

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water

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Snowy River high-flow releases

Stakeholder and Community Engagement Plan

May 2024





Acknowledgement of Country

The Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water acknowledges that it stands on Aboriginal land. We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land and we show our respect for Elders past, present and emerging through thoughtful and collaborative approaches to our work, seeking to demonstrate our ongoing commitment to providing places in which Aboriginal people are included socially, culturally and economically.

Published by NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water

dceew.nsw.gov.au

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First published: May 2024

ISBN/ISSN:

Department reference number: INT24/39798

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Introduction

The Snowy Water Initiative (SWI) was formally established in 2002 to significantly improve river health by releasing environmental water into the Snowy, upper Murrumbidgee and upper Murray river systems.

Embodied in the Snowy Water Inquiry Outcomes Implementation Deed 2002 (SWI OID), the SWI is an agreement for water recovery and environmental flows between the NSW, Victorian and Australian governments (the partner governments) and Snowy Hydro. The NSW Government is responsible for the implementation of the SWI OID.

The environmental water is released from Jindabyne Dam into the Snowy River. The NSW Government is responsible for determining the annual release strategy of these environmental flows, which collectively are called the Snowy River Increased Flows (SRIF).

The annual SRIF strategy focuses on three key aspects, these being:

- increased daily flow variability
- a series of high-flow releases to rework the river bed and improve in instream habitat
- frequent smaller releases.

Key issues/considerations

- The Snowy River is an Australian icon. There is strong community interest in rehabilitating the Snowy River, as well as widespread agreement across all stakeholders that the delivery of additional flows is greatly needed.
- The department has previously consulted widely with the local community to identify stakeholders likely to be affected by the planned 2024 high-flow water releases, or who may be able to assist in ensuring the safety of staff, the public and property during the releases.
- The department recognises that effective management of the risks that could arise from the releases requires the support and coordination of many stakeholders.
- This year's annual targeted volume of 204,963 megalitres (ML) reflects the generally wet conditions seen over the past year. The yearly flow sequences are designed to differ from previous years to introduce variability between years, especially around the timing and magnitude of high-flow events.

- As in past years a component of the strategy is to include, where dam levels are high enough to allow delivery via the spillway gates, a ‘flushing flow’ event large enough to scour the bed of the Snowy River to improve the habitat and resulting in secondary ecological responses to the improved habitat condition.

Key water release dates

The table below shows the schedule for high-flow releases. “High-flow” releases are those equal or greater than 2,500 ML/day, which is the threshold above which flows may have the potential to create safety risks, based on local risk knowledge and experience from past releases. The timing and volumes of flows may change subject to environmental, climatic or operation conditions.

Date	Volume
Thursday 27 June 2024	Daily flow of 2,977 megalitres per day (ML/d) over 24 hours, with equivalent peak flow 4,006 ML/d for eight hours from 8 am to 4 pm
Wednesday 21 August 2024	Daily flow of 3,549 ML/d over 24 hours, with equivalent peak flow 4,916 ML/d for eight hours from 8 am to 4 pm
Wednesday 28 August 2024	Daily peak flow of 4,935 ML/d over 24 hours
Thursday 19 September 2024	Daily flow of 3,135 ML/d over 24 hours
Thursday 3 October 2024	Daily flow of 3,917 ML/d over 24 hours, with equivalent peak flow 4,787 ML/d for eight hours from 8 am to 4 pm
Monday 14 October 2024	Daily peak flow of 2,932 ML/d over 24 hours
Wednesday 23 October 2024	Daily flow of 5,596 ML/d over 24 hours with equivalent peak flow 9,563 ML/d for eight hours from 8 am to 4 pm if Jindabyne Dam levels are high enough to enable delivery If dam levels are not high enough, daily flow of 4,200 ML/d over 24 hours with equivalent peak flow 5,000 ML/d for eight hours from 8 am to 4 pm.
Thursday 24 October 2024	Daily peak flow of 2,575 ML/d over 24 hours If dam levels are not high enough to allow the peak delivery on 23 October, a daily peak flow of 3,525 ML/d will be delivered on 24 October over 24 hours.
Thursday 21 November 2024	Daily flow of 2,410 ML/d over 24 hours, with equivalent peak flow 3,837 ML/d for eight hours from 8 am to 4 pm

Note: Flows will commence at 00:00am (midnight) local time on the date listed for a period of 24 hours. Peak flow releases will occur between 8am to 4pm local time.

