

# Progress Report 2024-25

[nrar.nsw.gov.au](http://nrar.nsw.gov.au)

November 2025



NRAR staff using a drone on a North Coast property. Photo: Salty Dingo



Murrumbidgee River, Darlington Point. Photo: Jane McKelvey, NRAR

**This report is printed on 100% recycled paper by Flagstaff Group.**

Flagstaff is a registered charity and NDIS provider who employs over 260 people with a disability. Its paper division recycles more than 17,000 tonnes of paper, cardboard and soft plastics each year, with 99.3% of materials diverted from landfill to support a more sustainable future.



# Contents

<b>Message from the NRAR Board</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Message from the Chief Regulatory Officer</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>A year of progress</b>	<b>7</b>
NRAR achievements	8
Community and environmental benefits	10
Compliance outcomes	14
How we enforce the law	17
Educating and enabling people	23
Research, development and technology	32
Building public confidence	36
<b>Regional snapshots</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>The year ahead</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>How NRAR works</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>Your questions answered</b>	<b>75</b>

# Message from the NRAR Board

---

NRAR's vision for fair and sustainable water regulation in NSW continued to shape our strategy throughout 2024–25. Our focus remained on building public trust and confidence in the way water is managed and regulated across the state.

Supporting this vision are 3 key pillars:

1. Helping people understand and follow water laws through education and support.
2. Enforcing the rules to ensure fairness and deter unlawful behaviour.
3. Driving improvements in how our natural resources are managed.

A major step forward this year was the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal's (IPART) decision to fully fund our compliance program at \$36.3 million per year for the next 4 years. This not only strengthens our ability to deliver on our purpose, but also addresses past funding gaps and sets a better benchmark for future support.

IPART's endorsement reflects NRAR's careful planning and efficient operations. It's also a credit to the many people behind the scenes whose hard work made this outcome possible.

This funding will have a lasting impact — not just on NRAR but also on the communities and industries across NSW that rely on us to uphold the rules and protect the water we all depend on.

Another important development was the introduction of a new bill to strengthen water laws in NSW. After years of enforcing the current legislation, NRAR has a clear understanding of what works and what needs improvement. Our staff played an active role in shaping the proposed changes.

The Water Management Legislation Amendment (Stronger Enforcement and Penalties) Bill, introduced to Parliament in June 2025, aims to give NRAR stronger powers to hold individuals and companies accountable, pursue those who break the law, and respond to public concerns about unlawful water use.

The NRAR Board extends its thanks to NSW Minister for Water the Hon. Rose Jackson for her continued support and leadership. Her commitment to improving water regulation helps NRAR drive meaningful change in the way water is managed in our state.

We also thank the whole NRAR workforce for yet another 12 months of excellent work. Their dedication and flexibility has kept the organisation moving steadily toward its vision.

**The Hon. Craig Knowles**  
Board Chair,  
Natural Resources Access Regulator



# Message from the Chief Regulatory Officer

---

NRAR has now completed its eighth financial year, and it stands out as one of the most impactful since the agency was founded.

While we remained firmly committed to our core vision of ensuring the sustainable management of NSW's limited water resources, we also took important steps to prepare for the future. This included investing in new technologies, improving our systems, and advocating for legislative changes to make water laws clearer and easier to apply. We also focused on innovation in how we work and continued to invest in the capability and wellbeing of our people.



A key area of focus this year was the non-urban metering framework, which ensures licensed water use is measured accurately and securely. In August 2024, a major review of the framework concluded, with NRAR playing a central role. The NSW Minister for Water endorsed several recommendations aimed at accelerating implementation. These changes strengthen our ability to enforce metering rules and prevent water being taken without compliant meters.

Another important milestone was reached with the launch of a \$2.9 million rehabilitation project at Wingecarribee Swamp on Gundungurra Country in the NSW Southern Highlands. This initiative is part of a legal agreement with a coal mine that allegedly took surface water without a licence. It represents NRAR's largest enforceable undertaking since our establishment in 2018, which you can read about on page 10 of this report.

We also continued to take firm enforcement action where necessary. In March 2025, a commercial farming company in the Kempsey region and one of its directors were fined nearly \$300,000 for building an unauthorised dam and wetland damage (full details on page 18). In May, we commenced a prosecution against a Condobolin region farmer accused of breaching licence conditions by pumping water while their meter was not functioning.

NRAR continued to see the value of community outreach, engagement and education activities in helping water users to comply. Our staff visited more than 2700 sites across NSW to check basic water management issues, examine licenced works and offer advice and guidance. We connected with communities, supported voluntary compliance and upheld the law to ensure fairness and accountability. We drove meaningful improvements to the regulatory system, delivering leadership and integrity for the people of NSW.

None of NRAR's achievements for the financial year would have been possible without the skill and dedication of our staff, and I thank them sincerely for this contribution.

**Grant Barnes**  
Chief Regulatory Officer,  
Natural Resources Access Regulator

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Grant Barnes', written in a cursive style.

# Acknowledgement of Country

The Natural Resources Access Regulator acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters across New South Wales. We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and we recognise the ongoing connection Aboriginal peoples have to Country. We honour their deep spiritual, cultural, and custodial relationships that continue to this day.





# 1

A year of  
progress

# NRAR achievements

## What we cover



**800,000**  
square kilometres



**197,000**  
kilometres of waterways



**146,000+**  
licensed works subject to regulation



**1,300+**  
storage dams

## Staffing



**21**  
offices across NSW



**217**  
employees



**60%**  
are based regionally



**71%**  
of senior leaders are women



**7%**  
of employees speak a first language other than English

## Educating and enabling



**18**  
targeted education sessions delivered

**341**  
people attended



**9**  
field days

**81**  
hours of discussion about water laws



**19**  
stakeholder events attended

**23**  
face to face meetings

**772**  
other interactions with stakeholders

**831** people enrolled in our online water regulation course, bringing total enrolments to over 1,200



**2,700+** property visits

## Building public confidence



**58,100**  
social media interactions



**510**  
media mentions across digital, print, TV and radio



**78,700**  
website views

## Law enforcement



537

enforcement actions taken



1

prosecution started



82

penalty notices issued



200

directions issued to stop work or take remedial action



254

formal warnings/ official cautions issued

## Technology



3

new heavy-lift drones with LiDAR and camera capability

7

new advanced field drones to complement the existing NRAR drone program

1.5K+

groundwater water access licences identified through advanced data analysis

2

new sonar boats to map dams and measure water flow

1

new crop mapping software to analyse crops and irrigation

\$1.3m

investment in tech upgrades

## Compliance outcomes

### Flood works



205

works assessed

4

works removed through enforcement

7 works removed voluntarily

113

properties inspected

### Groundwater



244

groundwater licences checked

73%

increase in monthly self-reporting of water use

89

non-compliant licence holders now following the rules

### Metering



540

advisory letters sent to licence holders

125

enforcement actions taken including warnings, cautions and directions

1,532

works assessed by site visits

6,382

works checked by desktop audit

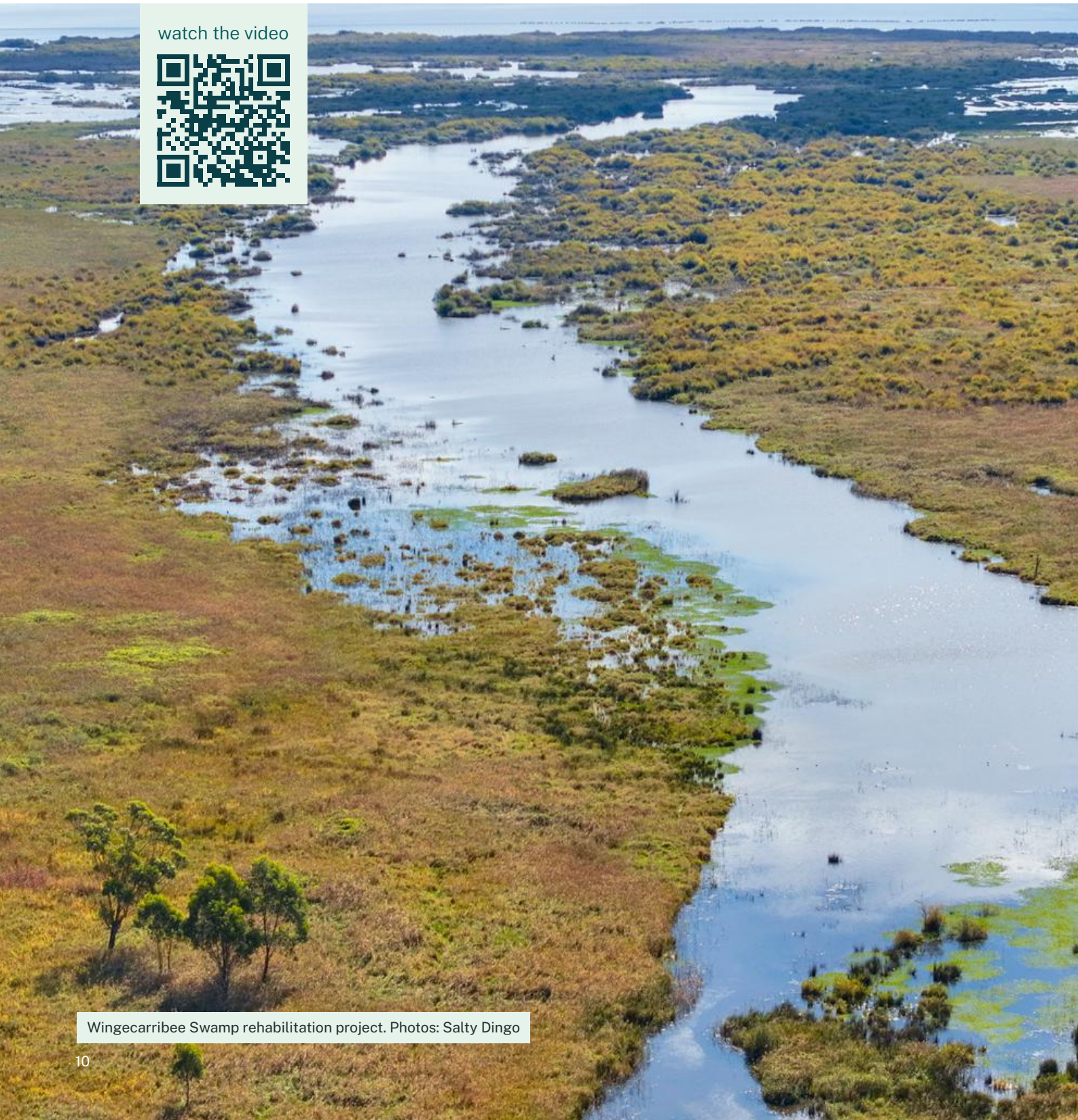
16K+

metering works identified by combining satellite and extraction site information

# Community and environmental benefits

Wingecarribee Swamp rehabilitation project

watch the video



Wingecarribee Swamp rehabilitation project. Photos: Salty Dingo

In early 2025, work began on a \$2.9 million, three-year project to rehabilitate the 5,000-year-old Wingecarribee Swamp on Gundungurra Country in the NSW Southern Highlands.

The project is funded by Illawarra Coal Holdings as part of an enforceable undertaking (EU) with NRAR, after they allegedly took surface water without a licence over 5 years. As part of the EU, the company agreed to fund a major community project focused on wetland or waterway restoration.

Key activities include:

- protecting habitat for endangered species like the Wingecarribee gentian and leek orchid
- conducting vegetation surveys to track ecological health
- installing fencing to prevent weed spread, livestock damage and water contamination
- removing invasive weeds to support native plant growth
- improving access for ongoing management
- incorporating traditional knowledge to support cultural resilience.

The project is being run in partnership with the Illawarra Local Aboriginal Land Council, creating jobs and training opportunities.

Wingecarribee Swamp is heritage-listed, a protected part of the Sydney drinking water catchment, and home to rare species including a giant dragonfly. It has a long history of environmental disturbance, including peat mining from the 1960s, flooding from a 1974 reservoir, and a major collapse in 1998.

### Fast facts

- The swamp is one of the largest montane peat swamps in mainland Australia.
- It is listed on the directory of important Australian wetlands.
- The project is expected to be completed by the second half of 2027.





Satellite image showing what water ponds look like from above. Source: Google Earth

### Improving hard claypans

A rangeland restoration project began in the Narrabri region in the second half of 2024.

Boggabri Coal funded the project as part of an EU with NRAR after they allegedly took surface water without a licence and collected it in storages between 2019 and 2022. As part of the agreement, the company agreed to support a community project focused on water management.

Northern Slopes Landcare led the project, which started with a workshop in May 2024, followed by surveys on 6 local farms at the end of 2024. Three landholders chose to fund extra surveys to expand the benefits of water ponding on their properties.

Water ponding involves building horseshoe-shaped banks that form small ponds to hold rainwater, helping the soil crack, absorb water and trap seeds for germination.

Farmers and machinery operators were trained to build banks that last, helping both the land and environment.

**Fast facts**

- 38.4 km of water ponding banks built.
- Six properties installed the ponds.
- Three farmers put their own money into extra surveys to expand the benefits.



Water ponding workshop in Narrabri. Photo: NRAR



Machinery operators forming horseshoe-shaped banks.



Before: Stonequarry Creek Revegetation Project

## Creek gets a boost

A section of Stonequarry Creek beside a popular Picton walking track is becoming a refuge for native plants and animals thanks to enforcement action by NRAR.

Hundreds of native seedlings were planted along the banks of the creek behind Hume Oval to re-create a Shale Sandstone Transition Forest – a type of endangered ecological community once more common in the region.

Funding for the Stonequarry Creek Revegetation Project was one of several obligations in an EU between NRAR and Tahmoor Coal after the company allegedly took water without a licence.

Work involved the removal of severe weed infestation along the creek including weeds of national significance such as blackberry and madeira vine, and many other serious environmental invaders.

The community project began in September 2023 and was completed by the end of 2024.

### Fast facts

- Over 1,600 native seedlings planted.
- \$25,000 in funding for the project came from the EU.
- The project built on the previous work of Bushcare at the site.



After: Stonequarry Creek Revegetation Project. Photos: supplied

# Compliance outcomes

## Improving floodplain connections

### The problem

In the northern Murray-Darling Basin, many floodplain structures have been built without approval or don't meet legal standards. They can block or redirect floodwater, stopping it from reaching important ecosystems, cultural sites, and downstream users.

