

Wilcannia Weir Replacement

Wilcannia Weir update on timeline

In our last project update in April we provided information on how COVID-19 was likely to extend our timeline, and that we would come back to the community once we had a clearer idea of the path ahead. Despite the challenges of COVID-19, WaterNSW remains very committed to delivering the Wilcannia Weir project as soon as possible.

The Wilcannia Weir project has a new timeline to have shovels in the ground as early as August 2021 with main construction work starting in October 2021. This timeline had some changes because of COVID-19 restrictions and the need for further seasonal biodiversity studies under a more in depth planning approval pathway.



February community consultation and the new weir site.

Updated planning pathway for the Weir Project

WaterNSW in consultation with State and Federal Government agencies are pursuing a more in depth planning approval pathway based on information found in early environmental impact studies.

Early environmental field work in February 2020 indicated more studies are needed on some fish species in the river. These species range from being vulnerable to being critically endangered and include the Murray Cod and Silver Perch which are Federally listed, and other fish such as the Olive Perch as well as the Darling River Snail. Other biodiversity, including both flora and fauna, need to be assessed in depth.

More seasonal biodiversity studies were planned for April 2020 but were delayed due to COVID-19 restrictions, which extends the overall project timeline.

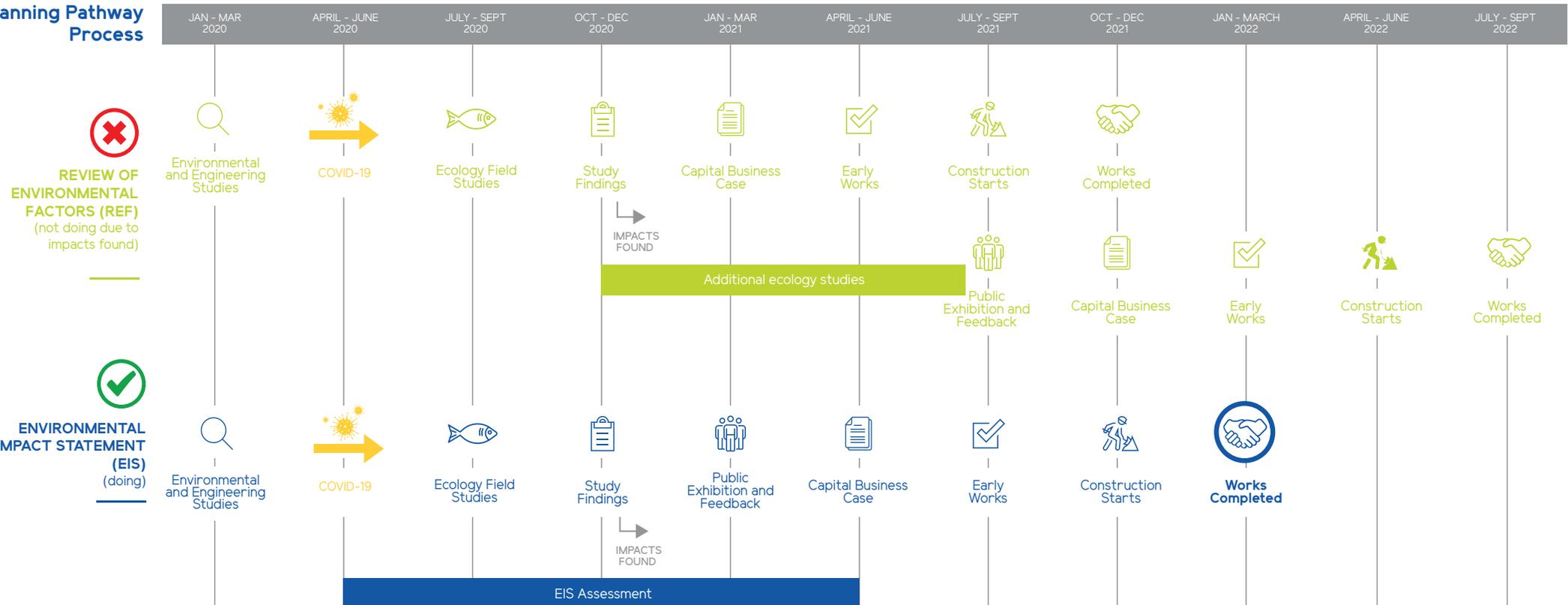
WaterNSW wants to ensure the project has an in-depth environmental assessment process and the best way to do this is through an Environment Impact Statement (EIS). To complete the environmental assessments needed, and to obtain the planning approval may extend the project by up to 12 months but WaterNSW will work hard to deliver the project as soon as possible.

