

Statement of Intent

Draft Water Plan (Barron) 2022

July 2022



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Contents

1.	Purpose	iii
2.	Background.....	4
2.1	Water planning framework.....	4
2.2	Status of water planning in the Barron	4
3.	Considerations for draft water plan.....	8
3.1	Links with other government policy	8
3.2	Public interest	10
3.3	Preliminary public consultation notice	11
3.4	Climate change.....	11
3.5	Recognition of Aboriginal values and uses in managing water in the plan area	11
4.	Preparation and effect of the draft water plan.....	13
4.1	Technical assessments	13
4.2	Water plan outcomes and measures.....	15
4.3	Strategies to achieve outcomes	18
4.4	Monitoring and reporting.....	21
5.	Consultation and submission process	22



Foreword

I am pleased to release this statement of intent to support community consultation on the draft Water Plan (Barron) 2022. The statement of intent provides an overview of the draft water plan and what it means, as well as the key issues raised during previous consultations and how these inputs have been addressed. The chief executive has also released a draft Barron water management protocol and draft Barron water entitlement notice for consultation. These draft instruments implement the draft water plan.

The plan area in Far North Queensland is large, covering the Barron River catchment and the upper reaches of the Walsh and Mitchell rivers. It spans the bulk of the Atherton Tablelands region and includes the Mareeba-Dimbulah Water Supply Scheme (MDWSS). Notably, parts of the Walsh and Mitchell River catchments are included in the plan area to allow all supplemented water from the MDWSS to be managed under one water plan.

Water in the plan area is important for town water supply, agriculture, fishing, tourism, hydro-electric power generation and the environment. The socio-economic assessment report that informed the draft water plan showed a projected growing population coupled with overall increases in demand for water for economic growth. Cultural engagement has shown that Traditional Owners want and expect to be part of the management process for water, and the environmental assessment report shows environmental strategies have generally been successful and ecological outcomes in the existing water plan have been achieved.

To shape the draft plan, public consultation was undertaken with water user groups, councils, environmental interest groups, Traditional Owners, industry groups and water service provider Sunwater. It also incorporates the best science available from technical and scientific assessments. Thank you to those people who have contributed ideas and vital information to help prepare the draft water plan.

The draft water plan recognises existing entitlements and builds on the strengths and learnings from the existing water plan which will expire in December 2022. Proposed changes in the draft water plan will provide certainty, security and flexibility for water users as well as provide for the environment. Cultural values have been considered as well as climate change impacts.

I encourage anyone with an interest in water resources in the region to get involved and lodge a submission on the draft plan on or before 19 August 2022. This document provides details of how to make submissions to assist you with this process.

Your feedback will help ensure the final water plan meets the needs of the community and the environment in the Barron plan area.

Hon Glenn Butcher MP

Minister for Regional Development and Manufacturing

Minister for Water

How to make a submission

Anyone can make a submission about the draft water plan. These submissions are important to finalising the plan which will replace the Water Plan (Barron) 2002. Submissions close on 19 August 2022.

The draft Barron water management protocol is a key document used to implement a water plan. Any person affected by the draft protocol can make a submission on this instrument.

Affected water entitlement holders are invited to make submissions on the draft Barron water entitlement notice but these submissions can only be made by the individual who holds that water entitlement.

Submissions must be made in writing and include the name, address and signature of the person or persons making the submission. An authorised officer (such as the executive officer or secretary of a committee) must sign submissions made by entities or interest groups. Respondents should clearly outline the issues that their submission concerns and include facts used to support their submission.

Email and internet submissions will be accepted and are considered to have been 'written and signed'.

A submission form must be completed and is provided in **Attachment 1** or the form can be completed online at www.getinvolved.qld.gov.au

Lodging submissions

Submissions can be made to the Department's Chief Executive on or before **5pm, 19 August 2022**.

Submissions can be made and lodged as follows:

- online at www.getinvolved.qld.gov.au
- by printing and completing a submission form available in **Attachment 1** of this document
- emailing submissions to waterplanning.barron@rdmw.qld.gov.au
- sending your submission by post or courier to:

Department of Regional Development, Manufacturing and Water
Chief Executive
Water Services Northern Region
Attention: Coordinator, Water Plan Implementation
PO Box 156
Mareeba Qld 4880

Submissions should identify any information that is considered confidential. The Queensland Government will endeavour to maintain confidentiality of information that is identified in this way; however, submissions are subject to the *Right to Information Act 2019* and *Information Privacy Act 2009*, and information may be required to be released upon requests made under these Acts. Furthermore, other legal obligations, such as the processes of the courts or natural justice, may also override confidentiality.

Acknowledgement of the Traditional Owners of the Barron water plan area

The Department of Regional Development, Manufacturing and Water acknowledges and pays respect to the Traditional Owners in the Barron water plan area of Queensland. The contributions of earlier generations, including the Elders, who passed on their knowledge of natural resource management, are valued and respected.

The department acknowledges that the Traditional Owners of this region have a deep cultural connection to their lands and waters and that there is a need to recognise Traditional Owner knowledge and cultural values in water planning.

1. Purpose

The Queensland Government has prepared a draft water plan, which when finalised, will replace the Water Plan (Barron) 2002. To implement the draft water plan, a draft water management protocol (draft protocol) and draft water entitlement notice (draft WEN) have also been developed for consultation.

The purpose of this document is to provide information on the intent and the effect of the draft water plan. It explains how and why the Water Plan (Barron) 2002 (the existing water plan) is being replaced, the factors that were considered in the preparation of the draft water plan, and the key changes and the reasons behind them.

The existing water plan has been in place since 2002 and has been implemented, monitored and assessed. Information gathered from these processes has been important in developing the draft water plan. There has also been an additional 20 years of climate data to consider as well as changing land use and population increases.

The draft water plan provides recognition of the interests of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders in relation to the water resources for the plan area. The draft water plan also proposes new and more relevant environmental, social, cultural, and economic outcomes, strategies and performance indicators, building on new and improved science that has been gathered over the life of the existing water plan.

Available documents

Relevant documents include:

- Notice of the availability of the draft Water Plan (Barron), draft water management protocol, and draft water entitlement notice
- Draft Water Plan (Barron) 2022
- Draft Barron Water Management Protocol
- Draft Barron Water Entitlement Notice.

Accessing the draft planning documents

Copies of the above documents are available on the department's website at www.rdmw.qld.gov.au

2. Background

2.1 Water planning framework

The *Water Act 2000* (the Act) provides the legislative framework for the sustainable planning, allocation and management of water resources in Queensland. It requires that all planning, allocation and use of water must 'advance sustainable management and efficient use of water'.

Water plans provide the principal mechanism for achieving the requirements of the Act, setting out detailed strategies and outcomes for water to be shared between water users, including the environment.

A new water planning framework was introduced to the Act by the *Water Reform and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2014* and commenced in December 2016. The new planning framework is delivered through new documents designed to make the water planning process more flexible and efficient in its delivery of planning outcomes, making it better able to respond to stakeholder and community needs as well as allow for adaptive management over time as new information becomes available.

