

OFFICIAL



MINISTERIAL BRIEF

City and Environment Directorate

To:	Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water	Tracking No.: 25/0235077
Date:	20/06/2025	
From:	Executive Group Manager, Climate Change, Energy and Water	
Subject:	2025-26 Priorities for the Office of Water	
Critical Date:	23/07/2025	
Critical Reason:	To inform you of the policy and program priorities Office of Water and the associated workload for the 2025/26 Financial year.	

Recommendations

That you:

1. **Note** the policy and program priorities Office of Water Office for the 2025/26 Financial year;

Noted / Please Discuss

2. **Note** the number and scope of national, regional and ACT level projects, reviews or commitments that the Office will be involved with in 25/26;

Noted / Please Discuss

3. **Note** that new tasks must be undertaken within existing resources and resource constraints may delay delivery of some items, and that these risks will be communicated ahead of time in the Climate Change, Energy and Water (CCEW) status report; and

Noted / Please Discuss

4. **Agree** the Office of Water 2025/26 Priorities.

Agree / Please Discuss

Suzanne Orr MLA/...../.....

Minister's Feedback

Background

- 1) The Office of Water (OoW) is responsible for coordination of water policy and management for the ACT government, including policy development and the planning and delivery of major urban and rural waterway restoration programs.
- 2) The OoW also coordinates, or has a key role in, the ACT's involvement in National and Regional level water programs such as the Basin Plan, the National Water Initiative, the Upper Murrumbidgee Catchment, and the development of a Water Trade Framework to support cross border water supply with NSW regional communities.
- 3) The OoW plays a leadership role in bringing together the data and scientific evidence to inform policy and management options. This evidence base is used to ensure you are aware of emerging risks and the opportunities to respond.

Office of Water Priorities

- 4) The Office of Water has undertaken a review of its workload for the 2025/26 Financial year and prioritised tasks based on the value of the outcomes and the effort required. These priorities are detailed in Attachment A. A one page 'placemat' summary is at Attachment B. The connections between the data and modelling work and the priority work outputs are summarised in Attachment C. A visual of the 6-month forward work plan for the delivery of these priorities is provided in Attachment D.
- 5) Note that there are four important 'once in a generation' reviews that are taking place concurrently at the national level that will draw on OoW resources in the coming 12- 24 months:
 - the Murray Darling Basin Plan review,
 - the Commonwealth Water ACT (2007) review,
 - endorsement and implementation of the National Water Agreement,
 - the Snowy Water Inquiry Outcomes Implement Deed review.
- 6) You have requested a Cabinet subcommittee submission on this national level review.
- 7) The Water Ministerial Council and Murray Darling Basin Water Ministerial Council meetings are likely to be scheduled in July-August. The Water Act review, Basin Plan review and National Water Agreement endorsement and implementation are likely to be significant agenda items for these meetings.
- 8) There are three large, resource-intensive regional initiatives underway:
 - the establishment of Water Trade and Accounting,
 - negotiation on agreements for cross border water supply to NSW townships,
 - the Upper Murrumbidgee Restoration program to be delivered in collaboration

with NSW and the Commonwealth.

- 9) Further, there are two major time-critical decisions that Icon Water needs to make on
 - a) future sewage treatment options, and
 - b) enhanced drinking water supply options. The Office is helping progress both decisions on several fronts.
- 10) On future sewage treatment options, the Office has prepared advice on the impacts of the proposed Queanbeyan Sewage Treatment Plant and the potential Icon Water Eastern Sewage Treatment Plant on the water quality and ecology of Lake Burley Griffin. OoW is preparing advice on the potential cost of offsetting through reducing diffuse source pollutants elsewhere in the catchment to inform Icon's decision on a future Eastern STP. This advice will be shared both with the regulator Environment Protection Agency and Icon Water.
- 11) On enhanced drinking water supply, the two highest ranked options for Icon Water are
 - a) transfer of water from Tantangara in the Murrumbidgee River, which is co-dependent of the SWIOD Review and interstate water trade, and
 - b) indirect potable reuse (recycling).
- 12) On the latter, while the recycling of sewage to drinking water has been proven to be effective in many other jurisdictions it remains contentious with the community. Introducing potable reuse in the ACT will also have approval implications with NSW Health as the water will be supplied to NSW under cross-border water supply agreements. To have the best chance of getting community support, the ACT government should consider developing a potable reuse policy and engaging the community ahead of the Icon Water decision. The Office is developing a position paper on potable reuse to inform next steps.

