Australia’s water resources

Reliable and sustainable water resources support the health and wellbeing of all Australians. Access to water raises productivity and supports economic growth across a range of agricultural and other industries. Effective water policy makes a difference to all Australian communities, especially rural and farming communities.

The Australian Government works to enhance the sustainable, efficient and productive management and use of water resources in the Murray–Darling Basin and across Australia.

Building water infrastructure for the 21st century

The government has committed $2.5 billion to fast-track and build water infrastructure through the $500 million National Water Infrastructure Development Fund and the $2 billion National Water Infrastructure Loan Facility. This includes $293 million to build:

- Rookwood Weir ($130 million) in northern Queensland
- Dungowan Dam ($75 million) in New South Wales
- North Adelaide Irrigation Scheme ($45.5 million) in South Australia
- Macalister Irrigation District ($20 million) in Victoria
- South West Loddon Pipeline ($20 million) in Victoria
- McLaren Vale winter storage ($2.5 million) in South Australia.

In addition to the fund and loan facility, the government has:

- provided $200 million for irrigation projects in Tasmania to improve productivity and jobs in agriculture
- spent $125 million under the Great Artesian Basin Sustainability Initiative to cap uncontrolled artesian bores and replace wasteful open earthen bore drains with closed pipes systems—recovering 253 gigalitres of water for the Great Artesian Basin
- committed $8 million over two years to enable a seamless transition from the terminating Great Artesian Basin Sustainability Initiative to a new, long-term funding model that encourages greater private investment in water infrastructure.

Key facts

- Australia has an accessible water storage capacity of almost 81,000 gigalitres. In 2015–16 this was around 68% full at 55,000 gigalitres.
- In 2015–16 the gross value of Australian agricultural production was more than $56 billion, and more than $15 billion of this was irrigated production.
- Total water use on Australian farms decreased by 3% or 238,900 megalitres between 2014–15 and 2015–16.
- 9.2 million megalitres of water was used on Australian farms to support agricultural production in 2015–16.
**Murray–Darling Basin**

The Murray–Darling Basin Plan delivers on the government's commitment to restore the Basin's rivers and wetlands to health while supporting strong regional communities and sustainable food production.

To return the Murray-Darling river system to health, the Basin Plan requires a reduction in diversions to a more sustainable level. To reach this level, the government is prioritising the recovery of water through investment in infrastructure projects and is also investing in projects that will result in the same environmental outcomes with less water being removed from productive use.

Since 2007–08, the government has committed almost $13 billion to implement the Murray–Darling Basin Plan and associated activities. More than $8 billion of this funding is for on-farm and off-farm water infrastructure upgrades across the Basin.

As part of this funding, the government is working to improve the efficiency and productivity of on-farm irrigation water use and management through several programs, many of which return a portion of their water to the government for environmental flows.

- **Sustainable Rural Water Use and Infrastructure Program**
  This program is investing in rural water use, management and efficiency, including improving water knowledge, reforming markets and purchasing water for the environment. Water recovered through this program is used to maintain the health of the Murray–Darling Basin river system. There are more than 50 programs funded under this program; including:
  - **On-Farm Irrigation Efficiency Program**
    This program assists irrigators within the southern connected system of the Basin to modernise their on-farm irrigation infrastructure while returning water savings to the environment.
  - **Private Irrigation Infrastructure Operators Program in New South Wales**
    This program aims to improve the efficiency and productivity of water use and management of private irrigation networks while returning water savings for the environment.
  - **Healthy HeadWaters Water Use Efficiency Project**
    This project assists irrigators in the Queensland Murray–Darling Basin by investing in efficient irrigation systems and technologies that reduce water loss, deliver long-term social and economic benefits, and return a share of water savings to the Basin's rivers, wetlands and floodplains.

- **Commonwealth On-Farm Further Irrigation Efficiency Program**
  Through this program, the government will fund infrastructure for participating irrigators to improve the efficiency of their farm water use. This will deliver long-term social and economic benefits while enabling additional water to be recovered for the environment.

- **South Australian River Murray Sustainability Program**
  The South Australian Department of Primary Industries administers this program, through which it invests in irrigation efficiency projects under a national partnership agreement with the Australian Government.

**Leadership on water policy**

The government provides national leadership in water policy and legislation reform for all Australians. Clear direction and leadership is increasingly important as Australia faces the challenge of ensuring sustainable water supply in the face of a drying climate and growing demand for water.

Through the *Water Act 2007* and reforms such as the National Water Initiative, the government provides national leadership to work with the states and territories to support agricultural and other industries, environments and communities that rely on Australia's water resources.

The government is also a signatory to the Lake Eyre Basin Intergovernmental Agreement. This agreement provides for implementation of policies and strategies concerning water-related natural resources in the Lake Eyre Basin Agreement Area to avoid or eliminate, so far as reasonably practicable, adverse cross-border impacts.

Internationally, Australia has taken a leadership role in implementing water-related sustainable development goals through the United Nations High-Level Panel on Water. Australia is also leading work through the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) to develop an ISO international standard for water efficiency testing and rating of domestic water-saving products.

**Urban water management**

Australia's urban water sector delivers water supply, sewerage and drainage services to more than 20 million people. The government provides leadership and coordinates national action for reform, in consultation with state and territory governments. Between 2005 and 2017, the government invested more than $2.4 billion to assist cities and towns across Australia to improve their water security. While significant progress has been made on increasing the efficiency and sustainability of urban water services, further reforms are being developed that focus on improved governance, better economic regulation and enhanced competition.