

FAQs

Q. What is the role of the Office of the Inspector-General of Water Compliance?

A. The role of the Office of the Inspector-General of Water Compliance is to rebuild trust and confidence in the Murray-Darling Basin Plan by providing communities the assurances they are seeking through strong and independent regulation of water compliance.

The Inspector General has the powers to identify any compliance issues and enforce compliance with water rules. The Office will independently regulate the regulators.

Q. Why was this Office created?

A. The Office of the Inspector-General of Water Compliance was created to serve as a strong and independent regulator of Australia's largest water resource, by separating compliance from Basin Plan implementation to establish an independent compliance and enforcement office.

Powers that were previously held within the Murray-Darling Basin Authority have been transferred to the Office of the Inspector-General of Water Compliance. The Office will independently and effectively manage compliance with the Basin Plan, Water Act and other associated government resource plans to restore community confidence in Basin Plan implementation.

Q. How will the Office operate differently to the Murray-Darling Basin Authority or state and federal governments?

A. The Office is independent and has been established to provide independent authority, and act as an impartial arbitrator by regulating the regulators. The Office is not a government department and will not formulate or set policy.

Importantly, its role is not to duplicate the role of the states which remain the frontline regulators for water compliance. The states will still be the primary frontline regulators, and the Office of the Inspector-General of Water Compliance will oversee states' compliance with implementation of the Basin Plan to ensure effective management of Australia's largest water resource.

Q. What powers does the Office of the Inspector-General of Water Compliance have?

A. Legislation has been passed which includes new penalties for water theft and illegal trading of water. This legislation gives the Office the power to act to ensure compliance and enforcement of water rules.

The Office will be able to provide people with the information they need, act independently on matters or issues raised, and provide an independent, fair, evidence-based and balanced voice for Basin communities.

The Office is committed to rebuilding trust and confidence in the Murray-Darling Basin Plan.

Q. What are the 2021-22 priorities of the Office of the Inspector-General of Water Compliance?

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

Q. What are the immediate priorities of the Inspector-General?

- A. The Murray Darling Basin community has made it clear in conversations with the Inspector-General that there is a lack of confidence in the Murray Darling Basin Plan and regulators. As a result, the Inspector-General has commissioned the following consultative assessments to ensure that all parties are working to plan, and that best practice water management is being delivered. Two of three consultative assessments are underway, with the third due to commence on 6 September 2021.

Commonwealth Environmental Water Office (CEWO)

Focus - review the robustness and adequacy of the water management cycle including the delivery, measurement and review the use of water for the environment.

State/Territory Compliance and Enforcement

Focus - establish how decisions are made across the jurisdictions relating to water accounting, entitlements, measurement, allocation, governance, and barriers that inhibit the compliance and enforcement functions.

River Murray and Lower Darling River System water data and accounting processes

Focus - assess the adequacy and robustness of the processes used to measure water at both Basin and individual valley scale in the River Murray and lower Darling River systems.

Q. How will the Office report on outcomes?

- A. Reviews and audits completed by the Office will all be published in a timely manner and will be available online.

Q. How will the Office be able to do its job in the Basin effectively?

- A. The Office of the Inspector-General of Water Compliance comprises a team in five regional locations across the Basin to ensure the Office is well-embedded within the Basin communities it serves and can effectively engage with people and communities who live and work in the area.

Q. How can people or communities contact the Office of the Inspector General?

- A. Anyone who has concerns around water compliance is encouraged to contact the Office www.igwc.com.au. The Office is committed to delivering outcomes in Basin communities. We also recommend contacting local frontline regulators for concerns such as metering, on-ground water and water theft.