Financial Implications

- 13) Any additional resourcing will be sought under future business cases.
- 14) There are options for the ACT Government to generate revenue through interstate water trade. However, the Office has not been tasked with developing revenue options and would require additional resources to do so.

15) Consultation

Internal

- 16) The staff in the Office of Water contributed to the workload prioritisation.

External

- 17) The Office of water consulted with the Environmental Protection Agency, Utilities Technical Regulator, Chief Minister Treasury and Economic Development Directorate, and Icon Water.

Work Health and Safety

- 18) There are Work Health and Safety issues related to the range and load of work being undertaken by the Office of Water. The prioritisation process was initiated to ensure that the workloads for staff are manageable. Having approved priorities provides

support to staff to manage work effectively.

Benefits/Sensitivities

19) Benefits of completing the prioritised work include:

- a) Compliance with Commonwealth regulation and commitments;
- b) Increased Sustainable Diversion Limit and water available for take to support growth in the ACT and region;
- c) Recognition of the importance of releases from Tantangara to support cultural and environmental flows as well and water for human critical need;
- d) Streamlining reporting requirements across Commonwealth agencies, in particular to MDBA and the Bureau of Meteorology, and
- e) Increased climate resilience of the water supply, for environmental, cultural, economic and social needs including drinking water security.

20) Sensitivities:

- a) Recycling of sewage to drinking water is still contentious with the community and communication regarding it will need to be carefully managed;
- b) Progression of the Eastern Sewage Treatment Plant option could necessitate the development of an offsets policy for the management of diffuse source phosphorus pollutants entering Lake Burley Griffin, and
- c) The implementation of cross border water supply agreements for Bungendore, Murrumbateman and Yass may create a precedent for developers elsewhere in surrounding NSW to expect access to ACT drinking water infrastructure.

Communications, media and engagement implications

21) Nil.

Signatory Name: Kieran Lawton Phone: 0466 389 760

Action Officer: Chris Hepplewhite Phone: 0482 117 150

Attachments

Attachment	Title
Attachment A	OoW 2025/26 Priorities detail
Attachment B	OoW priorities on a page
Attachment C	OoW priorities and data interconnections
Attachment D	OoW 6-month deliverables plan July to December 2025
Attachment E	OoW org chart June 2025

Office of Water - Short Term Priorities

Purpose of this document

This document seeks to outline the priorities of the Office of Water (OoW) through 2025.

Its purpose is to highlight the work that will be delivered over the coming 6 months. It also outlines the work for which permission will be sought to delay or stop so that resources can be focussed on the highest priorities. The audience includes OoW staff, EPSDD Executive and the Minister's Office. For staff it is intended to provide clear direction and to help prioritise day-to-day work. For Executive and the Minister it is intended to illustrate the breadth of work in train and to seek agreement on the priorities for delivery.

Contents

Office of Water - Short Term Priorities	1
Purpose of this document.....	1
Purpose of the Office.....	3
Background	3
Addressing current and emerging challenges	3
Elevating leadership on water matters	4
Office of Water – Strategic Vision and Priorities	5
Vision	5
Who we are	5
What we do	5
How we are doing it	5
What we don't do.....	7
Priorities for delivery until the end of 2025	9
TABLE 1: Priority Tasks - Policy, Planning and Intergovernmental	9
TABLE 2: Priority Tasks - Programs	13
TABLE 3: Tasks to be delayed or efforts minimised.....	14
TABLE 4: Tasks where the Office has a supporting role	18
TABLE 5: Tasks that are well advanced or complete	19

Purpose of the Office

Background

Waterways in the ACT provide water for consumption by residents and businesses, enhance the amenity of the Territory and serve as habitat for the region's aquatic flora and fauna.

The OoW is responsible for aspects of water management in the ACT, including policy development and the planning and delivery of major urban and rural waterway restoration programs. It also works with urban planning functions in relation to built area design standards to ensure stormwater quality is managed to maintain lake and riverine health.

The Office is also a central point of reference for coordinating water management activities by other ACT government entities including the Environment Protection Authority (water licencing and pollution standards), Transport Canberra and City Services (stormwater), the Utilities Technical Regulator (regulatory standards) and for the Territory owned cooperation, Icon Water (urban water supply and sewage).

The Office operates within the ACT but also contributes to cross-border water governance, most notably in relation to regional water supply, water sharing within the Murray-Darling Basin, and the volume and quality of flows entering and exiting the ACT.

