

# Rural Water Use Strategy Report Card

2022



Sustainable  
management of  
Tasmania's water  
resources



Strategic  
development  
to maximise  
opportunities from  
water resources



Effective  
regulation, strong  
entitlements and  
planning



Optimising  
services



## MINISTER'S FOREWORD



I am pleased to present the first Rural Water Use Strategy Report Card providing a snapshot of NRE Tasmania's progress in implementing the Rural Water Use Strategy which was released in March 2021.

Freshwater is arguably our most precious resource, underpinning the Tasmanian economy, environment, and way of life. And water is a key enabler for this Government's vision to grow the value of Tasmania's agriculture sector. That is why the Tasmanian Government developed the Rural Water Use Strategy, to support the wise use of water and ensure that our freshwater resources are available for the wide range of water uses and environments that depend on them.

As part of our 2021 almost \$50 million commitment to *Securing Tasmania's Future by Accelerating Agriculture*, we committed investments to propel the agriculture sector towards our bold target of an annual farmgate value of \$10 billion by 2050, supporting rural and regional communities

and creating even more jobs. This commitment included \$1.5 million over four years to implement initiatives in the Rural Water Use Strategy, including the announcement of a new River Health Advisory Project.

The Tasmanian Government has also partnered with the Australian Government through the National Water Grid Authority to secure \$1.84 million for new water science projects, an additional \$23.4 million for Tranche 3 of irrigation development and \$26.5 million for six smaller water infrastructure projects including three wastewater reuse schemes and a water quality improvement plan.

In addition to these commitments, I firmly believe that there are opportunities to improve the way we manage our freshwater resources and look after our waterways through government and industry partnerships, coordination and collaboration. This is a key area that the Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania (NRE Tas) is exploring, assisted by senior leaders from across Tasmania's water sector, through the Rural Water Roundtable which was formed in August 2021.

**Jo Palmer**

Minister for Primary Industries and Water

# NRE TAS KEY ACHIEVEMENTS 2021–2022

## Guiding delivery of the Rural Water Use Strategy

Achievement	RWUS Action
✓ Rural Water Roundtable formed in August 2021 to bring together leaders from water management bodies, water users and environmental managers to provide strategic oversight and input into the delivery of the RWUS. Four meetings held.	cross-cutting
✓ Water Management Reference Group - a strategic discussion forum for water matters within government formed in October 2021 to support the delivery of actions within the RWUS. Three meetings held.	cross-cutting
✓ A new, permanent position for a River Health and Freshwater Engagement Officer created in NRE Tas.	cross-cutting
✓ A new permanent position for a Water Resource and River Health Scientist created in NRE Tas.	cross-cutting
✓ A new permanent position for a Project Manager to drive implementation of the Rural Water Use Strategy created in NRE Tas.	cross-cutting

## Developing sustainable water infrastructure

Achievement	RWUS Action
<p>Leveraged further funding for irrigation development bringing total current commitments to \$232.1 million to support business case development and capital costs for Tranche 3 of irrigation development by working with Tasmanian Irrigation to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ - Finalise the Business Case for the Don Irrigation Scheme for which construction will commence shortly. The Australian Government has increased its commitment for this project to \$26.28 million, to enable the \$54.41 million project to be delivered. This scheme will deliver 4,750 megalitres of new irrigation water to the Don and Barrington districts.</li> <li>- Secured \$4.65 million for South East Integration Project business case development.</li> </ul>	2.1, 2.3
✓ Worked with Tasmanian Irrigation to support progress of the Northern Midlands Irrigation Scheme, Tamar Irrigation Scheme and Sassafras-Wesley Vale Irrigation Scheme Augmentation proposals.	2.1, 2.3
✓ Secured \$26.5 million from the Australian Government through the National Water Grid Authority Connections and Small Projects pathways, for six smaller water infrastructure projects including three wastewater reuse projects and one water quality improvement program.	2.1, 2.3
✓ Undertaking statutory approvals under the <i>Water Management Act 1999</i> for key elements of the Don Irrigation Scheme (for example watercourse authorisations and the establishment of the Irrigation District).	2.1, 2.3



**Enhanced information and data that supports water managers, business and the community to make informed decisions.**

Achievement	RWUS Action
✓ Water Managers and Data Custodians Working Group to enhance water information sharing and management involving key water managers across the state being created.	1.1, 1.8, 1.9, 1.10, 3.10, 3.14, 4.3, 4.4
✓ \$1.84 million new funding from the Tasmanian Government and Australian Government (National Water Grid Authority), for three key water science projects to update catchment yield modelling, undertake new groundwater assessment research and review water use accountability, metering and reporting requirements.	1.1, 1.2, 1.4, 1.5