### Why it matters

Unauthorised flood works change how water moves across the land, often unpredictably. This can harm towns, farms, the environment, and cultural sites. Some structures also allow unlawful water use to happen, reducing the amount available for legal users. Removing the worst of these helps protect river health and ensures floodwater reaches places like the Menindee Lakes and Macquarie Marshes.

### Our approach

With funding from the Commonwealth (\$10.2 million) and NSW Government (\$1.08 million), we joined a multi-agency effort to address unauthorised flood works in 5 valleys with existing Floodplain Management Plans.

We inspected more than 100 properties and used satellite data and flood modelling to assess the impact of the flood works. High-risk cases were referred for further investigation and possible removal.

We worked directly with landholders to understand how these structures were used and to find solutions. Some works were removed entirely, while others were modified to meet legal requirements under the *Water Management Act 2000*.

Our approach balanced enforcement with education, aiming to improve long-term floodplain health and compliance.

### Key results

- 205 inspections across 113 properties.
- 45 high-risk works referred for removal.
- 66 works needed licences or approvals.
- 3 cases still under investigation.
- 10 draft directions issued for remedial action.
- 7 works voluntarily removed.
- 4 works removed through enforcement.
- 5 works found to be legal.
- 5 cases caused environmental harm.
- 11 cases awaiting landholder response.





NRAR staff checking metering equipment. Photo: NRAR

## Non-urban metering

### The problem

Non-urban water metering helps track water taken from rivers and groundwater under a water access licence. It's a national requirement to ensure water is measured, monitored and managed properly.

Our efforts focused on high-volume, high-risk water users with entitlements over 100 megalitres whose deadline for installation has passed.

The NSW Government updated the metering policy this year to make compliance quicker, easier and cheaper for water users.

The policy review made significant changes and confirmed NRAR's focus area, but our work showed that many users still face challenges to comply. These challenges often require ongoing engagement and support from NRAR.

### Why it matters

High-volume users hold over 95% of NSW's water entitlements. Making sure they comply with metering rules is critical for fair and sustainable water use.

### Our approach

In 2024–25, we used spatial data and other tools to identify high-volume, active works in inland NSW that were overdue to comply.

#### Our staged assessment included:

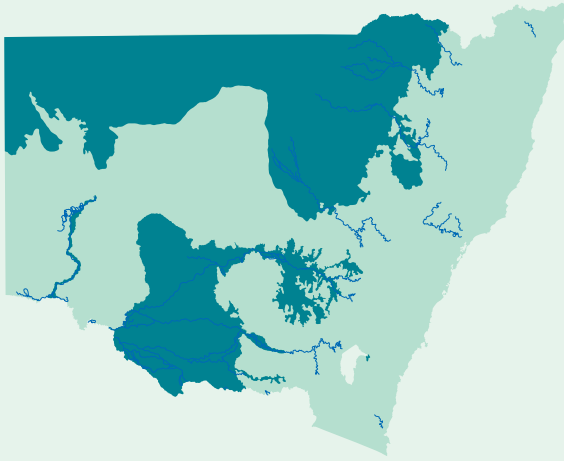
- desktop audits and site visits to check metering requirements and compliance
- actions taken for non-compliance, including advice, warnings, directions, or cautions
- follow-up audits to track progress.

#### When engaging licence holders, we ensured they:

- clearly understood their obligations
- were taking steps to comply
- knew the consequences of not meeting requirements.

### Key results

- 6,382 works assessed by desktop audit — covering over 2 million ML of water entitlement.
- 1,532 works assessed through site visits — covering over 467,000 ML of water entitlement.
- 540 advisory letters issued.
- 125 enforcement actions taken, involving 239 works — including cautions, warnings and directions.



## Groundwater sources in NSW

### Legend

Groundwater sources	<span style="color: #4DB6AC;">■</span> Not identified at-risk
	<span style="color: #00838F;">■</span> At-risk
	<span style="color: #00838F;">—</span> Regulated rivers

## Increasing groundwater reporting

### The problem

The NSW Government updated the rules for reading groundwater meters as part of wider reforms to improve how water use is measured and accounted for. Before these changes, WaterNSW read the meters. Now, groundwater licence holders are responsible for reading and reporting their take.

In places where the groundwater source was at risk of over-extraction, licence holders were required to submit monthly meter readings unless they had telemetry installed to do it automatically.

This new requirement led to a decrease in meter reads being reported, often because people were unaware the rules had changed.

Encouraging compliance was important to support better water management and help users avoid breaking the law.

### Why this matters

People, businesses and the environment all rely on groundwater in NSW. The government relies on data from water meters to determine how much groundwater can be safely shared. Without reliable data, allocations must be set more cautiously, especially in areas of high demand.

### Our approach

During the first stage of the project in 2023–24, we focused on 7 groundwater areas that were thought to be at risk. Staff worked closely with water licence holders by meeting with them, calling, texting and sending letters. We also used media and social media to spread the word about the monthly meter reading requirement. As a result, monthly meter reporting went up by 73% in these areas and WaterNSW begun routinely using text message reminders.

In stage two, the team planned to meet more people in person and visit properties. However, in late 2024 they were advised of an upcoming rule change that would remove the “at risk” label from the regulation. This removed the requirement to meter for many smaller water users and changed the recording and reporting requirements. As a result, the project was paused in November 2024 and officially ended in May 2025.

### Key results

- 244 water users were analysed during the project.
- 89 of them (36%) improved how well they followed the rules.
- Monthly self-reporting went up by 73%.
- Clear and personalised communication helped water users respond better.
- Different teams working together made the project stronger and more effective.
- Regular feedback helped the team adjust and improve the project as it progressed.

# How we enforce the law

## NRAR’s approach to enforcement

NRAR aims to be fair and firm. We focus on educating and supporting water users to follow the rules, but we take strong action against those who deliberately or carelessly break them, or where breaches result in significant harm.

When deciding whether to investigate, we ask:

- Is there strong evidence that rules are being broken?
- How much harm could this cause?

The greater the risk and harm, the tougher our response.

Our enforcement tools range from serious actions like prosecutions and enforceable undertakings, to fines, warnings, stop-work directions, and other measures.

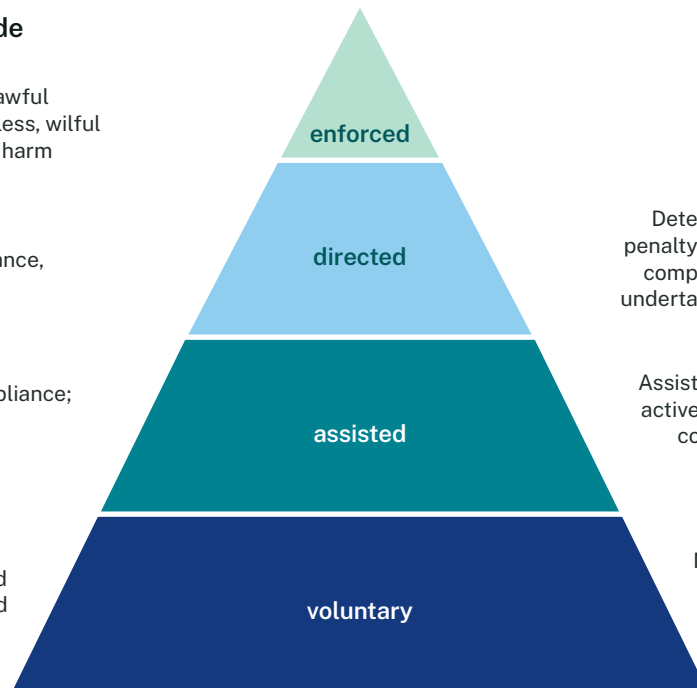
### Compliance attitude

Criminal intent and unlawful activity; recidivist, reckless, wilful conduct and/or serious harm

Tendency to offend; intentional non-compliance, and/or harm

Unintentional non-compliance; willing to comply, but not sure how to

Knows what is expected and willing/ incentivised to do what is right



### Our regulatory tools

Use full force of the law: prosecution, licence suspension or revocation

Deter by detection then action: penalty infringements, directions, compliance orders, enforceable undertakings, financial recoveries

Assist to comply: use risk-based active monitoring, system audit, corrective actions, guidance and education

Make it easy — offer advice and guidance through stakeholder outreach and promotional campaigns

**Actions at the top of the pyramid support actions at the bottom by clarifying expectations and demonstrating that those who don't comply will be held to account.**

# Prosecutions

## Fined for unlawfully building dams near wetlands

### The offences

A commercial farming company in the Kempsey region and one of its directors were each found guilty of 12 breaches of the *Water Management Act 2000*. These occurred between October 2016 and February 2021, including during a drought.

The charges included:

- 4 for using dams without approval
- 2 for extending dams without approval
- 6 for building dams in a wetland.

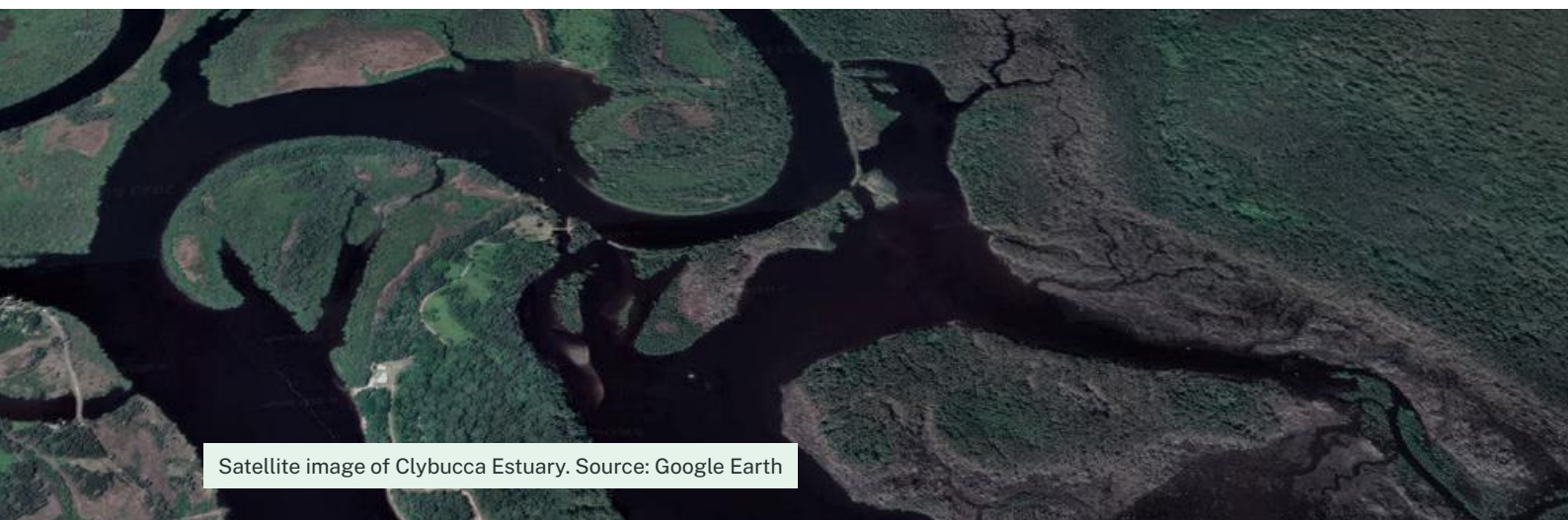
Some of the unlawful work took place in the culturally significant Clybucca Aboriginal Area, important to the Dunghutti, Gumbaynggirr and Ngambaa peoples.

### The outcome

The company and director were fined nearly \$300,000 and ordered to pay \$155,000 in legal costs to NRAR. They must also repair the site and publish public notices about the offences in 3 North Coast newspapers. The Magistrate called their actions “reckless” and “motivated by financial gain.” The defendants have lodged an appeal.

### The significance

The court found that the work damaged endangered wetlands and caused environmental harm. This is the largest fine NRAR has secured in a local court since its creation in 2018. It was also the first time NRAR included Aboriginal cultural harm in sentencing.



Satellite image of Clybucca Estuary. Source: Google Earth

## Failing to attend interview ends in fine

### The offence

A farm manager near Wentworth pleaded guilty to disregarding a legal notice from NRAR. They failed to attend a directed interview about a major investigation into suspected unlawful water use.

### The outcome

They were fined \$1,750, ordered to pay \$2,000 in costs, and now have a criminal conviction. The Magistrate called the offence “significantly serious,” noting its impact on public interest, the environment and future generations.

### The significance

This is the first time NRAR has prosecuted someone for not attending a directed interview. NRAR officers have legal powers to enforce water laws, including requiring people to provide information or attend interviews.

## Still in court

### Multiple charges

In May 2025, NRAR began a prosecution against a Condobolin region farmer who allegedly pumped water from a creek when the meter wasn't working, and in breach of licence conditions.

The farmer faces charges in Condobolin Local Court, including for taking water when a meter was not working, contravening terms and conditions of a water access licence, and failing to supply documents to NRAR investigators.

The offences are alleged to have taken place between April 2022 and March 2024, involving water allegedly taken from Island Creek, a tributary of the Lachlan River.

### Fines corrected

A former Wentworth region wine company and its manager pleaded guilty to 2 offences of unlawfully tapping into the Western Murray Irrigation pipeline contrary to section 342 of the *Water Management Act 2000* and 2 offences of taking water from the pipeline contrary to section 343 of the Act. The offences took place at 2 separate vineyards between 2016 and 2019 and involved unlawful take of just under 365 ML of water.

The NSW Land and Environment Court on 27 March 2024 imposed fines on the farm manager and the company. Her Honour Justice Duggan said the conduct of the offenders was "intentional", and the offences formed "part of a planned or organised criminal activity", which took place over a long period.

On 16 October 2024, following the Court correcting an error in the sentence, the fine amounts were corrected to \$270,000 and \$607,500 for the farm manager and company, respectively. This is the largest combined fine ever imposed in an NRAR prosecution.

The farm manager and the company have both appealed their sentences. The appeal was heard before the Court of Criminal Appeal on 30 June 2025, and judgment is reserved.

