



Australian Government
Department of Climate Change, Energy,
the Environment and Water

Restoring Our Rivers: Delivering the Basin Plan 2012

*Draft framework for delivering the 450 GL of additional
environmental water*



Draft framework for delivering the 450 GL

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This publication (and any material sourced from it) should be attributed as: DCCEEW 2024, Restoring Our Rivers: Draft framework for delivering 450 GL of additional environmental water, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, Canberra, January 2024. CC BY 4.0.

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Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water

GPO Box 3090 Canberra ACT 2601

Telephone 1800 900 090

Web dcceew.gov.au

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Summary

The *Water Amendment (Restoring our Rivers) Act 2023* commenced on 7 December 2023. The Act made changes to the *Water Act 2007* and *Basin Plan 2012* to provide more options, more time, more funding and more accountability to deliver the Basin Plan in full.

The Water Act, as amended, provides for the recovery of 450 GL¹ of water for the environment to achieve enhanced environmental outcomes. The Act provides that the Minister must take all reasonable steps to meet the 450 GL target by 31 December 2027.

The Australian Government approach to recovering the 450 GL water for the environment will be focussed on three guiding principles:

- A. Enhanced environmental outcomes
- B. Minimising socio-economic impacts
- C. Achieving value for money.

This draft framework provides key information for each principle.

The Australian Government will deliver the 450 GL through three programs:



1. Resilient Rivers Program – infrastructure projects, rules changes, land and water partnerships and other ways to recover water



2. Voluntary Water Purchase – purchase of water entitlements from willing sellers by the Commonwealth



3. Sustainable Communities Program – community adjustment assistance for Basin communities impacted by voluntary water purchase.

The draft framework sets out the toolbox under each program and the proposed implementation approach for 2024.

We have heard clearly from industry and peak groups that they want more time to discuss options to minimise socio-economic impacts and the design of community adjustment assistance.

Based on the feedback the proposed approach for 2024 is to:

- Prioritise the Resilient Rivers Program to maximise non-water purchase recovery options.
- Allow more time to consult with industry, irrigation infrastructure operators and communities about minimising socio-economic impacts and designing community adjustment assistance.
- Prioritise voluntary water purchase options that have the least unintended socio-economic impacts.

Delivering the full suite of water recovery tools will be reliant on strong cooperation with our Basin state partners.

¹ All water recovery figures are expressed in gigalitres per year long-term diversion limit equivalence.



Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Australia and their continuing connection to land and sea, waters, environment and community. We pay our respects to the Traditional Custodians of the lands we live and work on, their Culture, and their Elders past and present.



Delivering the Basin Plan

The *Basin Plan 2012* sets the amount of water that can be taken from rivers for industry, agriculture, and community use, while leaving enough to restore and maintain a healthy environment and river system. In the face of an increasingly harsh climate, full plan delivery is more important than ever.

Over 2,000 GL has been recovered for the environment under the Basin Plan, but there remains more to be done. In July 2023, the Murray–Darling Basin Authority reported that Basin Plan outcomes due in 2024 will not be achieved and there would be a shortfall of water for the environment.

Very little progress has been made in achieving the 450 GL target and, since 2018, only 12.2 GL, or less than 3%, has been recovered, with a further 13.8 GL contracted for delivery by 30 June 2024.

MDBA Advice on Basin Plan implementation (25 July 2023)

In May 2023, the department ran a public consultation seeking ideas to deliver 450 GL of additional environmental water and to address shortfalls from gap bridging water infrastructure projects. More than 130 submissions were received. Ideas included alternative water supplies and new technologies, water savings projects, and water market solutions.

In August 2023, Murray–Darling Basin Water Ministers (except Victoria) agreed to deliver the Basin Plan in full, including 450 GL of additional water (the Agreement)².

On 7 December 2023, relevant elements of the *Water Amendment (Restoring our Rivers) Act 2023* commenced. The Act makes changes to the Water Act and Basin Plan to provide more options, more time, more funding and more accountability to deliver the plan in full.

Milestones

- **August 2022**
Release of second independent review of the Water for the Environment Special Account.
- **October 2022**
Ministerial Council commits to work together to deliver Basin Plan.
- **February 2023**
Ministerial Council discusses range of options, including purchase of water.
- **March 2023**
Strategic water purchase program opened to bridge the gap to sustainable diversion limits.
- **May 2023**
Community ideas sought to deliver the Basin Plan in full.
- **July 2023**
MDBA advises the Basin Plan will not be delivered on time.
- **August 2023**
Historic agreement between Murray–Darling Basin Ministers (except Victoria).
- **September 2023**
Water Amendment (Restoring Our Rivers) Bill 2023 introduced into Parliament.
- **December 2023**
Water Amendment (Restoring Our Rivers) Act 2023 commenced.
- **January 2024**
Draft *Restoring our Rivers framework to deliver 450 GL* released.

² <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/water/policy/mdb/basin-plan/agreement2023>.

Restoring Our Rivers Act 2023

On 7 December, relevant elements of the Restoring Our Rivers Act commenced. The changes support more options, more time, more accountability, and more funding to deliver the Basin Plan in full, including recovery of 450 GL of environmental water to achieve enhanced environmental outcomes.



