

Update on actions from the Snowy Water Licence Review

The NSW Government is making progress on implementing the actions arising from the Snowy Water Licence Review.

The Department of Planning, Industry and Environment is making improvements to Snowy water management in response to outcomes from the Ten-year Snowy Water Licence Review, completed in 2018. This fact sheet outlines the progress made so far.

There were 23 proposed actions arising from the review. The department has completed 10 of the actions as part of the first-round of its administrative licence amendments. We are in the process of implementing the remaining 13 actions. Table 1 summaries the progress to date.

Table 1: Summary of progress implementing actions from the 10-year Snowy Licence Review

Category	Actions	Status	Due
Administrative licence amendments	1(a), 2, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 14(a), 15(a), 17	Complete Amended licence published on 16 December 2020	Complete
Best practice licence review	21	In progress Review complete and recommendations endorsed Development of best practice tools and resources commenced	December 2021
Environmental water investigations	7, 8	In progress The department's Environment, Energy and Science group and Water group are working to review issues and investigate options for Mowamba Weir and Snowy River increased flows flexibility	December 2022
Water release investigations	12, 13, 14(b), 15(b), 16, 18, 19, 20, 22	In progress Issues papers under development	December 2022
Final licence amendments	N/A	Not started Due for implementation once outcome of actions known	June 2023

The department is overseeing the implementation of the actions with the support of Snowy Hydro Limited and other state and federal agencies with a direct interest in water regulated and released from the Snowy Hydro Scheme.

Best practice licence review

Action 21 of the Snowy Licence Review called for a review of the department’s regulatory policies and procedures used to administer the Snowy Water Licence and to provide recommendations to improve regulatory best practice for administering the licence moving forward.

Review and recommendations

An independent body reviewed the department’s policies and procedures in late 2020. The review produced several recommendations to reform how we manage the licence and implement transparent and consistent regulatory administration. The reform will target:

- developing transparent policies and procedures to direct the department’s role in administering the licence
- publishing annual compliance reports and improving transparency and the availability of information to the public
- planning, resourcing and providing the capabilities and skills needed for ‘business as usual’ administration of the licence and conducting 10-yearly statutory reviews
- reviewing and implementing improvements to the compliance and enforcement regime and the licensee’s obligations under the current framework
- reviewing and updating environmental water governance and water accounting systems to match current best practice.

Implementation

In March 2021, representatives from the NSW, Victorian and Australian governments endorsed the recommendations of the independent review at the Snowy Water Government Officials Committee meeting. The department is moving to implement the recommendations over the coming year, with the aim of adopting the new practices in 2022.



Figure 1: Stages for implementation of the best practice review

Water release investigations

Water release investigations formed most of the actions arising from the licence review.

The department is part of the Snowy Technical Working Group (TWG), which is working to progress these actions. The TWG comprises representatives from the Australian, South Australian and Victorian governments, WaterNSW, the Water and Environment, Energy and Science groups within NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment, the Murray–Darling Basin Authority and Snowy Hydro Limited.

Because of the complexity of investigations relating to water releases, the TWG has endorsed a staged approach (see Figure 2). Stage 1A is underway, which involves a detailed investigation of issues. Subsequent stages will consider options and development of proposals, where feasible options are identified.