## Overview of prosecutions in 2024-25



2

started



2

concluded



4

ongoing



27

convictions



0

dismissed



0

withdrawn



0

Guilty, no conviction

## Other ways we respond to non-compliance

NRAR has a range of enforcement options available, and decisions about how to respond to breaches are made according to NRAR's Regulatory Policy.

### NRAR's varied enforcement responses in 2024–25

- 541 total enforcement actions
- 199 directions and enforceable undertakings
- 257 formal warnings or official cautions
- 81 penalty notices issued
- 2 prosecutions started



### Warnings and cautions

In some cases, NRAR opts to issue an official caution, a formal warning, or advice to someone who has allegedly breached the rules. This is NRAR's approach when the alleged offence is not at the serious end of the spectrum and when the person is co-operative and has a good attitude to complying. If the person comes to NRAR's attention again, the previous warning or caution may be considered when deciding whether to take stronger enforcement action.





## Enforceable undertakings

If a company or individual breaches water laws in a significant way, they sometimes propose entering into an enforceable undertaking (EU) with NRAR to remedy the breach instead of facing prosecution in court. An enforceable undertaking must contain actions to address the alleged rule breaking and to acknowledge the wrongdoing.

NRAR did not enter into any new EUs in the 2024-25 financial year, however, community projects related to previous EUs progressed. This included a significant project in the Southern Highlands worth almost \$3m. Read about this on pages 10-11.

## Penalty notices

A penalty notice is a type of enforcement action available to NRAR under the *Water Management Act 2000*.

These fines are a way to enforce the law quickly and effectively without resorting to long and costly legal proceedings.

When issuing a penalty notice, we consider things like the severity of the offence and its likely results, whether the breach was deliberate, and the history of compliance.

Penalty notice amounts for breaches of water law increased in September 2024 for the first time in nearly 20 years.

Fines for serious offences rose from \$750 to \$7,700 for individuals and from \$1,500 to \$15,400 for corporations. Fines for other offences also increased, with the lowest-tier penalties now set at \$3,000 for individuals and \$6,000 for corporations.

These changes are outlined in the *Water Management (General) Regulation 2018* and reflect tougher consequences for breaking the law.

Water course diversion. Photo: NRAR



## Case study

### Creek diverted at Gunnedah

#### The offence

In 2020, a tip-off led NRAR to a landholder near Gunnedah who had unlawfully diverted creek water into a farm dam.

#### Our response

NRAR ordered the landholder to restore the creek's natural flow and monitored the site until the work was completed in late 2024.

#### The result

By 2025, the creek was flowing normally again along its original course — an important outcome for protecting downstream koala habitat.

## Stop work orders and directions

If harmful activity continues and threatens water sources or the environment, NRAR can issue stop-work orders or directions. Directions may require action such as removing unlawful pumps or dams, installing meters or repairing waterways. These can be issued before an investigation is finished.

All stop-work orders and directions are listed in the public register on the NRAR website.

## S60G charges

Under the *Water Management Act 2000*, NRAR can issue a Section 60G charge when water is taken unlawfully. The charge can be up to five times the value of the water taken.

## Case study

### Unlicensed water take at Moree Plains

#### The breach

A landholder in Moree Plains took floodplain water without a licence. NRAR detected this using satellite imagery, drones, and data from meters, rainfall, and dam levels. Analysts estimated 5,371 megalitres may have been taken unlawfully.

#### The outcome

NRAR issued a Section 60G charge, requiring the landholder to pay \$4.78 per megalitre plus a penalty. The total payment was \$102,693.50.

#### The harm

Water access in NSW is regulated through licences. Taking water without one reduces availability for other users, including communities and the environment. Floodplain harvesting without a licence may be an offence.

# Educating and enabling people

Helping people understand and follow NSW water laws is one of NRAR's key roles. This year, we continued to focus on making the rules easier for people to understand and follow.

We shared information in many ways — by going to field days, hosting education sessions, visiting 2,711 properties to give advice in person, and offering a free online course.

## Over 1,200 enrolled in online course

Launched in early 2024 with TAFE NSW, our online course is self-paced and helps users build a basic understanding of water regulation.

The information is designed for Certificate III and IV levels and is targeted at primary producers, rural landholders and those working in the agricultural sectors. However, it's freely available to anyone interested in learning more about NSW water law.

It includes 3 mandatory modules, 5 elective modules and a decision tool to help users choose the right modules for their needs.

## During 2024-25



# 831

people enrolled bringing total enrolments to more than 1,200



# 292

completed the mandatory modules and tests



# 7

modules updated to reflect changes in legislation

## Tailored talks

NRAR ran 18 tailored education sessions for 12 organisations in 2024-25. These seminars were attended by more than 300 people both in person and online. They included both small stock and domestic users, and larger licensed irrigators.

Tailored education sessions are a way for us to educate and inform water users about how the rules apply to their situation. Subjects covered included drought resilience, Duly Qualified Person (DQP) training, and water law.

Sessions for DQP meter installers were held in collaboration with Irrigation Australia and Sapphire Irrigation.

We also collaborated with Murray Local Land Services to hold farm water management planning workshops.

## Case study

### Building partnerships for better knowledge sharing

In early 2025, NRAR staff delivered an education session at the Australian River Restoration Centre (ARRC). The presentation created a valuable platform to discuss what is allowed on waterfront land and the different types of controlled activities.

ARRC blends science, experience and a people-first philosophy to protect and restore waterways. Its work spans on-the-ground collaboration with landholders, leadership and mentoring programs, and strong advocacy for sustainable change.

This session showed us how sharing knowledge can spark valuable conversations and strengthen partnerships with stakeholders who are actively shaping the future of natural environments.



Staff presenting at the ARRC. Photo: NRAR

## Inactive works program

In February 2025, the Outreach Programs team began a project called the inactive works program. They were working on behalf of the Intelligence team to physically check water infrastructure, like pumps and bores, that were listed as active in the Water Licensing System but were suspected of not actually being used to take water.

In 2024-25, our Outreach team visited 1,063 extraction sites across 784 properties.

### Why it matters

Accurate records of water use are essential across NSW. The Intelligence team had developed a method to identify infrastructure that hadn't taken water for over 10 years, even though it was still marked as active. Outreach teams were tasked with testing this method on-ground. Their inspections help improve how water use is tracked and reported, which supports broader reforms in non-urban water metering.

### Our approach

Outreach staff inspected active and inactive water infrastructure at various properties, advising water users on proper water use recording. Around the same time, NSW DCCEEW introduced a framework allowing users to classify works as inactive, not built, or only used for basic rights. Outreach officers used this framework during visits to assess sites and help users update their records.

### Main outcomes

So far, Outreach teams have visited 1,063 extraction sites across 784 properties in NSW. Staff wrote reports on each property based on what they found. Early results show that the Intelligence team's method for identifying inactive works is working well. The program is still underway, and staff continue to help water users understand their responsibilities when it comes to reporting water use.



Staff provide support on water rules at field days. Photo: NRAR

## Field days

NRAR's field day program has been running for 5 years and continues to play a key role in helping water users understand the rules.

In 2024–25, we attended field days at Mudgee, Henty, Murrumbateman, Gunnedah, Moss Vale, Berry, Orange, the Hunter Valley and Casino.

At these events, our team spoke with more than 350 water users and had in-depth conversations with the majority of them.

Staff covered common topics like licences and approvals, stock and domestic rights, harvestable rights, and metering. They also showed people how to use free online tools to help them stay compliant.



9 field day events

350 conversations on specific water compliance concerns

81 hrs = 2 working weeks spent discussing the water rules with people

90% of surveyed visitors said the interactions were very useful

## City outreach

NRAR's Outreach teams visited Sydney's 33 councils in June after a pilot project revealed some councils' water works were in breach of the law.

The initial project examined 3 metropolitan councils and found that the most common breaches were not recording water use and using unauthorised or expired works.

Outreach officers inspected the rest of the city's councils to ensure they understood their obligations under the *Water Management Act 2000* and were not breaking the rules.

Complying with water laws is important for everyone, no matter where they are in NSW.

Early assessments showed that Sydney councils had on average 10 water supply works.



Staff inspect water works in metro councils. Photo: NRAR

## Engagement activities

In 2024–25, NRAR’s Engagement team improved how we connect with water users and other key groups across NSW.

We ran a range of programs to build strong relationships, promote responsible water use and support compliance. We also improved internal tools — like our stakeholder management platform Borealis — to make sharing knowledge and tracking engagement easier and more accurate.

### Key achievements

#### Stronger relationships

We built trust with Traditional Owners, water user groups, industry leaders, and farming associations through open, two-way conversations. The groups we met with included attendees at the Upper Namoi Water Symposium, the Australian Cotton Conference, Darling River Action Group, and the Cotton Sustainability Reference Group.

#### Better education and compliance

We explained new and existing rules and promoted tools like our online course to help people understand and follow the law.

#### Face-to-face focus

In person meetings helped build trust, especially with Aboriginal communities and water users.

## Floodplain harvesting

### Building a stronger future

The year 2024–25 marked a turning point in how we oversaw floodplain harvesting. With licences now issued across all five major valleys — and the Namoi regulated rivers soon to follow — NRAR began laying the groundwork for stronger compliance in the years ahead.

One of the biggest changes was the introduction of new measurement rules. To support this, NRAR expanded its monitoring capabilities by integrating satellite and Earth observation tools into its automated floodplain monitoring system. These technologies gave staff a clearer picture of what was happening on the ground and helped them identify potential risks earlier.

### Working with communities

Throughout the year, NRAR continued to prioritise direct engagement with water users. Staff travelled across multiple valleys, meeting with landholders and community groups to explain how the new rules work in practice. These conversations helped inform communities about the floodplain harvesting rules and the metering obligations that apply.

### Keeping the public informed

Raising awareness about floodplain harvesting was another key focus. NRAR worked closely with the media to make sure the public understood the importance of these new regulations. Three media releases led to 34 mentions in regional newspapers and broadcast outlets.

For example, when heavy rain fell between Walgett and Mungindi in December 2024, NRAR acted quickly. The risk of unlawful harvesting was high, so media releases were issued to local outlets to remind water users that harvesting without a licence and compliant meter is not allowed. These timely messages helped keep the rules top of mind during critical weather events.



### A snapshot of floodplain harvesting compliance

By mid-2025, NRAR had identified 231 licence holders responsible for 581 floodplain harvesting dams. Of these, 127 were compliant, making up 55%. Another 53 were working towards compliance, representing 23%, while 50 had not taken steps to comply, accounting for 22% of licence holders.

Among the river valleys in the program, the Border Rivers stood out with the highest compliance rate. 72% of licence holders were meeting the rules and more than 65% of 97 active storages complied.

The Gwydir Valley had the largest number of water storages. Of 297 dams, 64% were meeting compliance requirements.

In contrast, the Barwon Darling valley had just 2 compliant dams out of 75 active storages, resulting in less than 3% compliance. In the Macquarie Valley only 28 of 102 active storages met requirements.



**581**  
dams  
assessed

**290**  
compliant

**110**  
making  
progress

**180**  
not compliant



**231**  
licence holders  
assessed

**127**  
compliant

**53**  
making  
progress

**50**  
not compliant

## Respecting Aboriginal values

NRAR respects the deep connection Aboriginal people in NSW have with water and their role in caring for Country. This is an enduring priority for NRAR.

We're working towards this by engaging with communities, building strong relationships, and improving how we include Aboriginal cultural values in our everyday decisions.

### Case study **Sharing through art**

NRAR commissioned artwork by Tubba-Gah Wiradjuri artist Nathan Peckham. The artwork will be used in various ways to help build stronger connections with Aboriginal communities, show respect for their culture, and promote awareness of Aboriginal traditions across NSW.

The artwork features a jabiru flying over a winding river, symbolising NRAR's role in protecting and monitoring water resources. The jabiru is intertwined with the river, reflecting the reliance many communities have on water and the importance of its continued health. These communities are represented by horseshoe-shaped symbols gathered around waterholes. The jabiru's tracks represent NRAR's presence across the state. They cross through symbols of connected communities, illustrating NRAR's commitment to working with them to monitor and protect essential water resources. The cracked earth serves as a reminder of the reality we face if these resources are not effectively managed.

Watch the  
artwork story  
video here



## NAIDOC week

NAIDOC Week 2024 was celebrated from 7-14 July, celebrating and recognising the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The year's theme was chosen by the National NAIDOC Committee - Keep the Fire Burning! Blak, Loud & Proud.

The theme honoured the enduring strength and vitality of First Nations culture – with fire a symbol of connection to Country, to each other, and to the rich tapestry of traditions that define Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

NRAR staff took part in various activities, including a special event with Wollombi Cultural Centre. The village of Wollombi takes its name from the local Aboriginal language -and means meeting place of the waters -appropriate for an NRAR group.

Participants learned about places which have been significant to Aboriginal people for thousands of years.

These included Mt Yengo, an important gathering and learning place, and a little of the meaning and symbolism of rock art at Finchley Aboriginal Area (some thought to be 40,000 years old).





## Training staff

We've trained 100 field staff in using the Aboriginal Heritage Information Management System (AHIMS) across 5 locations. This helps them understand and protect Aboriginal cultural heritage during field work.

Using AHIMS will help NRAR improve how it investigates cases. It makes sure Aboriginal cultural values are considered from the beginning.

NRAR can use AHIMS to check if there are any registered Aboriginal cultural sites or values on a property linked to a report. If they find anything, they can add this to the case file and let the investigator know.

By including this information early, investigators will better understand if the reported issue could also affect Aboriginal cultural heritage. This helps them make better decisions, ensures cultural values are respected, and supports NRAR's role in protecting heritage as well as following the rules.