The new water planning framework consists of:

Overarching legislation:

- *Water Act 2000*.

Subordinate legislation:

- Water Regulation 2016
- water plans.

Statutory Instruments:

- water entitlement notices
- water management protocols
- resource operations licences; and
- operations manuals.

Under the previous water planning framework, the rules and arrangements relating to water supply schemes were mostly contained in the resource operations plan. As provided under the Act, these arrangements are now primarily contained within the resource operations licence and corresponding operations manual. While these instruments must be consistent with the water plan, changes can be proposed by the resource operations licence holder at any time (Sunwater is the resource operations licence holder for the Mareeba-Dimbulah Water Supply Scheme). The resource operations licence holder must engage with stakeholders on any proposed changes prior to submitting new arrangements to the Queensland Government for approval.

2.2 Status of water planning in the Barron

2.2.1 Water plan area

The Barron water plan area is in Far North Queensland and covers approximately 5200 km² (**Figure 1**). It comprises the Barron River catchment and the upper reaches of the Walsh and Mitchell rivers. The plan area covers the bulk of the Atherton Tablelands region and includes the Mareeba-Dimbulah Water Supply Scheme (MDWSS).

The existing water plan applies to all surface water, excluding overland flow water, and underground water in the Atherton and Cairns Northern Beaches underground water management areas.

Utilisation of available water resources in the plan area are supported by water resource infrastructure. Tinaroo Falls Dam supplies the MDWSS through a network of channels, pipelines and supplemented streams, and includes inter-basin transfers between the Barron and Walsh-Mitchell

River catchments. Parts of the Walsh and Mitchell River catchments were included in the plan area to enable the management of all supplemented water from the water supply scheme under a single water plan. Other major water storages in the plan area include Copperlode Dam on Freshwater Creek (operated by Cairns Regional Council) and the Kuranda Weir on the Barron River (operated by CleanCo Queensland).

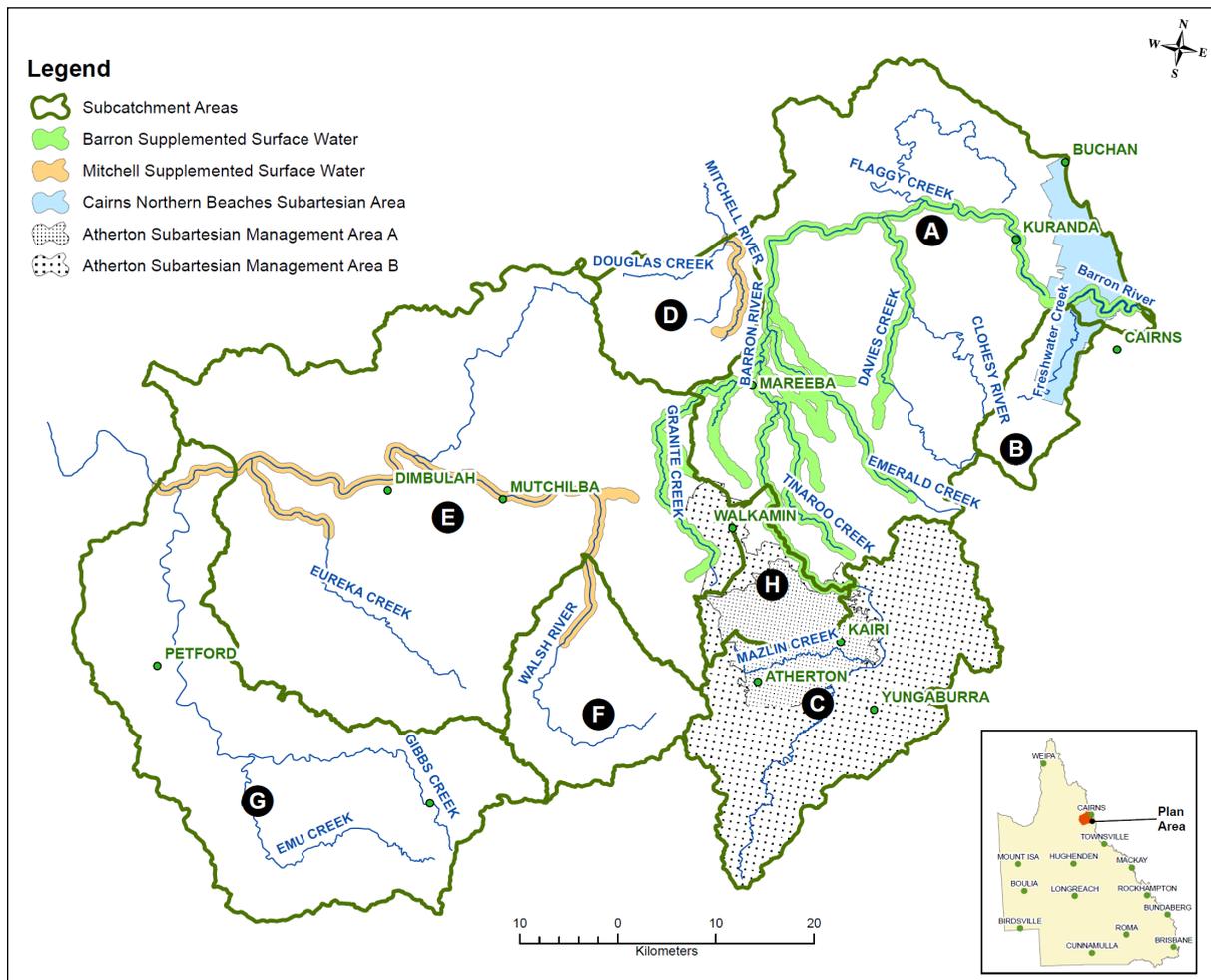


Figure 1 – Plan area

2.2.2 Timeframe to renew the water plan

A water plan expires after 10 years and is replaced, unless it is repealed prior to this date, or its expiry is postponed. The existing water plan expires on 19 December 2022.

2.2.3 Implementation of existing Barron water plan

The existing water plan manages surface water within the water plan area (excluding overland flow water) and underground water within the underground water management areas. It provided for the conversion of some water entitlements to tradeable water allocations separate from land, the amendment of water licences to state daily and annual volumetric limits for taking water and made unallocated water available. Flow management rules in the water management protocol have supported the ecological condition of the plan area to achieve specific ecological outcomes.

The existing water plan was amended in 2009 to include the management of underground water in the Atherton underground water management area, extended water trading for supplemented surface water upstream of Lake Tinaroo and amended area-based unsupplemented surface water licences in Rocky, Spring and Cherry Creek catchments to volumetric limits. A further amendment was

undertaken in 2015 to improve and streamline the framework for the allocation and management of surface water and underground water.

New hydrologic and ecological data and greater scientific understanding of the river systems in the Barron water plan area has been developed during the past decade. Complementing this, ongoing hydrological and ecological monitoring has provided a greater understanding about how management arrangements are performing in providing for sustainable water management.