More options

The Restoring Our Rivers Act provides more options for water recovery:

- Efficiency measures will continue to be supported, with no change to the socio-economic criteria.
- There will be a new category of water recovery called '*additional Held Environmental Water (HEW)*'. This will enable more options for water recovery such as land and water partnerships, rule-changes and voluntary water purchase.
- Basin states are also able to bring forward new projects under the Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment Mechanism (SDLAM) to try to achieve a 605 GL water recovery offset.



More time

The Restoring Our Rivers Act extends key timeframes for water recovery:

- 31 December 2027 will be the last date to enter contracts to deliver additional HEW that can contribute to the 450 GL target.
- This allows for the transfer of the contracted additional HEW to occur within an agreed time after 2027.
- 31 December 2026 will be the new reconciliation date, which gives Basin states an extra two and a half years to complete projects that offset water recovery.



More accountability

The Restoring Our Rivers Act sets reporting and review points to ensure water recovery stays on track:

- The Commonwealth Water Minister must table in Parliament annual reports on progress towards achieving targets.
- There will be a third independent Water for the Environment Special Account review by 30 September 2025 that will consider funding and progress to recovery of the 450 GL.
- The third WESA review will also consider the effectiveness of payments to address any social or economic impact of water purchases.



More funding

The Australian Government has set aside more funding to support Basin Plan implementation.

This includes for:

- water infrastructure projects
- voluntary water purchase
- community adjustment assistance.

Funding is not for publication due to market sensitivities.

This funding builds upon funding already available for the Basin Plan:

- Water for the Environment Special Account
- Sustainable Rural Water Use and Infrastructure Program.

First Nations

The Restoring Our Rivers Act also makes amendments to improve First Nations outcomes, including to:

- Amend the objects of the Water Act and purposes of the Basin Plan to ensure the use and management of Basin water resources takes into account matters relevant for First Nations People, including in relation to their knowledge, values, uses, traditions and customs.
- Require the Minister to table an annual report on First Nations activities that includes activities and engagement for the purposes of ensuring Basin water resources takes into account matters relevant to First Nations People.

Delivering the 450 GL target

Water for the environment is now provided for environmental benefits across the Murray–Darling Basin when and where plants and animals need it most. It is used to help rivers keep flowing and connected – particularly in dry times.

The Water Act requires an increase in the volume of Basin water resources that is available for environmental use by 450 GL to enhance environmental outcomes under the Basin Plan.

An additional 450 GL of water will be available for the environment. It will be used in rivers and wetlands to support them and the plants and animals that live, feed and breed in them.

Flows at the right time and delivered to the right place help rivers and wetlands function as they need to. For example, connecting wetlands to the main river channel supporting fish to find food and shelter and breed.

Consistent with the Water Act, the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* and the Agreement, the Australian Government approach to recovering the 450 GL of additional environmental water will be focussed on three guiding principles:

- A. Enhanced environmental outcomes
- B. Minimising socio-economic impacts
- C. Achieving value for money.



A. Enhanced environmental outcomes

The Water Act seeks to enhance the environmental outcomes that can be achieved under the Basin Plan by:

- Protecting and restoring the environmental assets of the Murray–Darling Basin
- Protecting biodiversity dependent on the Basin water resources

Water Act section 86AA

Water for the environment is used to keep the Murray–Darling Basin resilient and healthy, supporting native plants and animals to feed, breed and move. This is critical to keeping rivers, wetlands and their floodplains connected and resilient, so they can continue to sustain healthy communities, waterbirds, native fish, frogs, platypus, and turtles.

There is still more to do.

Waterbird populations have been declining over the past 40 years and native fish populations are below historical records.

A greater share of water for the environment is needed to ensure the health of the Basin and water recovery will seek to enhance the environmental outcomes that can be achieved under the Basin Plan.

It will also improve water quality as well as supporting a range of social and cultural values for communities throughout the Basin. The importance of additional water for the environment was supported in development of the Basin Plan and is reinforced by recent climatic events and monitoring.

Where water is recovered will be based on advice from experts, including from the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder and the MDBA.

Enhancing environmental outcomes

Examples of how environmental outcomes can be enhanced by water recovery:

1. Flush salt from the Basin and reduce salinity levels in the Coorong and Lower Lakes.
2. Support connectivity by increasing flows through the barrages to the Coorong.
3. Enhance in-stream outcomes and improve connections with floodplains, and their frequency, in the southern Murray–Darling Basin.
4. Enhance in-stream outcomes and improve connections between rivers, including during low and cease-to-flow conditions, in the northern Murray–Darling Basin.
5. Support waterbird breeding and provide healthy foraging and roosting habitat.
6. Improve native fish diversity and numbers by supporting spawning, movement, condition and habitat.
7. Restore the health of internationally significant Ramsar wetlands and waterways that support them.
8. Restore the condition and resilience of Basin riparian and floodplain vegetation such as river red gum, blackbox and coolibah forests and woodlands, and wetland vegetation and lignum communities.