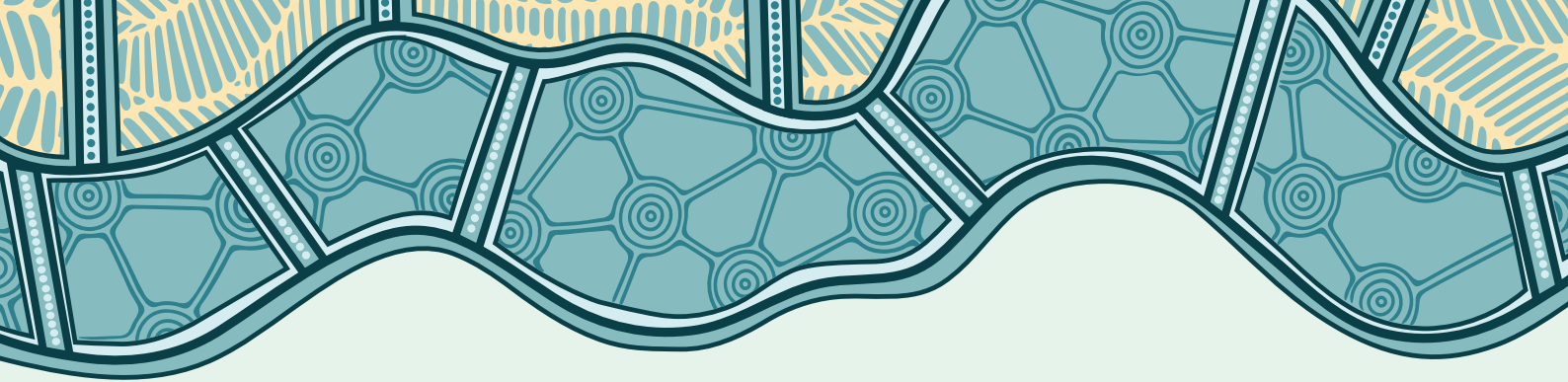
Cultural heritage officers training NRAR staff on using AHIMS. Photo: NRAR

## Building relationships

In 2024–25, we strengthened our partnerships with Elders, especially the Dharriwaa Elders Group and Rangers in Walgett. The Dharriwaa Elders Group are respected cultural leaders in the Walgett region with deep knowledge of local water issues. Engaging with them ensures NRAR's decisions are guided by cultural authority, community priorities, and lived experience of water management on Country. We'll keep meeting regularly to talk about water and learn more about cultural views.

We also met with the North Coast Regional Aboriginal Water Committee and worked closely with the Aboriginal Water Program team at NSW DCCEE. It's important for NRAR to continue to further build a relationship with the Regional Aboriginal Water Committees because they are the recognised forums for Aboriginal input into water management across NSW.

Partnering with them ensures NRAR's work is culturally informed, avoids duplication, and strengthens trust by engaging through structures Aboriginal communities have already endorsed.



## Increasing awareness and trust

We've helped Aboriginal water stakeholders better understand what NRAR does. This has helped build trust in our commitment to protecting water in NSW. Our focus has been on building strong relationships with Aboriginal communities in key areas.

### In the Northern Basin, NRAR has:

- built stronger connections with Elders and community members in Bourke, Brewarrina, and Walgett
- worked closely with the Dharriwaa Elders Group and local Rangers, including ongoing joint planning and culturally respectful knowledge-sharing
- continued working with the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder (CEWH) through the Local Engagement Officer in Walgett.

### On the North Coast

NRAR met with the Regional Aboriginal Water Committees (RAWCs) and collaborated with the NSW DCCEE Aboriginal Water Program Engagement team to:

- help Aboriginal stakeholders better understand NRAR's role
- build trust in NRAR's commitment to protecting culture and enforcing water rules
- support RAWC meetings and improve coordination between agencies.

In total, NRAR connected with First Nations communities 97 times through meetings, briefings and events.

## Growing cultural capability

We're improving staff knowledge of Aboriginal cultural and spiritual values to get better outcomes. At the start of 2025, we welcomed the first group of Aboriginal trainees to NRAR, initiating a program developed in collaboration with the National Rugby League. This program is likely to continue, with a planned intake of up to 4 further trainees each year providing an important step in creating job pathways and cultural leadership. We also created a new senior role to support Aboriginal leadership.

# Research, development and technology

## Permanent crops pilot project

In 2024–25, NRAR started a pilot project to better understand how permanent crops affect water law compliance in the southern Murray-Darling Basin.

### The problem

Permanent crops include nuts, grapes, citrus, stone fruit, olives, and avocados. Unlike annual crops like rice or cotton, they live for many years and need a lot of water every year. When there is not much rain, that water must come from irrigation.

### Why it matters

More permanent crops in the region could lead to problems, especially below the narrowest part of the Murray River at the Barmah-Millewa Reach.

High water demand might exceed what can flow through the reach, causing crop water shortages.

Water prices rise during droughts, making it harder for some farms to afford water, which could increase the risk of unlawful water use.

### Our approach

NRAR looked at farms with permanent crops that didn't have enough water rights to get through dry periods. Staff visited 10 farms to talk with landholders about their water needs and future plans. NRAR also built a computer model to predict water use and spot risks early, helping prevent unlawful water use.

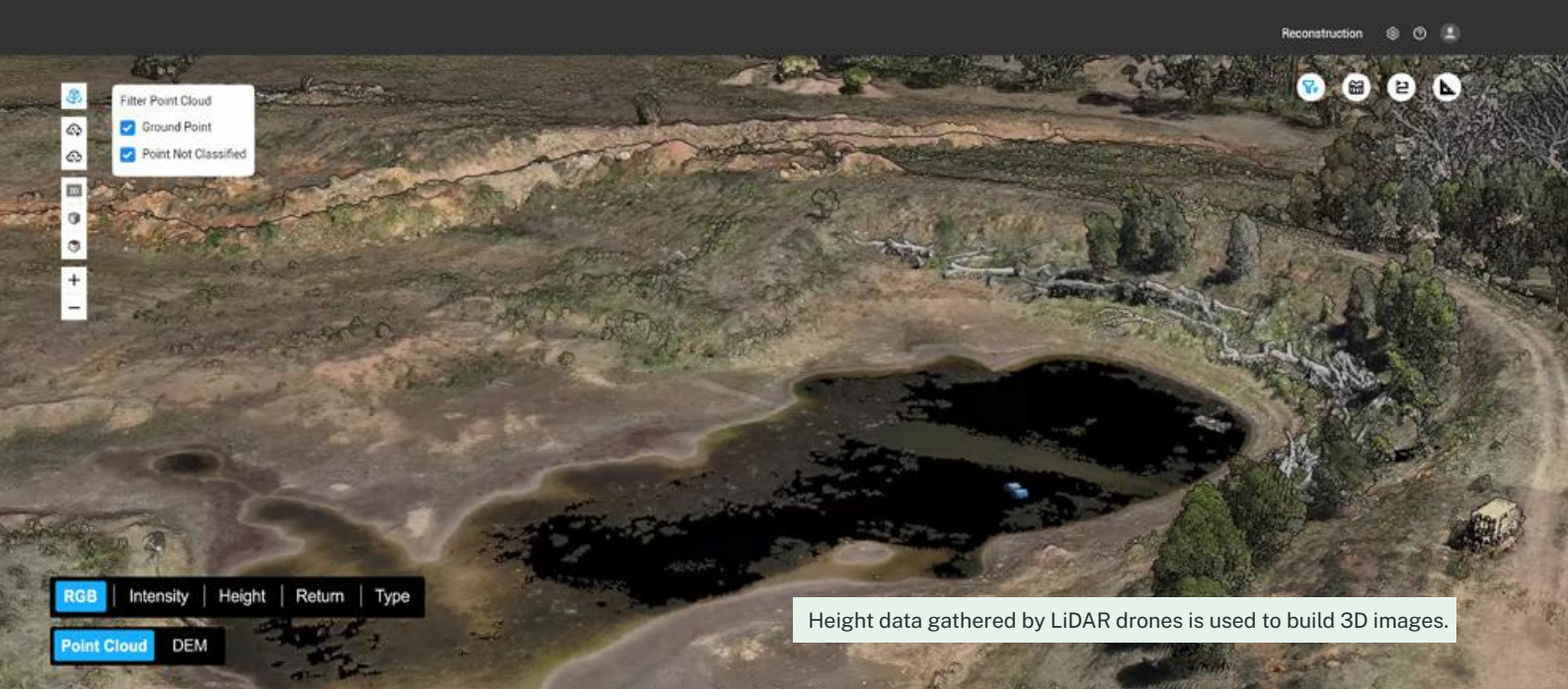
### We surveyed 25 farmers to learn more about:

- types of crops and water needs
- plans to expand
- water trading and future planning
- water management practices
- how they manage water demand risks.

This project aims to prevent harm during droughts and times of high-water costs in the lower Murray River. The insights from the survey help NRAR support farmers and ensure they follow water rules.



NRAR CRO, Grant Barnes, visits an almond farm. Photo: Salty Dingo



## Technology boost

In 2024-25, NRAR invested \$1.3 million to upgrade the tools and systems used to collect and manage evidence in the field. This major uplift strengthens our ability to gather high-quality evidence and supports our role as a technology-driven regulator.

### New technology toolboxes

We rolled out toolkits across NSW packed with advanced gear like drones, waterproof cameras, laser measurers, sonar boats, and rugged laptops. This will help our staff collect better evidence, faster.



New rugged laptop for field work. Photo: NRAR

### Specialised drones

We more than doubled our fleet of large drones, now equipped with LiDAR, thermal imaging, and high-resolution cameras. These capture detailed data that's hard to get any other way.



LiDAR drone for capturing images. Photo: NRAR

### Custom sonar boats

We added 2 automated boats with sonar and flow-measuring tools. These help us map farm dams and measure water flow in rivers and channels with high accuracy.

### Staff training and standards

We updated our guidelines to align with best-practice and global research. We trained our frontline staff to use the new tech consistently and confidently.

This investment shows our commitment to staying ahead with smart, reliable technology. We're always looking for new tools to improve how we work, while making sure our current systems stay effective.

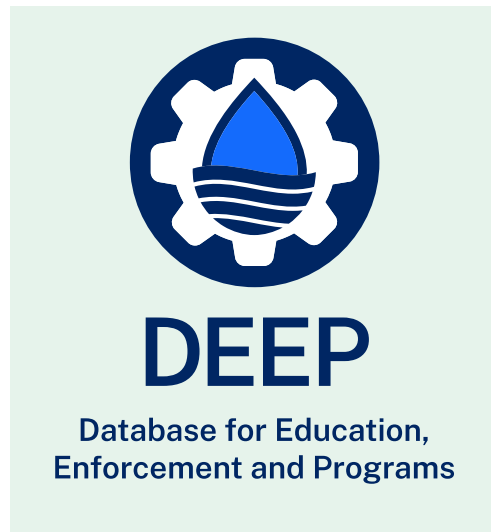
## New system improves case management

In 2024, NRAR reached a major milestone with the launch of DEEP — our new Database for Education, Enforcement and Programs. DEEP replaces our old case management system and gives us better tools to handle public reports of suspicious activity and investigate incidents securely.

This upgrade is just the beginning. Future updates will add features like audits, inspections and mobile access to make our work even more efficient.

Thanks to funding from NSW Treasury, we delivered this complex project on time. The rollout will continue into the next financial year, with new features and training for different teams.

DEEP is a great example of how NRAR is using modern technology to improve how we work so we can better regulate and educate.



## Staff safety

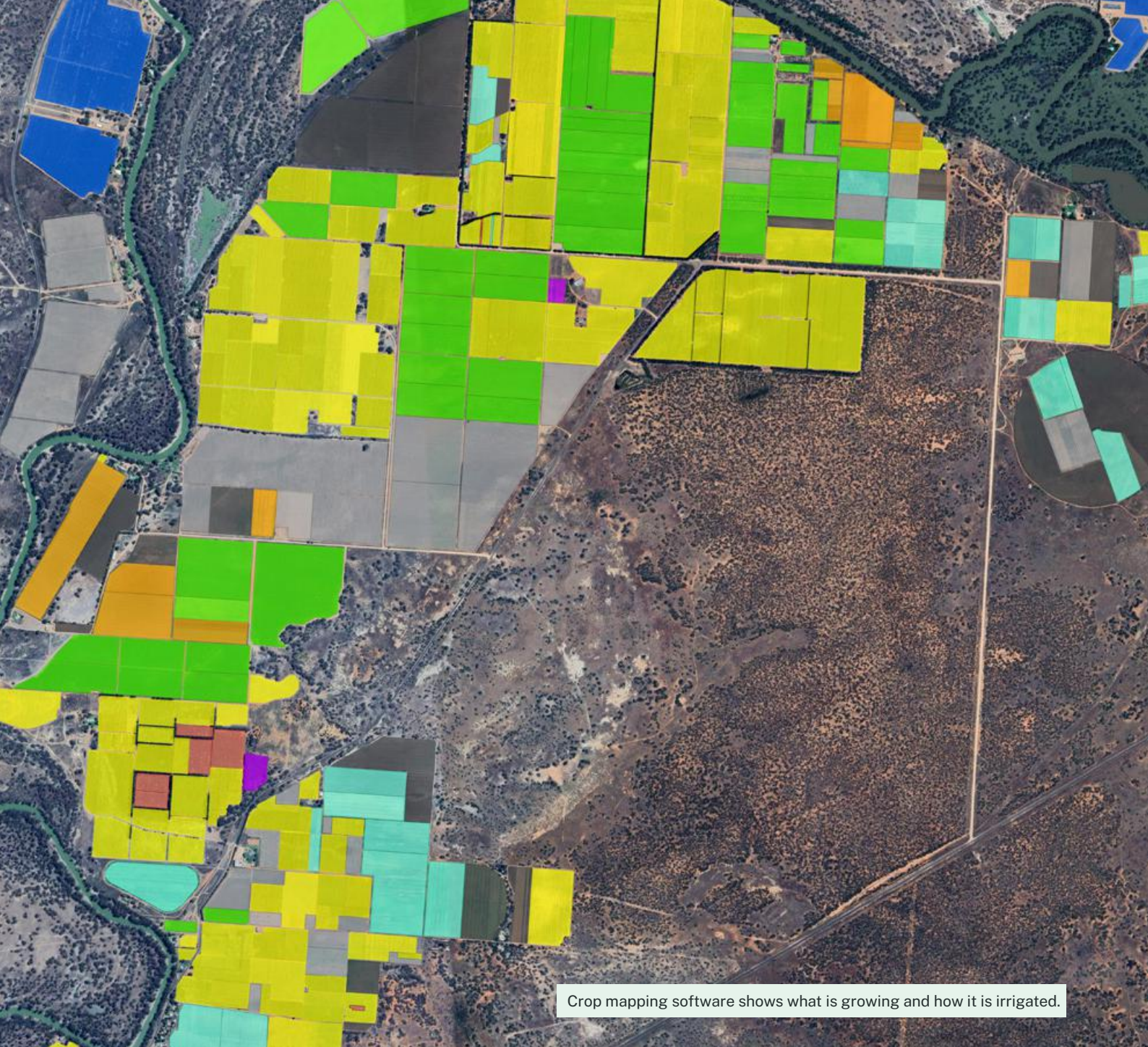
NRAR staff often travel to remote areas to meet landholders, farm managers and other stakeholders. These trips carry risks like long travel times, bad weather, poor roads, vehicle issues or challenging interactions.