This information, along with information on the implementation of water management arrangements, trading of water allocations and water accounting, has provided a greater understanding about how well the existing water plan has worked and achieved its outcomes.

2.2.4 Minister's report

Section 49 of the Act requires the Minister to report on the effectiveness of each water plan and its implementation at least every five years. The report addresses the following reporting requirements outlined in the Water Regulation 2016:

- whether the water plan is advancing the sustainable management of Queensland's water resources
- what amendments, if any, have been made to the water plan since its commencement
- information on water use and authorisations in the water plan area, including water entitlements and water taken or interfered with under statutory authorisations
- a summary of the findings of research and monitoring for the water plan area
- an assessment of the effectiveness of the implementation of the water plan in achieving its outcomes
- any identified risks to the water plan's outcomes; and
- any non-compliance under a water entitlement or other authorisation in the water plan area.

The Minister's performance assessment report for the Water Plan (Barron) 2022 (June 2019) indicated that the existing water plan has been effective in achieving plan outcomes and is advancing the sustainable management of water. A summary of this report is provided in **Attachment 2**.

The report highlighted the following potential emerging issues that would need to be addressed in the development of the draft water plan:

- underground water demand and access
- water use and demand changes in the MDWSS
- climate change; and
- consultation with Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders to better understand cultural flow requirements.

2.2.5 Preliminary public consultation notice

The water planning process formally commenced in March 2021 when the Minister published the Preliminary Public Consultation notice (the notice) - proposed replacement of the Water Plan (Barron) 2002. The notice outlined the following issues that needed to be considered in replacing the water plan:

- effectiveness of outcomes, measures, strategies and performance indicators
- opportunities for new unallocated water reserves

- potential future infrastructure arrangements
- effectiveness of water sharing and water trading rules
- effectiveness of environmental management rules
- effectiveness of groundwater management arrangements in the Atherton and Cairns Northern Beaches groundwater management areas
- update science assessments to include the past 20 years of climate and flow data, and
- include consideration of climate change
- identify and provide for water related cultural outcomes in consultation with Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders; and
- requirements under the *Human Rights Act 2019*.

The notice asked stakeholders to put forward their thoughts on water management in the plan area through a submission. Section 3.3 provides detail on the submissions received on the notice.

3. Considerations for draft water plan

Under section 45 of the Act, the Minister must consider all of the following in making a draft water plan:

- regional plans made under the *Planning Act 2016* that apply to the plan area (see section 3.1.1)
- environmental values established under the Environmental Protection (Water and Wetland Biodiversity) Policy 2019 (under the *Environmental Protection Act 1994*) (see section 3.1.2)
- the public interest (see section 3.2)
- the results of any public consultation undertaken prior the preparation of the draft water plan through the release of a preliminary public consultation notice (see section 3.3)
- the water-related effects of climate change on water availability (see section 3.4); and
- the interests of any Aboriginal parties or Torres Strait Islander parties in relation to the water resources for the plan area (see section 3.5).

3.1 Links with other government policy

In developing the draft water plan, the Minister considered national, state and regional sustainable development goals and all management strategies and policies relevant to the plan area. Some of the key policies are described below.

3.1.1 Far North Queensland Regional Plan

The Minister must consider regional plans made under the *Planning Act 2016* (Planning Act) when making a draft of a water plan (section 45 of the Act). The Planning Act seeks to achieve ecological sustainability by:

- managing the process by which development takes place, ensuring the process is accountable, effective and efficient and delivers sustainable outcomes
- managing the effects of development on the environment (including managing the use of premises); and
- continuing to coordinate and integrate planning at local, regional and state levels.

The draft water plan supports sustainable water resource development within the Barron catchment and is consistent with the Planning Act. When preparing the draft water plan, consideration was given to the Far North Queensland Regional Plan 2009-2031 (Department of Infrastructure and Planning 2009) which encompasses the following local government areas in the Barron water plan area, Cairns and Tablelands Regional Councils and Mareeba Shire Council.

The Far North Queensland Regional Plan identified strategic priorities for water in the region including ensuring more efficient management and use of water and on-going need for water to accommodate growth in the region.

The draft water plan supports these priorities through the following plan outcomes:

- to maintain the availability of water for the supply of urban water to towns and communities dependent on the water resources of the plan area

- to provide water for domestic purposes in the plan area
- to provide water to meet increased demand for urban water supply for Cairns local government area from Lake Placid
- to provide mechanisms that support water being made available for growth in industries dependent on water resources in the plan area
- to maintain the availability of water for various purposes in the plan area including urban and rural needs as well as hydro-electric power generation, tourism and aquaculture; and
- to improve and support the effective and efficient operation of the market in water allocations and relocatable water licences.

3.1.2 Environmental values, water quality and Great Barrier Reef Outcomes

In preparing the draft water plan, the Minister must consider water quality objectives and environmental values established under the Environment Protection (Water and Wetland Biodiversity) Policy 2019 (EPP Water and Wetland Biodiversity), which is subordinate legislation to the *Environmental Protection Act 1994*. The environmental values (EVs) and water quality objectives (WQOs) for Wet Tropics region waters were updated in 2020 and these updated values were considered in developing the draft water plan.

The Reef 2050 Water Quality Improvement Plan (WQIP) is a joint commitment of the Australian and Queensland governments that seeks to improve the quality of water flowing from the catchments adjacent to the Great Barrier Reef (GBR). Its specific purpose is to identify management and monitoring requirements for all land-based pollution to improve the quality of water flowing from catchments adjacent to the reef. As a GBR catchment, targets have been set for the Barron River to reduce sediment and nutrient pollution loads and to ensure that aquatic ecosystems are protected from pesticides at the end of the catchment.

The environmental assessments for the draft water plan considered both the EVs and WQOs under the EPP Water and Wetland Diversity and the Reef 2050 WQIP. Specifically, the draft water plan provides outcomes to:

- maintain and if possible, improve flows of water to which this plan applies that support long term water quality suitable for riverine and estuarine ecosystems; and
- maintain and if possible, improve flows of water to which this plan applies, to support the freshwater flows to the estuary to deliver sediment, nutrients and organic matter that support productivity in the receiving waters of the Great Barrier Reef.

Figure 2 shows the links between the draft water plan outcomes and the environmental values.

It is important to note that while water plans can support good water quality outcomes through responsible flow management, there are many other pressures on water quality that are external to water planning provisions and cannot be managed under the Act. These include point source pollution, poor land use management, and degradation of riparian vegetation and wetlands.

Water Plan Outcomes	Environmental values				EV categories
Environmental e.g. maintaining flows to support native plants and animals and their associated freshwater habitats	 Aquatic Ecosystems				Ecological
Economic e.g. support water being made available for growth in industries	 Irrigation	 Farm water	 Stock	 Aquaculture	Human uses
		 Aquatic food consumption	 Industrial use		
Social e.g. maintain flows of water to significant areas that support water-related aesthetic and recreational values	 Primary recreation	 Secondary recreation	 Visual recreation	 Drinking water	
Cultural e.g. maintaining flows to support the cultural and spiritual values of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders in the plan area	 Cultural and spiritual values				Cultural

Figure 2 – Alignment between the draft water plan outcomes and Environmental Values

3.2 Public interest

The draft water plan provides a mix of opportunities to meet the economic aspirations of the communities in the plan area while putting mitigating strategies in place to protect the area’s social, environmental, and cultural values.