**Reviewing and refreshing water management policy settings to get the balance right**

Achievement	RWUS Action
✓ Participated in the National Water Reform Committee delivering advice to the Australian Government on strategic directions for national water reform.	cross-cutting
✓ Input into nationally driven work to refresh the National Water Initiative Agreement including working groups on urban water, climate change risks, water information, groundwater reform.	cross-cutting
✓ Working to ensure greater inclusion of Aboriginal freshwater interests as part of the refresh of the National Water Initiative, including supporting the Committee for Aboriginal Water Interests. Supporting work around the establishment of an inland waters target for the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.	3.5
✓ Detailed scoping of the water accountability, metering and reporting framework project.	1.7
✓ Project planning for the suite of policy review projects for Rural Water Use Strategy underway.	3.1-3.14

**Looking after the health of our waterways and water quality**

Achievement	RWUS Action
✓ Commenced delivery of the River Health Advisory Project.	1.8, 1.9, 1.10
✓ Partnered with the Australian Government to deliver smaller water infrastructure projects that will improve health of waterways as well as provide new high-surety water for irrigation.	2.3

**RURAL WATER ROUNDTABLE**

The Rural Water Roundtable is made up of water industry leaders and key stakeholders including water managers, environmental managers and industry peak bodies. Key achievements of the Roundtable so far are:

- greater collective awareness of goals and priorities of water sector stakeholders;
- greater awareness of existing water sector partnerships and collaboration;
- identification of alignment of goals and activities that can be built on for future partnerships and collaboration; and
- agreement to establish a Water Managers and Data Custodians Working Group to explore and improve water data and information sharing.

Since inception, the Roundtable have met four times to discuss strategic issues relating to water management, river health and water quality to inform development of the Rural Water Use Strategy Implementation Plan.

The Roundtable will be extended so that it can carry on its work and contributions to improving coordination and collaboration for water resource and waterway management.

For further details see the [NRE Tas webpage: Rural Water Roundtable](#)



## DEVELOPING STRATEGIC INITIATIVES FOR HEALTHY WATERWAYS

In September 2021 a River Health Advisory Project was announced. Actions to support this project are closely aligned to the Rural Water Use Strategy. River Health Advisory Project actions have been incorporated into the Strategy's Implementation Plan to ensure coordination and alignment of actions as they evolve. Three new actions will enhance partnerships to identify how to better understand, maintain and improve water quality and the health of Tasmania's waterways:

**New Action 1.8** – Improve coordination and data sharing of river health and water quality data.

**New Action 1.9** – Undertake targeted case-study research and reporting to enhance understanding of drivers of changes in river health in Tasmanian catchments.

**New Action 1.10** – Deliver a Strategic Directions for Healthy Waterways Paper.



## NEW SCIENCE TO UNDERSTAND FRESHWATER

The Tasmanian and Australian Government, through the National Water Grid Authority, are partnering to provide \$1.84 million to deliver three critical science projects to underpin our knowledge base and support a range of Strategy actions.

### ***Catchment yield science update – climate projections for the future***

The effects of climate change are predicted to impact on catchment yields as well as on the timing of water demand and reliability of water supply. Climate change projections currently used in catchment yield modelling in Tasmania, whilst still being very useful, are dated and are no longer considered to fully inform us of the future risks to water resources.

Funding for Phase 1 of a major project to update catchment yields in Tasmania, has been secured in order to explore:

- current and contemporary predictions of climate change; and
- methods to update estimates of catchment yield in test catchments.

Phase 1 of the project will support the scoping of the second phase that will deliver the full benefits of this work. It is envisaged that once funding for Phase 2 is secured, new Tasmania-wide catchment yield estimates utilising updated future climate projections will be developed and used to inform water resource assessments, water management planning, water infrastructure planning and water allocation decision making.

### ***Water accountability, metering and reporting framework review***

Many of Tasmania's catchments have reached full allocation in summer, and some are fully allocated in winter. With increasing competition for our freshwater resources, more accurate data on water usage will be required to ensure that the resources continue to be managed sustainably and equitably. The project will review the technology available, and the water use data required, to evaluate water resource management questions.

This Water Accountability, Metering and Reporting Framework Review Project will provide advice on contemporary policy settings for water use accountability, metering and reporting, and make recommendations for change.

### ***Groundwater Assessment Project***

The Groundwater Assessment Project will develop a desktop groundwater risk assessment tool, undertake targeted case-study groundwater research and support our understanding of groundwater use as well as the interaction of surface water and groundwater to enhance knowledge of risks and opportunities for groundwater use and management.



