

ACT and Region Catchment Management Coordination Group

Annual Report 2024–25



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Cover images

Aerial photo of Murrumbidgee River Corridor.

View of the Murrumbidgee River from the hill at Kambah Pools.

Coordination Group members discussing options for sedimentation mitigation in the Murrumbidgee River.

Wattles along the riparian zone at Kambah Pool.

A two lane bridge over the Murrumbidgee River at Uriarra Crossing.



A typical sand bank along the Murrumbidgee River

Contents

Chair's Foreword	5
Acknowledgments	6
2024-25 Annual Report	8
1. Background	8
2. Membership	9
3. Resourcing	12
4. Geographical area of interest	13
5. ACT and Region Catchment Strategy 2016-2046	14
6. 2024-25 Achievement of Priorities	15
6.1 Governance, policy and planning	15
6.2 Communities	19
6.3 Regional Development	23
6.4 Water	26
7. 2025-26 Priorities	32
Appendices	37
Appendix A: SWIOID Review – Key principles from the Coordination Group	37
Appendix B: SWIOID Review – Letter to Tanya Plibersek	40
Appendix C: UMCN Annual Report	42
Appendix D: Financial Report 2024-25	44
Appendix E: Community representative update	45





Rapids on the Murrumbidgee River between Pine Island and Kambah Pool

Chair's Foreword

Yuma

I acknowledge the Traditional custodians of the Upper Murrumbidgee River Catchment; the Ngunnawal / Ngunawal, Ngarigo, Gundungurra, Ngambri and Walgalu peoples are acknowledged, along with all other Aboriginal people and families with enduring connections to the lands and waters that are Country.

These Aboriginal people have cared for and managed the lands and waters of this Country for tens of thousands of years. I respect their deep cultural, spiritual and practical knowledge, and the continuous connections that are the foundation of their Caring for Country practices - practices that provide cultural stewardship which are fundamental to having healthy catchments and communities

The 2024–25 financial year has once again highlighted the value of the ACT and Region Catchment Management Coordination Group (the Coordination Group) as a multijurisdictional body championing collaboration and communication. We continue to promote strategic policy and program approaches that contribute to safeguarding this unique catchment we all call home, and I extend my thanks to each of my fellow members for their commitment, innovation and courage in this space.

In previous Annual Reports, I shared concerns regarding the declining health of the upper Murrumbidgee River and its catchments. While there is work to be done, this year has seen new commitment from governments to address the declining health of the upper Murrumbidgee River and broader catchment, and to do so in a way that values local experiences and expertise. First and foremost, following the encouragement of member organisations and other catchment advocates, this year saw the Australian Government commit to review the Snowy Water Inquiry Outcomes Implementation Deed (SWIOID) for the first time since its inception in 2002. The Coordination Group will continue to champion improved quadruple bottom line outcomes in the upper Murrumbidgee throughout this process to support critical water resource management challenges in the ACT, the Queanbeyan-Palerang, Yass, and Snowy Monaro Regional Councils.

Greatest thanks to the many presenters and guests who shared their expertise and perspectives with the Coordination Group over 2024-25, many of which are

acknowledged below. These meetings provide a space for new ideas and connections to emerge in critical areas of water resource management, the power of which cannot be overstated. Some members, including myself, were also lucky enough to be invited to speak in other forums throughout the year to broaden the network of collaboration. I am incredibly proud of the growing community of catchment champions and look forward to continuing this important work in 2025-26.

Thank you to those in the Office of Water who directly supports the Coordination Group, especially our Secretariat, Ms Rinzin Lhamo; and Mr Ryan Breen (erstwhile Director of Water Policy and Planning) and Hannah Evans for their technical advice.

Finally, on behalf of the Coordination Group I extend our thanks to former ACT Minister for Water, Shane Rattenbury MLA, and welcome the new ACT Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, Suzanne Orr MLA. We appreciate your ongoing support of the Coordination Group, and appreciate the many opportunities taken to meet with me and the broader group. We will continue to provide robust advice and facilitate work to improve coordination and cooperation across the ACT and region.

Dr Maxine Cooper

*ACT and Region Catchment
Management Coordination
Group Chair*



Acknowledgments

The Coordination Group gratefully acknowledge the input of the following members, observers and peoples in the successes we have seen over the 2024-25 financial year.

- Emeritus Professor John Rodger, Chair of the Snowy Advisory Committee (SAC) for ongoing engagement and cross committee coordination of important regional water considerations.
- Senator the Hon. Katy Gallagher for her time in joining the Group for the Upper Murrumbidgee River fieldtrip in February 2025 and considering the Group's concerns around the health of the River.
- Alex McNee, Independent Water expert, who has provided considerable input to the Group's considerations.
- Members of the ACT and Region Catchment Strategy Review Project Working Group, whose diligence and advice continue to lead to excellent outcomes. Members include: Woo O'Reilly (ACT Office of Water), Andy Lowes (UMCN), Alex McNee (Independent water expert), Ruth Ormella (Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council), Wally Bell (Ngunawal Elder), and Kristanne Anderson (NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW)).
- Mr Peter Hyde, (NSW DCCEEW); and Andy Lowes, Australian River Restoration Centre (UMCN) and Upper Murrumbidgee Catchment Network (UMCN) Chair, for sharing their knowledge on water, rivers and catchment.
- Wally Bell, from Buru Ngunawal Aboriginal Corporation, for acting as interim observer on the Coordination Group, and providing excellent cultural water advice and contextualisation to the Coordination Group, his time is greatly appreciated.
- Dr Jamie Pittock, Australian National University (ANU) for his support to the Coordination Group in providing technical review and advice on SWIOLD related considerations and his input into generation of the 'Principles to Inform the SWIOLD Review'.
- Ryan Breen and Tess Williamson, Commonwealth Department of Climate Change, Energy, Environment and Water (DCCEEW) for providing presentations and updates to Coordination Group meetings on the 'Strategy to improve the health of the Upper Murrumbidgee', the 'Drought Operating Framework', the 'Restoring the Upper Murrumbidgee River (UMR) program', and the 'SWIOLD Review' process.
- Mr Peter Horne, from Australian Watertrust, Dr Daryl Fields, BC Hydro Board and Ms Lee Failings, Compass Resource Management, for continuing to sharing their knowledge of Structured Decision Making in British Columbia (i.e. a case study). This information has outlined modern collaborative processes for complex water management decisions, which are directly related to the SWIOLD considerations being reviewed by the Coordination Group. It also informs discussions around the implementation of a structured collaborative decision-making process for the Upper Murrumbidgee River to be included in the updated SWIOLD.
- Mr Simon Stratford, for providing an ACT Parks and Conservations Service viewpoint on conservation efforts at the Tharwa Sand Wash, Murrumbidgee River, and for joining the field trips to review potential conservation processes which may be employed along this stretch of river.



Aerial view of the Murrumbidgee at Angle Crossing

2024-25 Annual Report

1. Background

The [ACT and Region Catchment Management Coordination Group](#) (the Coordination Group) is a statutory advisory group established under the *Water Resources Act 2007* to facilitate improved governance and coordination of water catchment activities within the ACT and surrounding region.

The Coordination Group was established to:

- advise the ACT Minister for Water, Energy and Emissions Reduction
- improve coordination, cooperation and direction of effort in catchment management across the ACT and region

- facilitate collaborative problem solving for inter-jurisdiction and inter-agency issues
- provide advice on opportunities to align national, regional and territory investment in the context of integrated catchment management
- deliver and foster the implementation of an ACT and Region Catchment Strategy
- undertake other matters as determined by the ACT Minister for Water, Energy and Emissions Reduction.

This report outlines the activities of the Coordination Group from 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025 and fulfils the Coordination Group's obligations under Section 67D of the *Water Resources Act 2007*.



■ Members and observers of the Coordination Group on a field trip with Senator Katy Gallagher to outline priority issues for the Upper Murrumbidgee Catchment at Tharwa Sands

2. Membership

ACT and Region Catchment Management Coordination Group – Chair

Dr Maxine Cooper

The role of the Chair is to independently facilitate a collaborative process between jurisdictions to ensure the best outcomes are achieved. Dr Cooper who is the current ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment (part-time) and an adjunct Professor at the University of Canberra, has extensive leadership experience, having held key positions, including ACT Auditor-General, ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, and Chair and Executive Director of the ACT Water Security Taskforce and as a professional senior executive in the ACT Government, Brisbane City Council, New South Wales Government and in private enterprise. Dr Cooper is also the independent Chair of Landcare ACT and the Deputy Chair of the National Landcare Network.

ACT and Region Catchment Management Coordination Group – Community Representative

Mr Andy Lowes

The Community Representative's role within the Coordination Group is to contribute work undertaken by peak stakeholder groups, volunteers, community groups, property owners and land managers in maintaining and improving the region's catchments and waterways to discussions. Mr Lowes was appointed to the role of independent Community Representative in December 2023 and brings a wealth of knowledge in water planning and management and experience in community engagements. Mr Lowes is currently the Chair of the Upper Murrumbidgee Catchment Network (UMCN) and works as the Program Manager for the Australian River Restoration Centre (ARRC).

ACT and Region Catchment Management Coordination Group – Water Expert

Mr Alex McNee

The Water Expert's role within the Coordination Group is to contribute to the scientific and technical understanding of members on a broad range of catchment and water management issues, and provide insight into water planning, water quality and regional water matters. Mr McNee was appointed to the role of independent Water Expert in May 2024. Mr McNee offers a well-rounded combination of scientific knowledge, applied science, policy development and practical application in the field of natural resource and water management.

ACT City and Environment Directorate (Formerly Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate)

Deputy Director-General, Planning and Sustainable Development

The City and Environment Directorate supports the ACT Government's interests in water resource management, environmental protection and conservation. Through the Office of Water, it has responsibility for strategic water policy development within the urban and natural environments as well as inter-governmental engagement on national and Murray-Darling Basin water reforms.

Icon Water

Managing Director, Mr Ray Hezkial

**Proxy: Senior Advisor, Finance and Strategy,
Mr Adam Cowell**

Icon Water owns and operates the ACT's network of dams for drinking water, water treatment plants, sewage treatment plants, reservoirs, water and sewage pumping stations, mains and other associated infrastructure. It provides water and sewerage services to the ACT and bulk water to Queanbeyan. Icon Water's interests in healthy catchments include the region's security, quality and sustainability of water resources for various uses and minimising the impact of its network on the region's waterways. Icon Water provides the Coordination Group with considerable insight into the issues associated with the Region's drinking water supply and its quality and security.