The draft water plan recognises the social, economic, environmental and cultural outcomes to be achieved so that the diversity of public interest in the plan area can be maintained.

3.3 Preliminary public consultation notice

Forty-five submissions were received from a range of stakeholders including local water users and entitlement holders, community, environmental and regional development groups, local government and government entities. Issues raised in submissions within the scope of the draft water plan included:

- improving rules for underground water and surface water such as for trading and water sharing
- recognising cultural values and uses
- managing releases for the environment and the Barron Gorge hydro-electric power station
- improving consultation with water users
- addressing operational rules for the Mareeba-Dimbulah water supply scheme
- managing overland flow water
- providing unallocated water reserves and addressing increase in demand for water
- considering climate change impacts
- maintaining water rights; and
- addressing water quality impacts.

3.4 Climate change

The Department of Environment and Science (DES) has assessed the current and potential future climate for the Barron water plan area. Current trends in average temperature, potential losses from evaporation and annual rainfall were compared to the historical period. Predicted trends to 2030 and 2050 were generated from a range of General Circulation Models (GCMs) described in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Fifth Assessment Report and further evaluated by CSIRO for Australian conditions. The predictions considered the Representative Concentration Pathway (RCP) 4.5 and 8.5 emissions scenarios as a realistic envelope for the future emissions trends.

The temperature predictions for the Barron catchment show increases and the scenarios diverge around 2030, meaning some temperature rise is inevitable. There is also an associated increase in potential water losses through evaporation across the catchment. Annual rainfall data shows a small decreasing trend although the projected rainfall has a large uncertainty which is typical for Queensland. Monthly rainfall data shows more variability alongside a trend towards a small increase in dry season months and decreases in the summer months. These seasonal rainfall changes are projected to lower annual rainfall totals and will affect the generation of natural streamflows from the catchment.

Climate change has been considered in the draft water plan by comparing historical trends with recent years (1996 to 2020) to determine the extent of changes in the climate over time. Predicted changes and its impact on water availability have been taken into consideration in the draft plan settings for performance objectives to help manage climate change risks and adverse impacts.

3.5 Recognition of Aboriginal values and uses in managing water in the plan area

Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders have a deep connection to their traditional land and waters. Engagement with Traditional Owner groups connected to the catchment was a key aspect of the plan review. Through an eternal facilitator, the department undertook engagement with Traditional Owner groups to identify the social, spiritual and cultural values and uses for water in plan area. The

draft water plan includes outcomes, objectives and strategies for the management of water that reflect these values and uses.

Section 4.1.4 describes the issues identified from this engagement process.

4. Preparation and effect of the draft water plan

The preparation of the draft water plan has involved extensive data collection and technical assessments as well as preliminary consultation on the Minister's preliminary public consultation notice and thorough review of provisions in the existing water plan.

4.1 Technical assessments

The technical assessments and other analyses undertaken to inform the development of the draft water plan included hydrologic, socio-economic, cultural and environmental assessments. Technical assessments provide information on the effectiveness of the strategies in the existing water plan and operational rules and identify key issues for consideration in the development of the draft water plan. A spatial analysis of overland flow development was also undertaken to determine the risk for overland flow management consideration.

A summary of the hydrologic, cultural, socio-economic, and environmental assessments and their key findings are summarised below.

4.1.1 Hydrologic assessment

The Barron hydrologic model has been re-calibrated, the data period extended to include data from 1889 to 2019 (compared with the previous model using data from 1913 to 1995) and transitioned from the IQQM to the eWater Source model platform. These changes mean the existing plan modelled performance objectives are no longer applicable as a new hydrologic model has been developed.

Water science has significantly improved since the existing water plan was developed over 20 years ago. The hydrologic model has been used to develop new performance indicators and inform objective setting that improve the water management framework in the draft water plan.

The modelling undertaken to develop the new performance objectives ensures all existing water entitlements, water management rules and arrangements under the existing framework are included in assessments to ensure a business-as-usual transition from the existing water plan and model to the draft water plan.

4.1.2 Environmental risk assessment for the water plan area

The existing water plan identifies a number of ecological outcomes for the Barron water plan area. These relate to maintaining water-dependent habitats, such as wetlands, and important ecological processes. An ecological risk assessment was conducted by the Department of Environment and Science (DES) to assess the effectiveness of these outcomes. This assessment was critical for developing environmental outcomes in the draft water plan and determining environmental flow objectives to meet these outcomes.

The environmental assessment identified ecological and geomorphological (land form) values (e.g. lakes and springs) that are critically linked to flow. The assessment considered the water requirements of these values to determine the risks to the values from both existing and potential water resource development and management scenarios.

Overall, the draft water plan strategies for managing and allocating water ensure that the environmental outcomes can be met.

4.1.3 Socioeconomic assessment

The socio-economic assessment provides a social and economic profile of the Barron water plan area and identifies how socio-economic changes are likely to impact on water resources in the area. The assessment examined changes in the social, demographic, economic trends and water demand and supply data relevant to the plan area over the past 10-20 years. It also analysed the social and economic outcomes of the existing plan as well as the values, pressures and threats affecting these outcomes.

Major implications for water demand in the future include the growing population, which is projected to increase by 43% for the entire plan area, with growth concentrated in the Lower Barron River associated with growth in the northern suburbs of Cairns. Population growth will likely be driven mainly by migration, which has been historically sustained by the economic opportunity in the area. Increases in population around major town centres such as Cairns will increase the demand for potable town water in the plan area.

The rural population of the plan area increased significantly since 2011. The data suggest that rural, primarily farming areas, especially in the Lower Barron River may be affected by expanding urbanisation. The drought-sensitive perennial horticulture sector and the growing urban population will both have major implications on future water demand.

A combination of lifestyle and natural endowments including the Great Barrier Reef and Wet Tropics World Heritage Areas support a leisure and recreation-based service economy based on tourism and permanent migration to the region. In addition, agriculture continues to drive primary production based on a mixture of commodities including tree fruits such as bananas, mangoes and avocados; crops, especially sugar cane; and vegetables including potatoes and pumpkins.

Risks to the current outcomes of the plan are low and are supported with good data and an understanding of the underlying risk factors. However, there are a number of trends that cut across many of the outcomes that may generate future risks. In particular, major underlying trends include: the increase in area and gradual maturation of horticulture crops, the increase in population within and adjacent to the plan area, and the potential for increased evaporation as a result of climate change.