The flow regime includes eight separate ‘high-flow’ events between 27 June and 21 November 2024. The daily flow for each of these high-flow events will be near or above 2,500 megalitres per day (ML/d). High-flow events are generally released at midnight, with a constant flow rate for 24 hours. Five of the high-flow release events will include a higher peak flow rate over 8 hours from 8am to 4pm.

A flushing flow is planned in October, which will be delivered if Jindabyne Dam water levels are high enough to enable delivery of flows via the spillway gates. If water levels are insufficient to achieve this, a lesser volume will be released via the cone valves.

Frequent smaller flow releases, below 2,500 ML/d, will also be made throughout the year.

About this stakeholder and community engagement plan

The stakeholder and community engagement activities outlined in this plan have been developed in line with the department's Stakeholder and Community Engagement Policy (IND-I-245) to ensure effective and genuine engagement with stakeholders and the broader community to achieve better public policy outcomes, improved service delivery and enhanced customer service.

The methodologies and actions listed in this plan demonstrate a transparent and consistent approach in relation to stakeholder and community engagement and have been developed using the principles of the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) model.

These principles include:

- **Purposeful** – deliver on NSW Government priorities, corporate goals with a clear understanding of what we want to achieve.
- **Inclusive** – the identification of all stakeholders and enabling participation.
- **Timely** – clear identification of timeframes and allow sufficient time for meaningful consultation.
- **Transparent** – clearly explain the engagement, consultation and implementation processes and provide the information necessary to enable meaningful and purposeful participation.
- **Respectful** – ensure engagement activities acknowledge and cater for the differing needs, perspective and levels of understanding of participants.

Objectives

The aim of this Stakeholder and Community Engagement Plan is to outline the key activities to be undertaken during the 2024-25 water year, but predominantly focusing on the 2024 high-flow releases.

The department has prepared the *Snowy Rivers Increased Flows: Safety Management Plan 2022-2027* to identify and manage public and staff risks associated with the planned environmental water releases. This plan reflects the communication requirements of the SMP.

This plan will:

- Identify and define the approach, methods and collateral material to engage stakeholders to inform them of and assist them prepare for the Jindabyne releases.
- Ensure appropriate action is undertaken in a timely manner to inform stakeholders and the community, with particular emphasis on down-stream landholders, of the planned ‘high-flow’ water releases, the anticipated dates of each release, the associated volumes of each release and the potential water depths at existing gauges downstream of Jindabyne Dam.

Engagement purpose

To effectively engage with relevant stakeholders regarding the Snowy River environmental high-flows by:

- Informing all interested parties of the planned series of eight ‘high-flow’ events between 1 May 2024 and 30 April 2025.
- Providing interested stakeholders and the broader community with access to relevant materials regarding the high-flow events.
- Ensuring interested people, particularly landholders immediately down-stream of Jindabyne Dam are aware of the planned high-flow events, their timing and magnitude.

Stakeholders targeted under this plan

Agency	Contact (where applicable)
Commonwealth Government	https://www.dcceew.gov.au/about/contact
NSW Government	https://water.dpie.nsw.gov.au/about-us/contact-us
Victorian Government	https://www.deeca.vic.gov.au/our-department/contact-us
Snowy Hydro Limited	https://www.snowyhydro.com.au/contact/
Snowy Advisory Committee	sac@dpie.nsw.gov.au

Agency	Contact (where applicable)
Snowy River Alliance	wallacevr@snowy.net.au
Landholders along the Snowy River	
Snowy Monaro Regional Council	council@snowymonaro.nsw.gov.au
East Gippsland Shire Council	https://www.eastgippsland.vic.gov.au/contact-us
NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service	info@environment.nsw.gov.au
Transport for NSW	https://www.nsw.gov.au/transport-for-nsw/contact-roads-and-waterways
State Emergency Service NSW SES Vic SES	https://www.ses.nsw.gov.au/about-us/contact-us/ https://www.ses.vic.gov.au/about-us/contact-us/
Other Emergency Service Agencies	
Bureau of Meteorology	https://shop.bom.gov.au/contactus
Local Land Services	
East Gippsland CMA	https://egcma.com.au/contact-us/
State/Regional/Local media organisations	
Snowy Monaro Regional Council – e-news	communications@snowymonaro.nsw.gov.au
Shire Wire	
Snowy Magazine	https://www.snowymagazine.com.au/contact
Jindabyne Summit Sun	http://www.summitsun.com.au/
Monaro Post	https://monaropost.com.au/contact
XL FM	https://www.2xl.com.au/connect/contact
Snow FM	snow@capitalradio.net.au
ABC Radio South East	https://www.abc.net.au/southeastnsw/contact-us
Local businesses within the Snowy region	