National Capital Authority

Chief Executive, Ms Karen Doran

**Proxies:
Chief Operating Officer, Mr Hamid Heydarian
and Manager, Lake and Dam, Mr James Callan**

The National Capital Authority (NCA) manages many of Canberra's national, iconic and culturally significant landscapes and attractions, including Lake Burley Griffin and the surrounding lands. It is keen to see national land and water bodies used and enjoyed by visitors and Canberra residents for various recreational uses. It aims to ensure an appropriate balance between public access to national land and the protection of national assets. The NCA provides a much-appreciated national perspective to Coordination Group discussions.

NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water

Director, Mr Peter Hyde

**Proxy: Director, Regional Water Strategies,
Southern and Coastal, Ms Kristianne Anderson**

The NSW DCCEEW represents the NSW Government's interest in the ACT region catchment. It is responsible for water security and managing NSW water resources, including surface and groundwater management. The NSW DCCEEW also ensure equitable sharing of surface and groundwater resources, and that water entitlements and allocations are secure and tradeable. It is working towards delivering on the NSW Government's water goals through planning, policy and regulation and leading negotiations with the Commonwealth, including the Murray-Darling Basin Authority and other jurisdictions.

NSW South East Local Land Services

General Manager, Mr Luke Pope

**Proxy: Manager, Delivery Support,
Ms Rebecca Bradley**

The South East Local Land Services (LLS) brings agricultural production advice, biosecurity, natural resource management and emergency management into a single organisation. Its services add value to local industries, enhances natural resources, protects industries from pests and disease, and helps communities respond to and recover from natural disasters. The South East LLS will ensure the natural assets, local industries, landholders and communities of the surrounding tablelands region are represented in the Coordination Group.

Regional local government members

The local government areas of **Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council** (QPRC), **Snowy Monaro Regional Council** (SMRC) and Yass Valley Council significantly contribute to managing and protecting the region's natural resources.

Local governments undertake a wide range of activities related to catchment management, including developing and implementing land use planning, managing public land and regulating private activities. They play a key role in translating the policies of the Australian and state governments into local and on-ground projects. As such, their input to regional strategic planning, economic development and water management is vital to providing the best outcomes for an inter-jurisdictional catchment.

Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council – Deputy Chair

General Manager, Ms Rebecca Ryan – Proxy is Director Infrastructure Services, Mr Mike Duff

Snowy Monaro Regional Council

Chief Executive Officer, Ms Noreen Vu – Proxy is Coordinator, Strategy Development, Ms Gina McConkey.

Yass Valley Council

Chief Executive Officer, Mr Gayleen Burley – Proxy is Director, Planning and Environment, Ms Julie Costa.

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate

Executive Branch Manager, Regional, Infrastructure, Planning and Transport Branch, Policy and Cabinet Division

The Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate (CMTEDD) attends all meetings and provides strategic advice and support on cross-border matters.

Observer

Wally Bell is a Ngunawal Traditional Custodian and Knowledge Holder of his clan group, the Yharr. Wally holds a Certificate III in Conservation and Land Management and is certified as a NSW Bushfire Fighter.

Wally holds positions on at least nine recognised organisations such as Buru Ngunawal Aboriginal Corporation, ACT Government, ACT Government Natural Resource Management Advisory Group.

Wally actively participates in all aspects of Aboriginal cultural heritage and land management for the area that lies within his ancestral boundary and engages with the wider community on developing an awareness of local Ngunawal Aboriginal culture.

Wally attends Coordination Group meetings in this capacity as an observer and provides advice and information to the group on First Peoples context and cultural values in water management.



■ A typical deep pool and rapids section of the Murrumbidgee River

3. Resourcing

Secretariat services and support are provided for the Coordination Group on an ongoing basis through the OoW within the Climate Change, Energy and Water Division of the ACT City and Environment Directorate.

Members of the Coordination Group cover their own staff time from their respective budgets. As independently appointed positions, the Chair, the Community Representative and the Water Expert are entitled to receive City and Environment funded honorariums as determined under the ACT Remuneration Tribunal Determination (Determination 15 of 2024).

The Coordination Group's financial report for the 2024-25 financial year is in [Appendix D: Financial Report 2024-25](#). Coordination Group members provide funds from their respective budgets into the Coordination Group fund. For 2024-25, total funds of \$107,000 were contributed by members. Funds are managed within a holding account by the ACT City and Environment Directorate.

The Budget Sub-group (the Sub-group), established within the Coordination Group in 2021-22, provides advisory support to the Coordination Group on budget utilisation. The Sub-group met in March 2025 to review financial status and potential investment opportunities for the Coordination Group. The Sub-group made several recommendations related to investment opportunities in 2024-25 which also helped inform the 2025-26 priorities. The Sub-group also highlighted the need for continued funding contributions from existing members and emphasised the importance of exploring investment opportunities for the broader benefit of the ACT and region.



■ A popular swimming hole on the Murrumbidgee River at Pine Island Reserve

4. Geographical area of interest

The Coordination Group's geographical area of interest is the upper Murrumbidgee Catchment, which comprises the ACT and parts of the local government areas of:

- Snowy Monaro Regional Council
- Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council
- Yass Valley Council.

The upper Murrumbidgee Catchment covers about 14,000 km², with its headwaters originating above Adaminaby and flowing through to Burrinjuck Dam.

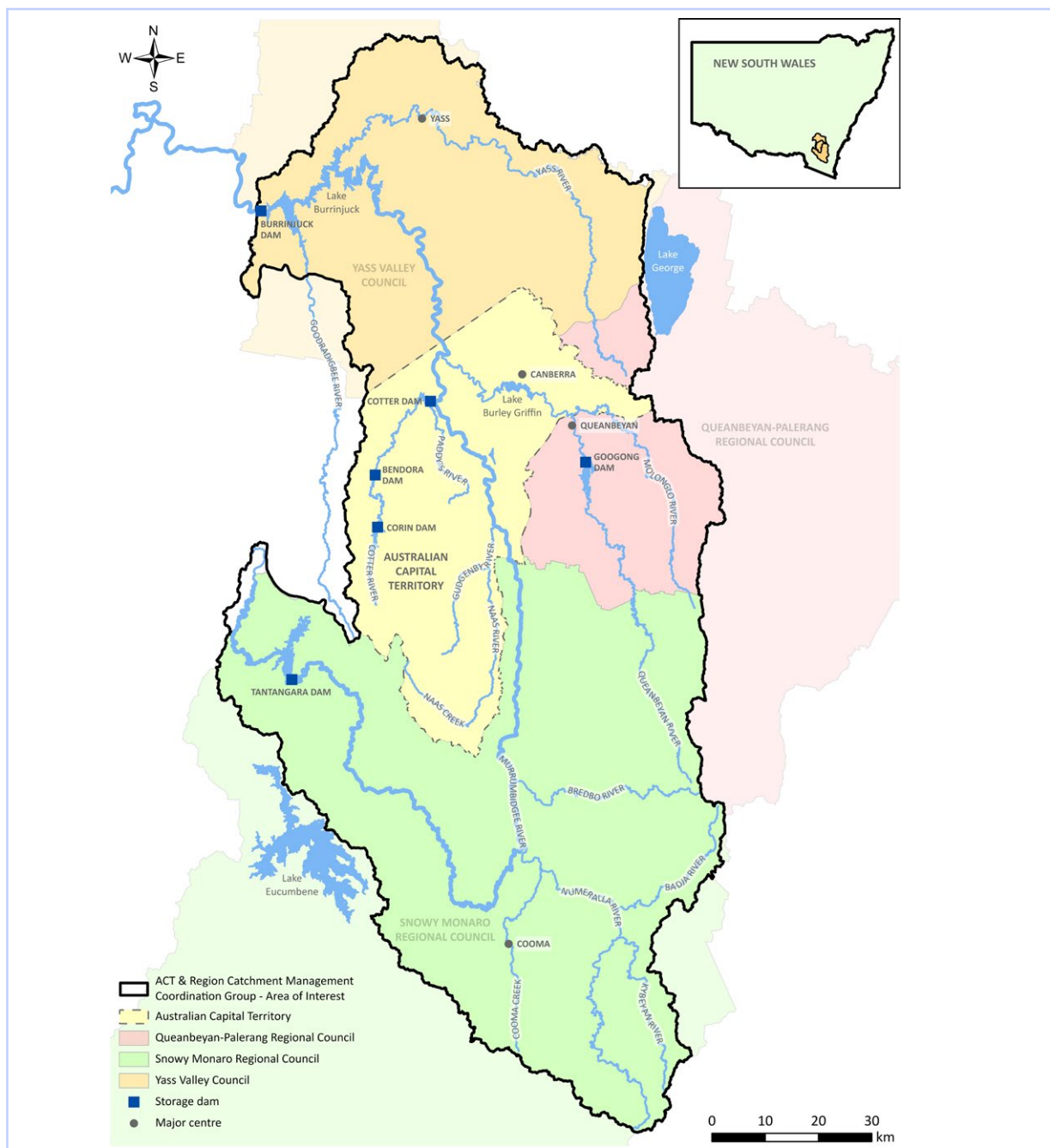


Figure 1 A Map of the upper Murrumbidgee River Catchment

5. ACT and Region Catchment Strategy 2016-2046

The [ACT and Region Catchment Strategy 2016-2046](#) (the Catchment Strategy) sets out the principles for catchment governance, describes the key factors that will affect the catchment over the next 30 years and the actions that aim to optimise outcomes for the region. The Catchment Strategy provides the guiding framework for Coordination Group priorities and activities.

The Strategy set out 19 actions that are referred to throughout this Annual Report.

Action 1: Build an inter-jurisdictional decision-making framework related to catchment policy and planning.

Action 2: Establish an inter-jurisdictional investment and resourcing framework. Information and knowledge sharing

Action 3: Promote evidence-based decision making for improved healthy catchments.

Action 4: Continue to inform a catchment wide assessment of vulnerability to climate change. Policy, legislation and plans

Action 5: Review and align catchment management legislation, regulations, policies and compliance to improve consistency.

Action 6: Align enforcement between NSW and the ACT on catchment management practices.