B. Minimising socio-economic impacts

The Water Act and Basin Plan require that social and economic impacts are considered in water recovery programs:

- Before approving a water purchase program for the 450 GL, the Minister must consider the socio-economic impact on communities

Water Act section 86ADB

- Efficiency contributions to the SDL adjustment mechanism must achieve neutral or improved socio-economic outcomes

Basin Plan section 7.17

The Australian Government has also committed to minimising socio-economic impacts on communities in delivering the Basin Plan through the Agreement with Basin states. This includes through:

- considering how the 450 GL of additional environmental water is recovered, with all options considered
- providing an additional three and half years to deliver the Plan so that water recovery can be gradual and communities have more time to adjust
- working with Basin governments and communities to draw on local knowledge
- learning from outcomes of previous water recovery and community adjustment programs
- in the case of **water purchase towards the 450 GL**, providing funding for **community adjustment assistance** and working with Basin governments in delivering this assistance.

Draft community adjustment assistance principles

To minimise socio-economic impacts of water purchase for the 450 GL

1. Support diversification and resilience
 - Support transition of regional communities to prepare for a future with less water.
 - Focus on job creation and sustainable economies.
2. Place-based
 - Place-based and focused investment.
 - Engage local people as active participants in development.
3. Proportionality
 - Investment to each state proportional to water purchased.
 - Investment in each community proportional to impacts observed.
4. Co-design
 - Co-design across government.
 - Consultation with communities, First Nations, local government, and regional industries.
5. Strategic alignment
 - Consistent with Commonwealth Regional Investment Framework.
 - Aligned with regional and First Nations' priorities and plans.
6. Transparency and integrity
 - Clear outcomes and objectives, and value for money.
 - Transparency through administration and evaluation.
7. Evidence-based
 - Underpinned by agreed evidence and data.

C. Value for money

Achieving value for money is critical in ensuring taxpayers' money is used in the most efficient, effective, ethical and economic manner.

Price is not the only factor. Officials are required to consider a range of other relevant financial and non-financial costs and benefits.

*Commonwealth Procurement Rules*³

Procurements

When conducting a procurement, the relevant financial and non-financial costs and benefits of each submission are considered.

The current market price for water rights does not determine value for money alone. A range of financial and non-financial factors need to be considered in determining whether a solution achieves value for money in accordance with the Commonwealth Procurement Rules.

Other approaches

Value for money is also a core consideration of water savings projects and other non-purchase approaches to recover water.

While the price of the water right is an important input, other considerations such as the cost of project implementation (including the base cost of any civil works, infrastructure, or equipment) is also considered. This is assessed alongside the expected benefits from the investment.

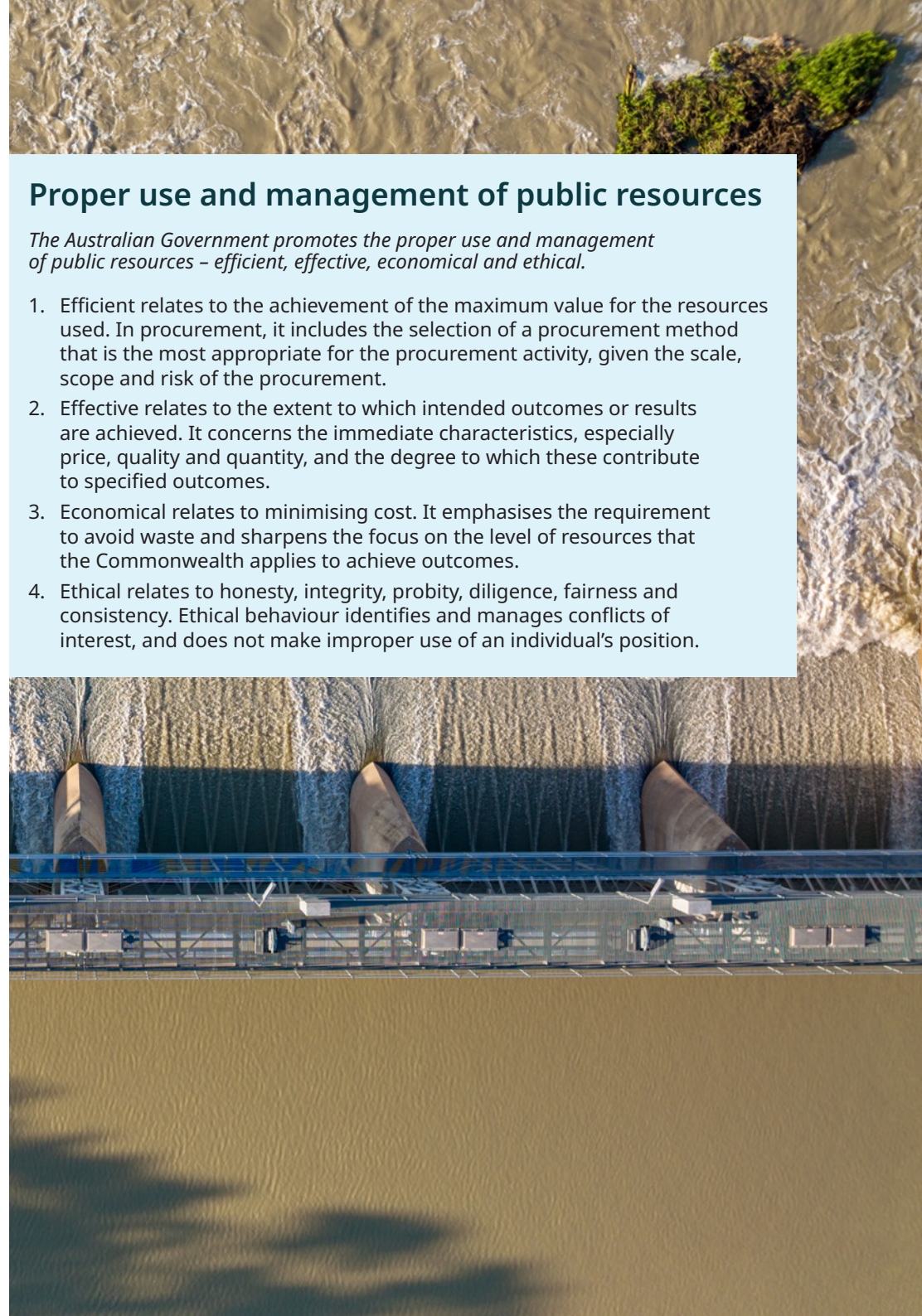
These will be outlined in specific program documents and guidelines.

