Statement of Proposals to prepare a draft Water Resource (Border Rivers and Moonie) Plan

6 July 2016
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Minister’s foreword

I am pleased to release this Statement of Proposals to prepare a new draft Border Rivers and Moonie water resource plan. As it has been over a decade since the current plans were prepared and these plans are due to expire in 2019, it is timely that the community is engaged to ensure the ongoing relevance of the outcomes and its strategies proposed in these plans.

The current water resource plans for the Border Rivers and Moonie catchments, which came into effect in 2003, were built on a foundation of best available science and community knowledge. Advice from individuals, stakeholder groups and the general community was a critical component of building the plans. The high level of commitment and input of these many people must be acknowledged and paid tribute to in reflecting on the success of the current plans and the solid basis provided for future water resource management in the catchments.

The preparation of this new draft plan will again be informed by the best available science and knowledge as well as extensive community engagement. The new science and knowledge includes updated hydrological models, as well as a new groundwater model for the Border Rivers Alluvium aquifer.

The new plan will also be developed in accordance with the requirements of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan. Queensland is committed to implementing the Basin Plan and working with the other Murray-Darling Basin States to ensure that water in the Basin is sustainably managed to provide for environmental, social and economic outcomes.

In an effort to streamline processes, the Border Rivers and Moonie water resource plans will be amalgamated. This will enable the government to focus more actively on key policy issues in the catchments by reducing administrative inefficiencies. This amalgamation will not impact on management arrangements in the plans nor will it affect current water recovery processes being undertaken by the Commonwealth.

The preparation of the draft plan formally commences with the release of this statement of proposals, which is intended to provide the basis for further engagement with the community on water management issues in the catchment. This Statement of Proposals outlines the scope of issues which will be considered in preparing the new plan and provides a platform for interested people to make a written submission about proposals discussed.

My department is already consulting key stakeholders, including water user groups and community leaders, about the proposals and will continue to engage with the community throughout the process to ensure their concerns and suggestions are considered. I encourage anyone with an interest in the plan to present your views.

The Hon Dr Anthony Lynham
Minister for State Development and Natural Resources and Mines
Introduction


It has been well over a decade since the original plans were developed and it is timely that the community in these plan areas be engaged to ensure water planning is of continued relevance. There has been significant new science and monitoring that will provide a greater understanding about how management arrangements are performing in relation to providing for sustainable management of water resources in the area. The new water resource plan will also expand on the management of groundwater and will need to be consistent with the Murray Darling Basin Plan 2012, in line with the requirement of the Commonwealth *Water Act 2007*.

This Statement of Proposals is a requirement under the Act where the Minister has decided there is a need for formal consultation during the development of a draft water resource plan.

Any changes through the review and replacement of plans will necessitate amendment of the resource operations plan so that the changes can be implemented.

Amalgamation of Border Rivers and Moonie water resource plan areas

For all plan areas, the process of developing a new draft water resource plan is broadly similar. Combining the Border Rivers and Moonie water resource plans will allow for administrative efficiencies and enable the Department of Natural Resources and Mines (the department) to focus on developing specific policies to improve water management in each area. Stakeholder consultation will continue to occur on a catchment basis as needed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The amalgamation will not impact on water recovery by the Commonwealth to achieve the Basin Plan Sustainable Diversion Limit (SDL). Only small volumes remain to be recovered in each catchment.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Moonie area includes two groundwater aquifers, the sediments above the Great Artesian Basin and the St George Alluvium. These aquifers extend into neighbouring plan areas and it is intended that they will be managed consistently across plan areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The proposed Water Resource (Border Rivers and Moonie) Plan will be implemented through an amended resource operations plan. The resource operations plan will identify specific provisions that apply in the Moonie and/or Border Rivers catchments.</td>
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Statement of Proposals

This Statement of Proposals provides information on the issues and matters that will be considered as part of the development of the new amalgamated plan. The Statement of Proposals provides details on the opportunities that will be made available for the community and stakeholders to engage in the review process.

Details on how to make a submission are provided in the final section of this document.

The release of this Statement of Proposals marks the beginning of engagement with stakeholders for developing the plan. There will be opportunities throughout the plan development process for input from stakeholders up to the release of the new plan in 2019 (Figure 1)
This Statement of Proposals does not limit the degree to which further issues can be included in the plan review or omitted from the review at a later stage.

**Background**

The Moonie and Border Rivers catchments lie within the Murray-Darling Basin and, in Queensland, cover around 41,000 square kilometres. The MacIntyre and Moonie rivers flow into the Barwon River in northwest New South Wales.

Key towns in the Moonie catchment include Westmar, Thallon and Nindigully. The economy is largely based on agriculture, particularly grazing, as well as dryland and irrigated cropping such as cotton. The area forms part of the Surat Basin, which is a key location for production of oil and coal seam gas.