Action 7: Strategically support the role and work undertaken by peak stakeholder groups, volunteers and landowners and managers.

Action 8: Develop an integrated catchment emergency response plan. Education and promotion

Action 9: Build community understanding about catchment health to promote behaviour change through a broad range of communication and education strategies.

Action 10: Provide an integrated catchment management planning approach for growth and settlement patterns in the ACT and Region. Infrastructure provision and renewal

Action 11: Develop regional capacity to implement and manage sustainable water infrastructure.

Action 12: Secure long term water supplies for the ACT and Region. Water quality and aquatic ecosystems

Action 13: Improve water quality, protect and restore aquatic ecosystem health and reduce nutrient, sediment and pathogen loads at key sites across the catchment. Indigenous and cultural waters

Action 14: Ensure Indigenous and other values are recognised. Groundwater

Action 15: Develop a better understanding of groundwater resources (quantity and quality) within the region.

Action 16: Implement an approach to biosecurity planning and risk management.

Action 17: Develop a regional approach to strategic land and biodiversity management practices.

Action 18: Mitigate soil erosion at priority sites.

Action 19: Consider regional approaches to dealing with contaminated land, illegal dumping of contaminated waste and dumping of sub-soil construction waste.

6. 2024-25 Achievement of Priorities

6.1 Governance, policy and planning

Linking with the Catchment Strategy

Theme one of the Catchment Strategy is governance, policy and planning. Under this theme, there are six priority actions with the objective that *governance decisions consider the values of stakeholders, the evidence base, and the benefits of cross-jurisdictional collaboration, and are undertaken for the collective, long-term good of the catchment and its residents.* These actions are:

Action 1: Build an inter-jurisdictional decision-making framework related to catchment policy and planning.

Action 2: Establish an inter-jurisdictional investment and resourcing framework.

Action 3: Promote evidence-based decision making for improved healthy catchments.

Action 4: Continue to inform a catchment wide assessment of vulnerability to climate change.

Action 5: Review and align catchment management legislation, regulations, policies and compliance to improve consistency.

Action 6: Align enforcement between NSW and the ACT on catchment management practices.

Governance, policy and planning is an ongoing key focus for the Coordination Group. Implementing these actions ensures that the Coordination Group is consistent, considered and can maintain long-term collaboration to support water management in the upper Murrumbidgee Catchment.

Coordination Group activities

Quarterly meetings

As per the Group Terms of Reference, the Coordination Group is required to hold four meetings per year. The Coordination Group met this requirement through the following formal meetings:

Quarter one – Meeting #1 was held on Thursday, 12 September 2024, at the ACT Government Office, Canberra City.

Quarter two – Meeting #2 was held on Tuesday 10 December 2024 at ACT Government office, Dickson, Canberra.

Quarter three – Meeting #3 was held on Friday 4 April 2025 at the ACT Government office, Dickson, Canberra.

Quarter four – Meeting #4 was held online (MS teams) on Tuesday 24 June 2024.

ACT and Region Catchment Strategy 2016-46 review and refresh

With the support of the ACT Office of Water, and an external consultant, the Coordination Group progressed a refresh of the Catchment Strategy in 2024-25. Following a formal review, the Strategy is currently being re-envisioned as a living guide for catchment management in the ACT and the Region, rather than a traditional Strategy. The guide will provide a high-level, flexible framework that supports collaboration, coordination, and shared ownership across jurisdictions and sectors to achieve better health of the upper Murrumbidgee catchment. The project is jointly funded by the ACT Office of Water and the Coordination Group.

Championing a review of the Snowy Water Inquiry Outcomes Implementation Deed (SWIOID)

The Coordination Group has continued to champion a collaborative review of the SWIOID in 2024-25. The SWIOID review is driven by cultural, social, economic and environmental imperatives that interact and are complex. It was therefore fortunate that the Australian Watertrust, volunteered its resources to assist the Coordination Group, and others, to gain an in-depth understanding of the ways collaborative decision-making processes had been used in the water sector. The Watertrust facilitated a seminar with presenters who had firsthand association with collaborative processes and a simulated a collaborative decision-making process workshop for the upper Murrumbidgee River. Participating in these processes provided valuable insights for the

Coordination Group and reinforced the value of using such processes in the SWIOID review. More information on the Coordination Group's work with Watertrust can be found in [Case Study 1: Finding common ground in the Upper Murrumbidgee](#).

To support ministerial engagement in the SWIOID review, the Coordination Group provided Minister Orr with five key principles in June 2025 (see [Appendix A: SWIOID Review – Key principles from the Coordination Group](#)). These principles articulate more fully the information conveyed in a letter, from the former ACT Minister for Water and Coordination Group Chair to the former Federal Minister for Environment and Water, the Honourable Tanya Plibersek, in November 2024 (see [Appendix B: SWIOID Review – Letter to Tanya Plibersek](#)).



■ The foreshore at Casuarina Sands on the Murrumbidgee River, a hotspot for endangered species like Murray cod

CASE STUDY 1: Finding common ground in the Upper Murrumbidgee

Uniting community, industry and government to protect and manage the Upper Murrumbidgee together.

The Upper Murrumbidgee faces growing pressures from a changing climate and competing demands on water and land. Addressing these challenges requires more than technical fixes; it calls for bringing diverse interests together to build trust, share knowledge, and agree on lasting solutions. Over the past year, the Coordination Group has played a key role in helping showcase powerful ways of doing just that.

In early 2024, not long after the Commonwealth announced a review of the framework for environmental flows released from the Snowy Scheme (including into the Upper Murrumbidgee), the Coordination Group was approached by Watertrust Australia with ideas for collaborative community processes to support the review*. The structured approaches to water decision making they were advocating had been proven in very similar contexts elsewhere to deliver workable policy outcomes where previously there had been only conflict and deadlock. The processes are designed to put relationships first, recognising that workable outcomes are much more likely when all parties feel the process was legitimate and their voices were heard.

Watertrust asked the Coordination Group, with its wide membership across jurisdictions, to help raise broader understanding about these structured decision processes in the hope that governments associated with the SWIOD review would become supportive. In response, the Coordination Group provided Watertrust with critical support to bring the right government, industry, science and civil society representatives to a workshop at the Academy of Science in June 2024, to showcase how these processes have worked elsewhere.

The workshop highlighted experiences in British Columbia, Canada, where the province-owned hydro-electric company used a structured deliberative process to re-licence 32 hydro facilities to accommodate social, cultural and environmental values of water. All but one of the agreements were achieved through consensus even though it was not required. Importantly, not one agreement was based on a pre-existing concept of any interest group. The structured deliberative process spawned innovation and learning between interest groups that had rarely worked together, leading to hybrid new alternatives for managing the hydro facilities.

* Watertrust is a philanthropically-funded, not-for-profit company, hosted by the Australian Academy of Science in Canberra, whose mission is to promote collaborative processes in support of better water and catchment management decisions in Australia.



Figure 2 Lee Failing from Compass Resource Management discussing Canadian experiences with structured approaches to water decision making

With Canadian colleagues from Compass Resource Management, Watertrust hosted a second workshop in Canberra in November 2024 to demonstrate, using a mock-up of the Upper Murrumbidgee, how these processes could help unlock workable decisions here. Several members of the Coordination Group helped provide the back-room technical support that was needed to construct the Upper Murrumbidgee mock-up. The workshop showed that with these processes, even groups with historically different or opposing views can work together constructively towards agreed outcomes.

One of the most significant developments to emerge after these workshops was the Commonwealth's decision to call for a structured deliberative process to underpin the SWIOID review that "supports stakeholder input and the application of evidence to

examine resource management trade-offs" associated with possible changes to the way water is managed from the Snowy scheme. While the decision was the result of many factors, the advocacy for structured decision processes gave governments confidence that stakeholders in the region could engage constructively on complex and sometimes contentious issues.

The SWIOID review, the first since its establishment in 2002, represents an important opportunity to address long-standing concerns about water management and the health of the upper Murrumbidgee. The Coordination Group will remain closely engaged in this process to carry the momentum forward, ensuring that decisions about the river's future are informed and inclusive, and reflect the best interests of both people and the environment. ■

6.2 Communities

Linking with the Catchment Strategy

Theme two of the Catchment Strategy is communities. Under this theme, there are three actions that Coordination Group members are committed to undertaking with the objective that *the community values and remains strongly connected to the catchment, and has the capacity to quickly adapt to environmental, economic and policy changes*. These actions are:

- **Action 7:** Strategically support the role and work undertaken by peak stakeholder groups, volunteers and landowners and managers.
- **Action 8:** Develop an integrated catchment emergency response plan.
- **Action 9:** Build community understanding about catchment health to promote behaviour change through a broad range of communication and education strategies.

Coordination Group activities

Supporting the Upper Murrumbidgee Catchment Network

The Coordination Group continued to provide funding to and work closely with the UMCN. The UMCN is a not-for-profit organisation that brings together community organisations with an interest in the management of the upper Murrumbidgee Catchment. They help to facilitate conversations between these groups on issues such as water quality and security and positive ecological land management techniques to support catchment and river health.

Key activities undertaken by UMCN to collaborate and educate the community on a range of national resource management matters in 2024-25 are provided in [Appendix C: UMCN Annual Report](#). Further information can be seen in [Case study 2: Working together for the River Forum 2024](#).

Recognising UMCN's performance, the Coordination Group continued to fund the Network in 2024-25. For additional information on the Coordination Group finances, see [Appendix D: Financial Report 2024-25](#).



■ Members of The ACT Parks and Conservation Service undertaking native fish surveys along the Murrumbidgee at Tharwa Sand Wash

While the Coordination Group currently funds the UMCN, it recognises the importance of all community groups who advocate for and undertake actions to improve the health of catchments and waterways. Some of the Coordination Group's members fund local groups. For example, City and Environment Directorate, through ACT Natural Resource Management, funds the ACT's three catchment groups (Ginninderra, Molonglo and Southern ACT). The importance of these groups is further detailed in [Appendix E: Community representative update](#).

Understanding community values

Building a community understanding of catchment health remained a significant priority for the Catchment Group this financial year. In April 2025, the Coordination Group engaged an external supplier to develop and promote a social expectation towards waterways surveys to better understand what people across the region value when it comes to rivers, creeks and water. While this project will extend into 2025-26, the result is expected to help the Government agencies and regional partners make more informed and balanced decisions around waterway management.