## DELIVERING HIGH-SURETY WATER THROUGH TASMANIAN IRRIGATION, IN PARTNERSHIP WITH FARMERS AND THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT

A priority for the Tasmanian Government is supporting industry to adapt, leverage opportunities for growth, and manage risk in a changing climate. Our investment in Tranche 2 and 3 of irrigation development through Tasmanian Irrigation, in partnership with farmers and the Australian Government, is ensuring access to highsurety water. This is a long-term, proven investment which is reducing the impacts of a changing climate and sustainably transforming Tasmanian agriculture.

In the last year, Tasmania has worked with Tasmanian Irrigation and the Australian Government to leverage further funding bringing total current commitments to \$232.1 million to support business case development and capital costs for Tranche 3 of irrigation development.

Tranche 3 key milestones have included:

- Secured \$4.65 million in additional funding to develop a business case for the South East Integration Scheme. The business case is progressing well.
- Developed the Don Irrigation Scheme to construction stage, including securing increased funding from Tasmanian and Australian Governments to support an expanded scheme from the proposed original concept.
- The Northern Midlands Irrigation Scheme project has been developed to the detailed business case stage. Tasmanian Irrigation is continuing work on the detailed design, with a view to the project being contracted and construction commencing in late 2022. This project is now substantially larger than originally envisaged.
- The Tamar Irrigation Scheme project and the Sassafras-Wesley Vale irrigation Scheme Augmentation project are both actively progressing. Both projects are significantly larger than originally envisaged and have been redesigned based on irrigator and community feedback. During the next twelve months, design of these projects will be finalised to enable business case development.

NRE Tas has worked with Tasmanian Irrigation, TasWater and a private proponent to secure \$26.5 million of Australian Government funding for smaller water infrastructure projects through the National Water Grid Authority's Connections and Small Projects funding pathways.

**\$20 million for four NWGA Connections projects with a total value of \$56 million:**

- Tasmanian Irrigation's Greater Meander Irrigation Scheme Augmentation Project. This project will enhance elements of the Greater Meander Irrigation Scheme and make a further 11,500 ML of irrigation water available while improving environmental outcomes in the water courses within the scheme area.
- TasWater's Shellfish Lease Water Quality Improvement Program to upgrade sewerage pump stations close to shellfish lease areas. This will significantly reduce the incidence of lease closures resulting from sewerage system spills.
- TasWater's expansion of the Penna Recycled Water Scheme. This project will divert an increased quantity of treated effluent away from an environmentally sensitive waterway to be beneficially re-used as an irrigation supply, delivering benefits to agriculture and to the environment.

- A private Proponent's project to develop the South Arm Recycled Water Pipeline. This project will deliver high quality recycled water to the South Arm Peninsula for use in irrigation activities, supporting enhanced agricultural outcomes on the Peninsula. The project will also deliver benefits to the regional community generally.

**\$6.5 million for two NWGA Small Projects with a total value of \$20.1 million:**

- TasWater's Bicheno Recycled Water Scheme. This project will distribute Bicheno's wastewater for use in irrigation – improving agricultural production in the region, supporting the local community and improving environmental outcomes.
- Tasmanian Irrigation's Lake Leake life extension upgrade. This project will upgrade the 140 year old Lake Leake dam wall to ensure it continues to function effectively for a further 100 years. This will ensure the ongoing availability of 14,600 megalitres of irrigation water.

## EXISTING PARTNERSHIPS IN WATER AND CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT

There are many ongoing partnerships delivering good outcomes within Tasmania's water sector, such as:

- The Tamar Estuary and Esk Rivers (TEER) Program and the Derwent Estuary Program, each improving science and evidence to inform decision making; and delivering coordinated management from catchment to coast.
- Water monitoring and data sharing between NRE Tas, Hydro Tasmania, the Bureau of Meteorology and others for a range of ongoing water management outcomes such as inputs to water resource assessment, flood warning systems, managing sustainable water access and water use restrictions.
- Partnership between the Tasmanian Government, Australian Government, Tasmanian Irrigation, farmers and industry delivering high reliability irrigation water supplies across the state.

It is envisaged that as the Rural Water Use Strategy and associated projects continue to be implemented that NRE Tas will seek further opportunities to build on existing partnerships, and to add value through further coordination and alignment of goals, priorities and activities.