Staff safety is our top priority. After listening to feedback, we replaced our old tracking system with one that's easier to use and more reliable. It works even if one part of the system fails and helps staff stay connected.

We also gave face-to-face training to all staff who work in remote areas, to ensure they can use the system and stay safe.

Whether staff need urgent help or just want to check in, we've got them covered.





Crop mapping software shows what is growing and how it is irrigated.

## Sky high surveillance

NRAR's data and mapping experts help monitor water use across NSW by creating clear pictures of potential non-compliance. These insights guide our investigations and priority programs.

This year, we made big progress by using crop water-use estimates to spot risks. By modelling how much water crops need, we can detect potential non-compliance. This is especially useful to assess water use on farms from sources we can't directly see, like some dams or groundwater.

We also used crop mapping software to see what crops are growing and how they're irrigated. By linking this with IrriSAT data, we can estimate water use and compare it to water entitlements, metered use and trades. This helps us find areas where water use doesn't match what is allowed. This can trigger further checks.

We developed a risk assessment process related to future water needs. This flags areas with water-thirsty crops but low water entitlements or reporting. These insights help us rank properties by risk and send field teams to investigate.

# Building public confidence

NRAR is open about how it works, what it does and the results it gets. This helps people trust that water laws in NSW are enforced fairly and properly.

NRAR's commitment to transparency includes:

- a website that's easy to use and understand
- public dashboards that show what actions were taken, when and what happened
- a public register listing our most serious enforcement actions
- updates through media and social media.

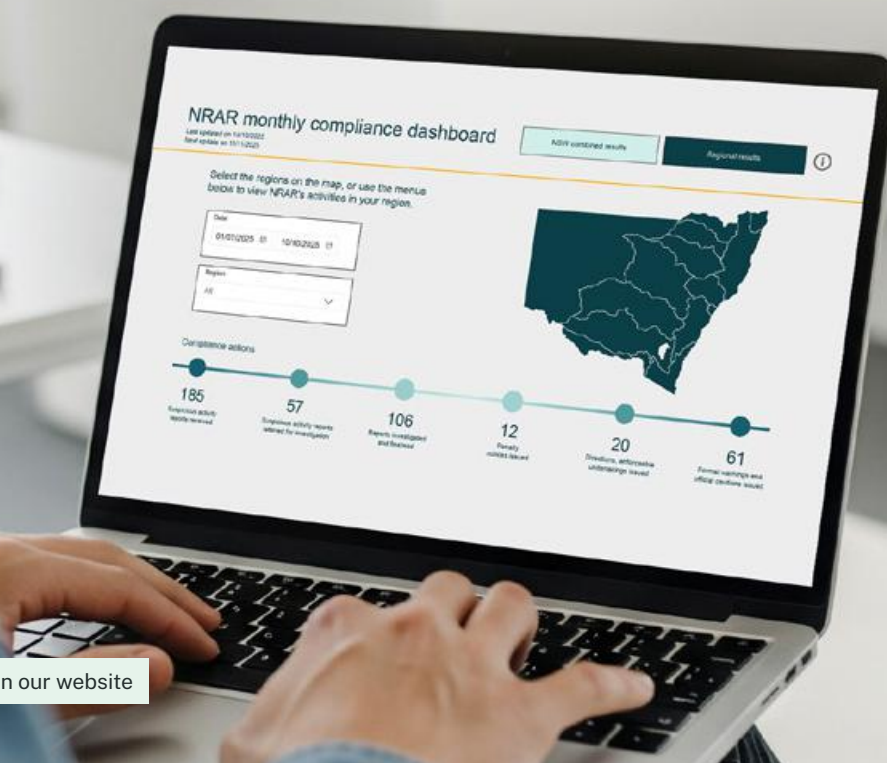


Reporting through the media helps keep NRAR accountable. Photo: NRAR

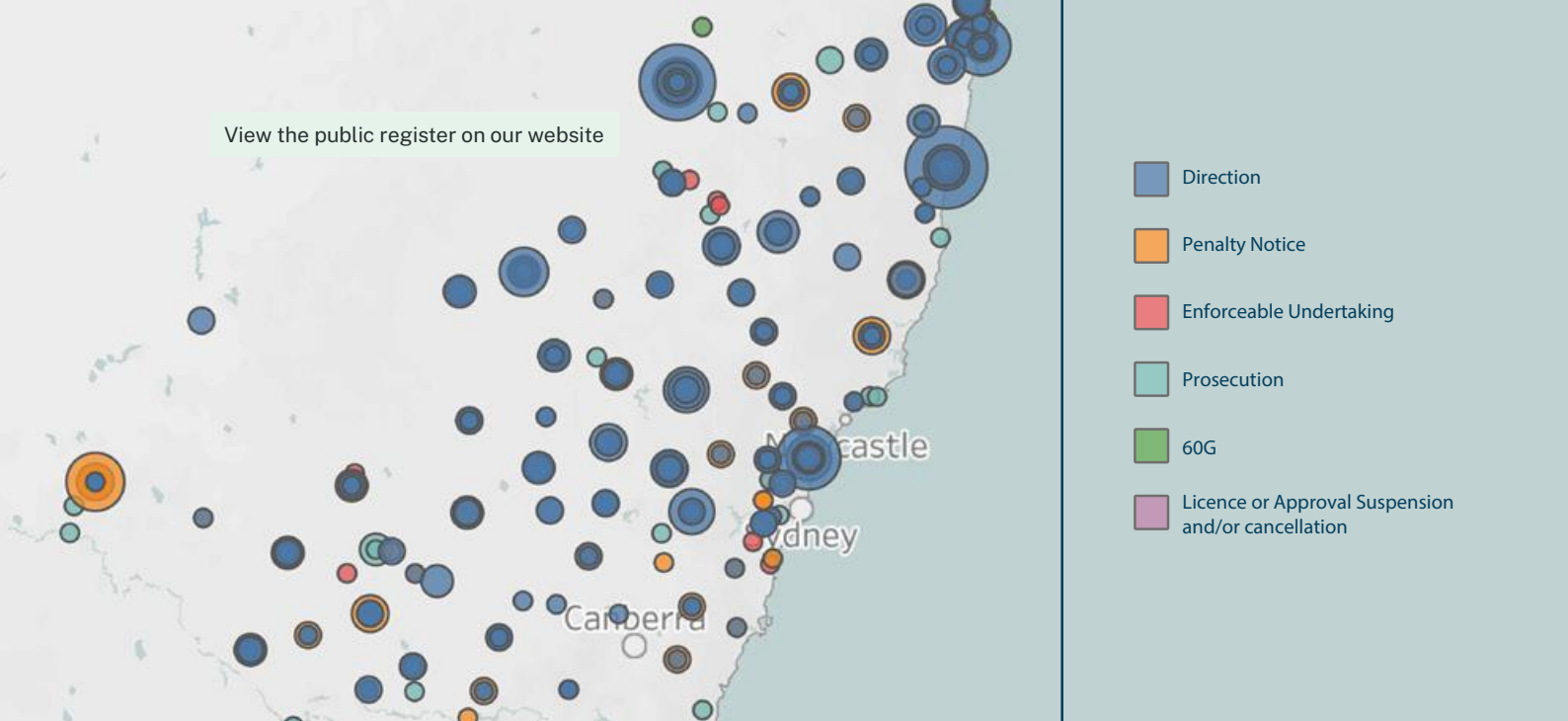
## Digital tools

NRAR provides updates on its work through digital dashboards available on our website.

For example, the compliance activity dashboard shows our investigations and enforcement actions by region and across the state. This includes information such as the numbers of investigations and fines, directions and warnings issued.



You can view digital dashboards on our website



## Public register

NRAR publishes its most serious enforcement actions on a public register available on our website. This shows water laws are enforced and helps deter breaches.

The register includes a heat map showing where different actions have taken place, including stop work orders, penalties, legal agreements and court cases.

## Public communication

NRAR uses different methods to share updates and build trust in how water is managed.

In 2024–25, we used our quarterly newsletter, social media channels like LinkedIn, Facebook, YouTube and X, and traditional media to share important updates about water compliance.

Public reporting of major enforcement actions helps build accountability and discourages others from breaking the rules.

Here's an overview of the results of our public reporting efforts during 2024-25:



510

media mentions across print, digital, TV and radio



58,100+

social media interactions



78,700+

website views





# 2

Darling River near its confluence with the Murray River. Photo: Salty Dingo

## Regional snapshots

Compliance data gives us a snapshot of what happened during a specific period. For example, one area might show more enforcement actions this financial year, but that could look very different in the next one.

The numbers also reflect where NRAR focused its efforts during that time. Sometimes we have more teams working in one region and fewer in another. This can affect how the data looks.

# Barwon, Darling and West



152

suspicious activity reports received



63

suspicious activity reports referred for investigation



73

reports investigated and finalised



9

penalty notices issued



27

directions, enforceable undertakings issued



25

formal warnings and official cautions issued



Menindee Lakes. Photo: NRAR

## Stats and facts

Last financial year, NRAR received 25% fewer reports of suspicious water activity in the Barwon, Darling and West Water Sharing Plan region compared to the year before. However, the number of cases sent for investigation went up 53% from 41 to 63.

There were also more fines given out: 9 this year compared to just 1 last year. The number of orders to stop work or fix other problems also rose from 14 to 27.

In November, NRAR's Board held a meeting in the far south-west, near Wentworth. They spoke with local farmers and businesses to better understand the issues faced by agriculture and other water users.

NRAR's Outreach teams visited this region to offer advice and guidance on water compliance issues at Walgett, Bourke, Broken Hill and around the Wentworth region.



The Barwon, Darling and West region covers many traditional lands, including the lands of the Barkandji, Barapa Barapa Budjiti, Gomerioi/Kamilaroi, Guwamu/Kooma Kunja, Euahlayi, Maljangapa, Maraura, Murrwarri, Ngemba, Muthi Muthi, Tati Tati, Ngyampaa, Wadi Wadi, Weki Weki, Wemba Wemba, Wiradjuri and Yorta Yorta Nations.

# Border Rivers



28

suspicious activity reports received



20

suspicious activity reports referred for investigation



13

reports investigated and finalised



2

penalty notices issued



6

directions, enforceable undertakings issued



12

formal warnings and official cautions issued



The Severn River. Photo: Tanya Weir

## Stats and facts

Compliance numbers fell for the Border Rivers Water Sharing Plan region across almost all areas compared to the previous financial year. The number of suspicious activity reports received fell 45% from 51 to 28, and the number of investigations finalised fell by 53% from 28 to 13. The number of directions to stop work or take other remedial action fell from 13 to 6.

There were more fines issued from 0 to 2, and the number of formal warnings and official cautions issued rose from 1 to 12.

NRAR's Outreach teams visited this region to offer advice and guidance on water compliance issues at Inverell, Mungindi and the Goondiwindi area.



The Border Rivers region covers the traditional lands of the Bigambul, Githabul, Kambuwal, Gomerioi/Kamilaroi, Kwiambul and Ngarabal Nations.

# Gwydir



42

suspicious activity reports received



28

suspicious activity reports referred for investigation



44

reports investigated and finalised



4

penalty notices issued



13

directions, enforceable undertakings issued



21

formal warnings and official cautions issued



Mehi River near Moree. Photo: NRAR

## Stats and facts

The number of suspicious activity reports received for the Gwydir Water Sharing Plan region fell by 43% from 74 to 42 compared to the last financial year. The number of these reports referred for investigation also fell from 40 to 28. The number of investigations finalised dropped from 60 to 44. However, the number of fines issued this year doubled to 4 compared to last year while directions to stop work and fix other problems remained steady up from 12 to 13, as did warnings and cautions issued down from 22 to 21.

A landholder in Moree Plains took floodplain water without a licence. NRAR issued a charge under Section 60G of the *Water Management Act 2000*, resulting in the farmer having to pay \$102,693.50 in penalties. Read the full case study for this matter on page 22.

NRAR's Outreach teams visited this region to offer advice and guidance on water compliance issues around Moree.



The Gwydir region is the traditional lands of the Gomerioi/Kamilaroi Nation.

# Namoi



88

suspicious activity reports received



65

suspicious activity reports referred for investigation



135

reports investigated and finalised



9

penalty notices issued



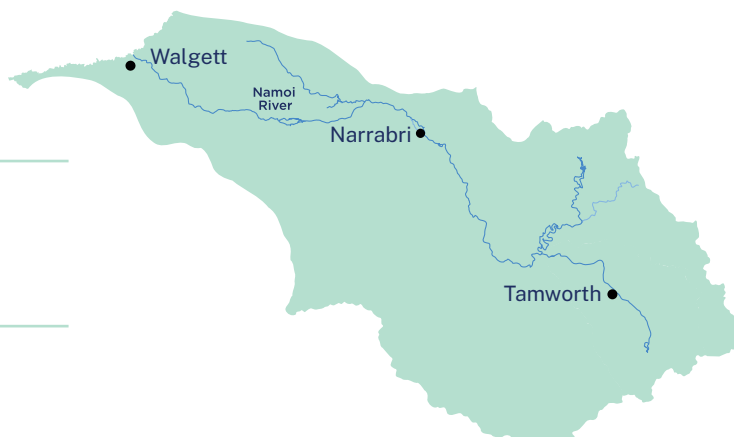
61

directions, enforceable undertakings issued



42

formal warnings and official cautions issued



Peel River near Tamworth. Photo: NRAR

## Stats and facts

The number of suspicious activity reports received for the Namoi Water Sharing Plan region fell by 63% compared to last year from 243 to 88. Reports referred for investigation also fell by 39% from 107 to 65. One hundred and thirty-five reports were investigated and finalised for the period down 40% from last year. The number of fines issued rose from 2 to 9 and the number of directions to stop work and fix other problems also increased from 34 last year to 61 this year. The number of warnings and cautions issued remained steady on 42.