■ Senator Katy Gallagher and the members of the Coordination Group reviewing the health of the Murrumbidgee River at Tharwa Sand Wash

Field trips

The Coordination Group arranged several field trips to better understand and facilitate discussion on key issues relating to the upper Murrumbidgee Catchment. This includes:

- Upper Murrumbidgee River field trip with Senator the Hon. Katy Gallagher**
 (8 February 2025) – The Coordination Group organised a field trip to the Tharwa Sand Wash with Senator Gallagher. The purpose of this trip was to highlight challenges along this stretch of river, including the cultural and societal impacts of the degraded river system, and champion the need for better integration of ACT and regional needs in environmental water flow arrangements.
- Tharwa Sand Wash and Lambrigg farm field trip with Minister Orr** (11 April 2025) - Members, observers and other stakeholders attended a field trip with Minister Suzanne Orr to the Tharwa Sand Wash and Lambrigg Farm to discuss key environmental and water management issues. Discussions highlighted concerns around low water flows, sedimentation issues and the impacts on recreation, fish ecology, and emergency human water needs in the upper Murrumbidgee region. Other matters discussed includes the limitation of SWIOLD and cultural and historical insights related to the upper Murrumbidgee.
- Snowy Advisory Committee (SAC) Field Trip** (27-29 May 2025) – The Coordination Group, via the Chair, engaged with the SAC for their meeting and field trip in May 2025. The meeting highlighted the relevancy of ongoing and increased monitoring throughout the Murrumbidgee River.
- River sand dredging operations on the Murrumbidgee River near Yass** (10 June 2025)
 – Supported by Tharwa Sands, the Coordination Group arranged a field trip to a river sand extraction site near Yass in June 2025. The attendees observed the dredging infrastructure and discussed potential environmental impacts (both positive and negative) to better understand the role of sand extraction in environmental restoration works.

CASE STUDY 2: Working together for the River Forum 2024



Figure 3 UMCN Working Together for the River Forum promotional material

As part of UMCN’s ongoing commitment to collaborative, integrated catchment management, this year saw the successful delivery of the second Working Together for the River Forum—a bi-annual event that convenes key stakeholders to share and discuss significant policy developments and the pressing challenges and opportunities facing the Upper Murrumbidgee River system.

The Forum brought together representatives from all levels of government, including the Commonwealth, NSW and ACT, as well as natural resource agencies, corporates, research institutions, landholders and

community organisations. The event focused on a shared goal: improving outcomes for the river and its catchment through collective insight, dialogue, and action.

Structured around three core themes—The River Remembered, Investing in the Region’s Nature, and Population and Environment: Planning for Growth—the program provided a platform to reflect on recent policy developments and to explore forward-looking strategies for sustainable water management.

A [detailed program of the event is available here](#).



Figure 4 Dr Maxine Cooper at the Forum (photo credit: UMCN)

A key outcome from the Forum was the strong acknowledgment of the value of inclusive stakeholder engagement. Participants highlighted the importance of involving local communities alongside institutional stakeholders to ensure policy and management approaches are grounded in both local knowledge and scientific evidence.

The work of organisations such as the UMCN as well as the contributions of other advocates, were recognised as pivotal in shaping policy and driving change. Attendees walked away with a deeper appreciation for the complexity of the issues, the interconnected nature of environmental, social,

and economic considerations, and the urgent need for collaborative action. This included updates on the Australian Government's Restoring the Upper Murrumbidgee Program, Snowy Hydro's latest operations, the Australian Government's Nature Repair Market, Icon Water's long-term planning, QPRC's role in urban environmental regulation, research on local groundwater hydrology from the Australian National University, the role of collaboration and community from the Australian River Restoration Centre, and values of water in a working catchment by local landholders, among many others.

Feedback from presenters and participants was overwhelmingly positive, with many emphasising the event's value in fostering new partnerships, sharing knowledge, and building momentum for future initiatives.

A short highlights video, including interviews with speakers and attendees on why they attended and the benefit of the event is [available here](#). Videos of all the presentations are available on the [UMCN YouTube channel](#) (see the playlist).

The Forum served as a powerful reminder that meaningful progress in water management is only possible through shared responsibility and coordinated effort—a message that will continue to inform our work in the coming year. ■



Figure 5 Siwan Lovett, ARRC, presenting at the Forum (photo credit: UMCN)

6.3 Regional Development

Linking with the Catchment Strategy

Theme three of the Catchment Strategy is regional development. Under this theme, there are two actions that Coordination Group members are committed to undertaking with the objective that *human development across the ACT and region is resilient and sustainable*. These actions are:

- **Action 10:** Provide an integrated catchment management planning approach for growth and settlement patterns in the ACT and Region.
- **Action 11:** Develop regional capacity to implement and manage sustainable water infrastructure.

Coordination Group activities

2024-25 saw ongoing delivery of longer-term projects that aim to support regional capacity to implement and manage sustainable water infrastructure and conduct catchment management planning for regional growth. These projects include:

- Bombala and Cooma Water security studies commissioned by the Snowy Monaro Regional Council (SMRC). For more information about these projects, see [Case study 3: Bombala and Cooma Water Security Studies](#).
- As part of the Improving the Health of the Upper Murrumbidgee River (IHUM) program, South East Local Land Services contracted researcher Mark Lintermans of Fish Fonder Pty Ltd to undertake a 3-year project aimed at improving the genetic diversity of the Macquarie perch in the Upper Murrumbidgee River. For more information on this project, see [Case study 4: Shuffle the Deck – Improving Macquarie perch genetic diversity in the Upper Murrumbidgee River through translocation](#).



■ Minister Suzanne Orr, Coordination Group members, ACT Office of Water staff, and water experts meeting at a local property to discuss sedimentation in the Murrumbidgee downstream from Tharwa

CASE STUDY 3: Bombala and Cooma Water Security Studies

In early 2024 Snowy Monaro Regional Council engaged NSW Public Works to undertake two water security studies as part of the NSW Regulatory and Assurance Framework for local water utilities - formerly known as Integrated Water Cycle Management (IWCN). Water security is one of 12 of the strategic planning outcomes of this framework.

The role of local water utilities is to deliver safe, secure, efficient, and affordable water and sewerage services to customers and communities, providing public health outcomes, and supporting economic development, liveability, and the environment.

Bombala Water Supply

Bombala Water Supply Scheme comprises a river off-take and treatment facility which is located off Cathcart Road to the northeast of the Bombala Township. The raw water is sourced from Coolumbooka Dam along Coolumbooka River, upstream of the confluence with Bombala River. The reservoir has a capacity of 300 ML, which is estimated to be reduced to approximately 250 ML due to siltation (Bombala Urban Water Plan, 2000). After the dam, Coolumbooka River merges with Bombala River just upstream of where it flows through Bombala Township.

Water restrictions are put in place depending on the flow into and the water levels in Coolumbooka weir. In December 2019 Level 3 water restrictions were in place in Bombala as the flows into Lake Wallace Dam, and in Delegate and Coolumbooka Rivers had decreased.

The Bombala water supply is therefore not reliable during drought.

Cooma Water Supply

The Cooma drinking water supply system sources raw water from the Murrumbidgee River via Cooma Weir, also known as Mittagong Crossing, located 8 km north of Cooma Township. The Cooma Weir is located downstream of the Tantangara Dam, which is regulated as part of the Snowy Water licence originally dated November 2002 and varied on 18 November 2020. The majority of the flow at Cooma Weir comes from the catchment downstream of Tantangara Dam, the rest is derived from Tantangara Dam releases. The catchment area of the Cooma Town water supply is 1,810 square kilometres, approximately 471 square kilometres from the catchment of Tantangara Dam. Previous studies concluded that there was a shortfall in secure yield to meet future demand.



Figure 6 Downstream Cooma Water Supply – Murrumbidgee River (photo credit: BH Photos)

Scope of Work

Snowy Monaro Regional Council received government funding to assess options to address water security at Bombala and Cooma and has engaged NSW Public Works (NSWPW) to deliver the following functions:

1. Review, analysis and establishment of current connected properties and growth
2. Review, analysis and establishment of current water demands and future water needs
3. Water security Levels of Service and analysis to characterise and quantify the risk
4. Identification of all water sources and preliminary development of scheme options
5. Screening process to shortlist the water sources and scheme options for the town water supply
6. Feasibility level proof of concept development and assessment of shortlisted scheme options
7. Selection of the preferred scheme option for the town water supply, and reporting
8. Project communication reporting and management.

The projects commenced in earnest at the beginning of March 2024 with data collection, research and consolidation of previous studies and reports to inform yield studies, taking into account a dry climate future modelled through NARCLIM 1.5. At the end of June 2025, the studies were yet to be completed with options for water security to the towns of Cooma and Bombala. It is expected the projects will be finalised by June 2026. Currently, further modelling for Cooma is being undertaken and is expected to continue through to the latter half of 2025. In addition to this work, Council will be closely following the progress of the SWIOID review, advocating strongly to have a seat around the decision maker's table.

6.4 Water

Linking with the Catchment Strategy

Theme four of the Catchment Strategy is water. Under this theme, there are four actions that Coordination Group members are committed to undertaking with the objective that *water is managed in a total water cycle management regime*. These actions are:

- **Action 12:** Secure long term water supplies for the ACT and Region.
- **Action 13:** Improve water quality, protect and restore aquatic ecosystem health and reduce nutrient, sediment and pathogen loads at key sites across the catchment.
- **Action 14:** Ensure Indigenous and other values are recognised.
- **Action 15:** Develop a better understanding of groundwater resources (quantity and quality) within the region.

Coordination Group activities

Water resource management and security was a key focus for Coordination Group members in 2024-25. This was explored through a range of actions.

Submissions

Key submissions and correspondences include:

- July 2024: Submission on the draft *ACT Water Strategy* refresh
- July 2024: Submission on the draft *Murrumbidgee Regional Water Strategy*
- August 2024: Submission on the Australian Government *draft Strategy for improving the health of Upper Murrumbidgee*
- August 2024: Co-signed letter to Minister Tanya Plibersek regarding the review of the SWIOID and requesting the integration of collaborative decision-making processes into the review of the SWIOID, cosigned by Minister Rattenbury and the Chair ([Appendix B: SWIOID Review – Letter to Tanya Plibersek](#))



■ Coordination Group members exploring how sand extraction might be employed in the Murrumbidgee River in areas of excess sedimentation

- September 2024: Submission on the draft principles for a revised *National Water Agreement*
- December 2024: Submission to the Murray Darling Basin Authority on the Draft *Basin-wide Environmental Watering Strategy*
- January 2025: Submission to the NSW Government on the *draft Water Sharing Plan for the Murrumbidgee Unregulated River Water Sources 2025*
- June 2025: Letter to Minister Suzanne Orr's providing proposed principles to guide engagement in the SWIOID review ([Appendix A: SWIOID Review – Key principles from the Coordination Group](#)).

