

Draft Report: Independent Review of the Snowy Water Inquiry Outcomes Implementation Deed

Take the survey

Department of Climate Change, Energy, Environment and Water

Response received at:

August 3, 2026 at 9:01 PM GMT+10

Response ID:

sbm3e5d61448c6eb0dfba34e

- 1 Do you agree to the Privacy Collection Statement?
Yes
- 2 Confirm that you have read and understand this privacy notice.
Yes
- 3 Please indicate how and if you want your submission published.
Public
- 4 Published name
Conservation Council ACT Region
- 5 Confirm that you have read and understand this declaration.
Yes
- 6 First name
Anna
- 7 Last name

McGuire

8 Email

anna@email.org.au

9 Phone

Not answered

10 Who are you answering on behalf of?

Organisation

11 Organisation name

Conservation Council ACT Region

12 What sector best describes you or your organisation?

Environment group

13 What state or territory do you live in?

New South Wales

14 Postcode

Not answered

15 What area best describes where you live?

Regional area

16 Overall, what is your view of the proposed package of reforms?

Very positive

17 Please explain your answer.

We support the reforms and believe they would greatly improve the ecological condition of the river and improve the transparency and accountability of water management.

An important governance issue that needs further attention is ensuring enough water is

available each year to meet the environmental release target. The current arrangements include a design flaw that limits water available for environmental releases based on the availability of water in western storages downstream. The link to western storage levels in the current system is because water entitlements were purchased from these catchments to offset impacts on consumptive users of lower inter-basin water transfers when the Snowy Water Initiative was established in 2002. This link is no longer relevant and must be disregarded in the new arrangements as it is one of the key reasons the current system has failed. The new system must learn from this mistake and ensure enough water is available to meet the target.

- 18 To what extent do you think the proposed package of reforms will achieve the Deed review objective to modernise water management in the Snowy Scheme and improve the health of the upper Murrumbidgee by:

Agree

- 19 Please explain why.

The reforms would offer much-needed relief for the upper Murrumbidgee River that has been deprived of flows for too long.

- 20 Do you have any major concerns with the overall direction of the recommendations?

Not answered

- 21 Do you want to continue this survey to provide feedback on specific areas of the recommendations?

Yes

- 22 To what extent do you support the proposed approach to increase environmental flows in the Upper Murrumbidgee equivalent to a long-term average annual target of 30% (87 GL equivalent)? (Chapter 4)

Support

- 23 Please explain why.

We strongly support the delivery of at least 30% of annual natural flows (87 GL/yr) as

environmental releases. This is the minimum volume that must be delivered to support ecological recovery and protect endangered species.

These flows can be achieved today without the need for water recovery.

Recommendation 1 of the draft report is that environmental flows be increased to “achieve environmental outcomes equivalent to the delivery of an average annual target of 30%...”. This is concerning language as there is no substitute for flows and a minimum of 30% must be delivered without seeking any offsets to deliver ‘equivalent outcomes’ to environmental releases. The experience in the Murray-Darling Basin has clearly demonstrated the shortcomings of an offset-based approach.

We do not support waiting 5 years to implement the 30% target. There is no need to wait until the Tantangara Dam outlet is upgraded before delivering 30% of flows. The 30% target could be implemented immediately and delivered using existing infrastructure. The outlet upgrade is critical for achieving optimal ecological outcomes, to enable the needed channel maintenance flows along the entire upper Murrumbidgee River, but waiting for this upgrade should not prevent delivery of the 30% target via several smaller more regular flushes in the interim.

- 24 To what extent do you support implementing enhanced adaptive management of environmental water, as described in the report, in the upper Murrumbidgee and Snowy rivers to improve environmental outcomes and minimise impacts on electricity generation? (Chapter 4)
- Strongly support

- 25 Please explain why.

The implementation of a more flexible approach is necessary for enabling water managers to respond to natural events, for example by releasing water to coincide with rainfall or snow melt to achieve a higher flow level.

Water availability should be tied to seasonal conditions – more water is available in wet years, less water in dry years. Flow patterns need to reflect the needs of the river, higher flows in late winter and early spring, lower flows in summer, medium flows in autumn and base flows that are variable throughout the rest of the year. Channel maintenance flows occur in late winter.

We support flexibility in delivery to minimise impacts on electricity generation, to the

extent that this flexibility does not substantially limit environmental benefits of releases.

- 26 To what extent do you agree upgrading Tantangara Dam outlet is required to enhance environmental outcomes in the upper Murrumbidgee River, and that within two years from the Panel's Final Review Report, a feasibility study should be completed?

Strongly agree

- 27 Please explain why.

Upgrading the Tantangara Dam outlet to enable flushing (channel maintenance) flows of around 6000ML/day is vital for achieving optimal environmental outcomes at a system scale. These high flow events are fundamental for improving river health, scouring the river of sediment. The outlet upgrade should proceed as soon as possible. The costing/feasibility study must be completed by an independent entity.

- 28 To what extent do you agree that the effectiveness of the existing Snowy River Increased Flows (SRIF) be subject to a thorough, quantitative evaluation for delivering on the original agreed commitment of governments to restore the health of the Snowy River?

Strongly agree

- 29 Please explain why.

We support efforts to improve the health of the Snowy River and other montane rivers.

The Mowamba Weir should be decommissioned.

- 30 To what extent do you agree that a new Deed is required to be established between governments to manage Snowy water resources, to improve the health of the upper Murrumbidgee and Snowy rivers?