A case where a landholder near Gunnedah had unlawfully diverted creek water into a farm dam was finalised during this period. The creek is now flowing normally along its original course. Read the full case study on page 22.

NRAR's Outreach teams visited this region to offer advice and guidance on water compliance issues at Narrabri, Wee Waa, Gunnedah and Tamworth.



The Namoi region is the traditional lands of the Gomerioi/Kamilaroi Nation.

# Macquarie-Castlereagh



137

suspicious activity reports received



67

suspicious activity reports referred for investigation



58

reports investigated and finalised



4

penalty notices issued



19

directions, enforceable undertakings issued



36

formal warnings and official cautions issued



Cudgegong River near Mudgee. Photo: NRAR

## Stats and facts

The number of suspicious activity reports received for the Macquarie-Castlereagh Water Sharing Plan region has fallen slightly, down 5% to 137 last year. Of the reports received, 67 cases were referred for further investigation, from 47 cases last year. The number of penalty notices issued fell from 10 last year to 4 in 2024-25. The number of directions to stop work and fix other problems fell from 25 to 19, but the number of warnings and cautions rose by 24% to 36 for this financial year.

NRAR's Outreach teams visited this region to offer advice and guidance on water compliance issues around Bathurst, Orange, Cudal, Oberon, Mudgee, Gulgong, Dunedoo, Gilgandra, Dubbo, Narromine, Trangie, Nyngan and Coonabarabran.



The Macquarie-Castlereagh region is the traditional lands of the Gomeroi/ Kamilaroi, Ngemba, Ngiyampaa, Wailwan and Wiradjuri Nations.

# Lachlan



311

suspicious activity reports received



201

suspicious activity reports referred for investigation



205

reports investigated and finalised



7

penalty notices issued



22

directions, enforceable undertakings issued



23

formal warnings and official cautions issued



The Lachlan River near Booligal. Photo: NRAR

## Stats and facts

The number of suspicious activity reports received for the Lachlan Water Sharing Plan region rose from 140 in the last financial year to 311 in 2024-25. The number of these reports referred for further investigation also rose from 69 last year to 201 this year. However, the number of fines issued fell from 16 to 7, and the number of directions to stop work and fix other problems fell from 60 to 22. There was a jump in the number of warnings and cautions issued, from 14 last financial year to 23 this year.

In May 2025, NRAR began a prosecution against a Condobolin region farmer who allegedly pumped water from a creek when the meter wasn't working, and in breach of licence conditions. Read the full report on page 19.

NRAR's Outreach teams visited this region to offer advice and guidance on water compliance issues around Parkes, Forbes, Canowindra, Hillston, Condobolin, Cowra and Young.



The Lachlan region is the traditional lands of the Barkandji, Nari Nari, Ngiyampaa, Wiradjuri and Yita Yita Nations.

# Murrumbidgee



**184**

suspicious activity reports received



**69**

suspicious activity reports referred for investigation



**78**

reports investigated and finalised



**8**

penalty notices issued



**13**

directions, enforceable undertakings issued



**39**

formal warnings and official cautions issued



Murrumbidgee River, Darlington Point. Photo: NRAR

## Stats and facts

The number of suspicious activity reports received for the Murrumbidgee Water Sharing Plan region fell 38% from 301 in the 2023-24 financial year to 184 in this one. The number of reports referred for investigation rose 23% from 56 to 69. The number of fines issued increased slightly from 7 to 8. The number of directions to stop work and fix other problems fell from 16 to 13, but there was a marked jump in the number of warnings and cautions issued from 5 last year to 39 this year.

NRAR's Outreach teams visited this region to offer advice and guidance on water compliance issues around Yass, Gundagai, Tumut, Batlow, Queanbeyan, Wagga, Leeton and Griffith.



The Murrumbidgee region is the traditional lands of the Barapa Barapa, Muthi Muthi, Nari Nari, Ngunnawal, Nyeri Nyeri, Wadi Wadi, Wolgalu, Wemba Wemba, Weki Weki, and Wiradjuri Nations.

# Murray



**253**

suspicious activity reports received



**109**

suspicious activity reports referred for investigation



**145**

reports investigated and finalised



**11**

penalty notices issued



**15**

directions, enforceable undertakings issued



**19**

formal warnings and official cautions issued



Murray River near Albury. Photo: NRAR

## Stats and facts

The number of suspicious activity reports received for the Murray Water Sharing Plan region increased slightly to 253, compared to 251 last year. The number of reports referred for further investigation increased significantly to 109 from 56. Fines issued decreased from 16 to 11, along with warnings and cautions down 62% from 51 to 19. The number of directions to stop work and fix other problems increased by a quarter, from 12 to 15.

NRAR's Outreach teams visited this region to offer advice and guidance on water compliance issues around Barham, Deniliquin, Finley, Albury, Mulwala, and Swan Hill.



The Murray region is the traditional lands of the Barkandji, Barapa Barapa, Maljangapa, Maraura, Muthi Muthi, Ngiyampaa, Tati Tati, Wadi Wadi, Weki Weki, Wemba Wemba, Wiradjuri and Yorta Yorta Nations.

# Far North Coast



93

suspicious activity reports received



11

suspicious activity reports referred for investigation



15

reports investigated and finalised



7

penalty notices issued



6

directions, enforceable undertakings issued



13

formal warnings and official cautions issued



Richmond River, Kyogle. Photo: NRAR

## Stats and facts

The number of suspicious activity reports received for the Far North Coast Water Sharing Plan region decreased to 93, compared to 172 last year. The number of reports referred for further investigation also fell from 20 to 11. More fines were issued this year, increasing from 2 to 7, along with a rise in warnings and cautions from 6 to 13. The number of directions to stop work and fix other problems increased from 4 to 6.

NRAR's Outreach teams visited this region to offer advice and guidance on water compliance issues around Ballina, Lismore, Nimbin and Casino.



The Far North Coast region is the traditional lands of the Bundjalung Aboriginal Nation.

# North Coast



257

suspicious activity reports received



44

suspicious activity reports referred for investigation



30

reports investigated and finalised



18

penalty notices issued



7

directions, enforceable undertakings issued



8

formal warnings and official cautions issued



Macleay River near Kempsey. Photo: NRAR

## Stats and facts

The number of suspicious activity reports received for the North Coast Water Sharing Plan region decreased to 257, compared to 316 in the previous year. The number of reports referred for further investigation also fell from 58 to 44. More fines were issued this year, rising from 5 to 18, but the number of directions to stop work and fix other problems fell from 17 to 7. Warnings and cautions were also down from 14 to 8.

A commercial farming company in the Kempsey region and one of its directors were found guilty of 12 breaches of the *Water Management Act 2000*. These occurred between October 2016 and February 2021, including during a drought. Read the full details of the case on page 18.

NRAR's Outreach teams visited this region to offer advice and guidance on water compliance issues around Grafton, Coffs Harbour, Nambucca Heads, Port Macquarie and Armidale.



The North Coast region is the traditional lands of the Birpai, Dughutti, Gumbaynggirr and Nganyaywana Nations.

# Hunter



80

suspicious activity reports received



11

suspicious activity reports referred for investigation



17

reports investigated and finalised



3

penalty notices issued



7

directions, enforceable undertakings issued



11

formal warnings and official cautions issued



Hunter river near Maitland. Photo: NRAR

## Stats and facts

Compliance data decreased across all areas in the Hunter Water Sharing Plan region compared to last year. Suspicious activity reports fell from 203 to 80. Reports referred for further investigation dropped from 29 to 11. Fines were down from 9 to 3. Directions to stop work and fix issues fell from 19 to 7. Warnings and cautions also declined from 13 to 11.

NRAR stepped up water compliance checks along regulated sections of the Hunter River catchment during May to improve water law compliance.

Property visits followed a review of water account statements in 2023-24 that showed many water users had not placed sufficient orders for water through WaterNSW.

Locations visited by Outreach teams over the year included Taree, Gloucester, Singleton, Salamander Bay, Maitland and Allynbrook.



The Hunter region is the traditional lands of the Kamilaroi, Geawegal and Wonnarua people.

# Central Coast



39

suspicious activity reports received



3

suspicious activity reports referred for investigation



2

reports investigated and finalised



0

penalty notices issued



0

directions, enforceable undertakings issued



0

formal warnings and official cautions issued



Wyong River Central Coast. Photo: NRAR

## Stats and facts

The number of suspicious activity reports for the Central Coast Water Sharing Plan region increased by 30% compared to the previous year, from 30 to 39. The number of reports referred for further investigation fell from 5 to 3. No fines were issued, the same as last year. The number of directions to stop work and fix other problems fell from 2 last year down to 0. Warnings and cautions were also lower, from 2 to 0.

NRAR's Outreach teams visited this region to offer advice and guidance on water compliance issues around Peats Ridge, Mangrove Mountain and Wyong.

The Central Coast region is the traditional lands of the Darkinjung people.

# Greater Metropolitan



161

suspicious activity reports received



45

suspicious activity reports referred for investigation



32

reports investigated and finalised



0

penalty notices issued



4

directions, enforceable undertakings issued



5

formal warnings and official cautions issued



Stonequarry Creek, Picton. Photo: NRAR

## Stats and facts

During the 2023-24 financial year, NRAR received 364 suspicious activity reports from the Greater Metropolitan region and referred 53 for further investigation. Forty-one reports were investigated and finalised although some may have started earlier than July 1, 2023. Our enforcement responses are detailed above, including three penalty notices issued.

This large region was the focus for many site visits by NRAR's Outreach teams in the last financial year to offer advice and guidance on water compliance issues.

Landholder visits included properties around Lithgow, Katoomba, Penrith, Richmond, Windsor, Wilberforce, Ebenezer, Cobbity, Picton, Narellan, The Oaks, Bringelly, Badgery's Creek, Berry, Wollongong, Nowra, Gerrigong, Albion Park, Moss Vale and Kangaroo Valley.



The Greater Metro region is the traditional lands of the Yuin, Eora, Tharawal, Dharug and Gundungurra Nations.

# Clyde



44

suspicious activity reports received



3

suspicious activity reports referred for investigation



5

reports investigated and finalised



0

penalty notices issued



0

directions, enforceable undertakings issued



0

formal warnings and official cautions issued



Snowy River Kosciuszko. Photo NRAR

## Stats and facts

The number of suspicious activity reports for the Clyde (South Coast) Water Sharing Plan region fell significantly, from 115 last year to 44 this year. Of the reports received, 3 were referred for further investigation, down from 10 the previous year. No fines, directions to stop work, warnings or cautions were issued. Outreach teams also provided advice and guidance on water compliance issues around Bermagui and Narooma.

The Clyde region is the traditional lands of a number of Aboriginal groups including the Dharawal and Yuin people.



# 3

## The year ahead

Lake Mulwala, Yarrowongga. Photo: Salty Dingo

## A new way of setting priorities

NRAR's regulatory priorities help us encourage voluntary compliance and tackle the biggest challenges in water management. These priorities may include new or complex issues that need a whole agency response.

In 2024–25, NRAR's Intelligence team led the work to set these priorities and improve how we solve problems. We've strengthened how we choose, plan and run our priority projects – and how we record decisions.

Our executive team and board will now review key regulatory risks every quarter. Rather than locking in a one-year cycle, we will now respond to regulatory risks as they emerge. This lets us tackle complex issues in real time and close out projects only when the problem is solved.

They'll use climate forecasts, data and expert insights to guide decisions. This new approach will help us respond quickly to changing conditions, apply clear criteria, and involve the right people.

We'll keep focusing on the biggest risks and designing smart, effective solutions to address them. The details of each project will be publicly released following design completion and prior to roll-out.

## Proposed legislative change

Since 2018, NRAR has taken more than 2,800 enforcement actions under the *Water Management Act 2000*, including 42 prosecutions. These actions have shown where the law works well and where it needs improvement.

Now a new Bill seeks to strengthen NRAR's ability to hold people and companies accountable, pursue offenders and discourage unlawful water use. It also seeks to respond to public concerns that more needs to be done to stop unlawful water use.

The Water Management Legislation Amendment (Stronger Enforcement and Penalties) Bill was introduced to the NSW Parliament in June 2025 and proposes updates to several laws to improve deterrence, provide more certainty and address the complexity of the law.

### Tougher penalties

Since some companies treat fines under the *Water Management Act 2000* as a cost of doing business, the Bill seeks to introduce civil penalties – a first for natural resources management in NSW. These penalties are an alternative to criminal charges and come with much higher fines of up to \$5 million for individuals and \$10 million for companies, or 5 times the value of the water taken unlawfully.

A new offence would also apply when water is taken without approval, over extraction limits, or without following metering rules. Similar to the existing Section 60G charge, this offence would also attract a minimum charge equal to the value of the water taken, and possibly up to 5 times that amount.

## Expanded enforcement powers

Under the proposed bill, courts and NRAR could gain greater authority to enforce water laws.

- Courts could estimate and recover financial benefits gained from offences.
- Licences and approvals could be cancelled or suspended if the Minister has reasonable grounds to believe an offence occurred—no prosecution needed.
- Courts could cancel licences and stop offenders from reapplying.
- NRAR could recover costs for monitoring and enforcing compliance.

## New offences

The proposed changes could introduce new offences to strengthen water management and deter unlawful behaviour.

- Profiting from offences committed by related companies (e.g. company directors).
- Giving false or misleading information.
- Blocking NRAR officers from working.
- Tampering with seized evidence.

## Higher fines

The proposed bill seeks to increase maximum penalties for individuals and companies, introduce civil penalties, and raise Local Court limits.

- Regulation breaches: up from \$2,200 to \$11,000 for individuals and \$22,000 for companies.
- Local Court penalties: up from \$22,000 to \$110,000 for individuals and \$220,000 for companies.

## Making water laws clearer and more effective

The Bill would help water users and the regulator by making rules easier to understand and apply. Key changes include:

### Clearer powers for NRAR

- NRAR could start and appeal court cases in its own name.
- Rules for handling seized evidence would be clearer.
- Documents could be served by email.
- Officers could use drones to carry out inspections.

### Preparing for future reporting rules

- The Bill would set a future requirement for licence holders to report how much water they take.
- It would remove the right to avoid self-incrimination for this future rule, but it won't start right away.