Presenting and learning

The Coordination Group undertook the following engagements to support priority water policy and management activities during 2024-25:

- **Pacific Association of Supreme Audit Institutions** (18 September 2024) – The Chair presented to on the Coordination Group, including its function, Governance and key priorities.
- **The Basin State documentary** - The Chair engaged with film makers for this documentary and provided communication and engagement opportunities for regional councils, as well as ACT and NSW Government members.
- **Decision Process Sketch Workshop** (23-24 October 2024) – The Coordination Group was involved in a decision process sketching activity workshop with Watertrust Australia in October 2024. The goal of the workshop was to explore structured decision-making approaches and their viability for use in the upper Murrumbidgee River, and to outline potentially appropriate collaborative approaches for the review of the SWIOID.
- **Festival of Urbanism** (31 October 2024) – The Coordination Group Chair supported the event as part of the organising committee and also facilitated the Event.
- **'Working Together for the River' Forum** (27 November 2024) – The Coordination Group Chair presented at the forum on the health of the upper Murrumbidgee River.

Notably, Icon Water, member of the Coordination Group won the 2025 Australian Water Association National Award for R&D Excellence for its *Spoil to Topsoil* project, an important innovation for the ACT Region's circular economy. Further information on this can be seen at [Case Study 5: Spoil to Topsoil – Advancing the ACT Region's circular economy](#).

The Coordination Group was also fortunate to have been provided with updates on key water related initiatives throughout their meetings in 2024-25. This includes:

- Nic Morgan from Icon Water presented on Insights from community engagements: [Let's Talk-Our Water Future](#) in September 2024.
- Antje Brademann from the Upper Murrumbidgee Demonstration Reach Upper Murrumbidgee Demonstration Reach (UMDR) in September 2024 for presenting the UMDR Action Plan the opportunity for the Group to provide input.
- Dr Ralph Ogden from Office of Water provided an update on the ACT Healthy Waterways projects and plan, including development of a Lake Tuggeranong Healthy Waterways plan.
- Dr Su Wild-River from the ACT Environment Protection Authority provided an update on the water licence or the Queanbeyan-Sewerage Treatment Plant progress which highlighted the need for collaboration across all water sector agencies to resolve water quality issues in Lake Burley Griffin.
- Dr Chris Hepplewhite from the ACT Office of Water presented on the ACT & NSW joint water trading framework.



■ Healthy waterways are essential for safe recreation on the Murrumbidgee River, such as at this popular swimming hole at Pine Island Reserve

CASE STUDY 4: Shuffle the Deck – Improving Macquarie perch genetic diversity in the Upper Murrumbidgee River through translocation

The endangered freshwater fish species the Macquarie perch (Macquaria australasica) is found in a 91.5 km stretch of the Upper Murrumbidgee River. A recent study revealed alarming declines in genetic diversity and high levels of inbreeding in subpopulations along this stretch of river. This is likely due to limited movement of fish between subpopulations, as low flow releases from Tantangara Dam impede natural fish passage and isolate breeding groups.



Figure 7 A young-of-year fish from Red Crossing. Photo Dale Campbell

As part of the Improving the Health of the Upper Murrumbidgee River (IHUM) program, South East Local Land Services contracted researcher Mark Lintermans of Fish Fonder Pty Ltd to undertake a 3 year project aimed at improving the genetic diversity of the Macquarie perch in the Upper Murrumbidgee River.

The project aims to reverse the decline in genetic diversity and reduce inbreeding within isolated subpopulations by manually translocating small numbers of juvenile and subadult Macquarie perch

between physically isolated sites. It is proposed that taking fish with more diverse genetic material from healthier downstream populations and translocating them to more inbred upstream and midstream groups—simulates natural dispersal and overcoming physical limitations to fish passage—will enhance overall genetic variability and resilience of the subpopulations and increase the chances of long-term reproductive success across all segments of the river.

Sampling occurred at eight sites across lower, mid, and upper reaches in March and April 2025. Low numbers of breeding adults at most sites means that translocating adult fish is not a suitable option, so the sampling method was designed to target juvenile and subadult fish. Captured fish were measured, weighed, inspected for parasites (*Lernaea cyprinacea*), fin-clipped for genetic sampling, and tagged with passive integrated transponders (PIT tags) where feasible.

A total of 863 fish were sampled. An above average abundance of juvenile fish were captured at several sites although one site had a lower-than-expected catch which is thought to be due to low river flows in late 2024 and early 2025. Young-of-year and age 1+ fish were prevalent, indicating successful spawning in 2024.

Due to a shortage of ideal-sized subadults (170–250 mm), the decision was made to also translocate age 1+ fish (130–150 mm). In total, 52 fish were translocated between sites which exceeded initial expectations.

Genetic outcomes will be measurable in 3–5 years once translocated fish have reached sexual maturity and produced at least one cohort of offspring (if breeding is not disrupted by drought or flood events).

References

Lintermans, M. and Campbell, D.R. (2025). Shuffle the Deck: Improving Macquarie perch genetic diversity in the Upper Murrumbidgee River through translocation. 2025 Annual Progress report Consultancy report to South East Local Land Services. Fish Fonder Pty Ltd.



■ Aerial photo of Murrumbidgee River Corridor, a typical environment for the endangered Macquarie perch

CASE STUDY 5: Spoil to Topsoil – Advancing the ACT Region’s circular economy

Icon Water won the 2025 Australian Water Association National Award for R&D Excellence for its Spoil to Topsoil project, an important innovation for the ACT Region’s circular economy.

This industry-leading project is transforming two primary waste streams—spoil from network maintenance activities and water treatment solids from our water treatment process—into nutrient-rich topsoil for use in restoration activities such as nature strips, road verges and green belts. This solution effectively repurposes almost 100% of these hard-to-manage waste streams.

Benefits

- Beneficial reuse of around 2,000 tonnes of water treatment solids each year, which would otherwise go to landfill
- Financial savings by eliminating landfill fees and buying less virgin topsoil
- A new best-practice innovation that can help other utilities reduce their water treatment waste from going to landfill.



Figure 8 Icon Water’s Spoil to Topsoil project process

For Icon Water, sending the water treatment solids to landfill meant filling limited space, at the cost of hundreds of thousands of dollars, while wasting large volumes of valuable resources. Additionally, we were also buying topsoil from external organisations to use in our restoration activities.

This project builds on our existing spoil reuse initiative, part of Icon Water's award-winning *No Opportunity Wasted* program, which reuses spoil from our maintenance operations as backfill material. By integrating additional 'waste' materials to create a new internally usable product, we have achieved a full circular economy approach from a soil perspective. This approach aligns with Icon Water's Circular Economy Plan 2021-22 to 2026-27 which redefines a wide range of waste materials and products as resources. Using this approach, we have optimised resource use, maximised recirculation of resources, limited waste generation and enabled recirculation

of resources by others. This project also contributes towards all goals listed under the ACT Circular Economy Strategy and Action Plan 2023-2030.

This project is a great example of collaboration bringing together a wide range of stakeholders, both internally and externally. These stakeholders include Icon Water's Environment and Sustainability team, Network Maintenance team, contractors - Yass Earth Movers and Lanterra Consulting, the ACT Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) and the Transport and Road Network Division.

Overall, the Spoil to Topsoil project promotes an innovative solution for a hard to manage waste stream and reframes water utilities as resource recovery enterprises. But more importantly, it shows the power of innovation, collaboration and perseverance. This is not just a win for Icon Water and the local community, but for the water industry as a whole. ■

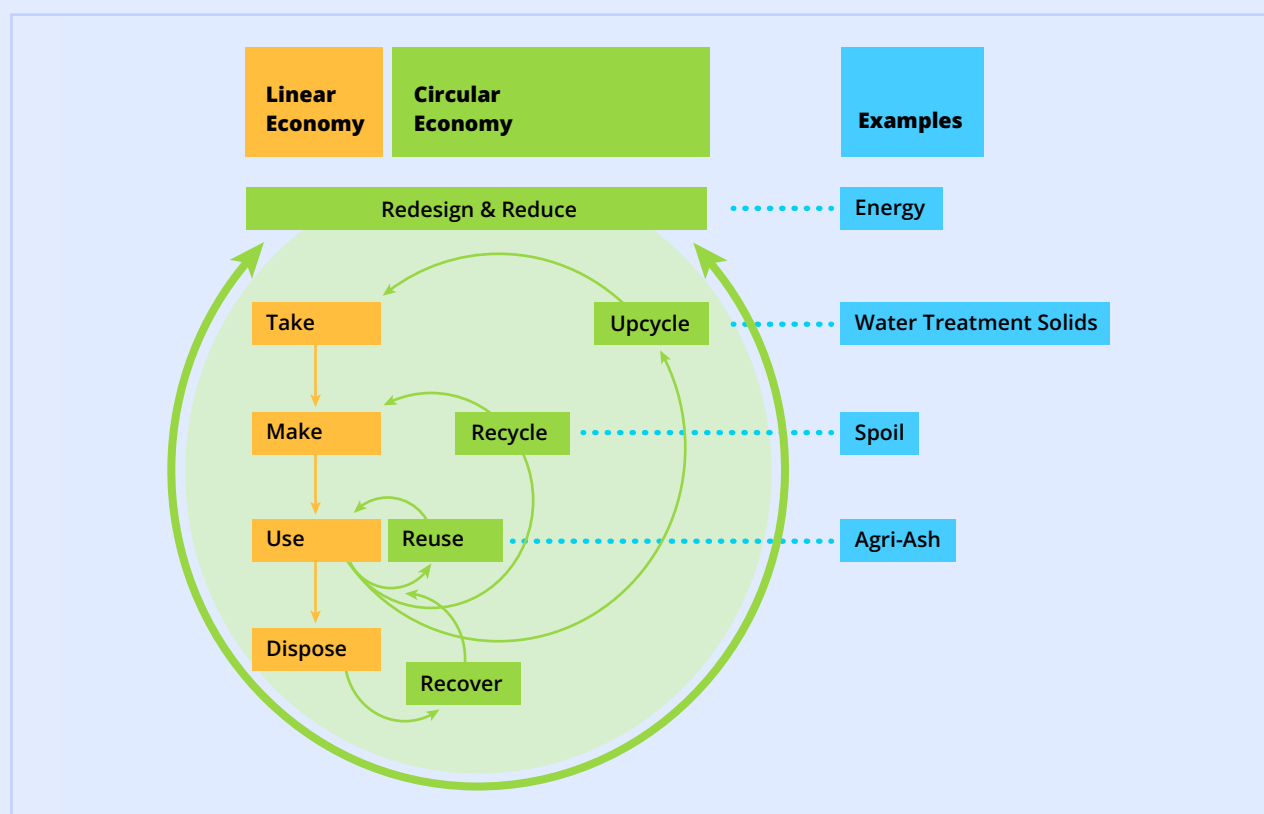


Figure 9 High-level road map of Icon Water's transition to a circular economy (Icon Water's Circular Economy Plan 2021-22 to 2026-27)