Addressing current and emerging challenges

In certain places and at certain times the condition of our urban lakes and rural rivers is poor. Urban lakes periodically experience algal blooms and faecal pollution, and the OoW leads the ACT government commitment to developing and delivering plans to improve water quality in the lakes. The Murrumbidgee River suffers from low flows due to upstream diversions, degradation by sand deposits, poor riparian health and resultant impacts on instream fish and other fauna. The OoW is working with partners in New South Wales and the Australian Government to improve the condition of the river.

There are rapidly emerging water governance challenges at territory, cross-jurisdictional and national scales which need a response and which will require the ACT government to consider policy innovations and reforms. The OoW is developing options for government in response to these emerging challenges.

Climate change presents a significant threat to water availability and quality and by association to the growth, development, wellbeing and prosperity of the Territory. Climate records over the past two decades show that Southeast Australia has been experiencing a rapidly drying and warming trend, and this change has been at a faster rate than climate scientists had initially predicted. The relatively steady-state climate which was experienced over the 1900's and in which Canberra was established, no longer persists and our management of water needs to adapt to these changing circumstances. Drying and warming trends increase the demand for water to meet domestic, cooling and commercial needs. Increasing population growth and heat island effects of denser residential areas further compounds the demand for water as well as negatively impacting the quality of water in our lakes and waterways.

Elevating leadership on water matters

The scale of the waterway restoration programs and rapidly emerging and compounding impacts on water security and quality present strong drivers for policy change and reform. Constant re-assessment and improvements to Territory policy, regulation, governance and practice will need to be made if broader government priorities for wellbeing, prosperity and lifestyle are to be met.

Bungendore provides an example of what can happen when leadership on water matters fails. No new building has been able to occur in Bungendore for five years because the water supply for expansion was not assured in a timely way. The situation is potentially now compounded by the discovery of PFAS pollutants in the existing groundwater supply.

The OoW plays a leadership role in bringing together the data and scientific evidence to provide policy and management options for the government to consider to stay in front of these issues. The OoW has a role to ensure the Minister is aware of emerging risks and the opportunities for change, as well as advice on how to integrate options across other portfolios including energy, planning, economic development and health.

The Government has already invested in establishing a strong water science, data and modelling capability in the OoW to underpin its advice. The challenges to water security and the condition of waterways present real and potentially rapid threats not only to supplies of drinking water and plants and animals living in our waterways but to broader government priorities such as for economic development, wellbeing and amenity. The OoW is well placed to continue to ensure that water issues do not limit the government's broader agenda.

Office of Water – Strategic Vision and Priorities

Vision

Working together to benefit waterways and people of the ACT region now and for future generations.

Who we are

We lead water planning, policy setting and program delivery to manage resources sustainably, ensuring water quantity, quality and efficiency through collaborative, cross-sectoral approaches.

What we do

We will focus on the following key areas to safeguard our water resources:

- Bringing together areas of Government that are involved in water management, providing a central point for cross agency coordination, and to building effective partnerships and relationships.
- Water policy and planning that balances the needs of water users and the environment and provides for a reliable and sustainable water quantity (security of supply, consumptive and environmental needs) and water quality (for amenity, recreational and environmental benefits).
- Grounding our advice and action (planning and decision) on evidence and science.
- Ensuring good water governance.
- Ensuring Traditional Custodian participation and respect for traditional knowledge.
- Ensuring we have an informed, engaged and involved community.

How we are doing it

Providing a central point for cross agency coordination.

- Governance forums support decision making on cross-cutting water sector issues and operations.
- Engaging across Government to uplift catchment and water management practices.

Sustainable water quantity and quality

- Refreshing water policy document including the ACT Water Strategy 2014-2044: Striking the Balance and the ACT and Region Catchment Strategy to reaffirm the vision and outcomes for water management within the Territory and region.
- Working with Icon Water to respond to the pressure climate and population growth is exerting pressure on our water resource systems.
- Improving water quality through programs and infrastructure that reduce the amount of pollution entering stormwater.
- Building wetlands and other assets that clean polluted stormwater and reduce stormflows.
- Preparing plans to ensure good water quality in urban lakes and ponds while supporting aligned values related to biodiversity, urban heat, First People's values, urban travel, amenity and recreation.
- Addressing the issue of catchment soil erosion and sediment deposition in rural rivers, with Government and community partners.
- Leading water policy that effectively contributes to statutory and strategic planning frameworks.
- Leading review of water quality guidelines and standards to ensure best practice adaptive management with water pollution activities.
- Ensuring contemporary legislation for water management.