Significant key values for consumptive, and non-consumptive uses of water exist in the plan area. Collectively, these values will likely increase the overall demand for water, the requirements for water security, and demand for water quality from multiple user groups. These key values and user groups include:

- town potable and commercial water users, which will drive population and employment growth in the plan area
- agricultural water users, which remain significant drivers of the economy and may be increasingly exposed to drought as crops transition to high-value horticulture
- cultural and economic values associated with Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders; and
- environmental service values, which include: provisioning services to the commercial and recreational fishing and aquaculture sectors, non-use values associated with tourism and recreation, and the significant existence values of the Great Barrier Reef and Wet Tropics World Heritage Areas.

4.1.4 Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander engagement and assessment of objectives and outcomes

Engagement with Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders connected to the water plan area was undertaken with the assistance of Buda:Dji Aboriginal Development Association Aboriginal Corporation (BADAAC). Topics discussed included cultural values of the waterways, concerns from custodians about water and water management, changes custodians had observed and aspirations for the future.

The key themes that emerged from discussions were:

- waterways, rivers, springs are highly significant components of the Aboriginal cultural landscape in the plan area
- engagement – Aboriginal custodians want and expect to be part of the process to manage water
- talking to the right people – the complexities around custodianship of sites and cultural knowledge extend beyond native title. The right people need to be at the table
- access – custodians and land users are unsure about legal rights of access to water, to waterways and to cultural sites. There is a need to educate all stakeholders
- the protection of keystone cultural species such as platypus, eel, water cherry, *guddabah* and *bica* should be considered in the water plan
- having places to connect to country is highly important for Aboriginal custodians, these places are often associated with water (springs, lagoons, rivers); and
- participants questioned how custodians can benefit financially from the management of water, which they see as a native title right.

The assessment from the engagement process resulted in the development of cultural outcomes and strategies to achieve those outcomes in the draft water plan. In addition, identification of cultural keystone species and cultural indicators will allow future establishment of baseline data on flow requirements for these species and indicators. This is an initial step to improve the way the Queensland Government engages with Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders in the Barron water plan area.

4.2 Water plan outcomes and measures

The existing water plan provides for outcomes for water in the plan area including, social, economic and ecological outcomes. For the draft water plan, these outcomes have been restructured into general, social, economic, cultural and environmental outcomes in accordance with section 43 of the Act. This change includes contemporising the plan outcomes in line with state-wide approaches to outcomes of recent water plans, new scientific knowledge and stakeholder feedback from consultation. A review of existing water plan outcomes is provided in the Minister's Report for the Barron (**Attachment 2**).

The general outcomes build on the outcomes for water specified in the existing water plan. These outcomes for water already seek to balance social, economic, cultural and environmental outcomes, cultural outcomes are now included. As water planning is an adaptive management process and uses risk-based approaches, management decisions based on new information will help advance sustainable management of the resource. A new general outcome seeks to improve understanding of the environmental, social, cultural, spiritual, and economic aspects of water planning. It also seeks to improve our understanding of climate change impacts on water availability.

The general water plan outcomes are that water to which this plan applies is to be managed and allocated in a way that:

- recognises that the natural state of watercourses, lakes, springs and aquifers has changed because of the taking of, or interference with, water
- seeks to achieve a sustainable balance between:
 - the economic, social, cultural and environmental outcomes; and
- promotes improved understanding of:
 - matters affecting the flow-related, and underground water dependent, health of ecosystems, including springs, in the plan area
 - the flow requirements of ecosystems in the plan area
 - the water required for social, spiritual and cultural uses of water by Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders
 - the water required to deliver social and economic benefits to communities in the plan area; and
 - the impact of climate change on water availability.

4.2.1 Economic outcomes

The draft water plan will maintain availability of water for consumptive and non-consumptive purposes and provide mechanisms to support growth for industries who are dependent on water in the plan area. The plan includes provision for the continued use of all water entitlements and other authorisations to take or interfere with water.

A new economic outcome has been included to support the economic aspirations of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders in the plan area.

The economic water plan outcomes for this plan are:

- the provision for the continued use of all water entitlements and other authorisations to take or interfere with water
- to maintain the probability of being able to take water to which this plan applies under a water entitlement
- to maintain the availability of water to which this plan applies for industries dependent on water resources in the plan area, including, for example—:
 - agriculture
 - hydro-electric power generation
 - tourism; and
 - aquaculture
- the provision of mechanisms that support water being made available for growth in industries dependent on water resources in the plan area
- to make water to which this plan applies available to support the economic aspirations of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders; and
- to improve and support the effective and efficient operation of the market in water allocations and relocatable water licences.

4.2.2 Social outcomes

The social outcomes for the draft water plan provide for water for domestic purposes, and water-related aesthetic and recreational values in the plan area. Water availability will also support population growth in towns and communities dependent on water resources in the plan area as well as the social aspirations of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders in the plan area.

The social water plan outcomes for this plan applies are:

- to maintain:
 - the availability of water for the supply of urban water to towns and communities dependent on the water resources of the plan area; and
 - the flows of water to which this plan applies to significant areas that support water-related aesthetic and recreational values, including the Barron Falls, Barron Gorge and Tinaroo Falls Dam
- to provide water to which this plan applies:
 - for domestic purposes in the plan area; and
 - to meet increased demand for urban water supply for Cairns local government area from Lake Placid; and
- to make water available to support the social aspirations of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders.

4.2.3 Cultural outcomes

The draft water plan includes new cultural outcomes, which have developed from key issues identified from consultation with Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders in the plan area. These seek to maintain flows that support water-related cultural, spiritual and social values of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders and reflect their key desire to protect important flow-related values and uses. In addition, protection of Flaggy Creek which is a site of significant cultural conservation value, has been respecified as a cultural outcome. In the existing water plan, protection of Flaggy Creek is an ecological outcome.

The cultural water plan outcomes for this plan are:

- to make water to which this plan applies available to support the cultural aspirations of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders
- to maintain the flows of water to which this plan applies that support the water-related cultural, spiritual and social values of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders
- to recognise and respect the cultural and spiritual connection to water of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders through:
 - engaging Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders into the processes for making decisions about the future management and allocation of water in the plan area; and
 - integrating knowledge about Aboriginal tradition, Island custom and science into the processes for making decisions about the future management and allocation of water in the plan area; and
- to manage and allocate water in Flaggy Creek in a way that protects areas of significant cultural conservation value associated with the creek.

4.2.4 Environmental outcomes

The Department of Environment and Science (DES) assessed the risk posed by water resource development in the plan area to the environment. Strategies are in place to support and maintain the current condition of ecological assets in this area. Environmental outcomes generally correlate with the aim of the Environmental Flow Objectives. While the outcomes of the existing water plan have generally been achieved, supporting the health and persistence of waterholes is now focussed on the Walsh part of the plan area (Subcatchments E, F and G) in line with the findings of the DES assessment. In addition, as Barron water plan area is a catchment to the World Heritage listed Great Barrier Reef (GBR), two new GBR related outcomes have been included in the draft water plan. These new proposed outcomes ensure freshwater flows from the plan area to the GBR and delivery of organic and inorganic matter to support productivity in receiving waters of the GBR.