Agency	Contact (where applicable)
Recreational fishing industry	
Recreational campers and tourists	
Community interest groups	
Members of the general public	
Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water – staff	snowylicencemanagement@dpie.nsw.gov.au

Key messages

Volumes allocated to environmental flows

- For the 2024-2025 water year, the New South Wales, Victorian and Commonwealth governments have committed 204,963 ML to be released from Jindabyne Dam into the Snowy River.
- This includes 196,463 ML of SRIF and 8,500 ML base passing flow.

Specific details for 2024/25 high-flow releases

- There are eight scheduled 'high-flow' environmental water releases to the Snowy River in excess of 2,500 ML/d planned for the 2024 water year, occurring between June and November.
- There will be three winter and five spring water releases, reflecting the natural timing of expected high-flow events.
- Flows from Jindabyne Dam are generally released at midnight, with a constant flow rate for 24 hours.
- Five of the high-flow release events will include a higher peak flow rate over 8 hours from 8am to 4pm.
- A flushing flow of 9,563 ML/d is planned for Wednesday 23 October 2024. If dam levels are not sufficient to deliver this in full, the following options will be implemented:
 - If dam levels are high enough to deliver a flushing flow but not high enough to provide the full peak, 5,000 ML/day will be delivered via the cone valves and as much additional SRIF via the spillway gates as possible.
 - If dam levels are insufficient to achieve this a smaller flow will be delivered.

General details for all high-flow releases

- High-flow releases are those in excess of 2,500 ML/day. This is the threshold above which flows may have the potential for creating safety risks, based on local risk knowledge and evidence from past releases. Smaller releases are also made throughout the water year.
- High-flows events from Jindabyne Dam are generally released at midnight, with a constant flow rate for 24 hours.
- Peak flow events are sometimes included, which involve an increased flow rate over 8 hours from 8am to 4pm.

- The days leading up to and following high-flow releases will have intermediate flows to create a more natural flow release pattern (hydrograph) that maximises ecological benefits.

Changes to planned dates and volumes

- Planned flows may be modified or cancelled subject to climatic, environmental or operational conditions near to the time of release.
- The department will endeavour to inform the public of changes to large flow releases, where possible.
- Whilst the volumes of smaller releases are also planned at the start of the year, these may be changed at any time without notice. This allows greater flexibility in the delivery of environmental releases, which provides improved environmental outcomes.

Why releases are being made

- Environmental water releases to the Snowy montane rivers are mandated under the *Snowy Water Inquiry Outcomes Implementation Deed 2002*, a tri-government agreement between the Australian, New South Wales and Victorian Governments, to achieve significant improvements in river health.
- Significant improvement in the condition of the Snowy River has occurred since the introduction of a more variable daily flow regime, including the introduction of a high-flow release strategy.

Design strategy for the flow release patterns

- Flushing flows are important to help develop a more defined river channel within the former riverbed to assist in achieving the long-term goal of returning the Snowy River to a smaller, but healthy montane river.
- High-flow water releases are designed to better mimic the natural flow characteristics that are seen in Snowy montane rivers, including snowmelt and 'freshes' that occurred before the construction of the Snowy scheme, with the aim of improving the long-term health of these river systems.
- High-flow releases are generally planned over winter and spring. This reflects the pre-regulation flow regime of a mixed rainfall and snowmelt river system characteristic of the Snowy Mountains.
- There are generally periods of lower flow in summer and autumn, broken by pulses of higher flow which are aimed to help maintain the opening of the Snowy River estuary and support the seasonal movement of native fish.

- A series of smaller flow releases has been demonstrated to improve river health by establishing a new smaller channel, wetting the riparian zone and promoting the establishment of aquatic and riparian vegetation.
- There is a high degree of daily flow variability with complex multi-peak hydrographs that are typical of rivers in the Snowy Mountains.