WaterNSW is working closely with State and Federal agencies to progress the approval and reduce any future delays to the project. WaterNSW understands the new weir is critical to the Wilcannia community and have worked to find the best solution to ensure shovels are in the ground as early as August 2021.

REF vs EIS

WaterNSW was going to complete a Review of Environmental Factors (REF) which is one option for securing the necessary planning approvals. Due to early findings around endangered and threatened fish, WaterNSW is preparing an EIS statement instead, which involves more flora and fauna studies. The graphic below shows each process and the activities needed to gain approval. If we had continued with the REF process, it is likely that we would have been requested to complete additional detailed environmental studies anyway, which would have pushed the construction start date out even further. WaterNSW has decided, in consultation with the relevant agencies to deliver an EIS so we have more certainty and can start construction as soon as possible. This will ensure the project meets both NSW and Commonwealth legislation needs.

Planning Pathway Process



Legend

- Environmental and Engineering Studies
- Ecology Field Studies
- Study Findings
- Construction Starts
- Early Works
- Public Exhibition and Feedback
- Capital Business Case
- Works Completed

1. When is WaterNSW going to start to build the weir?

This timeline was extended following COVID-19 restrictions and the need for seasonal biodiversity studies under a new planning approval process. The new timeline is:

- Completed Concept Design – September 2020
- Environmental Planning Approval – May 2021
- Detailed design – May 2021
- Site mobilisation – August 2021
- Construction starts – September/October 2021

2. What activities can start again after COVID restrictions are lifted?

There are many opportunities ahead for the community to be involved and provide feedback on the project. Until then, a Project Reference Group has been formed as a way for the WaterNSW team and the community to exchange information and feedback while under COVID-19 restrictions.

WaterNSW will continue to communicate with the community on when it is safe to resume site visits and consultation for the following activities:

- Field studies for engineering assessments
- Field studies for environmental assessments
- Field studies for cultural heritage assessments
- Community information sessions and school education activities
- Employment and training registration and implementation
- Art workshop session
- Video production work and training
- Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Assessment
- Social Impact Assessment

3. Why has the weir project been extended?

WaterNSW is committed to delivering and constructing a new weir for the community but some delays have arisen.

Alongside delays caused from COVID-19 restriction to studies onsite, an updated planning approval pathway has been confirmed with the relevant agency stakeholders. This more in depth pathway is to review the potential of impacts to cultural heritage and biodiversity, including Federally listed species.

Early environmental field work in February 2020 indicated more studies are needed on some fish species in the river. These species range from being vulnerable to being critically endangered and include the Murray Cod and Silver Perch which are Federally listed, and other fish such as the Olive Perch as well as the Darling River Snail. Other biodiversity also needs to be assessed in depth.

Further seasonal biodiversity studies were planned for April 2020 but were delayed due to COVID-19 restrictions. The next opportunity for these important studies is in early spring which extends the overall project timeline.

Because of these findings WaterNSW wants to ensure the

project has an in-depth environmental assessment process and the best way to do this is through an Environment Impact Statement (EIS). To complete the environmental assessments needed, and to obtain the planning approval may extend the project by up to 12 months but WaterNSW will work hard to deliver the project as soon as possible.

4. What is a planning approval pathway and what is an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)?

The planning legislation requires us to assess the potential and likely impacts the project may have on the environment, including cultural heritage and biodiversity among many other factors. Biodiversity impacts must also consider both NSW and Federal legislation.

When the project is likely to have significant impacts to certain features of the environment, an Environmental Impact Statement needs to be prepared. This is particularly relevant for biodiversity as it has to consider other potential significant impacts.

An EIS is an extensive document with more in-depth studies and assessments on various features of the environment. An EIS is assessed by the NSW Government's Department of Planning, Industry and Environment and involves many other agency stakeholders, including Federal agencies if Federally listed biodiversity is potentially significantly impacted.

The approval under this pathway is granted by the NSW Government likely in a bilateral agreement with the Commonwealth (not WaterNSW).