In the Border Rivers catchment, the Dumaresq and MacIntyre rivers form part of the Queensland-New South Wales border. The New South Wales-Queensland Border Rivers Intergovernmental Agreement 2008 (IGA) provides direction on groundwater and surface water sharing and access, interstate trading, and managing the flows of streams shared by both states as well as water for the Murray-Darling Basin.

The Border Rivers catchment includes the highly productive Granite Belt region where high value horticultural crops are grown such as permanent plantings of grapes for wine, and seasonal fruit and vegetables. In addition to irrigated agriculture in the catchments, there are numerous businesses dependent on irrigators for their livelihood. This is particularly the case in the Stanthorpe area, which relies on water to support its high value irrigation industry and tourism. Providing long term certainty for water users will be a key matter to deal with in this plan review.

In the Moonie and Border Rivers catchments, most surface water entitlements are tradeable including in the areas of larger scale irrigation development from Texas to Mungindi. Previous amendments in late 2014 included groundwater into the water resource planning framework to begin alignment with the Basin Plan. This amendment brought us a step closer to preparing for tradeable groundwater allocations in the Border Rivers Alluvium.

In the past decade, new data has been collected and greater scientific understanding developed of the river systems in the Moonie and Border Rivers catchments. Complementing this, ongoing monitoring will provide an understanding of how the current plans have worked.
New science and knowledge

The new science and knowledge which will inform improved plans for managing water in the catchment includes:

- updated hydrologic models using extended hydrological data incorporating the Millennium drought and recent significant flood events
- data from several new stream gauges providing for better understanding of the hydrology in the Moonie River, Weir River and the Stanthorpe area
- a new groundwater model for the Border Rivers Alluvium which will provide an improved understanding of, and assist in the development of new management arrangements for this alluvial resource
- new studies on the implications of flows on fish migration and spawning, wetland filling and watering requirements for floodplain vegetation.

Also driving the review of the plan is the need to ensure consistency with the Murray-Darling Basin Plan 2012, which provides a new framework to manage the water resources of the basin as a whole.

The Basin Plan 2012

The Basin Plan establishes Sustainable Diversion Limits (SDLs) throughout the Basin. SDLs represent the long-term average volumes of water that can be taken for consumptive use, while still maintaining the water needed for the environment. In areas where current use exceeds these limits it is the responsibility of the Commonwealth to recover water. The Commonwealth has committed to achieving this through voluntary means, including the purchase of water from willing sellers and participation in water efficiency improvement programs.

A key implication of the Basin Plan for the review of Queensland's plans is the ability to demonstrate that the plan can contain the growth where use of water is already at SDL. Other implications of the Basin Plan for the review relate to environmental watering requirements, recognition of Aboriginal values and uses, and addressing risks to the condition and availability of water.
The plan area and water to which the plan applies

The Border Rivers and Moonie water resource plan will apply to surface and groundwater in the area identified in Figure 2 (Figure 2 is indicative only). The exact boundary locations of the plan area held in digital electronic form by the department and may be inspected at the department’s offices in Warwick, Toowoomba and Goondiwindi.

The plan (and this review) does not include water in the Great Artesian Basin which is managed under the Water Resource (Great Artesian Basin) Plan 2006.

Figure 2 Border Rivers and Moonie WRP Area
Scope of the review

The following sections identify the issues and desired outcomes on which the review will focus. The input of the water users and the community is being sought on the proposals outlined within this statement of proposals.

Ensuring ongoing relevance of plan outcomes and strategies

The plan identifies economic, social and environmental outcomes. For example, the current Border Rivers and Moonie water resource plans seek to support an effective and efficient market in water allocations. This is then implemented in the resource operations plans which contain rules for converting authorisations to water allocations and water allocation change rules.

It is important that the community have input into the review of these outcomes and strategies to ensure their ongoing relevance. New science and knowledge, the outcomes of long term monitoring, and additional community knowledge are critical to reviewing and ensuring outcomes and strategies remain relevant and appropriate.

Recognition of Aboriginal values and uses in managing water

The Aboriginal people of Australia have a deep connection to their traditional land and waters. Engagement with the Aboriginal groups connected to the catchment will be a key aspect of the plan review. Ongoing engagement will be undertaken with Aboriginal groups to identify the social, spiritual and cultural values and uses for water that they hold. The new plan will seek to include objectives and outcomes for the management of water that reflect these values and uses.

Providing access to trade for groundwater users in the Border Rivers Alluvium

The department proposes to develop, in consultation with water users, a framework for the trading of groundwater in the Border Rivers Alluvium, including assessing the potential for interstate trading within this resource. Trading of groundwater will provide new and existing water users with a means to access water. This will enable continued economic growth and ensure security of entitlement while preventing overall growth in use of groundwater as required under the Basin Plan.