The environmental water plan outcomes for this plan area are:

- to maintain and if possible, improve flows of water to which this plan applies that support:
 - native plants and animals and their associated freshwater habitats
 - riparian systems and their functions
 - long term water quality suitable for riverine and estuarine ecosystems; and
 - river forming processes
 - ecosystem food chains, and the provision of carbon energy; and
 - the health and persistence of waterholes in subcatchment areas E, F and G
- to maintain and if possible, improve flows of water to which this plan applies, that support the continued capability of one part of a river system to be connected to another:
 - throughout the watercourse network; and
 - within riparian zones, floodplains and associated freshwater habitats
- to maintain and if possible, improve flows of water to which this plan applies that support freshwater flows to the estuary in the plan area in order to:
 - provide freshwater flow from the plan area to marine waters of the Great Barrier Reef
 - deliver sediment, nutrients and organic matter that support productivity in the waters of the Great Barrier Reef that receive flows of water from the plan area
 - maintain brackish water estuarine habitat
 - benefit native estuarine plants and animals; and
- the management and allocation of groundwater in the plan area to maintain groundwater contributions to-
 - the flow of water in watercourses, lakes and springs; and
 - groundwater dependent ecosystems including wetlands, springs and terrestrial vegetation communities.

4.2.5 Measures

The draft water plan proposes a measure to help guide implementation to achieve water plan outcomes. The measure proposes, within 12 months of commencing the plan, to develop a monitoring, evaluation and reporting strategy, to support assessment of the effectiveness of the plan and its implementation. The monitoring, evaluation and reporting strategy outlines the strategies to achieve each plan outcome, the evaluation questions to determine if the outcome was effective, the data needs and knowledge gaps and the reporting mechanism. This measure is commonly provided for contemporary plans and provides transparency in how outcomes are to be evaluated.

4.3 Strategies to achieve outcomes

The proposed outcomes will be achieved through a range of strategies included in the draft water plan and supporting instruments. The proposed strategies build on those contained in the existing water plan and incorporate recommendations from the suite of technical assessments that have informed development of the draft water plan as well as consideration of issues arising from the preliminary consultation undertaken.

4.3.1 Performance indicators and objectives

The draft water plan contains new performance indicators and objectives for water allocation security and environmental flows. A performance indicator is a hydrologic metric used to assess whether a target level (the objective) set in the water plan is being achieved. The performance indicators and objectives are used to test whether certain actions (such as trades or changes to management rules) can be permitted under the water plan.

The new performance indicators and objectives result in no net reduction in the level of protection for water allocation holders and environmental flows, while increasing flexibility for water users. There is also no change in the way Sunwater currently operates the MDWSS.

For water allocation security, the new performance indicator is based on a performance ratio that has been adopted for other recent water plans in Queensland with the objective allowing an acceptable

level of change that has considered climate change impacts. The performance ratio for a water allocation group is equal to the simulated average annual volume divided by the nominal volume. This approach offers benefits of simplifying the objectives in the plan as it applies to both supplemented and unsupplemented water allocations, maintains security of the water allocations while providing greater flexibility for water users and Resource Operations Licence holders.

The findings of the environmental assessment report were used to identify a set of improved performance indicators to support ecological processes in the Barron water plan area. These are:

- (a) Low flows for longitudinal stream connectivity
- (b) Low flows to support in-stream riffles
- (c) High flows to support estuarine processes
- (d) High flows to support riparian and floodplain vegetation communities
- (e) High flows to support fluvial geomorphology river forming processes; and
- (f) Mean annual flow volumes to support downstream water requirements.

The new performance indicators (a) to (e) use a count of consecutive period days with streamflow volume above or below threshold values to identify performance against required outcomes. Performance can be assessed simply by determining the percentage of days in the simulation period above or below the threshold volume and duration at relevant reporting nodes. For example: (a) Low flows for longitudinal stream connectivity is identified 'at risk' when a duration of at least 7 consecutive days of flow is below 5 ML/day at relevant reporting nodes; or (d) High flows to support riparian and floodplain vegetation communities is identified as 'achieved' when there is at least any one day of flow greater than determined bank full volume at relevant reporting nodes. Performance indicator (f) is consistent with the existing plan and typical of other water plans.

4.3.2 Changes to unallocated water

The draft water plan proposes to continue to provide limited reserves of unallocated water to meet future demand in areas from water resources that are not fully allocated. Total unallocated water volumes and purposes of unallocated water are specified in the draft water plan and the breakdown of volume, purpose and location is specified in the draft water management protocol.

Community engagement, submissions analysis and analysis of regional water supply security assessments undertaken by the department and the Cairns Regional Council's water security strategy indicates that:

- demand for the existing General reserve of 300 ML in subcatchment area B is low with alternatives available including underground water and overland flow water, and purchase of existing entitlements in water markets
- there is a continued need for the Strategic reserve of 4000 ML for Cairns town water supply as identified in the Cairns water security strategy
- expectations that the water plan will recognise cultural values and social and economic aspirations of Aboriginal stakeholders and can substantially be met through the provision of new Indigenous reserves in the draft water plan, and respecifying the existing General reserve as an Indigenous reserve; and
- expectations for unallocated water to be made available generally.

The hydrologic assessment undertaken indicates that there is scope to provide an additional 3850 ML of unsupplemented surface water across the plan area. Under the draft plan this is proposed to support Indigenous reserves in additional subcatchments and as a General reserve in the Walsh part of the plan area.

The draft water plan states the volumes of the unallocated water reserves whilst the draft protocol further specifies the sub catchments where these reserves are available (**Figure 3**).

