

Water in NSW: How it's managed and what you need to know

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Water management in NSW can be complicated. It's easy to understand why – with many agencies, rules and regulations for water, it can be hard to know where to go if you have a question. Thankfully it doesn't have to be difficult, and there are already many tools in place to make water users' journeys as smooth as possible.

But why is water management so complicated? NSW contains a huge amount of land with vastly different rainfall and river conditions, distinct inland and coastal climates, and a range of water sources. This means we must manage water slightly differently in every river, area or town.

NSW also sits at the centre of the Murray-Darling basin, is subject to political agreements on water that date back over a hundred years and contains a range of important and protected environments. We must also consider the many ways people use water, the different values they place upon it, and the need to ensure we have water for the future.

As a result, managing water in NSW is complex. We need policies and rules to manage water safely and fairly, a way to enforce the rules, and physical infrastructure to move and deliver water where it's needed. Several NSW agencies are responsible for particular parts of water management:



Department of Planning and Environment – Water (DPE - Water)

The DPE - Water is responsible for setting water policy that meets the needs of people and the environment.

Their policies aim to support economic growth, human health and wellbeing, Aboriginal outcomes, and the health of our catchments, waterways and groundwater, as well as the ecosystems that depend on them.

They also ensure the requirements of Commonwealth legislation and agreements are being met.

One of the ways this is being achieved is through the NSW Water Strategy, a state-wide plan to improve the resilience of water services and resources over the coming decades.

Together with 12 regional and two metropolitan water strategies, these strategies will help identify each region's water needs and challenges and implement the right mix of solutions to deliver water where and when it is needed for the long-term.

The strategies explore water efficiency programs, using new technologies to do more with less, new and innovative uses for recycled water, desalination and other rain-fall independent supply options, and more.

How water is managed



Department of Planning and Environment - Environment, Energy and Science group (DPE – EES)

The department’s Environment, Energy and Science group also has a role in managing water for the environment.

This group holds the licences for NSW’s environmental water and uses it in line with the long-term watering plans they prepare to set the long-term goals for water for the environment.

Natural Resources Access Regulator (NRAR)

The independent Natural Resources Access Regulator (NRAR) is responsible for regulating water users and enforcing NSW water law.

NRAR enforces compliance with water law using tools ranging from education through monitoring and auditing to legal prosecution.

NRAR is independent from the Department of Planning and Environment – Water to ensure the integrity of its regulatory and compliance activities.

While the agencies must work together on some issues, NRAR is led by an independent board, and the department can’t direct NRAR’s activities.

WaterNSW and local water utilities

When it comes to getting water to people or places, the state-owned corporation WaterNSW is responsible for delivering bulk quantities of raw water, managing the operations of surface and groundwater resources, and operating some of the infrastructure (like dams).

At a more local scale, individual water utilities manage infrastructure that delivers water to their customers and manage both water and sewage treatment plans to ensure safe water quality.

Each of these agencies is responsible for an important piece of the complex puzzle of water management. And each piece is critical to ensure we have enough safe water to go around, now and in the future. To do that, especially given the challenges of climate change, we will need to keep improving the way we manage water and water systems. We are working to collect and analyse environmental data and local stakeholder knowledge to ensure we can keep improving our models, planning, and understanding of our water systems.

What does this mean for water users?

Water rules can be difficult to navigate, but there are many tools at your disposal to understand the roles of government and what you must do to be a compliant water user.

WaterNSW's WaterInsights product is a one-stop shop for real-time data on storage levels, announcements, trade and water usage rules, weather and climate information, visibility of groundwater and 30 years of historical water data. It also links directly to all DPE's Water Sharing Plans, the Access Licence Register, the Water Register and iWas, the water accounting system at the centre of all WaterNSW operations.

This is a powerful, all-inclusive tool putting what you need to know at your fingertips. Visit: <https://www.watarnsw.com.au/waterinsights/water-insights>

Simply put, in NSW to take and use water from a river, stream, lake or from underground you must:

- hold a licence (gives you the right to take a certain amount of water from a water source)
- a water supply works approval (lets you use and build equipment which takes, stores or conveys the water) and
- a water use approval (authorises you to use the water for a particular purpose). This is often included in the works approval document.

In some cases, you may be exempt from these requirements – but it is your responsibility to check.

For more information about water licensing or approvals and how to lodge an application, WaterNSW's and NRAR's websites have all the information you need to get going. Visit: <https://www.watarnsw.com.au/customer-service/water-licensing>

And if you have questions for the regulator, including identifying which government agency you need to go to for your application, questions about lodging applications, or to report suspicious or unauthorised water activities, NRAR Assist is a simple, online tool. Visit: <https://www.dpie.nsw.gov.au/nrar/nrar-assist>

For all the latest information and for many more water resources, visit the DPE, WaterNSW and NRAR websites, or get in touch with us directly.

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WaterNSW: 1300 662 077
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NRAR: 1800 633 362
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