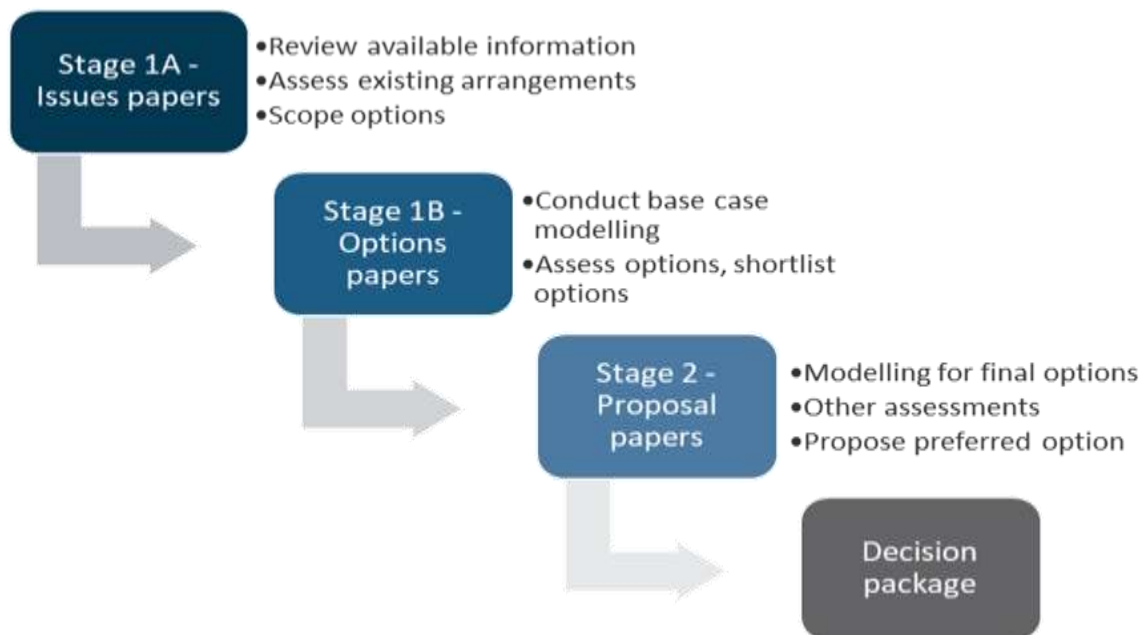


Figure 2: Staged approach to completing water release investigations arising from the 10-year Snowy Licence Review.

The department will assess proposed options through modelling and considering environmental outcomes. Where relevant, we will also consider the economic impacts.

The key areas of the investigations include:

- water availability for licence holders (announced allocations), including the severity of drought periods
- effects on below-target water and above-target water in the Snowy scheme.
- timing and volume of spills from downstream storages
- cost impacts to Snowy Hydro Limited
- potential ecological benefits, where relevant.

Modelling

The department, Murray–Darling Basin Authority, Victorian Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning and Snowy Hydro Limited are collaborating through the department’s regional water strategy program to develop an integrated model for the Snowy Scheme, the River Murray system, the Murrumbidgee regulated river system and the unregulated Upper Murrumbidgee river system.

It is anticipated to have the first integrated modelling in place by September 2021, for historic climate over the last 120 years.

Environmental water investigations

The department and the Snowy Advisory Committee (SAC) are investigating options for actions relating to environmental water and increased flows for the Snowy River and the Snowy Montane Rivers.

Progress to date includes scoping the issues and considering options to improve outcomes for environmental water delivery.

The department is establishing an expert panel comprising three scientists with specialties in river ecology, freshwater biochemistry and fluvial geomorphology. This will provide advice on two of the Snowy Licence Review actions, namely to investigate providing water releases to the Snowy River from Mowamba River (currently impounded by Mowamba Weir) and to investigate options for improving the flexibility of releases to the Snowy River from Lake Jindabyne.

Stakeholder engagement strategy

The department has developed and endorsed a stakeholder engagement plan for the Snowy Licence Review program to communicate the progress of the review and measure response to proposed licence amendments as outcomes of the review investigations.

The plan recognises the contribution of those living in and around the Snowy and western rivers who rely on the program to deliver water security and maintain the natural river systems. Consultation gives us an opportunity to draw on people's knowledge and to build support for the licence review outcomes.

We believe that through engagement, the department will achieve better outcomes for the management of water in this region.

Throughout the review implementation, we will use two approaches for engaging and communicating with stakeholders:

- **general updates** via webinars and fact sheets to all interested parties in the Snowy and western rivers regions to communicate progress and outcomes of the review implementation
- **targeted stakeholder consultation** to seek the views of interested parties on specific issues and the impact of draft recommended amendments.

Upcoming engagement opportunities

We have scheduled the following engagement opportunities over the next 6 months:

- **webinars** – we will hold a webinar session in September 2021 to provide a detailed overview of the approach and progress towards implementing actions from the licence review, as well as answer questions about the review process
- **direct briefings** – stakeholders can ask for a member of the department to attend your group's next meeting to answer specific questions regarding the licence review
- **updates** – we will publish information on the progress of the licence review on the Snowy Water Licence page of the department's website: www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/basins-catchments/snowy-river/corporate-licence

To register your interest in the above engagement opportunities, please visit the Snowy Water Licence page (www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/basins-catchments/snowy-river/corporate-licence) of the department's website and follow the link to the registration form.