7. 2025-26 Priorities



■ Members of the Coordination Group and Minister Suzanne Orr inspecting a large Murray cod which had just been captured for measurement by ACT Parks and Conservation Staff along the Tharwa Sand Wash



■ Coordination Group members escorting Minister Suzanne Orr along a stretch of the Murrumbidgee to outline community concerns around the health of the river

In 2025–26, the Coordination Group will continue to give priority to refreshing the [ACT and Region Catchment Strategy 2016 –2046](#) (the Catchment Strategy). To progress actions in the current strategy, the Coordination Group will focus on the following priorities.

Action 2: Establish an inter-jurisdictional investment and resourcing framework.

The Coordination Group will continue to annually review the inter-jurisdictional investment and resourcing requirements of the Group. This will be supported by the Budget Sub-group established in 2021–22 to provide advice on resourcing opportunities, including guidance on members voluntary contributions and investment planning to deliver activities for improved catchment management and river health.

Action 3: Promote evidence-based decision making for improved healthy catchments

The Coordination Group will continue to:

- promote citizen science programs, foster knowledge sharing and insights by supporting workshops/ conferences and working collaboratively with regional partners, key government agencies, scientists and community members
- integrate scientific research and data to provide directions for guiding catchment management. Emphasis will be given to identifying and fostering funding opportunities to conduct research in the upper Murrumbidgee Catchment (e.g., research on flow requirements for aquatic habitat)
- advocate for and facilitate investment in key sites to improve the health of rivers and the catchment
- advocate for stakeholder participation and evidence-based processes in review of water management in the upper Murrumbidgee River.

Action 5: Review and align catchment management legislation, regulations, and policies to improve consistency.

The Coordination Group has made strong progress in reviewing and refreshing the Catchment Strategy. As the guiding framework for the Coordination Group activities, the refresh is being conducted in line with the Catchment Strategy's first 10-year comprehensive review. In 2025-26, the Coordination Group will complete broader stakeholder engagements with the aim to have the refreshed Strategy ready for intergovernmental consideration by the end of 2025.

The refreshed Strategy, re-envisioned as an intergovernmental guide for catchment management in the region, will provide a high-level, flexible framework that guides collaboration, coordination, and shared ownership across jurisdictions and sectors to achieve better health of the upper Murrumbidgee catchment.

Action 7: Strategically support the role and work undertaken by peak stakeholder groups, volunteers, landowners and managers

Peak stakeholder groups, volunteers, landowners, and managers are valued for the important role and work they undertake in protecting the ACT region's catchments. The Coordination Group will continue to advocate for these groups to be financially supported and help identify potential funding sources to help groups take action to improve catchment and waterway health. Direct financial support for community groups such as the UMCN is dependent on the Coordination Group member's voluntary contributions.



■ A typical piece of detailed visitor signage at Pine Island Reserve welcoming visitors to Ngunnawal Country and providing details about the Reserve



■ Coordination Group members viewing and discussing the engineered log jams (ELJs) downstream from Tharwa on the Murrumbidgee River

Action 9: Build community understanding about catchment health to promote behaviour change through a broad range of communication and education strategies

Strengthening understanding of catchment health is fundamental to designing and undertaking appropriate actions. Building on the 2015 Survey undertaken by the University of Canberra, findings from the *Social Expectations Survey and Engagement Program* will be finalised and become available in 2025/26. The survey covers all areas of the ACT and Region and is structured to both share knowledge and hear views on the rivers and catchments of the region. The survey report will provide valuable information for the refresh of the Strategy.

The Restoring the Health of the Upper Murrumbidgee Program provides an opportunity to further invest in community education, participation and advocacy on sustainable water resource management. The Catchment Group will work with the ACT and NSW governments to secure better long-term outcomes for the river through this program.



■ Coordination Group members along with Minister Suzanne Orr hearing about freshwater fish ecology and the localised issues along the stretch of the Murrumbidgee downstream from Tharwa

Action 12: Secure long-term water supplies for the ACT and region

Water security is crucial in building the region's resilience to climate change and population growth. The Coordination Group will maintain efforts to secure the region's long-term water security for environmental, cultural, economic, and social use. The Group will also continue to advocate for fit-for-purpose governance and management mechanisms that consider quadruple bottom line values in achieving environmental, social and cultural outcomes, alongside renewable energy production through the review of the SWIOID. In addition, the Group will advocate for integrating a collaborative decision-making approach into the SWIOID review process to support transparent and accountable outcomes. The Group will also provide advice and input into other key policy documents including, but not limited to the Commonwealth Drought Operating Framework, the NSW/ACT water trading framework and Water Sharing Plans.



■ *The view from a popular walking track along the Murrumbidgee River*

Efforts of the Coordination Group to shape water planning policies and initiatives to foster healthy regional waterways will continue, especially in relation to the upper Murrumbidgee River.

Action 13: Improve water quality, protect and restore aquatic ecosystem health and reduce nutrient, sediment and pathogen loads at key sites across the catchment

The Coordination Group will continue informing decision-makers and the community on the condition of the upper Murrumbidgee River and the required changes highlighted under Action 12. The Group will also seek opportunities to work with the Commonwealth, ACT and NSW Government in delivering the Australian Government's funding commitment up to \$55.6 million for improving the health of the upper Murrumbidgee. Noting the Coordination Group provides an established forum for promoting regional collaboration and provides advice on resolving complex water catchment management issues, the Group will seek to provide strategic advice on program design to embed regional perspectives and ensure investments are in target priority areas to improve the health of the river.

Other key activities to support this action will be progressed through Action 3 and Action 12.

Action 14: Ensure Indigenous and other values are recognised

The Coordination Group will explore opportunities to embed Traditional Custodian land and water management practices and indigenous science into catchment management and biodiversity enhancement across the region. Activities on Country such as Cool Burn events will be considered for funding to support cultural knowledge sharing and collaborative learning.

Membership on the Coordination Group is determined by the Minister. The Coordination Group will continue to explore options for Traditional Custodian appointment to the Coordination Group for ministerial consideration.



■ *The Murrumbidgee River between Pine Island and Red Rocks Gorge*



Deep pools in the Murrumbidgee River are important for endangered fish species as breeding locations, such as seen here between Pine Island and Kambah Pool

Appendices

Appendix A: SWIOID Review – Key principles from the Coordination Group

Problem, approach and key principles for negotiating changes to the Snowy Water Inquiry Outcomes Implementation Deed (SWIOID) for the Upper Murrumbidgee River

Problem

The problem is:

... The upper Murrumbidgee River has been assessed to be in poor condition due in large part to the insufficient volumes and timing of flow delivery and catchment management.

Flow volumes have been reduced to less than 10% of natural volumes in the Upper Murrumbidgee River (UMR), with the greater alteration to flow regimes compared to 'natural', the greater the impact. These ... are as a result of the diversion of water to produce hydroelectricity through the Snowy Hydro scheme, with the Snowy Water Inquiry Outcomes Implementation Deed (SWIOID) and Snowy Water Licence establishing the rules for the timing and release volumes of water from Snowy Hydro storages.

These altered flows are impacting many natural processes in the river resulting in poor ecosystem health, loss of threatened species, the inability to meet critical human water needs and the increased risk of poor water quality outcomes under extreme climatic conditions such as drought events. For example, the township of Cooma, a short distance downstream of Tantangara dam, has the lowest water security rating under the NSW water management framework.

The above is an extract from the ACT & Region Catchment Management Coordination Group's Problem Statement that is reported in its Annual Report 2023-24, Appendix D.

Approach

Evaluating and negotiating the review of the SWIOID will be a complex process aimed at achieving a quadruple bottom line outcome – environmental, cultural, social and economic. Such an approach is needed for identifying ways to improve the health of the upper Murrumbidgee River and its catchments. Once this has been done, future operations of Snowy Hydro Limited will take place within a framework that respects this complexity and explicitly articulates the environmental, cultural, social and economic outcomes that are to be achieved.

Furthermore, by initially applying a quadruple a bottom line (environmental, social, economic and cultural) approach in the upper Murrumbidgee will provide lessons for reviewing the SWIOID with respect to other rivers affected by the Snowy Hydro Limited scheme, notably the Snowy Rivers.

To implement such a quadruple bottom line approach, key principles have been developed to guide negotiations in the SWIOID review process.

Key principles

1. **Improve the upper Murrumbidgee riverine health so that it meets environmental, economic, cultural and social needs by increasing flows and having more flexible releases that are aligned with environmental condition**

Addressing this principle will be guided by the following current concerns:

- The current flow releases allocated to the UMR are inadequate, and the current inflexible planning release arrangements for flows are having an adverse effect.
- There are to be no reductions in flows in the Snowy River and other montane rivers to achieve additional flows to UMR.
- The significant changes in climate conditions and Snowy Hydro Ltd operations (role in National Energy Market, development of Snowy 2.0) since the SWIOID was negotiated in 2002 provide a timely opportunity to revisit the overall agreement. The review should also consider the need for changes in operational releases in recognition of the changed environment and increased demand for regional and urban water security.
- The range of projected changes in river inflows due to the direct impacts of climate change and other risks to water resources (e.g. tree dieback, fire impacts on vegetation, reforestation, farm dams), requiring the development of relevant adaptation options.