The first step in establishing groundwater trading would be the conversion of existing groundwater licenses to tradeable water allocations. Conversion options will be developed with water users in the Border Rivers Alluvium to ensure the needs of these users are recognised. This process needs to consider opportunities for consistency with the New South Wales water management framework and collaboration with New South Wales stakeholders.

Additionally, appropriate rules for sharing and accounting for groundwater are proposed to be developed with water users. Where the take of groundwater is managed under existing water sharing rules, these rules will need to be reviewed and included in the final plan.

Improving access to trade in surface water allocations

The ability to buy, sell and lease water allocations on a temporary and permanent basis is a key benefit of water planning. In 2014-15 there were 8 trades of unsupplemented water allocations in the Border Rivers, with a total value of $5.1 million. For the same period, there were a total of 3 trades of unsupplemented water allocations in the Moonie Catchment with a total value of $5.4 million.
To further facilitate the trade of surface water in the catchment, the department proposes to explore, with water users, the conversion of existing water harvesting entitlements in the Upper Weir River and irrigation licences in the upper reaches of the Macintyre River upstream of Coolmunda Dam to water allocations (irrigation licences in the Stanthorpe Water Management Area are addressed later in this document).

Conversion to water allocations provides water users increased security of entitlement due to the allocation being tied to security objectives, as well as the benefits of a perpetual asset which cannot be cancelled, unlike a water licence. The conversion also provides access to the water market and the associated benefits of being able to trade water allocations.

The department also proposes to review the trading framework to ensure that it still meets the needs of allocation holders. This review will be undertaken in consultation with water users. Trading rules will be reviewed where allocation holders have raised concerns that the existing rules are unduly restricting trade. Any changes must take into account the local hydrology and the appropriate level of protection of the reliability of other entitlements.

**Water management in the Stanthorpe region**

The Stanthorpe region is an important area for horticultural production and water availability is limited while demand is growing. It is important to note that no change is proposed in relation to the unallocated water in the current plan.

Groundwater extraction from the region has not been regulated since 2002, and in recent years there has been a trend in the development of groundwater interception dams. The shallow groundwater that is being extracted is directly influencing stream flows, with base flows in the streams around Stanthorpe having a reliance on these flows. The review will look at the opportunities to manage these resources to ensure long term security for the existing industries that are currently completely reliant on both the groundwater and surface water availability.

**Moratorium**

As a step to manage groundwater in this area, a moratorium on new works that intercept groundwater (which would include new dams, trenches or bores) has been announced. This is an important step to manage these resources and ensure security of existing entitlements whilst the planning review is undertaken. A moratorium notice is available on the department’s website for more information.

In addition, the department will put processes in place to gain a better understanding of the current take of groundwater through existing works.

A key success in developing the current plan for the Stanthorpe region was having a strong community reference panel that contained a balance of all interests in the community. The Stanthorpe Community Reference Panel (CRP) has endured over this time and we will continue to work with this group in this review process.
When the current plan was developed, and with the advice from the CRP, many water harvesting licences were converted to tradeable water allocations. However, many direct irrigation or area licences were not converted as limited information existed and more time was needed to consider the opportunities and issues surrounding conversion. Since that time there has been ongoing interest in trading opportunities, more stream flow information and extraction data. It is therefore proposed to review the suitability of area licences for conversion to water allocations. In an area where water is limited, this conversion and the ability to trade opens up opportunities for businesses to purchase or sell entitlements to suit business needs.

Conversion of area licences and the management of unregulated groundwater extraction, as proposed here, will enable the sustainable management of water use and prevent growth in take of water in the Stanthorpe area (as required under the Basin Plan 2012).

### Unallocated water reserves in the Border Rivers catchment

No changes are proposed for unallocated water available for future consumptive use in the Border Rivers catchment as part of the development of the new plan. This unallocated water includes strategic reserves from the Stanthorpe Water Management Area available for irrigation and related industrial purposes, and for town water supply. Small amounts of groundwater are available as general reserve water from two groundwater units: the Border Rivers Fractured Rock and the sediments above the Great Artesian Basin. Unallocated water will continue to be available for release through processes specified in the Water Regulation 2002.

### Moonie Catchment

The current Moonie water resource plan relates to surface water and groundwater. Tradeable surface water allocations have been in place since 2006 and there is no proposal for any significant surface water management changes as part of the review of the plans. Similarly, the current provisions that relate to groundwater will continue.

### Review at a glance

- review plan outcomes and strategies, objectives for environmental flows and security of water allocations and trading zones for ongoing relevance
- recognise Aboriginal values and uses in managing water
- proposed conversion of selected groundwater licences to tradeable water allocations in the Border Rivers Alluvium and develop security objectives, review water sharing rules and accounting arrangements for groundwater allocations
- proposed conversion of surface water licence to tradeable water allocations in the Stanthorpe and Traprock regions and the Upper Weir River
- manage unregulated groundwater take in the Stanthorpe region to protect the important irrigation and tourism industry in this area.

