reviewing recent hydrological conditions, assessing the implications of unexpectedly wet winter flows on the 2026-27 environmental water plan for the catchment, and considering adaptive management options for both the Wambuul Macquarie and Cudgegong systems. Presentations were also provided by the Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) on the Basin Plan Review and by NSW DCCEE Water Group on the review of the Regulated Macquarie-Cudgegong Water Sharing Plan (WSP).

Winter 2026 differed from the dry anticipated conditions when the EWAG recommendations for the Annual Watering Plan (AWP) were developed in May 2026. Catchment rainfall and translucent and supplementary flow events produced a 70 GL flow at Marebone Weir during June and July 2026 and started Marshes inundation including the Eastern Marshes. This created an opportunity to reshape the Spring 2026 flow to aim for greater duration in the approximate 14,000ha current inundation, improving ecological outcomes with the same volume.

Key Watering Recommendations

Eastern Marshes 'Avoid Loss' watering 2026

WaterNSW commenced a Stock and Domestic (S&D) delivery to the Eastern Marshes in response to tributary inflows in June 2026. Environmental water managers took advantage of these conditions by directing part of translucent EWA flow through the Gum Cowal regulator, delivering approximately 8.8 GL into the Eastern Marshes of a 16GL total event here, earlier than originally planned.

The discussion centred on the future of the 10 GL originally designated for Eastern Marshes watering.

Three options were considered:

1. Deliver the planned event this year as per the May 2026/Annual Watering plan, seeking to add to any surplus flow events.
2. Carry the water over for future use in 2027-28.
3. Add the volume to the current watering event.

It was noted the winter inundation environmental outcomes would not assist key warmer-season wetland vegetation types like Water Couch. Consideration was given to targeting the proposed 10GL autumn 2027 flow towards the east.

Consensus was not reached on the recommendation, with several members favouring retaining the 10 GL for future use and others seeking to retain flexibility this water year should conditions change.

Outcome

Consensus was reached to Delay a decision on additional Eastern Marshes watering until the next meeting (Oct/Nov 2026), suspending watering until at least then.

Reshaping the Marshes Spring 2026 Pulse

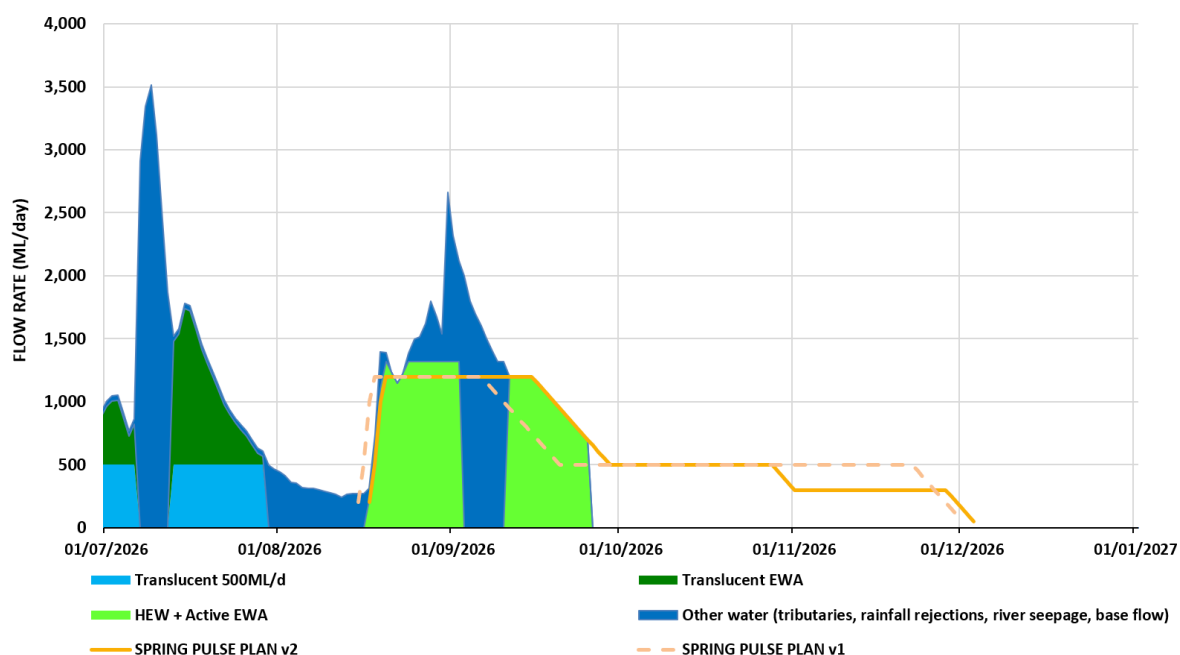
The second significant watering discussion examined modifying the planned spring 2026 hydrograph.

A proposal was put forward to extend the peak component of the event by approximately 15 days, reducing commitment to November low flows. The objective of the adjustment is to capitalise on the positive antecedent conditions to increase inundation duration while 14,000ha of the system is already wet, maintaining or possibly building on existing Marshes spread, particularly in the northern Marshes.

Potential trade-offs between expanded wetland inundation and event duration were considered. Concerns regarding Murray Cod breeding requirements were discussed and ultimately considered manageable.

Outcome

The group supported Redistributing water from the tail of the watering event to provide an additional 15 days of peak flow.



Cudgegong Environmental Water Planning

The meeting also revisited environmental watering plans for the Cudgegong River in the context of the proposed Bulk Water Transfer (BWT) from Windamere Dam to Burrendong Dam.

If the BWT proceeds: No environmental watering release is proposed, as the transfer itself is expected to provide environmental outcomes greater than those achievable under the planned environmental watering event.

If the BWT does not proceed: An environmental release remains available, supported by approximately 6,700 ML of environmental water. However, using this volume would leave no carryover available.

Outcome

The Bulk Water Transfer is not guaranteed, so delaying commitment to a managed event is prudent. The preferred approach was characterised as an "all on or all off" decision depending on whether the transfer proceeds.

Other items for discussion

Regulated Water Sharing Plan review

Julie Lovell of NSW DCCEEW Water Group presented on the 2026/2027 review, and some of the key items on the current list of issues to assess.

Concerns were raised from members of the group about the engagement model, which has excluded some people from having input as they were not invited by Water Group, and a lack of face to face meetings to hear from other catchment members and resolve issues around a table.

Review of the Murray Darling Basin Plan

Four members of the MDBA presented and discussed the current Basin Plan review with the group, including progress to date and timing of future steps.

Fish survey outcomes in the Cudgegong and Distributary Creeks

Jarrod Mesken of DCCEEW CPHR presented data to the group from the recent Cudgegong River and regulated distributary creeks fish surveys.

Exotic fish species are still dominant, but insights into the native species present in these systems are insightful. Collection of fin clips for future testing for stocked vs native origin was undertaken.

These are being written up into fact sheets.

Next meeting

Late Oct/Early Nov: Tues 27 October pencilled in.

***NOTE* This date has a clash, so we are proposing to run the meeting on Tues 3 and Wed 4 November, with a one-day optional fieldtrip to the Marshes.**