Introduction of flexibility in the delivery of smaller releases

- As an outcome of the Snowy Water Licence Review, flexible delivery of smaller flows may be introduced on a trial basis in 2024/25, whereby releases will be made in response to natural cues such as rainfall events. This will help support river health and water dependant plants and animals including native fish.
- The trials may include:
 - Varying releases based on Thredbo trigger flows – responding to natural flow cues based on real-time Thredbo River flow triggers resulting from rainfall events. If triggered, the highest planned release for the month (<1,500 ML) will occur in the Snowy River around one day after the Thredbo flow trigger. This will be done on up to four occasions throughout the water year. The default date for the highest flow is the 25th day of the month if not triggered.
 - Varying releases to achieve flows to the estuary– trial and monitor a series of low flow variations to support estuary health and help keep the estuary entrance open during summer and autumn 2025. Planned daily flows will be increased in February if conditions are dry. The water would be moved from a higher flow period in autumn to achieve this if required.
- Delivering flows in response to natural cues aims to support healthy river functions including helping to maintain a Snowy River estuary connection to the sea supporting critical habitat for native fish migration and breeding including for the Australian grayling which is nationally listed as vulnerable.
- Flexible delivery will not apply to high-flow events (i.e. great than 2,500 ML/day) for the 2024/25 water year, although we may move towards greater flexibility of high-flow events in the future. Appropriate safety management planning would be developed to support this.

Safety messaging

- Downstream landholders are encouraged to make appropriate plans, ahead of the water releases, including securing watercraft and moving stock, pumps and infrastructure to higher ground.

- The release of environmental water into the Snowy River over a series of high-flow events has been successfully trialled since 2011.
- Measures to ensure safe management of high-flow releases are detailed in the Safety Management Plan, which is available on the NSW DCCEEW -Water website.

Supporting materials

- Fact sheet: Frequently Asked Questions – provides an overview of the high-flow water release events
- Snowy River Increased Flows: Safety Management Plan – identifies risks associated with the high-flow water release events and outlines the management of these risks for both the general public and staff.
- Rising River Alerts – provides specific details for each of the eight high-flow events in relation to timing, volume and anticipated river level heights down-stream of Jindabyne Dam for the duration of each of the water releases.

Agency safety responsibilities for high-flow events

STAG members are expected to undertake the following tasks:

- Provide technical advice to the STAG Chair based on the agency’s expertise and local knowledge, on the potential risks and impacts of the releases and appropriate mitigation measures.
- Provide advice to the STAG chair on whether the SMP and flows should proceed.
- Ensure agency attendance at all STAG meetings and provision of timely responses to STAG meeting actions.
- Distribute media releases and Rising River Alerts through their own agencies communication channels as required.
- Assist with community engagement as required.

Additional tasks specific to individual agencies are listed in the below table

Agency	Role
NSW DCCEEW-Water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop the Safety Management Plan • Lead implementation of processes detailed in the Safety Management Plan • Chair Snowy STAG • Provide secretariat support to Snowy STAG • Coordinate all public and stakeholder communications prior to high-flow releases • Reply to contentious issues and enquires • Make decision in consideration of advice of the Snowy STAG
NSW DCCEEW Corporate Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and implement the Stakeholder and Community Engagement Plan • Undertake all public and stakeholder communications prior to high flow releases
NSW DCCEEW-BCS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of Snowy Rivers Increased Flow (SRIF) release pattern • Develop the SRIF Operations Plan • Work with Snowy Advisory Committee to ensure they consider risks in planning future SRIF release patterns • Liaise with impacted stakeholders

Agency	Role
BoM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide advice to the Snowy STAG on rainfall forecasts • Undertake modelling of rainfall events and impacts on river flows / planned releases • Issues flood watch and warnings
NSW SES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NSW SES is the legislated Combat Agency for floods and is responsible for the control of flood operations. NSW SES work with the Bureau and Councils to develop warning systems. • Responsible for flood consequence management
VIC SES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VIC SES is the legislated Combat Agency for floods and is responsible for the control of flood operations. VIC SES work with the Bureau and Councils to develop warning systems. • Responsible for flood consequence management
Snowy Hydro Limited	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure releases are able to be undertaken safely • Operate infrastructure to make releases to the Snowy River • Cease / alter releases (from this plan) when directed by NSW DCCEEW-Water
Snowy Monaro Regional Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist in providing up to date contact details for downstream landholders • Install additional signage where necessary
East Gippsland Shire Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist in providing up to date contact details for downstream landholders
NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Install additional signage to alert park users including campers in camping areas • Erect road closed signs as required