The Panel proposes a new Deed should:

Strongly agree

- 31 Please explain why.

A new Deed is necessary, current arrangements are out of date and are not functioning

effectively. The current Deed is not fit for purpose, the environmental outcomes are poor and declining, flows volumes are too low and the flow patterns are not right, species are increasingly endangered, poor and deficient governance, community, First Nations and ACT not embedded.

We support the involvement of the ACT Government as a party to the Deed, this is appropriate given the importance of river health, water quality and water security for the ACT.

- 32 To what extent do you agree that the new Deed should be written in clear language, supported by appropriate explanatory material, and include:

Strongly support

- 33 Please explain why.

Not answered

- 34 To what extent do you support the proposed governance arrangements to achieve the objectives of the new Deed (Chapter 5) (including decision making and oversight)?

Strongly support

- 35 Please explain why.

A new Deed needs to establish new Strategic and Operational governance arrangements. There needs to be clearer roles and responsibilities, bringing the ACT Government to the table and having a mechanism for independent oversight.

Communities and First Nations need to be embedded in these processes – to guide and provide transparency.

- 36 To what extent do you think the proposed governance changes will improve transparency and accountability? (Chapter 5)

Significantly improve

- 37 Please explain why.

The new Deed needs defined environmental objectives, performance measures,

monitoring, public reporting to ensure everyone sticks to the agreements.

- 38 To what extent do you think the recommendations will improve community stewardship in the management of Snowy water resources and improving river health? (Chapter 5, Chapter 6.2)
Improve
- 39 Please explain why.
Not answered
- 40 To what extent do you think the recommendations will improve First Nations custodianship in water management in the upper Murrumbidgee and Snowy rivers, consistent with the National Agreement for Closing the Gap (Chapter 6.1)?
Improve
- 41 Please explain why.
Not answered
- 42 To what extent do you think the recommendations support strengthening monitoring, reporting and evaluation of environmental water management? (Chapter 5)
Strongly support
- 43 Please explain why.
The recommended changes would deliver important improvements in monitoring and independent oversight to address knowledge gaps and increase accountability and scientific rigour.
- 44 To what extent do you support establishing a strengthened enforcement framework to support achievement of the new Deed objectives?
Strongly support

45 Please explain why.

Monitoring, enforcement and public reporting will be crucial for successfully restoring river health. Delivery of targets must be enforceable and there needs to be accountability for delivery, enable by regular public reporting. Current arrangements have not worked in part because the targets were not enforceable.

The new Deed needs to include ways of ensuring continuous compliance and enforceability, five-yearly audits and ten-yearly reviews will be vital.

46 To what extent do you agree with the proposed recommendation to improve investment and coordination of integrated catchment management across jurisdictions to complement environmental watering? (Chapter 6.5)

Strongly support

47 Please explain why.

We support complementary work to restore catchment health. This recognises that increased flows alone will not reduce the impact of catchment-based threats. However it is important to understand that these catchment works are not a substitute for returning flows.

Return of flows needs to be supported with well-planned and managed restoration activities to control sediment, woody weeds, instream habitat and riparian connectivity. Activities need to be coordinated across ACT and NSW Jurisdictions.

Catchment management needs to support coordinated, whole-of-catchment planning and management. Community stewardship and First nations engagement and participation needs to be embedded.

48 To what extent do you support establishing long-term funding arrangements to deliver the recommendations? (Chapter 7)

Strongly support

49 Please explain why.

The IRP Report recognises the frustrating short-term nature of funding to support river restoration and management.

We support an enduring hybrid funding model that supports implementation.

- 50 To what extent do you agree with the Implementation Roadmap as a framework for timely intervention by governments to improve river health (Chapter 8)?

Support

- 51 Please explain why.

We strongly agree that immediate action is necessary to restore river health and we agree that setting timeframes will be critical to ensuring progress does not stall. We support the timeline of establishing a new Deed and supporting governance within 2 years.

To ensure success, the roadmap must have clear milestones which are transparently reported against.

The cost estimate/feasibility work on the Tantangara outlet upgrade should proceed as soon as possible and it is vital that this work is undertaken by an independent entity.

We do not support waiting 5 years to implement flows of 30%. This can and should happen as soon as possible.

Communities and First Nations need to be directly involved in designing and implementing the next steps.

- 52 Is there anything important that the recommendations have missed?

Not answered

- 53 Do you have any other comments?

In summary, we are overall strongly supportive of the proposed reforms, with some caveats and suggestions.

1. We strongly support delivering environmental releases of at least 30% of natural flows (87 GL/yr). 30% is the minimum volume of water delivered to the river. There should be no offset programs that aim to deliver 'equivalent benefits' of these flows.

Complementary measures must be additional to these flows, not try to replace them.

2. There is no need wait until the dam outlet us upgraded to deliver 30% of flows. We should implement 30% of flows immediately as this has been clearly demonstrated as the volume that is required to deliver improved river health and to meet all of the environmental water requirements.
3. The scheme must be devised so that enough water is available in all years to meet the 30% target. The current arrangements include a design flaw that limits water available for environmental releases based on availability of water in western storages downstream. This link is historic and no longer relevant, and have been a key reason for the failure of the current system to deliver environmental releases. The new system must learn from this mistake and ensure it is designed so that enough water is available to meet the target.
4. We strongly support efforts to increase transparency and enforcement, revise Snowy Hydro corporate governance to reflect environmental and social benefits, and to work with First Nations to deliver water rights and enable shared decision-making and management.