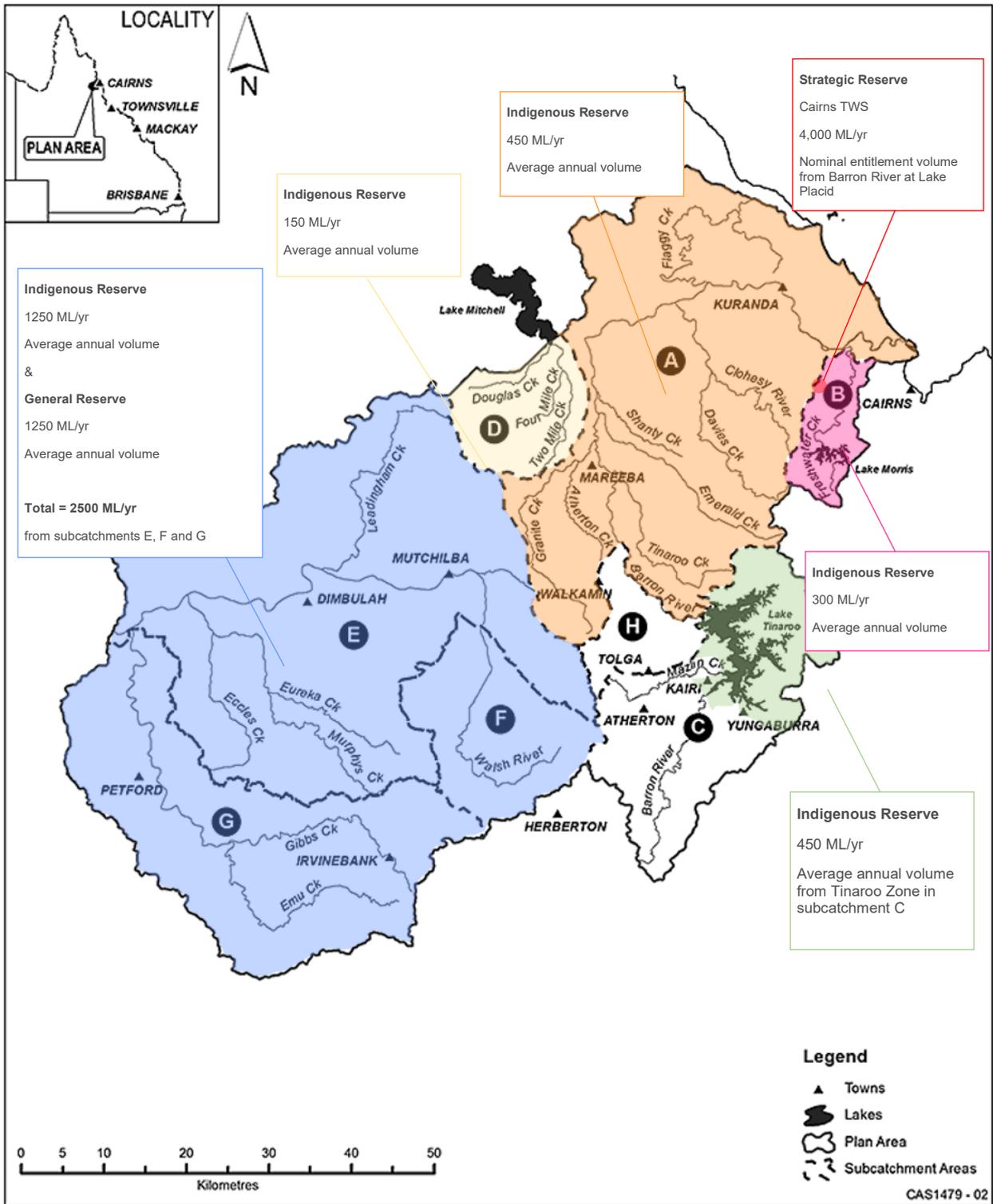


Figure 3 Map showing the unallocated water reserves by purpose for subcatchments

4.3.3 Other strategies

Other strategies provided in the draft water plan have not changed from those in the existing water plan. These strategies include prescribed activities and statutory authorisations, mechanisms for surface water and underground water management and trade. Note that the draft water management protocol proposes some changes e.g. to the water sharing rules for underground water to improve

management. These changes do not increase the risk to the resource and include changes to the announced entitlement notifications and bore setback distances for water trading in the Atherton groundwater management area.

As in the existing water plan, the draft water plan does not manage overland flow water given the low risk to the water resource from development. This level of risk is supported by a spatial analysis of overland flow development undertaken by the department. The department will monitor development and address this issue if the risk to the resource increases.

The draft water plan provides for amendment of a number of Relift licences and repeal of stock and domestic licences to be consistent with the new water planning framework and draft plan. These amendments are necessary for the Relift licences to make their attributes, such as purpose, consistent with plan requirements, and stock and domestic licences are no longer required as the Act already provides for this activity. Each affected entitlement holder will be contacted individually about any proposed change to their existing entitlement and will also have opportunity to make submissions on the draft water entitlement notice.

4.4 Monitoring and reporting

The draft water plan provides for monitoring to be addressed through the water management protocol. Reporting provisions are already provided under the Act for a resource operations licence or distribution operations licence. These requirements will help inform water market participants as well as ongoing assessments of the draft water plan's performance against stated outcomes and strategies. Regular reporting is important for transparency, to inform stakeholders on the progress with implementation and to inform the Minister's reporting of the effectiveness of the management strategies in achieving water plan outcomes. Information gathered will also inform future amendments and reviews as part of ongoing adaptive management throughout the life of the water plan. The measure discussed in section 4.2.5 will also outline the monitoring and reporting requirements.

5. Consultation and submission process

The release of this statement of intent and the draft water plan provides an opportunity for anyone to provide feedback on draft water plan proposals. All interested parties are encouraged to make a formal submission about the draft water plan.

Submissions which support aspects of the draft water plan, as well as those that suggest improvements, are encouraged. All properly made submissions will be considered by the chief executive prior to finalisation of the draft water plan.

Persons affected by the draft protocol and persons affected by the draft WEN are invited to make a submission on these respective instruments where applicable.

We will engage directly with interested parties and local stakeholder groups through meetings, briefings and dialogue with relevant Queensland Government representatives to discuss specific aspects of the draft water plan. Meetings will be held in townships in the plan area and on-country during the consultation period. To discuss any of the proposals or register for a meeting with one of our water planning officers, please call 1800 697 805.

Attachment 1: How to make a submission—Submission form

Barron draft water plan for consultation

You can share your views by completing this survey. We welcome interest in the planning process and value your input. This form allows you to make a submission and identify any concerns you would like addressed in developing a new water plan for Barron. Please identify yourself by providing contact details so that we can respond to your submission or contact you for further consultation.

Submissions must be made to the department's Chief Executive and received by close of business Friday 19 August 2022. You can attach additional information and submit it with this form by email or post. For more information visit www.rdmw.qld.gov.au

Name and contact details for person/s making the submission

Title (Mr/Mrs/Ms/Dr/Other) _____

Surname _____

First Name _____

Address _____

Postcode _____

Organisation (if applicable) _____

Position _____

Phone No. _____

Mobile _____

Email _____

Signature 1 _____ Date _____

Signature 2* _____ Date _____ *if necessary, e.g. for an organisation

Which interest groups or sector (if any) represent your interests in water resources? (You may tick more than one box) (*Compulsory question*)

- Aboriginal peoples or Torres Strait Islanders
- Grazier
- Irrigator
- Environmental interests
- Dryland farmer
- Tourism
- Small business
- Local government
- Mining/petroleum industry
- NRM Board/Catchment
- Industry group (please specify)
- Community group (please specify)
- Other (please specify)

What local government area or council area is your property/ business/ interest located within?

.....

Part A—General

What aspects of the draft Barron water plan do you support?

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What are your suggestions for how surface water could be better managed under the draft Barron water plan?

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What are your suggestions for how underground water could be better managed under the Barron water plan?

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Do you have feedback on how specific proposals in the draft water plan could be implemented?

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Are you submitting on the draft replacement water plan, the draft water management protocol and/or the draft water entitlement notice? (You may tick more than one box) (*Compulsory question*)

- Draft replacement water plan (refer to Part B)
- Draft water management protocol (refer to Part C)
- Draft water entitlement notice (refer to Part D)

Part B—Draft replacement water plan

What proposals in the draft replacement water plan do you support? (*Compulsory question*)

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How do you think the draft replacement water plan could be improved?

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Part C—Draft water management protocol

What features of the draft water management protocol do you agree with? (*Compulsory question*)

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How do you think the draft water management protocol could be improved?