Proper use and management of public resources

The Australian Government promotes the proper use and management of public resources – efficient, effective, economical and ethical.

1. Efficient relates to the achievement of the maximum value for the resources used. In procurement, it includes the selection of a procurement method that is the most appropriate for the procurement activity, given the scale, scope and risk of the procurement.
2. Effective relates to the extent to which intended outcomes or results are achieved. It concerns the immediate characteristics, especially price, quality and quantity, and the degree to which these contribute to specified outcomes.
3. Economical relates to minimising cost. It emphasises the requirement to avoid waste and sharpens the focus on the level of resources that the Commonwealth applies to achieve outcomes.
4. Ethical relates to honesty, integrity, probity, diligence, fairness and consistency. Ethical behaviour identifies and manages conflicts of interest, and does not make improper use of an individual's position.

³ The Commonwealth Procurement Rules are made under section 105B(1) of the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013*



More options

The 450 GL of additional environmental water will be achieved through three programs, each providing different tools to the water recovery toolbox. Working closely with our Basin state partners will be critical to ensuring that we can deliver all the tools in the toolbox.



Resilient Rivers Program

	<i>Toolbox</i>	<i>What</i>	<i>Why</i>	<i>How</i>
Water recovery infrastructure projects <i>Efficiency measures</i>	Irrigation Infrastructure Operator Modernisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A refreshed approach to water savings investment, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Water delivery upgrades – Irrigation network upgrades 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over \$7.5 billion has been invested in Basin water infrastructure, including irrigation infrastructure upgrades. Some opportunities still remain. • Investment in water infrastructure can help to increase agricultural and industry productivity. • More efficient water infrastructure will also help industry and community resilience in the face of climate change. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieving value for money, in accordance with Commonwealth legislative requirements. • We are still exploring whether there is demand for a Commonwealth-led stream of the program in addition to state-led streams.
	Water Use Efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Irrigation system upgrades – Stock and domestic 		
	Targeted Efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Water substitution – Urban, industrial, and mining 		
Alternative water recovery opportunities <i>Additional HEW</i>	Cross-portfolio priority projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-investment across portfolios, states, and industry in unique project opportunities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projects that can deliver multiple benefits locally and regionally and recover water for the environment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are consulting with Basin states to identify potential opportunities to investigate further and develop.
	Land and water partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purchase of land alongside water, where it can deliver complementary environmental outcomes to water recovery. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land and water partnerships may help deliver First Nations, conservation, or other outcomes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will open a public consultation in early 2024, to understand the potential demand and viability of a program to purchase land and water holdings.
	Rule changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes to water management rules that enable transfer of water rights to environmental water holders. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rule changes that reduce extractions at specific times (e.g., from the more variable and less regulated northern Basin) can provide significant benefits. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are consulting with Basin states, CEWH, and the MDBA to identify potential opportunities for further investigation and development.
	Commercial mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leasing or other mechanisms with willing water market participants to contribute to targets temporarily. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could enable water portfolio to be more agile, help address temporary shortfalls, allow access to water that is otherwise unavailable, or address specific priorities such as low flows. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We want to hear if these draft principles are robust or need adjustment.