2. **Foster good decision-making by using existing Governance systems, and supporting these with additional arrangements (including using collaborative decision-making) to amend the SWIOID, and in the longer term to provide on-going coordination and monitoring**

Implementation of this principle should be guided by the following expectations:

- Collaboration (including the development of a collaborative decision-making framework among the Australian Government and the governments of the ACT, NSW and Victoria, along with Traditional Custodians and other key stakeholders in the review process) is fundamental to achieving a good quadruple bottom line outcome. Examples of existing approaches to collaborative decision-making are reported in the ACT & Region Catchment Management Coordination Group's Annual Report 2023-24, Appendix E.
- The ACT & Region Catchment Management Coordination Group should provide support for on-going coordination and monitoring to decision-makers both during the SWIOID review and beyond.
- Environmental, economic, cultural and social values and assets, and the thresholds of water flows needed to restore and sustain them, need to be defined to inform options and future decisions on water allocations, noting the importance of flow levels in the UMR in providing regional water security in towns across the region (not just the ACT).
- Inclusion of the ACT as a formal partner in any future SWIOID agreement, in recognition of its position in the UMR and its reliance on releases from the Snowy Hydro Ltd Scheme while also ensuring a healthy Upper Murrumbidgee River that supports the region environmentally, culturally, socially and economically.

3. Apply the best available operational and technical information to inform changes to the SWIOID and inform land management river restoration practices

In implementing this principle, it is necessary to recognise that:

- Scientific assessments need to be used to define ecologically sustainable base flows and options for changes to flows for the UMR. The best available information to support these assessments may come from NSW, ACT or a combination of both. The available data and modelling should be provided and analysed holistically to inform further changes to the SWIOID.
- In investigating options to improve flow releases from the Snowy Hydro Ltd Scheme to the UMR it is essential to identify changes to engineering modifications to existing structures and opportunities that may arise from the likely changes to Snowy Hydro operations over the next fifty years (including the construction and operation of Snowy 2.0).
- Adaptive management of environmental flows- responding to changing conditions- is essential and should align with best practices in Australia.
- On-going monitoring will require new monitoring infrastructure.
- It is important that the consumptive water use on impacted rivers be quantified, with options for better allocation and regulation of water take identified to enhance river health.
- It is important to clearly identify where the additional water to improve flows will come from, and what needs to happen (such as costs covered, engineering changes on structures, changes to delivery/ take rules) for it to be delivered.
- Land management options for river restoration (such as weed control, riparian revegetation and sediment removal) may not require additional flows, but still play an important role in improving the health of the river and therefore need to be implemented as the SWIOID is reviewed.

4. Align regulatory and legal frameworks

Specifically in implementing this principle the following should be noted:

- The need for the revised SWIOID agreement to be consistent with river management goals and objectives of relevant existing frameworks (such as NWI, Water Acts, MDB Plan, NSW Water Sharing Plans, ACT and NSW Water Resource Plans).
- Reviewing the existing regulatory and legislative frameworks which apply to water resources in the Snowy Hydro Ltd Scheme and their impacts on the UMR needs to occur so that changes in the SWIOID are respected.

5. Provide transparency and accountability

As a matter of principle, the SWIOID review should:

- Call for open access to data, information, decision making processes and performance measure to evaluate the effect of management options.
- Foster active community collaboration, involvement in, and education on, the decision-making processes used in the review.

Appendix B: SWIOLD Review – Letter to Tanya Plibersek



The Hon Tanya Plibersek,
Minister for the Environment and Water;
minister.plibersek@aph.gov.au

CC:

Senator The Hon Katy Gallagher MP
Minister for Finance
senator.katy.gallagher@aph.gov.au

The Hon Chris Bowen
Minister for Climate Change and Energy
minister.bowen@dcceew.gov.au

Senator David Pocock
senator.pocock@aph.gov.au

Dear Tanya,

It is greatly appreciated that you have initiated a review of the Snowy Water Inquiry Outcomes Implementation Deed (2002) (SWIOLD). We write to request consideration of integrating a collaborative decision-making approach into that review process.

Such an approach would involve key stakeholders and experts in the explicit consideration of economic, environmental, social and cultural trade-offs in the review of the Snowy Water Inquiry Outcomes Implementation Deed (2002) (the Deed). Doing so would progress the outcome of the Review in a way that is highly transparent and accountable¹, fosters a shared understanding of the challenges and trade-offs, ensures best available scientific evidence is used to inform decision-making, and may reduce opposition by affected stakeholders.

The following considerations, endorsed by members of the ACT & Region Catchment Management Coordination Group (Coordination Group), may assist in you considering our request:

Key Considerations

6. The Deed includes provisions that facilitate annual water releases for water users, environmental flows and flexibility for electricity generation. The Snowy Hydro Limited Sustainability Report 2023 articulates its role in balancing rights to manage water under the licence, and requirements for downstream economic, environmental, cultural and recreational uses. The proposed review of the Deed should enable a process for delivering on this sustainability objective and supporting downstream values and uses of the water resources.
7. A common approach for conducting reviews is to put out a discussion paper, everyone submits their views, and a decision is made. These processes don't allow the collective to learn from each other to better understand the inputs and trade-offs made during the process.
8. A review of the Deed can only be undertaken with the agreement of the parties (NSW/Vic/Cwlth).
9. The SWIOLD hasn't been reviewed since it was agreed in 2002. There is no legislated requirement to review the Deed.
10. Significant changes have occurred since 2002 including: changed ownership of Snowy Hydro, new Snowy 2.0 infrastructure, implementation of the MDB Plan, and major reforms to environmental water management. Additionally, our knowledge and understanding of the environmental requirements has improved through science programs in the Snowy and montane and Murray-Darling Basin.

1 [Improving the health of the Upper Murrumbidgee: Draft Strategy](#)

11. Any changes to the Deed would need to be reflected in an equivalent amendment to the Snowy Water Licence.
12. In November 2023, the Australian River Restoration Centre undertook a survey, which resulted in over 1000 people² with an interest in the Upper Murrumbidgee River and Montane rivers expressing that, in addition to power generation and revenue, the Statement of Expectations should address the following matters (in order of priority): Water Quality, Transparency of Operations, Environmental Sustainability, Critical Human Water Needs, Community Engagement, Cultural Outcomes, Regional Development, Recreational Use and Agricultural Use.
13. As part of the Water Amendment (*Restoring Our Rivers*) Bill 2023 announcement, Snowy Hydro Limited committed to “supporting adaptive management approaches and best practice management to pursue a high standard of social, Cultural and environmental outcomes”³.
14. There is now an opportunity to use a collaborative decision-making process that includes the New South Wales, Victorian and Commonwealth Governments and key stakeholders (including Snowy Hydro Limited, the ACT Government, community and experts) in the Deed review process. As mentioned previously this seems to offer many benefits.

The attached information sheet outlines in more detail collaborative decision-making models such as Structured Decision Making, for enabling opportunities for stakeholder participation to foster a shared understanding and potential greater acceptance of the trade-offs and ensure best available scientific evidence is used to inform decision-making.

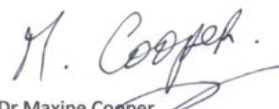
The Watertrust Australia, in June 2024, arranged presentations on SDM with key Stakeholders. Peter Horne, Principle Watertrust Australia, advised that they are open to a Decision Sketch with respect to helping inform the review of the SWIOD. This would likely include a couple of days, during which time, participants would develop a shared understanding of the values affected, identify the scope of alternatives, information and analysis needed to evaluate them and the nature of the likely trade offs and uncertainties that will need to be addressed in a full decision process.

Collaborative decision-making process characterises how the Coordination Group functions and would therefore welcome being part of a Decision Sketch, if it is progressed.

Coordination Group members are available to assist you, and your departments.

Yours sincerely,

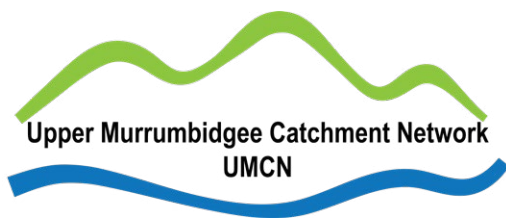

8/8/24
Shane Rattenbury
ACT Minister for water
Rattenbury@act.gov.au


Dr Maxine Cooper
Chair, ACT and Region Catchment
Management Coordination Group

2 [Community Voice — The Forgotten River — The Forgotten River](#)

3 [NEW HOPE FOR THE MURRUMBIDGEE IN WATER AGREEMENT - David Pocock](#)

Appendix C: UMCN Annual Report



The Upper Murrumbidgee Catchment Network (UMCN) is a network of individuals, community groups, businesses and organisations (government and non-government) committed to improving natural resource management in the upper Murrumbidgee catchment. Our focus is on networking, knowledge sharing and collaboration. UMCN is supported via core funding from the ACT and Region Catchment Management Coordination Group (ACT&R CMCG). The Executive Committee and Members are grateful to the ACT&R CMCG members for their support.

It is important to recognise that the UMCN is made of many member organisations which undertake a huge amount of work across the ACT and NSW including in the tributaries such as the Queanbeyan-Molonglo, Bredbo, Michelago, Yass, Numeralla, Gudgenby-Naas and other catchments. While this report focuses on UMCN activities, the work delivered by member organisations to care for our waterways, protect the environment and engage the community, needs to be acknowledged. UMCN is grateful to all our members and thanks them for another successful year across the upper Murrumbidgee region.

Connection and information sharing – The UMCN held a significant community engagement event this year - the second *Working Together for the River Forum*, on 27 November 2024 at the Royal Hotel in Queanbeyan (see [Case study 2 – Working together for the River Forum 2024](#)). This was a follow up to the successful 2022 event.

In addition to this event, we held our Member Meetings, which provide opportunities for UMCN to update members on its activities and for members attending to report on the initiatives of their organisations. In conjunction with these meetings, we have guest presenters on various topics; these events are also open to the community.

