



Inspector-General of
Water Compliance

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Compliance Priorities and Workplan

August 2021

Published by

Inspector-General of Water Compliance

August 2021

Cataloguing data

Title: Inspector-General of Water Compliance

Accessibility

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Acknowledgement of the Traditional Owners of the Murray–Darling Basin

The Author pays respect to the Traditional Owners and their Nations of the Murray–Darling Basin. We acknowledge their deep cultural, social, environmental, spiritual and economic connection to their lands and waters.

The guidance and support received from the Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations, the Northern Basin Aboriginal Nations and our many Traditional Owner friends and colleagues is very much valued and appreciated.

Aboriginal people should be aware that this publication may contain images, names or quotations of deceased persons.

Inspector-General of Water Compliance

The Inspector-General of Water Compliance was established by the Australian Parliament to provide the public with transparency, tell the truth on how water is managed and ensure compliance with the Basin Plan's water rules. The Inspector-General independence and focus on community engagement ensures that water compliance is fair and equitable.

The Inspector-General has powers to scrutinise, provide oversight of and monitor compliance with the Basin Plan 2012, Water Resource Plans and intergovernmental agreements and arrangements relating to water resource management in the Basin.

The Inspector-General is supported by an office with a capability and performance branch working from five regional offices across the Murray-Darling Basin (Goondiwindi, Narromine, Albury, Mildura and Loxton).

Work plan

This work plan reflects the Inspector-General's immediate approach to ensure water is managed in accordance with the rules set by the Basin Plan and report the facts to the community.

The Inspector-General has a proactive approach to address the risks in water compliance and areas where the office has concerns about water management and compliance.

As an independent regulator, the Inspector General has discretion in performing compliance and enforcement functions, and at any time may use his powers and choose to change his priorities beyond those published in the work plan.

Key priorities in the work plan

The Inspector-General takes a risk-based approach to develop his compliance priorities. This enables the Inspector-General to focus its regulatory activities and resources on areas where the relative risks of possible or actual non-compliance or harm are greatest.

Three compliance priorities areas have been identified for the 2021-2022 year:

- Whether the compliance and accounting approaches adopted by each Basin government are effective in responding to water theft and accountability
- Oversight of the water metering and floodplain harvesting measurement reforms
- Scrutinising increasing groundwater use

The work plan will be reviewed throughout the year to ensure the compliance and enforcement responses and activities are appropriate and effective. The work plan includes activities that may span multiple years to complete and may also be varied to reflect new priorities, inquiries requested of the Inspector-General and changing risks.

Development of the work plan

The work plan is designed to respond to current and emerging risks and challenges impacting water compliance. A range of factors are considered to set the work program, including:

- what community groups and stakeholders have told the Inspector-General and his office
- analysis of water compliance data and information demonstrating the level of compliance with the Basin Plan and water management arrangements in each state
- the condition of the Basin including water quality, health of the river and the environment
- monitoring and oversight of governments meeting their commitments to the public and each other
- the current state of water reforms and potential future scenarios and likely challenges.

The Inspector-General recognises there are current challenges that affect the Basin's communities and resources. Consideration of short, medium and long-term risks has highlighted that climate, changing demographics, new technologies and changing social values, are all influencing and shaping the industries and communities in the Basin. The Inspector-General will adapt the work plan as required.

Delivering against the work plan

The Office of the Inspector-General will undertake inquiries (if planned or required) and publish reviews and audits to report to the community how water is management. The Inspector-General will publish the outcomes of key areas of work to support transparency and ensure compliance with legislation.

Compliance Work Program Priority 1: Effective approach to water compliance

Why it's a priority	Inconsistency in Basin states' response to water theft risks undermining confidence. Left unchecked, these differences, including in the mandatory response to water theft, reinforces views that water management is unfair or not effective.
Inspector-General's Desired outcome	Ensure the Basin has clear, fair and effective compliance frameworks.
What the Inspector-General will do	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review whether Commonwealth water agencies are abiding by the Basin Plan rules• Independently review and publicly report on each State's water compliance and enforcement systems• Work with states to develop a set of common metrics to be used to communicate and report on water compliance performance and effort across the Basin

Priority 2: Water metering and measurement

Why it's a priority	Reforms to ensure accurate metering and measurement of water take is far from complete. Whilst policies have been developed and implementation plans are rolling out, increased meter accuracy and its benefits to communities, landowners and regulators is still some years away. This lag creates a risk of unchecked water theft.
Inspector-General's Desired outcome	Accurate metering and measurement of water take is in place across the Basin
What the Inspector-General will do	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Monitor jurisdictions commitments to develop and implement metering and measurement reforms• Audit key areas of risk• Provide easy to understand information to the community with a focus on outcomes

Priority 3: Managing increasing groundwater use

Why it's a priority	Groundwater extraction is increasing. All governments need to ensure that this precious resource is sustainably managed, particularly for surviving the next drought. If increasing use and demand for groundwater is not appropriately managed, it can lead to declining pressure levels, permanent salinity and drawdown problems, reversal of flow direction and affect dependent ecosystems.
Inspector-General's Desired outcome	Ensure the ground water management rules are complied with and enforced
What the Inspector-General will do	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Audit Water Resource Plan groundwater compliance• Audit Sustainable Diversion Limits accounting data in NSW in response to non-compliance in 2019-20 to ensure integrity of the SDL compliance process• Consider the effectiveness of Basin states' ground water management rules