Direct actions for high-flow events

Action item	Responsibility	Comment
Provide FAQ's factsheet	NSW DCCEEW-Water and NSW DCCEEW Corp Comms	The factsheet will be made publicly available via the department's website, emailed directly to downstream landholders (those with listed contact details) and via the working group.
Provide updates on the down-stream landholder and key stakeholders contact list to DCCEEW	NSW DCCEEW-BCS NSW DCCEEW-Water and NSW DCCEEW Corp Comms	<p>Opt-in list data is collected by DCCEEW-BCS, via website.</p> <p>This information is input directly into a contact list held by the Snowy Licence Team.</p> <p>SMS contacts added to Borealis by Snowy Licence Team and Email contacts forwarded to Comms Team for inclusion on their list.</p> <p>Media contacts maintained by Media Team, including interstate.</p> <p>Amendments made following requests from individuals, or following bump back on emails.</p> <p>Other agencies submit direct request to DCCEEW-BCS or the departments, for removal or inclusion of representatives.</p>
Advise Local Police and SES of the planned high-flows and seek comment on any issues they perceive	NSW DCCEEW Corp Comms	Act on any issues identified.
Email landholders below Jindabyne Dam along the Snowy River (those with listed contact details) and key stakeholders advising of the timing and magnitude of the flows	NSW DCCEEW Corp Comms	The department to make direct contact with downstream landholders (those with listed contact details) and key stakeholders approximately 4 to 6 weeks prior to first high-flow event – then ongoing as required.

Action item	Responsibility	Comment
<p>Distribute 2024 Snowy River high-flows FAQs to Jindabyne Visitors Information Centre and relevant SES offices for display</p>	<p>NSW DCCEEW Corp Comms</p>	<p>The department to prepare FAQs in PDF format and distribute to working group members and appropriate stakeholders – further copies will be emailed to external contacts as required.</p>
<p>Issue a total of eight separate media releases/notices including seven rising river alerts approximately seven days prior to the respective flow release to inform the affected communities</p> <p>Media outlets to be targeted:</p> <p>Snowy Shire Council – e-news Shire Wire Snowy Magazine Jindabyne Summit Sun Monaro Post XL FM Snow FM ABC Radio South East</p>	<p>NSW DCCEEW Corp Comms</p>	<p>Media release providing ‘overview’ of the high-flow water releases issued May 2024 - and then ‘Rising river alerts’ to be issued 7 days before the planned releases.</p>
<p>Provide Departmental ‘Customer Experience’ staff with all up-to-date information to answer any requests received.</p>	<p>NSW DCCEEW- Water and NSW DCCCEEW Corp Comms</p>	<p>‘Customer Experience’ staff to be provided with all relevant information – May 2024.</p>
<p>Release the ‘SRIF Safety Management Plan and the SRIF Operations Plan 2024-25’ – to be placed on the department’s website and sent to members of the inter-agency working group.</p>	<p>NSW DCCEEW Corp Comms</p>	<p>Updated ‘SRIF Safety Management Plan and SRIF Operations Plan 2024-25’ provided to interagency working group members – May 2024.</p> <p>Updated documents uploaded to DCCEEW website – May 2024.</p>

Action item	Responsibility	Comment
<p>Update the department’s website to ensure it contains the latest information on the environmental releases – ‘Snowy River Increased Flows’ website page.</p>	<p>NSW DCCEEW Corp Comms</p>	<p>‘Snowy River Increased Flows website page updated to coincide with the issuing of the ‘overview’ media release.</p> <p>Overview media release to be issued in May 2024.</p>

Evaluation

The following qualitative data will be used to indicate if this plan has successfully achieved its objectives.

Objective	Key indicators of success
Identify and define the best approach to engage key target groups to better inform them of planned high-flow water releases.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ media coverage resulting from the ‘overview’ media release issued announcing the planned high-flow water releases.▪ the number of media requests for interviews received.▪ the amount of positive/negative/incorrect media coverage (through media monitors).▪ stakeholder and landholder comments in both traditional and social media.▪ direct feedback from down-stream landholders as a result of the outlined notification process for planned high-flow water releases during winter-spring.▪ visits to the department’s website for information on the Snowy River environmental water releases.▪ feedback from inter-agency members.