The March 2025 event, which featured two engaging presentations, was well attended (in-person and online) and sparked significant interest among attendees—particularly in the unexpected synergy between the seemingly unrelated topics discussed. The two topics covered were driven by two quite different needs. The first was a presentation by QPRC on the proposed upgrades to the Queanbeyan Sewerage Treatment Plant, following requests from the community for an update. The second presentation demonstrated how a world leading research project to track Latham's Snipe, a migratory bird which travels from Australia to Japan and Russia (among other places) is changing our understanding of migratory birds and their management needs, using cutting edge technology. Videos are available on the UMCN YouTube channel:

- [Queanbeyan Sewage Treatment Plant Upgrade](#)
Simon Boulton, QSPT Project Manager, Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council, shared insights on creating a sustainable sewage treatment plant that protects public health and the environment.
- [Tracking Latham's Snipe](#)
Lori Gould, ANU, explored the fascinating migration of Latham's Snipe, a migratory wader bird we share with Japan and Russia, and its impact on habitat management.

Advocacy – The UMCN and some of our member groups continue to advocate for a healthier river, and have made a number of submissions:

- July 2024 to Cwlth DCCEEW – [Improving the health of the Upper Murrumbidgee River – Draft Strategy](#)
- July 2024 to NSW DCCEEW – Draft Murrumbidgee Regional Water Strategy
- Sept 2024 to Cwlth DCCEEW - Draft principles of a National Water Agreement Discussion paper
- January 2025 – NSW Water Sharing Plan for the Murrumbidgee Unregulated Water Sources

To support these submissions, UMCN representatives attended in-person and online consultation sessions by government agencies. Our members have also continued to engage at the political level, working with other agencies and the ACT&R CMCG to speak directly to Suzanne Orr MLA, ACT Water Minister, and the Hon Katy Gallagher, Senator for the ACT.

We are encouraged to see that our advocacy and submissions are making a meaningful impact, with the issues we've raised being actively considered and addressed.

Further engagement included:

- August 2024 – The Chair presented at the River Basin Management Society event, 11th Australian Stream Management Conference, in Victor Harbor, South Australia.
- September 2024 – UMCN Members attended Environmental flows information session with many other stakeholders (40+ people) at Bredbo, hosted by the NSW Government.
- Sept-Oct 2024 – UMCN members participated in Decision Sketch process run by WaterTrust Australia to demonstrate an example of collaborative decision making.
- Oct 2024 – The Chair presented at the River Basin Management Society event – NSW/ACT Highlights of 11 Australian Stream Management Conference in Newcastle (recorded as part of proceedings at: [RBMS NSW/ACT Highlights of 11ASM Seminar – 30 October 2024](#)).
- Nov 2024 – the Chair and UMCN members attended a workshop hosed by WaterTrust Australia on how to make trade-offs with hydro power developments.
- November 2024 – UMCN members attended a range of community consultation sessions hosted by NSW South-East Local Land Services, to improve the health of the catchment.
- November 2024 – The Chair participated with other stakeholders in the review of the ACT Catchment Strategy refresh.
- February 2025 – The Chair attended Clean Up Australia Day Awards breakfast at Parliament House.
- February 2025 – UMCN Members attended a walk and talk by the river with ACT Senator Katy Gallagher, to discuss the health of the river and options for improvement.
- May 2025 – Meeting of the Murray Darling Basin Officials Committee visiting Canberra and Cooma to look at the Upper Murrumbidgee River. UMCN Chair and Secretary made presentations.
- The Chair joined ACTRCMCG on a fact-finding visit to dredging operations upstream of Taemas Bridge near Yass.
- June 2025 – Following our submission, UMCN was invited to appear at the NSW Legislative Assembly Committee on Investment, Industry and Regional Development Inquiry into the [Impacts of the Water Amendment \(Restoring Our Rivers\) Act 2023 on NSW regional communities](#). (The hearing was rescheduled to July, and attended by Professor Fiona Dyer, UMCN Member and former Chair).

Appendix D: Financial Report 2024-25

Summary statement	
Income – members contributions (2024–25)	\$107,000
Expenditure (2024–25)	\$44,049
Balance (2024–25)	\$62,951
Balance carried over from 2019–2024	\$3,46,606
Total (Available funds)	\$409,557*

Detailed financial statement for 2024-25

Income – Invoiced contribution	2024–25
Total	\$107,000
Queanbeyan-Pelarang Regional Council	\$13,000
South East Local Land Services	\$13,000
Yass Valley Council	\$13,000
National Capital Authority	\$34,000
Icon Water Ltd	\$34,000
Expenditure – By project	2024–25
A. Annual Report 2023–24	\$16,368
B. UMCN	\$27,500
C. Operational expenses (meetings)	\$180
Balance (2024–25)	\$62,951

*This balance doesn't include the amount expended in early July 2025.

Appendix E: Community representative update

As the community representative on the ACT and Region Catchment Management Coordination Group (Coordination Group), I've enjoyed liaising with the community on local catchment management matters and conveying these back to the catchment group. As Chair of the Upper Murrumbidgee Catchment Network (UMCN), I've also had the opportunity to participate in a range of engagement activities with local stakeholders to strengthen collaboration in the region.

Participating in the UMCN's second *Working Together for the River Forum*, on 27 November 2024 at the Royal Hotel in Queanbeyan was a highlight. The conversations and networking between agencies, utilities, researchers, non-government organisations and community members emphasised the value of this forum for future waterway management in the region.

Community members and non-government organisations continue to advocate for improved waterway management via submissions, letters, and in-person engagement. Stakeholders provided input to consultations on the Commonwealth strategy for the upper Murrumbidgee River, NSW draft regional water strategy, a NSW Senate Committee Hearing on the Restoring Our Rivers 2024 Water Act Amendment, the new National Water Agreement, the NSW Water Sharing Plan for the Murrumbidgee Unregulated Water Sources, and attending planning meetings for environmental flows. Community representatives and experts also met with ACT Water Minister Suzanne Orr MLA, Senator for the ACT, the Hon Katy Gallagher, and the Murray Darling Basin Officials Committee in 2024-25, with all meetings happening by the river. It is encouraging to see this level of engagement from officials and Ministers.

A significant outcome from engagement in recent years has been the temporary protection of environmental flows released from Tantangara Reservoir, by the NSW Water Minister. These protections are now set to be codified in the Murrumbidgee Unregulated Water Sharing Plan, consistent with protections in place across most of the Murray-Darling Basin. This is a significant achievement for the region.

The community was also made aware of a new water trading framework developed between the ACT and NSW governments which commenced on 1 July 2025. Initially, this trading framework enables environmental water from the ACT to be made available to the

Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder for use below Burrinjuck Dam. Over the next two years, the framework may be expanded to allow other types of trade to occur. The community welcomes further engagement on this matter.

Noting the range of engagement activities above, the community would like to see different approaches to engagement in water management for more complex issues. A sense is that they don't always see their views adequately addressed via the 'Have Your Say; What We Heard' style of engagement. The concept of using participatory approaches to engagement is garnering substantial traction. In this context, community members participated in a Decision Sketch process run by Watertrust Australia to demonstrate an example of collaborative decision making. The demonstration provided an example of how stakeholders with diverse views can work together to identify new options and solutions to complex issues.

Invasive pest plant and animal species continue to be an area of concern across the region. Recognising the collective efforts of many organisations to manage weeds, prolific species such as African lovegrass, box elder and St John's wort are some of the key species I've heard in conversations about a need for continued, sustained efforts to control. Invasive animals such as pigs, goats, deer and rabbits continue to require control programs across the region. In our rivers, invasive fish species such as European carp, redfin perch and weatherloach are an area of great interest/concern to the community, particularly carp, and there is an appetite for more activities around carp control. Trout species can also impact fish numbers and there have been efforts to cease stocking of trout in the upper Murrumbidgee River to support the recovery of Macquarie perch. This is most welcome, and continued sign of collaboration across stakeholder groups to recover the Murrumbidgee River.

Sufficient flows are vital to the health of a river. It has been pleasing to see state agencies engaging the community and gearing up for on-ground restoration activities to improve the catchment. Establishing a flow regime which complements these works will be critical to recovering the upper Murrumbidgee River. It was pleasing to see the revised Statement of Expectations (SoE) from Snowy Hydro Shareholder Ministers to the Snowy Hydro Board released in

December 2024. Notwithstanding a lack of community engagement on this important document, the revised SoE includes the need for consideration of downstream values and uses of water in Snowy Hydro operations. We look forward to seeing how the revised SoE benefits the rivers and communities of the region over the coming years.

The next crucial step in restoring flows to the river will be the review of the Snowy Water Inquiry Outcomes Implementation Deed (SWIOID). The community eagerly awaits this review and, as flagged above, would welcome a participatory approach to engagement. Recovering the upper Murrumbidgee River will not be possible unless more water is made available to the river through this process, and it is essential that any additional flows do not come at the expense of environmental flow programs across the other Snowy and Montane Rivers.

We are keen to keep the upper Murrumbidgee River on the radar of broader networks. I was pleased to present about the upper Murrumbidgee River at the River Basin Management Society's (RBMS) 11th Australian Stream Management Conference in Victor Harbor, South Australia in August 2024. I subsequently presented to the NSW/ACT Highlights of 11 Australian Stream Management Conference, in Newcastle (recorded as part of proceedings at: [RBMS NSW/ACT Highlights of 11ASM Seminar – 30 October 2024](#)).

It is also important to acknowledge the other programs of work across the region which will increase the outcomes of the Commonwealth investment in the region. Examples include phase one and two of the Urban Rivers Program and Drought Resilience Programs, as well as core NRM activities undertaken by state and territory government agencies, councils and non-government organisations. Volunteer and citizen science programs are also crucial to maximising government investment and strengthening community engagement in NRM. I was pleased to attend the launch by the Federal Member for Eden Monaro, Kristy McBain MP, of phase two Urban Rivers Grant Program funding to Queanbeyan Palerang Regional Council and Queanbeyan Landcare, which will make a significant improvement to the Queanbeyan-Molonglo catchment.

Finally, I would like to thank the community and the ACT & Region Catchment Management Coordination Group for allowing me to be their representative on this committee. I would also like to acknowledge the many organisations and individuals undertaking work to care for the waterways and catchments of the region in paid and voluntary capacities. As we commence the 2025-26 financial year, I feel like the next two years are vital to ensuring better water quality and security for the region over the coming decades, which will be critical to supporting our communities and biodiversity.

Andy Lowes

Community Representative, ACT&R CMCG



A drone view of the Murrumbidgee River at Pine Island Reserve showing the border of the riparian zone and public use infrastructure