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## CONTINUING THE BUSINESS OF MANAGING TASMANIA'S FRESHWATER RESOURCES

NRE Tas is responsible for management of the sustainable use and allocation of Tasmania's water resources. In 2021-2022, the following priority activities are being undertaken:

- ✓ Progressed the development of the *Water Management Amendment (Irrigation District Delegation) Bill* for introduction to Parliament in 2022 to enable self-management of irrigation schemes.
- ✓ Adoption of the Great Forester River Catchment Water Management Plan 2021.
- ✓ Detailed planning and engagement work to support reviews of the Mersey and Lakes Sorell and Crescent Water Management Plans.
- ✓ Water management planning prioritisation approach developed to better engage with community and stakeholders.
- ✓ Awareness raising and compliance audits and investigations of water licences, dam permits and dam safety management obligations.
- ✓ Visiting all 53 long-term river health monitoring sites plus three additional sites in the Plenty River.
- ✓ Progressing implementation of the 39 recommendations of the *Review of the Tasmanian River Health Monitoring Program, 2018*, for example collection of algal cover, algal biomass and fine deposited sediment information in addition to macroinvertebrate samples to improve the understanding of overall nutrient and sediment status at a site.
- ✓ Hydrological monitoring at 81 surface water and 88 groundwater sites.
- ✓ Undertaking hydrological modelling activities that support day to day water resource management, planning, and drought and flood risk preparedness.
- ✓ Licensing and permitting activities including assessing water licence and dam permit applications, watercourse authorities and transfers.
- ✓ Policy support for water management in the urban and rural water sectors, and to support irrigation development and other emerging water-dependent industries.
- ✓ Participation in the National AELERT community of practice to share knowledge for implementing contemporary regulation and compliance processes across water and dam safety.

# Water Management Insights March 2021- 2022



## Compliance and enforcement

**170** Regulatory water access changes in response to high or low river flows

**17,754**

SMS messages sent to water licence holders

## Dam Safety Program

**47** Dam safety meetings with dam owners

## Licensing and permitting

**2,995** Total number of water licences

## Water monitoring

**81** Stream gauging sites monitored for flow and basic water quality

**10** Monthly assessments of catchment wet/dry conditions

**88** Groundwater bores monitored for level and basic water quality

**2,079 GL**

Total water allocations for town water, stock and domestic water, irrigation, aquaculture, commercial and non-Hydro Tasmanian hydro-generation.

Approx.  
**35,000 GL**

Average annual water runoff for Tasmania

## OTHER PARTNERSHIPS AND INVESTMENTS FOR THE USE, MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION OF TASMANIA'S FRESHWATER RESOURCES

Many areas of government, government businesses, non-government organisations and individuals play a role in managing our freshwater resources, catchments, waterways and water quality. Below are just some of the highlights of the existing work of water sector and land management partners that contribute to the management and protection of our freshwater resources.

- + \$100,000 over four years announced in the 2021-22 State budget for the Cows out of Creeks Program, currently in its 8th round, and managed by Dairy Tas. The program delivers off-stream watering systems, fencing and stock crossings to ensure cows are not accessing waterways.
- + An additional \$900,000 over four years announced in the 2021-22 State budget for the Tasmanian Landcare Action Grants Program, delivered in partnership with the Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association (TFGA) and Landcare Tasmania, working with individuals and communities across Tasmania to deliver catchment and landscape restoration and improvement activities.



- + Ongoing Tasmanian Government funding for the Tasmanian Regional Natural Resource Management bodies with \$4.2 million announced in the 2021-22 State budget over three years beginning in 2022-23.
- + Tasmanian Government support of the Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture delivered in partnership between NRE Tas and the University of Tasmania to undertake agricultural research, development, extension and education.
- + Tasmanian Government support of the Australian Government funded Tasmanian Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub and Tasmanian Government delivery of two Future Drought Fund programs jointly funded through the Australian Government's Future Drought Fund and the Tasmanian Government, the:
  - Regional Drought Resilience Planning program and,
  - Farm Business Resilience program.
- + TasWater, supported by its Council Owners and the Tasmanian Government, has committed to investing \$1.7 billion over 10 years in new and upgraded infrastructure, with projects spanning dam safety, environmental compliance, water security and drinking water quality. These projects will improve water supply security for towns across Tasmania and reduce the environmental impacts of wastewater management.
- + Regional Natural Resource Management partnerships such as:
  - Tamar Estuary and Esk Rivers Program.
  - Tamar Estuary River Health Action Plan Catchment Works Project.
  - Regional Land Partnerships Programs.
  - Derwent Estuary Program.
- + Hydro Tasmania, Tasmania's largest water manager, undertakes a broad range of activities, including scientific studies, sustainability reviews, and ongoing collaboration and engagement with stakeholders such as NRE Tas, other water and environmental managers and other important stakeholders including anglers, paddlers and irrigators.

Photos:

- cover: cauliflowers, Simon di Salis
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