Voluntary Water Purchase

	<i>Toolbox</i>	<i>What</i>	<i>Why</i>	<i>How</i>
Voluntary water purchase <i>Additional HEW</i>	Different procurement approaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Commonwealth water trading strategy may incorporate a range of procurement methods. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A range of procurement methods may be required including open tender and limited tender to achieve value for money and the best outcomes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We are considering the opportunities and risks of different approaches.
	Priority and sequencing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The order in which we might undertake voluntary water purchase for different areas or products. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Voluntary water purchase must start in 2024, but there may be advantages in staging the program. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We are considering the opportunities and risks of different approaches.
	Place-based design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working with major irrigation networks to understand specific concerns and priorities for their area. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides opportunity for voluntary water purchase to be targeted to align with irrigation network priorities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We are consulting with Basin states and major irrigation networks on opportunities and risks.
	Leaseback or delayed water transfer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Voluntary water purchase, but allowing the seller to use the water allocation for an initial period. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides more time for the seller, industry, and community to adjust to less water. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We want to hear more about the feasibility of this option. The 3 guiding principles on page 7 still apply.



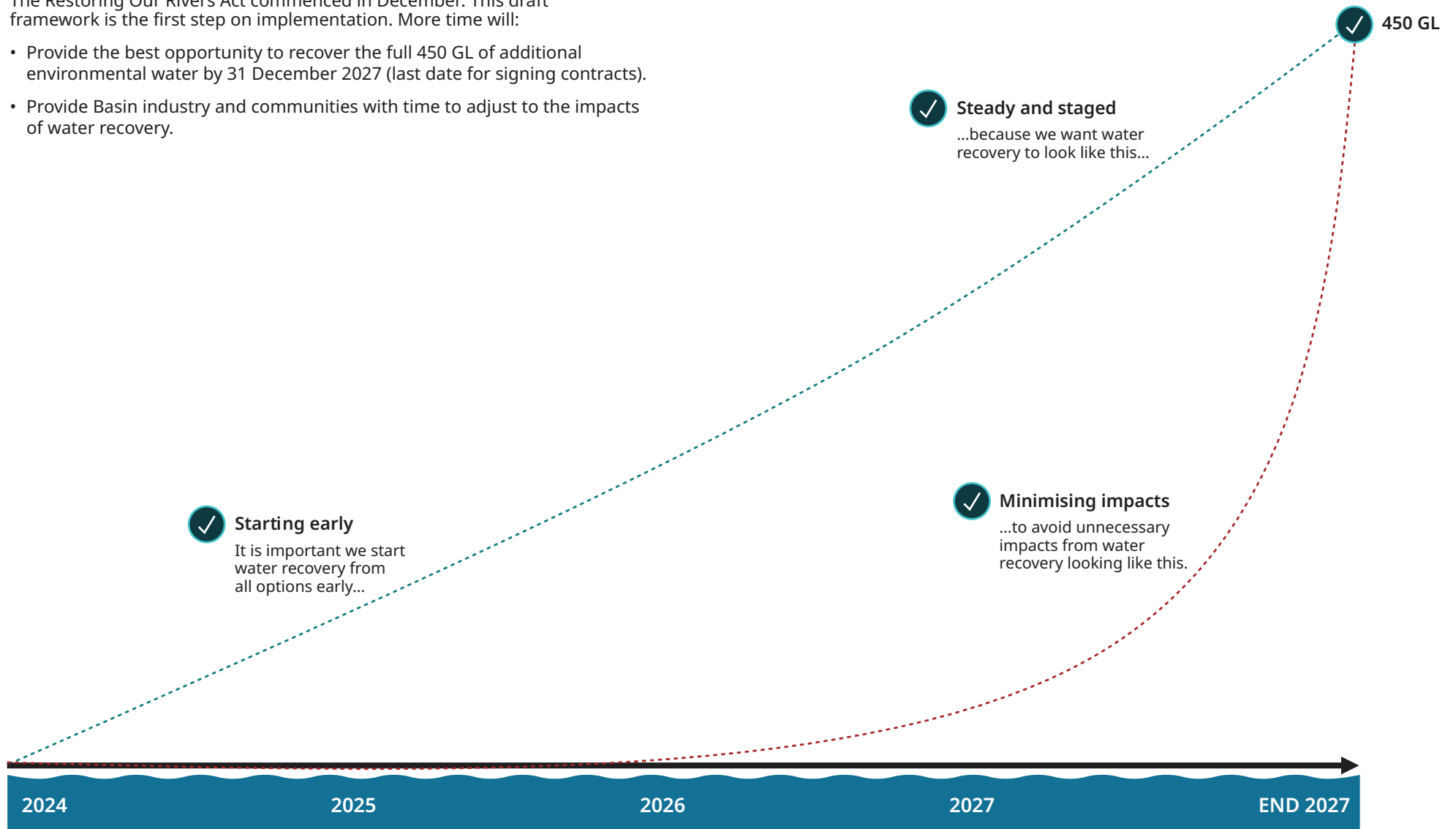
Sustainable Communities

	<i>Toolbox</i>	<i>What</i>	<i>Why</i>	<i>How</i>
	Community adjustment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investment in Basin communities. Program streams may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Economic diversification Capacity building and support Innovation and productivity Community sustainability Workforce development Tourism activation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some Basin communities may experience negative social and economic impacts from voluntary water purchase. Where these are identified, the Australian Government has committed to make funding available to minimise socio-economic impacts. Stronger and more diverse Basin economies will help to prepare for a future with less water. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Through a principles-based approach, as set out on page 9. We want to hear more about whether these draft principles should be changed or improved.