### Improving meter rules

- It would clarify how meters should be installed.
- It would allow NRAR to order accuracy testing of meters.

### Helping courts respond to water offences

- Courts would be required to consider the impact on Aboriginal communities and the environment when sentencing.
- Courts could also consider drought conditions.
- Courts could order benefits for communities affected by offences.

\*The proposed bill may be subject to amendments by Parliament.



# 4

## How NRAR works



Pivot irrigation system near Tocumwal. Photo: Salty Dingo

## Independent board

NRAR is guided by an independent board that oversees its compliance and enforcement strategy. The NSW Minister for Water appoints the 4 board members based on advice from NRAR's executive team.

Once appointed, the board operates independently and is not subject to direction from the Minister or the NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water. The Minister does not influence NRAR's day-to-day operations, and any formal directions must follow the *Natural Resources Access Regulator Act 2017*.

Board members are selected for their expertise in law, natural resource management, compliance, regulation, or related fields.

Current members include:

### Board Chair, The Hon. Craig Knowles

Craig brings extensive experience to his role as NRAR Chair. From 2011 to 2015, he served as Chair of the Murray Darling Basin Authority. During that time, he represented Australia at the 2014 UN General Assembly Forum on Water and Energy, contributing to global discussions on climate change and the development of the Sustainable Development Goals.

### Board Member, Bruce Brown

Bruce has held director roles and served on various committees in government at both state and federal levels, including the National Rural Advisory Council from 1999 to 2005. Before moving into the private sector through a lobbying role with a farming organisation, he was a university lecturer in agricultural economics and farm management.

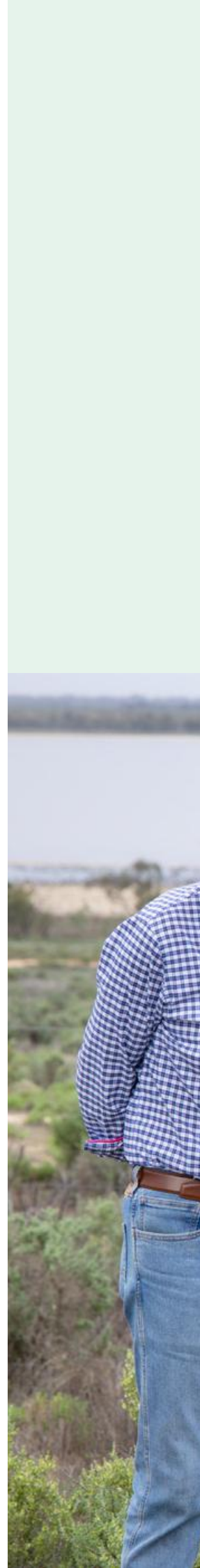
### Board Member, Phil Duncan

Phil joined the NRAR Board in 2020 and also chairs the Basin Community Committee of the Murray Darling Basin Commission. He has a long history of working with Indigenous communities and government to improve outcomes for First Nations people. Phil provides strategic advice and leadership to Indigenous organisations, universities, and government agencies at both state and federal levels. He was recently appointed to the board of the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust.

### Board Member, Ilona Millar

Ilona has more than 20 years' experience in natural resources law, with a strong focus on climate change and sustainability. She's worked on major legislative and policy reviews and regularly advises on the *Water Management Act 2000* (NSW) and the *Water Amendment Act 2008* (Commonwealth).

**Left to right:** Bruce Brown, Ilona Millar, Craig Knowles, Phil Duncan at Fletchers Lake. Photo: Salty Dingo



## Agency role in government

We are an independent arm of the NSW Government that oversees compliance with NSW water laws. We sit within the NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (NSW DCCEEW). Our compliance and enforcement functions are separate and distinct from the department.



### NSW DCCEEW - Water Group

Develops the rules and policies that guide water management across the state.



### WaterNSW

Carries out the rules, manages water licences, and manages NSW rivers and water supply systems.



### NRAR

Ensures the rules are followed through monitoring, education, and enforcement where necessary.



## Structure and functions

NRAR is divided into 5 branches directed by the Chief Regulatory Officer and independent board. These branches align with our goals and enable us to respond to changing demands.



### Chief Regulatory Officer

**Grant Barnes** leads NRAR's day-to-day operations, focusing on building strong regulatory capability to support the NSW Government's commitment to best practice regulation. With over 20 years' experience in science leadership, freshwater science and strategic planning, he brings deep expertise and insight to his role.



### Education and Engagement

This branch works directly with individuals and organisations involved in water regulation, helping them understand the rules and encouraging voluntary compliance. Staff travel across NSW to provide support and share information, backed by communication and media campaigns that extend the reach of these messages. The branch is led by **Keeley Reynolds**, who brings 15 years of experience in designing and delivering campaigns that raise awareness and drive behaviour change.



### Regulatory Initiatives

This branch tackles key compliance challenges that align with NRAR's priorities. It delivers targeted, intelligence-led campaigns and long-term projects that improve compliance and regulatory outcomes. Led through strong program and project management, the team supports, educates and encourages the regulated community and takes enforcement action when needed. **Dr Andrew Howe** leads this branch toward improvements in regulatory campaign design, measurement and reporting. Andrew brings experience from NSW Treasury and ICAC.



## Innovation, Systems and Intelligence

This team helps NRAR work smarter by using data and developing new tools that boost its impact and reach. Led by **Margaret Sexton**, the branch focuses on intelligent systems, analytics and continuous improvement. Margaret brings strong leadership skills and a track record of building high-performing teams that deliver lasting value in water management across NSW.



## Investigations and Enforcement

This team leads NRAR's response to potential breaches of the *Water Management Act 2000*, providing expert advice on when and how investigations and enforcement should happen. The branch is led by **Lisa Stockley**, who brings more than 20 years of experience, including senior roles in NSW Police Force Security Licensing & Enforcement Directorate and investigative work with the NSW Independent Commission Against Corruption.



## Policy and Performance

Policy and Performance is made up of diverse teams from finance, business and project performance, policy and crucial front of house services. They work together to provide quality advice and services that support excellence at NRAR. **Ila Lessing** leads this branch. She has managed teams responsible for project governance, budget management, and portfolio management across the government and banking sector.



## Legal

Legal is staffed by lawyers from the NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water. The legal team manages prosecutions brought by NRAR, other legal action to enforce the *Water Management Act 2000*, and responses to litigation challenging NRAR decisions. Legal provide advice and support to NRAR. **Ellen Chapple** heads this branch. Ellen is an experienced environmental law litigator.



NRAR staff gather for the annual all-staff day. Photo: Dillon Leigh, NRAR

## Our people

### Workplace diversity

NRAR is committed to fostering an inclusive work environment, aligning with the broader initiatives of the NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (NSW DCCEEW). The steps and measures to support this commitment are outlined in the NSW DCCEEW Diversity and Inclusion Workforce Strategy 2021–2025.

Table: Distribution of staff by gender

Year	Total	Men	Women	Non-binary or not indicated
30 June 2023	196	57.3%	42.1%	0.6%
30 June 2024	201	54%	45.5%	0.5%
30 June 2025	217	52.8%	46.3%	0.9%
% change	<b>+8%</b>	<b>-2.2%</b>	<b>+1.8%</b>	<b>+80%</b>

Table: Distribution of staff by age

Year	15-34 years	35-54 years	55+ years
30 June 2023	69	96	31
30 June 2024	68	99	34
30 June 2025	74	108	35
% change	<b>+8.8%</b>	<b>+9%</b>	<b>+2.9%</b>



NRAR staff connecting at branch days. Photos: NRAR

## Employee count and distribution

On June 30, 2025, NRAR employed 217 staff including permanent and temporary employees. This was an increase of about 8% in total staffing on the previous year. Almost 60% of staff were based in regional NSW. Staff in the 35-54 years category increased the most between last financial year and this one.



217

employees



60%

based regionally



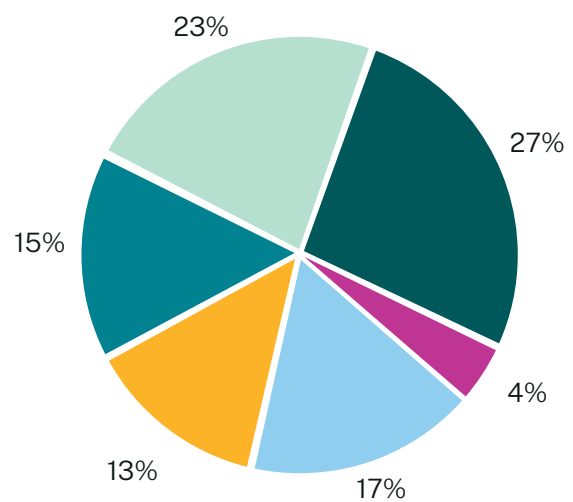
9%

increase in the 35-54 years category

## Employees per branch

- 58 Regulatory Initiatives
- 49 Education & Engagement
- 33 Investigations & Enforcement
- 29 Innovation, Systems and Intelligence
- 37 Policy and Performance
- 9 Other\*

\* Other is Chief Regulatory Officer and staff.



## Diversity and inclusion at NRAR

71%

or 5 out of 7 executives are women

7%

of employees speak a first language other than English

4%

of NRAR staff declared their disability

5.6%

is the NSW Government target for disability employment

### Gender equity

NRAR employs similar numbers of men and women. At June 30, 2025, just over 46% of staff were women and 52% were men. Some staff identify as non-binary, or prefer not to identify a gender. The percentage of women senior leaders at NRAR in 2025 is 71% or 5 of the 7 executives, exceeding the NSW Government target of 50% of senior leadership positions filled by women.

### Cultural diversity

NRAR employs people from a variety of cultural backgrounds, however exact numbers are difficult to determine because employees do not always elect to disclose this information.

As at June 30, 2025:

- 7% of employees spoke a first language other than English
- 27% chose not to disclose this information.

Eight per cent of staff identified as being part of a minority group in 2024-25, up slightly on the previous year, and 25% chose not to disclose this information.

### Disability inclusion action plan

The NSW Premier has set a target that people with disabilities hold 5.6% of all NSW Government roles by 2025. At the end of 2024, NRAR employed 9 people with disabilities, which represents 4% of our workforce.

The main steps to improving this percentage are:

- creating an inclusive and safe workplace, where employees feel they can declare their disability
- recruiting people with disability to meet the Premier's priority target
- ensuring inclusion of people with disabilities in leadership development programs.



Lake Canobolas Reservoir wall near Orange. Photo: NRAR

## Our values in action

NRAR's success in the last financial year is thanks to the hard work of its staff and the values that guide their work. To celebrate outstanding contributions, NRAR holds the annual NRAR Way Awards. These awards honour employees who show excellence in six key values: Kindness, Inclusivity, Daring, Integrity, Creativity, and Collaboration.

**Staff nominate and vote for the winners, who are announced at the annual all-staff event**

**These are this year's winners.**

### Creativity



**Niely Baron,  
Senior Assessment Officer**

Niely's colleagues described her as someone who tirelessly enhances and streamlines processes and implements user-friendly improvements.

### Inclusivity



**Gurinder Bhangal,  
Compliance Officer**

Gurinder's colleagues said he was always first to include those around him in conversations and could be trusted to hear their opinions and accept differing views respectfully.

### Kindness



**Sue Smith,  
Assistant Project Officer**

Sue's colleagues said she consistently demonstrated kindness and a willingness to help others at NRAR — no matter which team or group.

### Kindness



**Martin Stuart,  
Senior Spatial Analyst**

According to his workmates, Martin is always approachable and supportive. He always treats others with kindness and respect, creating a positive and collaborative work environment.

### Integrity



**Ivars Reinfelds, Manager  
Spatial and Data Analytics**

Ivars exemplifies courage and passion in tackling impossible challenges and consistently brings innovative solutions to complex problems, his colleagues said.

### Daring



**Grant Astill,  
Manager Priority Programs**

Grant's colleagues said he was always ready and willing to play the devil's advocate and initiate robust, constructive conversations that foster critical thinking and creative solutions.

### Collaboration



**David Thomas,  
Manager Priority Programs**

Dave's colleagues said he always uses people's strengths to achieve the best, timely results. He listens, hears people's ideas, and encourages them to pursue them.

## Jane Taylor Board Chair Awards

Established in 2020, the award honours the memory of Jane Taylor, a respected Senior Water Regulation Officer. Jane was known for her integrity, expertise and dedication to public service. This award recognises NRAR staff who show professionalism, leadership and commitment to excellence in regulatory, environmental and organisational outcomes. This reflects the values that defined Jane's contribution to water management in NSW.



Left to right, Jason and Cathy after receiving their award. Photo: Dillon Leigh, NRAR

### Jason Long Program Lead

Jason leads the largest team within the Regulatory Initiatives branch. He oversees NSW's most complex and high-volume water users, working to ensure they comply.

Jason is dedicated to making a difference, and among his many accomplishments is establishing our first Indigenous traineeship program in partnership with the NRL. He is well-respected by his team and a valued long-standing member of NRAR.

### Cathy Stubbs Senior Communications Officer

Cathy has led key communications initiatives with relentless tenacity, from leading production of the annual Progress Report to designing, coordinating, and delivering the communications strategy for NRAR's largest Enforceable Undertaking project to date.

Cathy leads NRAR's media office and plays a central role in shaping how we communicate our work to the public.





## Work, health and safety

### Keeping NRAR officers safe in the field

NRAR officers travel across NSW, often covering long distances to reach remote areas. Their work brings them into contact with a wide range of stakeholders, sometimes in situations that can be unpredictable. Because of this, safety is a top priority.

To help manage the risks involved, all staff complete mandatory training that prepares them to handle challenging scenarios safely and professionally. They also follow detailed safety procedures that guide their actions when working in environments with potential hazards. One recent improvement was the upgrade of satellite communication devices used in the field. These new tools help officers stay connected and allow NRAR to monitor their wellbeing while they're on duty.

### Understanding workplace incidents

In the 2024–25 reporting year, NRAR recorded 101 work-related incidents — an increase of 32 compared to the previous year. Of these, twelve involved injuries. Six required only first aid or no treatment at all, while the other six led to medical care or time off work. The remaining 89 incidents didn't result in injury but were still important to report. These included 39 near misses and 49 identified hazards, each offering valuable insight into how safety can be improved.