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Part D—Draft water entitlement notice

What is your licence number? (*Compulsory question*)

.....

Please identify any details associated with your water entitlement that you believe are incorrect.

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Number of additional pages attached to this submission form _____

NOTE: All submissions will be treated as confidential. However, submissions may be viewed by other parties under the provisions of the *Right to Information Act 2019* and *Information Privacy Act 2009*.

Office Use Only

Submission No:

Date Received:

Issue Category/ies:



Attachment 2: Minister's Report for Barron Water Plan (2002)

Under the *Water Act 2000* (s49) (the Water Act), a report on each water plan must be prepared at least every five years to assess the effectiveness of the plan and its implementation. The report must address the following matters as outlined in the Water Regulation 2016:

- whether the water plan is advancing the sustainable management of Queensland's water resources
- what amendments, if any, have been made to the water plan since its commencement
- information on water use and authorisations in the water plan area, including water entitlements and water taken or interfered with under statutory authorisations
- a summary of the findings of research and monitoring for the water plan
- an assessment of the effectiveness of the implementation of the water plan in achieving the plan's outcomes
- any identified risks to the water plan's outcomes
- any non-compliance under a water entitlement or other authorisation in the water plan area.

Water Plan Reporting Matters	Comment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • whether the plan is advancing the sustainable management of Queensland's water resources 	<p>Sustainable management</p> <p>The outcomes and strategies in the Water Resource (Barron) Plan 2002 (the water plan) were designed to promote sustainable management and efficient use of water resources. The preliminary assessment summarised below indicates that the implementation of the water plan's strategies has largely been successful at advancing the sustainable management of Queensland's water resources, and the plan has successfully established an adaptive management framework that provides for continued sustainable management.</p> <p>The plan was developed based on hydrological models for the surface water catchments in the plan area for the period 1900 to 2007. These models help to better understand patterns of water use, availability and security. The plan includes outcomes that aim to encourage water efficiency while protecting the availability of water for all users in the plan area. Rules apply that ensure the security of supply for towns and other users. These rules also provide environmental flows to maintain the ecological integrity of the river systems. The plan provides for specific ecological outcomes for ecological assets and underground water in the plan area.</p> <p>The plan's outcomes provide a framework for the allocation and use of water resources for the economic, physical and social wellbeing of Queenslanders. The plan establishes tradeable water allocations with security for irrigated agricultural, urban and industrial growth. It also provides for a trading framework for water licences (or relocatable licences) and water allocations. The plan allows for stock and domestic use and essential services. The plan also supports aesthetic, economic and recreational values in the plan area.</p> <p>The plan includes an outcome to support the water-related cultural values of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the plan area. This outcome was unable to be fully assessed. The department has identified the need for further engagement with Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders to better</p>

Water Plan Reporting Matters	Comment
	understand current and emerging cultural water needs in the plan area. It is proposed that this important work would occur prior to the plan replacement in late 2022.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> an assessment of the effectiveness of the implementation of the plan in achieving the plan's outcomes 	<p>Implementation of the plan</p> <p>The department monitors the implementation of the water plan to make sure it is achieving its outcomes. The plan's outcomes were implemented by the release of the first protocol in 2005 and through subsequent amendments to the protocol since, as well as other specific actions required by the plan. The plan's strategies were effectively implemented through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the conversion of water entitlements to tradeable water allocations the amendment of water licences to state daily and annual volumetric limits for taking water making unallocated water available. <p>Specific ecological outcomes in the plan were provided for by flow management rules within the protocol.</p> <p>The plan is performing well, based on the evaluation in this report.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> information on water use and authorisations in the plan area, including water entitlements and water taken or interfered with under statutory authorisations 	<p>Water entitlements and use</p> <p>Water entitlements</p> <p>Surface water entitlements within the plan area are spread across eight subcatchment areas and consist of supplemented and unsupplemented water allocations and unsupplemented surface water licences. The only supplemented water is supplied from the Mareeba Dimbulah WSS with a total of 14 026 ML of high priority water and 190 398 ML of medium priority water. There are 285 unsupplemented surface water allocations with a total nominal volume of 22 363 ML located in the Barron and Tolga priority areas across 19 water allocation zones.</p> <p>The total number of surface water licences is 61 with a total nominal entitlement of 34 061 ML. Subcatchment area B near Cairns has the greatest nominal entitlement of 30 694 ML able to be accessed under water licences however, there are only nine actual water licences, with the majority of the water used for urban or town water supply purposes. Underground water entitlements within the plan area exist in the Atherton groundwater management area and the Cairns Northern Beaches groundwater management area. There are 238 water licences in the Atherton groundwater management area with a total nominal entitlement of almost 70 000 ML and there are 60 water licences in the Cairns Northern Beaches groundwater management area with a total nominal entitlement of 3 057 ML.</p> <p>Statutory authorisations to take water</p> <p>Water users have access to water taken under a water entitlement (e.g. water licence) or under a statutory authorisation through the Water Act (e.g. low risk or prescribed activities such as stock and domestic use). Unallocated water is reserved and can be made available for future use with consideration to protecting existing entitlements and the environment.</p>

Water Plan Reporting Matters	Comment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a summary of the findings of research and monitoring for the plan 	<p>Research and monitoring findings</p> <p>Additional monitoring and research undertaken since plan commencement is summarised in the Minister's Performance Assessment Report Water Plan (Barron) 2002 June 2019. Key findings of monitoring over the life of the plan include:</p> <p>The department has previously conducted a number of ecological monitoring projects across the catchment, however no new information has been collected since the previous report in 2014. Targeted collection of new science will be completed prior to the plan expiry to inform review of the plan.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> any identified risks to the plan's outcomes 	<p>Risks to plan outcomes</p> <p>Of the 21 plan outcomes assessed, one plan outcome was ranked as medium risk and the rest of the outcomes were ranked as low risk within the life of the plan. The medium risk related to potential impacts on long-term water quality suitable for riverine and estuarine ecosystems, with localised impacts on water quality below Tinaroo Falls Dam from hypolimnetic releases.</p> <p>Additionally, knowledge of Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander economic aspirations and cultural values is limited, and further consultation is required to better understand these.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> what amendments, if any, have been made to the plan since its commencement 	<p>Plan amendments</p> <p>As mentioned, the water plan has been amended since its commencement to reflect administrative changes relating to the Water Act these include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Land, Water and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2013 (LWOLA 2013) Land and Other Legislation Amendment Act (LOLA 2014) Water Reform and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2014 (WROLA 2014)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> any non-compliance under a water entitlement or other authorisation in the plan area. 	<p>Non-Compliances</p> <p>In the past five years, 20 cases of non-compliance in the Barron water plan area were investigated by the department and dealt with in accordance with the standard departmental compliance response procedures. In 2017, the department enhanced its focus on monitoring, identifying and responding to compliance issues state-wide, including in the Barron plan area. This has been supported by a realignment of resources accordingly, as well as the development and refinement of processes and procedures. These have been investigated and actioned.</p>



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