More time

The Restoring Our Rivers Act commenced in December. This draft framework is the first step on implementation. More time will:

- Provide the best opportunity to recover the full 450 GL of additional environmental water by 31 December 2027 (last date for signing contracts).
- Provide Basin industry and communities with time to adjust to the impacts of water recovery.

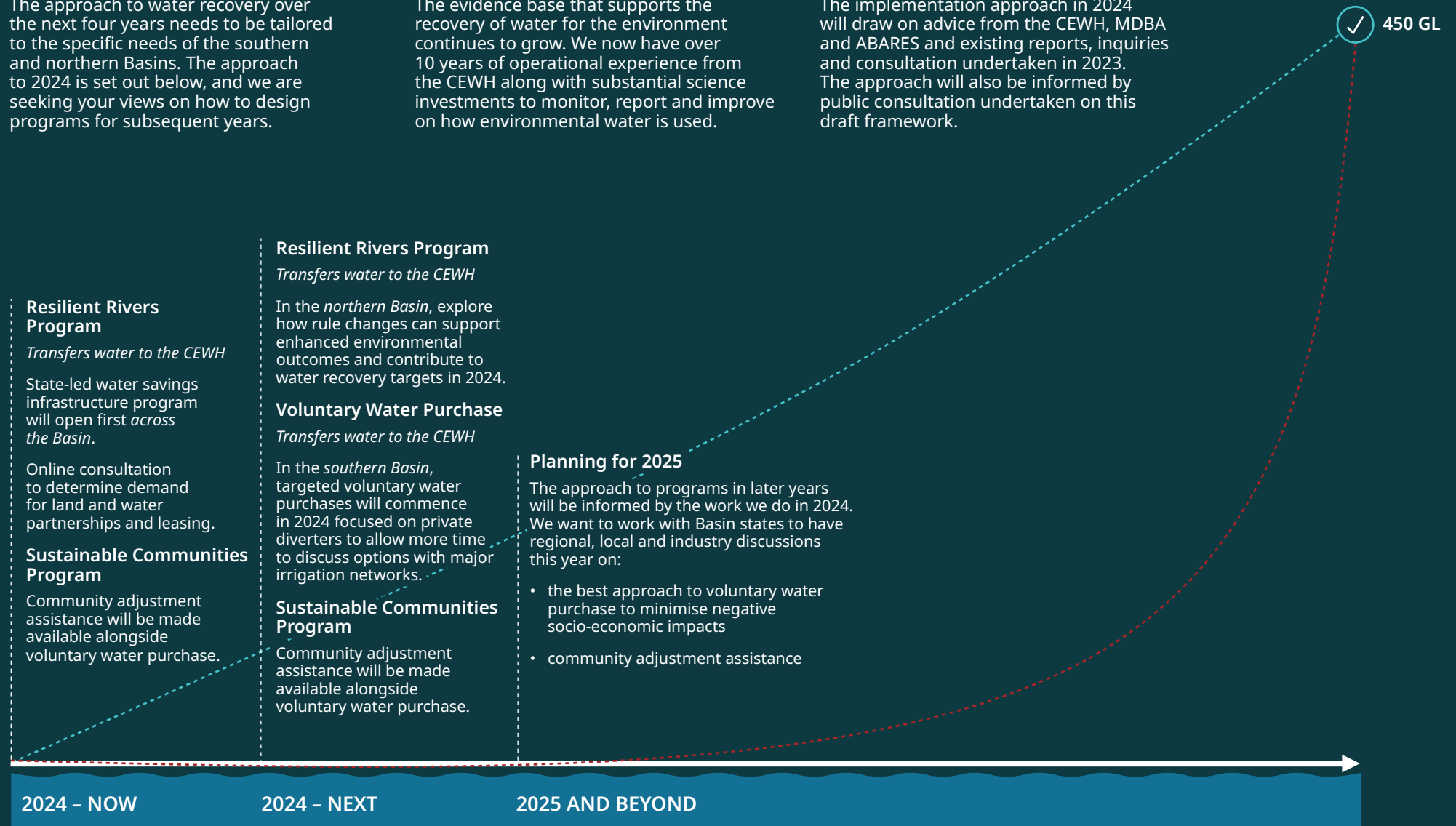


Implementation

The approach to water recovery over the next four years needs to be tailored to the specific needs of the southern and northern Basins. The approach to 2024 is set out below, and we are seeking your views on how to design programs for subsequent years.

The evidence base that supports the recovery of water for the environment continues to grow. We now have over 10 years of operational experience from the CEWH along with substantial science investments to monitor, report and improve on how environmental water is used.

The implementation approach in 2024 will draw on advice from the CEWH, MDBA and ABARES and existing reports, inquiries and consultation undertaken in 2023. The approach will also be informed by public consultation undertaken on this draft framework.