### Proposed arrangements for consultation

The release of this document marks the start of a formal submission period and provides an opportunity for all interested stakeholders to provide a submission on the proposals contained in this statement. As detailed below, there will be opportunities for interested parties to further engage in the development of these proposals to inform the preparation of a draft water resource plan.

Statement of Proposals to prepare a Water Resource (Border Rivers and Moonie) Plan, DNRM 2016
Advice on how to make a submission can be found in the next section of this document.

The department will conduct a number of engagement activities in support of the release of the statement of proposals and to help with preparing submissions. Information sessions are proposed to be held in key regional and local centres in the plan area. Details about information sessions will be made available on the department’s website at www.dnrm.qld.gov.au.

In addition, there will be opportunities to be involved if you are a member of a water user group or long standing advisory group, for example, Border Rivers Food and Fibre, Weir Rivers Water Users, Dumaresq Valley Irrigators Association, and the Stanthorpe Community Reference Panel. We will be engaging at various times with these groups on specific policy issues. We will also engage with Aboriginal groups, key peak body groups, local governments, the Murray Darling Basin Authority and with New South Wales representatives for those areas subject to inter-jurisdictional considerations.

How to make a submission

Anyone can make a submission on the statement of proposals. Submissions may be made in writing and posted, emailed or faxed to the department by 5pm, 31 August 2016.

To make a written submission, please use the submission form included in this document (refer Appendix A) and complete the checklist on the form to ensure the submission is properly made. Only properly made submissions will be considered in preparing the draft Water Resource (Border Rivers and Moonie) Plan.

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<tr>
<th>Mail</th>
<th>Border Rivers and Moonie WRP Coordinator</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Department of Natural Resources and Mines</td>
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<td>Attn: Principal Natural Resource Officer</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Water Services South Region</td>
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<td></td>
<td>PO Box 318</td>
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<td>Toowoomba Qld 4350</td>
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<td>Email</td>
<td><a href="mailto:wrpborderpuffermoonie@dnrm.qld.gov.au">wrpborderpuffermoonie@dnrm.qld.gov.au</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Online</td>
<td><a href="http://www.getinvolved.qld.gov.au">www.getinvolved.qld.gov.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fax</td>
<td>(07) 4529 1555 Attn: Principal Natural Resource Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone enquiries</td>
<td>(07) 4529 1221</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All submissions will be treated with sensitivity and wherever possible in confidence. However, submissions may be viewed by other parties under the provisions of the Right to Information Act 2009 and the Information Privacy Act 2009.
Appendix A

Submission form (Please use a ballpoint pen to complete this submission).

Title and surname

First name(s)

Address

Postal address (if different)

Organisation

Position

Telephone  Mobile

Facsimile  Email

Signature(s)  Date

Which interest group(s) do you primarily represent (e.g. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, irrigator, environment, business)?

In which part of the plan area are you located (you may tick more than one box)?

- Moonie Water Management Area
- Callandoon Creek Water Management Area
- Border Rivers Water Management Area
- Macintyre Brook Water Management Area
- Lower Weir River Water Management Area
- Macintyre Brook Water Supply Scheme

Statement of Proposals to prepare a Water Resource (Border Rivers and Moonie) Plan, DNRM 2016
| ☐ Upper Weir River Water Management Area | ☐ Border Rivers fractured rock groundwater unit |
| ☐ Border Rivers Water Supply Scheme | ☐ Sediments above the Great Artesian Basin groundwater unit |
| ☐ Border Rivers Alluvium groundwater unit | ☐ St George Alluvium (deep) groundwater management unit |
| ☐ Texas Beds | |
| ☐ Granites (Stanthorpe Area) | |
| ☐ St George Alluvium (shallow) groundwater management unit | |
| ☐ Other (please specify) | |

What type of water entitlement do you have?

| ☐ Supplemented surface water | ☐ Groundwater |
| ☐ Unsupplemented surface water | |
| ☐ Other (please specify) | |
What issues in the Statement of Proposals for the development of a new draft Border Rivers and Moonie water resource plan do you support? What issues concern you? How do you think the current water management arrangements can be improved to address these or other issues (within the scope of the proposed draft water resource plan)?

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☐ Please tick this box and attach a detailed submission if more space is required.

Checklist

Please follow these five steps to ensure the submission is completed correctly:

☐ Details of each person making the submission have been specified.
☐ Each person or authorised representative making the submission has signed the submission form.
☐ The grounds for making the submission, and the facts and circumstances relied on in support of the submission have been stated.
☐ If additional space is required, the box at the end of the submission form has been ticked and the detailed submission is attached.
☐ Submission made by the closing date 5pm, 31 August 2016