### Investigations and safety oversight

During the same period, one incident led to formal notices from SafeWork NSW. NRAR also launched 51 internal investigations into workplace health and safety matters. These investigations resulted in 122 corrective actions, each aimed at reducing risk and preventing future incidents.

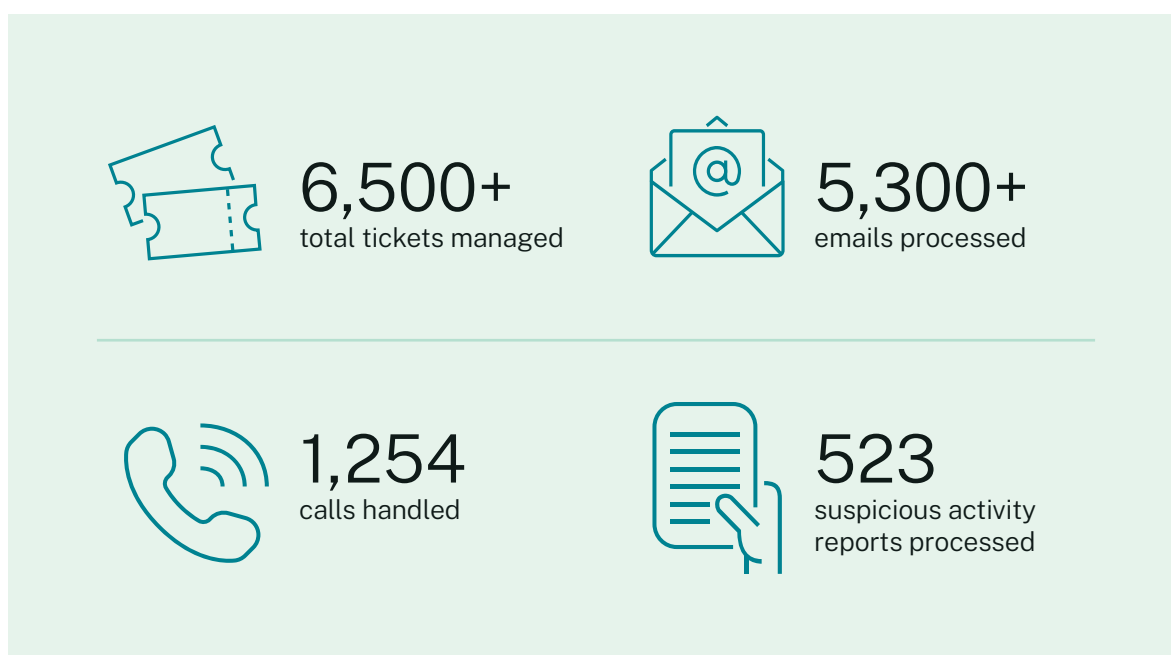
## Working efficiently

### Contact centre

In 2024–25, NRAR’s contact centre had a busy year, handling 1,254 calls (about 24 each week on average). The team also processed more than 523 suspicious activity reports and managed well over 5,300 emails and other enquiries from both the public and staff.

The in-house contact centre was set up in 2023 to improve how NRAR responds to enquiries, replacing an external provider. It’s now quicker and easier for people to get answers about the water rules, and staff also benefit from faster internal support.

The team regularly reviews its work to find better ways to collaborate with stakeholders.



### Centralised register

In 2024–25, NRAR created a centralised register to fix problems caused by using too many separate systems. Before this, different teams used different methods to track staff movements, assets, vehicles, and compliance tasks. This made it hard to keep information up to date, caused delays in reporting, and increased the risk of mistakes and audit issues.

The new centralised register brought all this information into one easy-to-use system. It replaced manual processes with automated workflows, making it quicker and easier to enter data, approve requests, and send notifications. Important forms were also digitised and automated.

The system includes tools to help staff in the field connect with workforce data to give a clearer picture of staffing. New features like automated recognition forms and satisfaction surveys help improve staff engagement and feedback.

Overall, the centralised register has made NRAR more efficient, more connected, and better prepared for the future.

# Maturity assessment project

## Modern Regulatory Improvement Tool

In 2024–25, NRAR undertook the Maturity Advancement Project (MAP) to assess and recommend areas to strengthen its approach.

Using the AELERT Modern Regulator Improvement Tool (MRIT), the project explored best-practice approaches to drive meaningful improvements. MRIT was created by the Australasian Environmental Law Enforcement and Regulators Network (AELERT). The tool helps regulators understand how well they’re performing across 12 key areas and where they can improve. It also helps show the public how NRAR is growing as a regulator.

Since establishment, NRAR has steadily strengthened its maturity, particularly in areas such as leadership, regulatory approach, and community engagement. The 2024 assessment found NRAR to be nearing the level of a ‘well established’ regulator, with some features demonstrating ‘leading practice’.

Following the latest review, NRAR’s Board and Executive chose 3 areas to focus on:

### Regulatory philosophy

NRAR is working to make sure its approach to regulation is clear, fits its purpose and is reflected in its decisions.

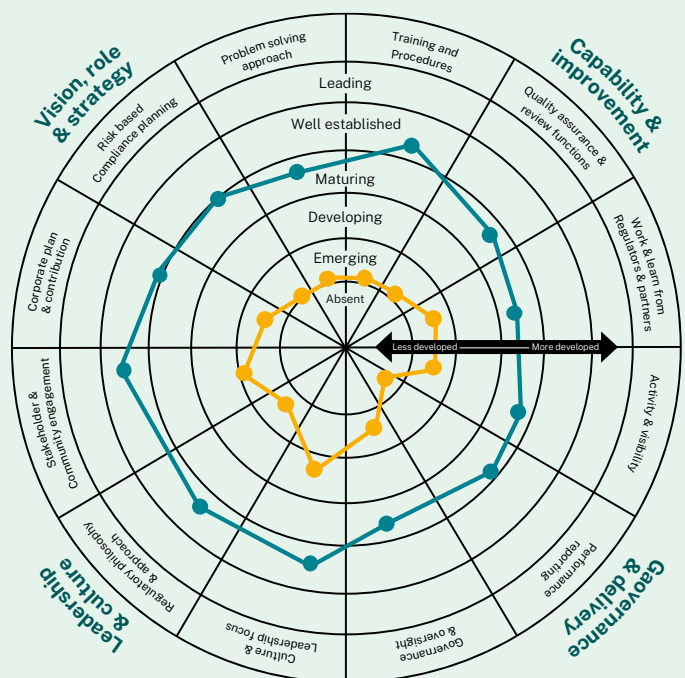
### Core planning processes

NRAR is improving how it sets priorities and plans its work. The changes include clearer procedures and a stronger role for data. Project management support from other teams will also make these processes more robust.

### Performance, brand and impact

NRAR is developing better ways to measure its success. The focus is on collecting data that matters and using it to guide decisions.

These efforts are helping NRAR become a smarter, more effective regulator that’s ready for future challenges.



The MRIT template wheel visually pinpoints NRAR’s previous and current maturity level. ● 2017 ● 2024

## Our commitment to quality

NRAR is committed to maintaining the highest standards in water regulation across NSW by regularly reviewing its policies, processes and systems. To support this, we implemented a Quality Management System (QMS) that helps us keep our policies and processes clear, up to date, and track improvements via a continual improvement register.

NRAR's QMS is independently certified to ISO 9001. It addresses process issues and gives staff greater confidence in delivering their work. It also gives us an external view of our own performance. By choosing certification, NRAR aims to strengthen its governance and build public confidence in the effectiveness of its regulatory activities.

## How we've progressed

In 2024, NRAR's QMS underwent its first recertification audit conducted by an independent external body, as part of the standard three-year cycle. The audit recommended NRAR for recertification, identifying only minor areas for improvement.

### Case study

#### Non-urban metering reform

We reviewed how we delivered the non-urban metering reform priority. The review showed we used a risk-based approach to identify licence holders, plan inspections and carry out fieldwork. Communications were clear and well-supported, and records were properly kept and analysed. The review also found areas to improve, such as clarifying some procedures and strengthening record keeping. These improvements are now underway.

#### Why quality matters

NRAR's QMS sets out clear processes so staff can conduct their work efficiently, transparently and with consistency. Regular internal reviews strengthen our accountability and drive continuous improvement.

## Project management office

In 2024-25, NRAR introduced a new project management system in response to an independent review. The system standardises project management practices across the agency, helping teams deliver projects on time, within scope and on budget.

Key benefits include:

- a consistent, user-friendly tool that supports best-practice project management
- custom dashboards and reports that reduce duplication and reporting effort
- integration with other software systems, centralising key project data
- automated approvals and reminders to streamline workflows
- alignment of outcomes and indicators with departmental and government priorities
- real-time insights for sponsors and leaders on progress, budget and issues to escalate.



Nambucca River, Macksville. Photo: Salty Dingo

## Measuring performance

NRAR is improving how key performance indicators are managed. We are reviewing and updating them to make sure they're clear, consistent and useful.

We are also building a framework to guide how AI is used, making sure it's transparent and safe. At the same time, we are developing AI tools to help predict performance, improve efficiency and support smarter decisions.

## Finance and funding

NRAR is prudent with its funding and manages its budget responsibly. We provide regular updates to our board and are subject to an external audit to make sure we are transparent and accountable.

In 2025, IPART decided to fully fund NRAR's water compliance program, approving an average of \$36.3 million per year for 4 years.

This decision secures funding until September 2029, makes up for past shortfalls, and sets a stronger standard for the future.

Back in 2021, IPART estimated that \$6 million a year was enough for an "efficient and effective" program. Although the government temporarily added \$10 million, NRAR argued that this wasn't enough to run a proper compliance system.

In its latest submission, NRAR presented a strong business case to secure its funding to the right level, which IPART accepted.

This outcome shows the value of NRAR's work and the strength of its funding proposal.

NRAR undertakes this IPART process every 3 to 5 years to secure a majority of its total funding.



# 5

## Your questions answered

NRAR officer assessing a dam Photo: Salty Dingo



## Why do we need a water regulator in NSW?

Before NRAR, water rules were often broken with no, or little, consequences. This harmed the environment, communities, and other water users.

## What do the 3 key water agencies in NSW do?

Water in NSW is managed by 3 main agencies:

- **NSW DCCEEW - Water Group:** Sets the rules and policies for water management.
- **WaterNSW:** Carries out the rules, manages water licences, and manages NSW rivers and water supply systems.
- **NRAR:** Makes sure the rules are followed by monitoring, educating, and enforcing when needed.

## How does NRAR monitor and enforce water compliance?

- encourages people to follow the rules
- uses smart tools to monitor water take and use
- takes strong action against serious breaches.

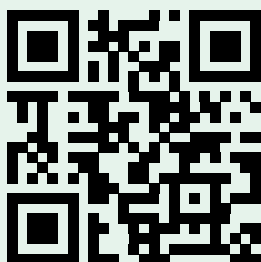
People trust that NRAR is watching, educating and enforcing the rules. With a likely hotter and drier future ahead, having an independent regulator is more important than ever to ensure fair and sustainable water use.

## Where can I see what NRAR is doing and the results achieved?

NRAR shares regular updates to show how it's enforcing water laws fairly and transparently. Here's where you can find that information:

### Compliance dashboard

View the number of fines, inspections, warnings, and common offences. Data is updated monthly and broken down by region.



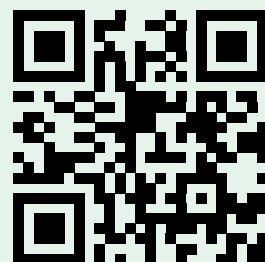
### Case studies

Learn about some of the consequences, including court cases and penalties from real examples of rule-breaking.



### Public register

See serious enforcement actions taken by NRAR to understand the consequences of not following water laws.



## How do I check how the rules apply to me?

You can take a free, self-paced online course created by NRAR and TAFE NSW. It's designed to help you understand water laws in NSW.

It's for primary producers, rural landholders, hobby farmers, rural industries, and anyone interested in water regulation.

### What's included:

- 3 mandatory modules
- 5 elective modules
- A decision-tree tool to help you pick the right electives.



**There is no prior knowledge required, and it's completely free.**

Enrol at [nrar.nsw.gov.au/eLearning](https://nrar.nsw.gov.au/eLearning)

## I have information about potential suspicious water use activity. How do I report it?

To make a confidential report of any suspicious activities, contact NRAR:

- by filling out the form at the web address below
- on 1800 633 362 during business hours.

Read more about how we handle these reports at [nrar.nsw.gov.au/report-suspicious-water-activities](https://nrar.nsw.gov.au/report-suspicious-water-activities)

## Will NRAR be at my local field day?

Yes! Field days offer a great chance to chat directly with our education team and get answers to your water regulation questions.

### Common events we attend include:

- May – Tocal Field Days, Hunter Valley
- May – Primex, Casino
- July – Mudgee Small Farms Field Days
- August – AgQuip, Gunnedah
- August – AgriShowm, Moss Vale
- September – Berry Small Farm Field Days
- September – Henty Machinery Field Days
- October – Murrumbateman Field Days
- October – Australian National Field Days, Borenore.



NRAR staff are ready to answer questions at field days. Photo: NRAR

## How do I know if a person is really from NRAR?

In 2024, NRAR was alerted to a case where people may have pretended to be government officers to unlawfully access properties.

Two men claimed to be “from the government” but had no uniforms or official vehicles, raising concerns they were scouting for theft.

To stay safe:

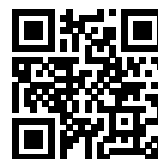
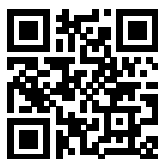
- NRAR officers usually wear uniforms, but they always carry official ID. You can ask to see it.
- Verify their identity by calling NRAR’s call centre: 1800 633 362.
- Report suspicious activity to the police immediately.



NRAR staff in uniform. Photo: Salty Dingo

## How can I keep up to date with NRAR’s activities?

- Follow us on Facebook
- Follow us on LinkedIn
- Subscribe to our YouTube channel
- Sign up to our quarterly e-newsletter Water Compliance News



**Notes:**

# Natural Resources Access Regulator

---

Locked Bag 5022  
Parramatta NSW 2124

T: 1800 633 362  
W: [nrar.nsw.gov.au](http://nrar.nsw.gov.au)