Northern Basin Water Recovery

In the northern Basin, key environmental risks arise from prolonged dry periods when long stretches of rivers stop flowing and river systems become disconnected. Improving the resilience of the river ecosystem to bounce back after these events as well as reducing the length of cease to flow events is critical to enhancing environmental outcomes. The best way this can be achieved is by focusing on when and where water for the environment is available, rather than just how much water is available.

Further, water markets in the northern Basin are comparatively 'thin'. The volume of total entitlements issued is lower than in the southern Basin and there is significantly less trade. Over the last decade, there has been, on average, nine times less annual trade of entitlements in the north when compared to the south. This means that relying on the water market alone as a method to recover water may be limiting. Rule based changes that improve connectivity have greater potential to enhance environmental outcomes by leaving more water in rivers at key times. It is important to note that, rule-based changes still require the transfer of water entitlements.

Significant work on potential rule changes is already underway. The NSW Government Northern Basin Connectivity Program is progressing connectivity improvements identified as part of the Western Regional Water Strategy. This includes analysis to inform potential changes to water sharing plan flow targets (triggers) to improve water flows across the connected catchments of the NSW northern Basin at important times.

Temporary water restrictions were used to protect the first flush of water through the system after the devastating northern Basin drought of 2017 to 2020, so we know these actions work. In mid-2024, the Connectivity Expert Panel will provide independent expert advice on the potential flow targets. Entitlements arising from these changes could be counted towards the 450 GL water recovery target. This work will be a key focus for NSW in the NSW northern Basin in 2024. The Australian Government will also continue to work with the Queensland Government to determine the right tools for Queensland to contribute to the 450 GL.

There is also likely to be some water that was recovered prior to 2019 that is in excess of bridging the gap targets in the northern Basin. While exact volumes won't be known until NSW water resource plans are accredited, it is intended this recovery count to the 450 GL. This water is already being used by the CEWH to deliver environmental outcomes, including to help the Macquarie Marshes recover from the impacts of northern Basin drought.

Proposals for recovery through cross-portfolio projects, water recovery infrastructure, land and water partnerships, and unique and significant market-led proposals can also be considered in the northern Basin.

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

2024

NOW

Open **Land and Water Partnerships** Expressions of Interest

Open **Resilient Rivers – Water Recovery Infrastructure Program**

NEXT

NSW Independent Connectivity Expert Panel reports on potential rule changes in the NSW northern Basin

Work with Queensland Government to determine the right tools for water recovery

Beyond

LATER

Count bridging the gap 'over-recoveries' to 450 GL

Potential contribution of rule changes to 450 GL

Consider any cross-portfolio priority projects brought forward

Implement other water recovery tools informed through consultation

Southern Basin Water Recovery

The southern Basin has a comparatively richer and deeper market of water entitlements that make voluntary water purchases a more reliable tool for water recovery. Water recovered from well-connected catchments have strong potential to meet and enhance a range of important environmental outcomes. Voluntary water purchase through competitive tender is expected to remain an important tool to meet water recovery targets.

While constraints may limit the flexibility of recovered water in some areas at some times, the Agreement of Basin Ministers supports the relaxation of constraints to continue to 2026. The development of the Constraints Relaxation Implementation Roadmap by the MDBA in 2024 will provide greater certainty on implementation beyond this time. Purchases involving the temporary lease-back of entitlement for consumptive use could be useful to both recognise short-term constraints and minimise socio-economic impacts.

The Australian Government also recognises that complementary water purchase and network rationalisation opportunities may help minimise the socio-economic impacts of water recovery. Therefore, it is proposed that a voluntary water purchase program for 2024 target entitlements outside of major irrigation networks so we can work with states and major irrigation networks to identify the best opportunities for purchase of water within networks.

Continuing an infrastructure program will enable water saving proposals to continue to be developed and brought forward, including some of the ideas raised through public consultation. However, as infrastructure programs have been in place for a number of years, the potential water recovery from this tool may be limited.

Proposals for water recovery through cross-portfolio projects, land and water partnerships, water recovery infrastructure projects and market-led proposals can also be considered. Land and water partnerships could be particularly useful to deliver greater socio-economic outcomes alongside enhanced environmental outcomes.

Proposals based on rule changes can be brought forward as new projects under the Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment Mechanism to achieve a 605 GL water recovery offset, rather than under the 450 GL recovery program.

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

2024

NOW

Open **Land and Water Partnerships** Expressions of Interest

Open **Resilient Rivers – Water Recovery Infrastructure Program**

NEXT

Open targeted **Voluntary Water Purchase** excluding major irrigation networks

Work with states and major irrigation networks on complementary voluntary water purchase and network rationalisation opportunities

Beyond

LATER

Open further targeted **Voluntary Water Purchase** potentially with lease-back

Consider any cross-portfolio priority projects brought forward

Minimising Socio-Economic Impacts

Water recovery is one of many influences on local and regional agricultural economies. Trends in the movement of water through the water market, trade and global commodity prices, drought, competition for labour and movements in other input costs are also the source of significant and variable impacts on irrigated agriculture and regional communities. These different influences should not be conflated or solely attributed to the effects of water recovery.

The Australian Government recognises there may be some social and economic impacts from further water recovery and where negative impacts are identified they should be minimised.