5. What are the fish species in the river that are being studied?

The Murray Cod and Silver Perch which are Federally listed will be studied, along with other fish such as the Olive Perch as well as Darling River Snail. These species range from being vulnerable to being critically endangered.

6. How will WaterNSW assess the cultural heritage sites on the river?

Under the planning approval pathway and as part of preparing the Environmental Impact Statement, an Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Assessment Report will be prepared in accordance with government policies and procedures. This will involve direct consultation with the community at the beginning of the study and will continue during its progression.

The non-Aboriginal heritage will also be assessed as part of a separate study.

7. Will the Wilcannia community be able to provide feedback on the EIS and the findings of the studies?

Yes, there will be multiple and different opportunities to provide feedback. The project team will engage with the community when preparing certain studies, such as those

Questions and Answers

on cultural heritage and social impacts. These all will inform how the EIS is prepared and submitted to the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment.

The EIS will also go on public exhibition and the community will have further opportunity to provide feedback. WaterNSW will review this feedback along with other feedback received from other government agencies.

8. Explain what might be defined as an 'impact' in the project?

For this project an impact can be generally described as a construction or operational activity that may have an influence on the environment. It includes how the weir project activities may impact on water quality, ecology (including fish species), Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal heritage, land, soil, air quality, noise, traffic, visual and social. Impacts can be both positive and negative.

The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) needs to look at these impacts and what can be done to minimise them if they are negative. It will also look at how positive impacts can be enhanced. The EIS is supported by specific studies, such as on ecology, water quality and heritage. Some of these studies, especially those relating to Aboriginal heritage, will be discussed with the community, to help us identify and better understand these impacts and how they may be

Community consultation during 2020-2021

The project team are looking forward to visiting Wilcannia as soon as it is safe for the community after COVID-19 restrictions are lifted. Until then, a Project Reference Group has been formed as a way for the WaterNSW team and the community to exchange information and feedback while under COVID-19 restrictions.

The art project for community artists to work with the schools to create lasting images on the surface of the weir will restart, along with the video project to provide mentoring and training opportunities in video production and editing. More information on the planned training and employment program will be provided in our next project update.

The EIS document will also involve extensive community consultation and is to go on public exhibition during 2021 for community and key stakeholders to make comments and provide feedback.



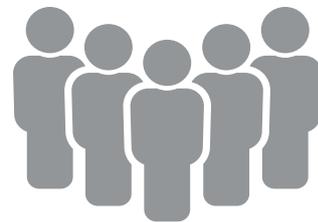
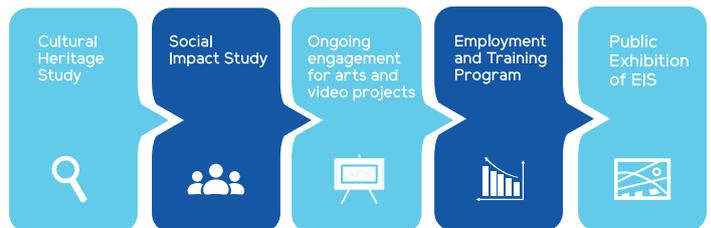
Wilcannia Weir Project Reference Group

The project team are not able to see you face to face yet but will keep communicating via phone, email, video meetings, advertisements, local radio and news.

We have now formed a project reference group to help us communicate and provide feedback, especially while we can't visit the Wilcannia community. We have invited members from the following organisations to represent the community on a project reference group for the weir project. They will meet online on a monthly basis and provide feedback on project related matters.

- Barkandji Native Title Group Aboriginal Corporation
- Wilcannia Local Aboriginal Land Council
- Wilcannia Community Working Party
- Regional Enterprise Development Institute
- Wilcannia River Radio
- Central Darling Shire Council
- Wilcannia Safehouse
- Wilcannia News
- Wilcannia community members
- Wilcannia Tourism Association

Key Community Consultation Points



Keep in touch

📞 Call us on **1300 662 077**

@ Email Us at **WilcanniaWeir@waternsw.com.au**

🌐 Visit us at **waternsw.com.au**

🐦 Follow us on Twitter **@WaterNSW**



Australian Government
**Department of Agriculture,
Water and the Environment**



This project is delivered under the Murray-Darling Basin Plan by the NSW Government, and jointly funded through the Australian Government and the NSW Government.