The planned approach to water recovery in year one prioritises options which are likely to have least unintended socio-economic impact. This approach provides time to further develop other options so that impacts can be identified, and proposals developed to minimise negative impacts on local communities.

The Sustainable Communities program will seek to mitigate unavoidable socio-economic impacts from voluntary water purchases. The Australian Government will seek to partner with Basin states to establish this program in the first half of 2024. This aims to put mechanisms in place for regular community, industry and local government participation in developing practical approaches to minimise negative socio-economic impacts.

The Australian Government will prepare an Impact Analysis that updates the 2012 Basin Plan Regulatory Impact Statement incorporating available evidence and insights from consultation and measuring socio-economic impacts.

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

2024

NOW

Seek input from stakeholders on appropriate evidence, indicators or measures of impacts

Prioritise water recovery options that are likely to have the least unintended impacts

NEXT

Release an **Impact Analysis** that updates the 2012 Basin Plan Regulatory Impact Statement

Publish how socio-economic impacts have been considered in opening Voluntary Water Purchase

Hold regional and place-based discussions on community adjustment with Basin states

Open the **Sustainable Communities Program** with Basin states to mitigate socio-economic impacts

Beyond

LATER

Third statutory **Water for the Environmental Special Account Review** considers impacts and actions

More accountability

The Restoring Our Rivers Act introduces a range of new mechanisms to strengthen accountability across Basin Plan implementation, including recovery of the 450 GL of environmental water. These mechanisms build on existing oversight arrangements including reporting and review processes.

Established oversight	Continuous public reporting	Ongoing review and evaluation
<p>Murray–Darling Basin Authority</p> <p>The MDBA produce the Basin Plan Report Card twice a year that provides short, timely updates on project status, delivery timeframes, and governance and funding arrangements.</p> <p>https://www.mdba.gov.au/water-management/basin-plan/basin-plan-report-cards</p>	<p>Publish progress of water recovery</p> <p>The Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water publishes tables on the progress of water recovery each month.</p> <p>https://www.dcceew.gov.au/water/policy/mdb/progress-recovery</p>	<p>Updated Impact Analysis</p> <p>The Australian Government will publish an addendum to, and update of the 2012 Regulatory Impact Statement for the Basin Plan with the next water purchase program.</p>
<p>Inspector-General of Water Compliance</p> <p>The Inspector-General of Water Compliance monitors, oversees and enforces compliance with the Water Act, including with respect to the performance of functions and obligations by Commonwealth and Basin state agencies under the Water Act.</p>	<p>Annual report on Basin Plan progress</p> <p>Annual reports must be prepared on progress being made against the Basin Plan water recovery targets each year to be tabled in Parliament by the Minister.</p> <p>The Restoring Our Rivers Act makes this a statutory requirement.</p>	<p>Consideration of socio-economic impacts</p> <p>The Minister must consider socio-economic impacts before approving a water purchase program for the 450 GL. The matters considered must be included in the annual report on progress of water recovery.</p> <p>The Restoring Our Rivers Act makes this a statutory requirement.</p>
<p>Productivity Commission</p> <p>The Productivity Commission is required to undertake five-yearly assessments of the effectiveness of the implementation of the Basin Plan and water resource Plans.</p> <p>The commission handed in the final inquiry report for the second assessment to the Australian Government on 19 December 2023.</p>	<p>Annual report on First Nations</p> <p>The Minister will table an annual report on First Nations activities that includes activities and engagement into matters relevant for First Nations people and an MDBA report on how environmental water holders considered Indigenous values and uses.</p> <p>The Restoring Our Rivers Act makes this a statutory requirement.</p>	<p>Third independent WESA review in 2025</p> <p>A third independent review will be provided to the Minister by 30 September 2025. The review will consider progress to the 450 GL, funding requirements, and socio-economic impacts.</p> <p>The Restoring Our Rivers Act makes this a statutory requirement.</p>

Next steps and engaging

The release of the draft framework for delivering the 450 GL is the first step in delivery of the Basin Plan under the new deadlines. As part of the Australian Government commitment to work with communities on the design and delivery of the 450 GL program, are be invited to have your say on the draft framework from the end of January through to early March 2024.

1

PHASE 1 (May to July 2023)

- Sought ideas from communities to deliver Basin Plan water recovery targets in full.

2

PHASE 2 (August to December 2023)

- Focussed discussions with states, peak stakeholder groups, Irrigator Infrastructure Operators (IIOs) and Basin Consultation Committees on the design of potential programs.

3

PHASE 3 (30 January 2024 to 4 March 2024)

- Public consultation open for feedback and input on the following elements of the draft framework for delivering the 450 GL, including:



- Sustainable Communities Program
 - *Understanding impacts on communities*
 - *Draft principles*



- Resilient Rivers Program
 - *Land and Water*
 - *Commercial leasing*

- Draft draft framework for delivering the 450 GL released.

- State collaboration

Continued collaboration with Basin States on programs and opportunities to join in engaging industry, IIOs and local government.

- Basin engagement

Continued consultation with IIOs, First Nations, local governments, industry groups and business