Grounding our advice and action (planning and decision) on evidence and science

- Developing a water quantity and quality evidence base to support water policy and management.
- Strengthening our analytics, modelling and monitoring capacity and capability to incorporate best available information in policy development and program delivery.
- Keeping the state and the condition of the Territory's water resources under continuous review.
- Providing leadership across Government to ensure all water data is fit-for-purpose, discoverable, accessible and can inform decision making and support transparency.
- Fostering partnerships with communities, industry, academia, and non-governmental organisations to facilitate evidence-based decision making.

Ensuring good governance

- Adjusting legislative and administrative arrangements to better align with core water policy, planning, operational and regulatory functions.
- Updating arrangements for monitoring, evaluating, and reporting on outcomes of water strategies to improve accountability and transparency.
- Improve accountability and transparency for water funding arrangements.
- Facilitating the Territory meeting its intergovernmental obligations under the Murray Darling Basin Plan and National Water Reforms.

Ensuring Traditional Custodian participation and respect for traditional knowledge

- Working with the Traditional Custodians to implement the government commitments under the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement and the National Agreement on Closing the Gap by increasing opportunities for access to cultural and economic benefits from water and to participate more fully in water management.

Ensuring we have an informed, engaged and involved community

- Providing advice on our functions and accountabilities to ensure community understanding of our area of responsibility and influence.
- Strengthening information-sharing arrangements between water sector entities and non-government bodies.
- Empower community to collect data and enhance catchment knowledge through supporting water quality citizen science programs.
- Improving public access to water information that would support community awareness and knowledge on the water resources of the ACT, and their condition.
- Providing the primary point of engagement for ACT community on water policy and planning matters.

What we don't do

We work collaboratively with our government agencies, water and wastewater utilities, stormwater manager and regulators who, nevertheless, have primary responsibility for aspects of water management:

- The management and operation of all water and sewerage services for the ACT and the bulk of Queanbeyan rests with Icon Water and QPRC.
- Responsibility for regulation and compliance with water resource management legislation (water take, licencing, issuing of water access entitlements) rests with the Environment Protection Authority, as does water access entitlement data custodianship.
- Management of the urban stormwater network, which comprises sumps, stormwater pipes, stormwater channels, water quality pond embankments, cut off drains, retarding basins, gross pollutant traps, dams and weirs, rests with Transport Canberra and City Services Directorate.
- Strategic flood risk management and emergency management sits with the ACT Emergency Services Agency, while flood planning in relation to development and land use planning sits with the Environment Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate's Strategic Planning area.
- Competition policy and through this, the capacity to issue price directions to the Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission in relation to the prices charged through monopoly infrastructure providers, such as Icon Water rests with Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate as does regional development.

Priorities for delivery until the end of 2025

Tasks are focused on

- improving Icon Water/ACT government working relationship
- securing more potable water for the ACT
- protecting and improving environmental condition.

A significant proportion of the priority tasks will need to be informed by a range of data analysis and modelling activities. The accompanying 'data interconnections' diagram maps these interdependencies.

This represents a snapshot of short term (~6 month) priority deliverables. Ongoing work to deliver long-term programs, such as for the Healthy Waterways and Water Efficiency Programs, are not listed here even though they are important government initiatives and fundamental to the longer-term deliverables of the Office.

In addition any ad-hoc requests (both internal and external of government) will need to be managed alongside the priorities listed here, as will be critical/non-negotiable business as usual activities (e.g. machinery of government, reporting, water quality improvements).

TABLE 1: Priority Tasks - Policy, Planning and Intergovernmental

Priority Tasks - Policy, Planning and Intergovernmental			
	Priority Task	Responsibility	Related task (need to be completed to inform delivery of the priority task)
Highest priority, urgent	Icon Water relationship		
	• MOU (August 2025 deadline)	Policy and Governance (Maria)	Potential data sharing agreement (EPSDD Corporate)
	Provide advice on wastewater management (Queanbeyan and proposed Eastern STP)		
	• LBG sustainable loads (Phosphorus) technical paper – advice to government and Icon Water	Policy and Governance (Maria)	Analysis of prior modelling for technical paper (complete)
	• Lake Burley Griffin Healthy Waterway Plan (key technical component) – undertake catchment modelling and other	ACT Healthy Waterways (Ralph)-Lead	Data cleaning/preparation TBC Modelling (Dec 2025) Equivalency study (outsourced)

	analysis to inform pollution management options, including cost of diffuse source offset to inform Icon Water and government decision making regarding the Eastern STP.	Water Information Services (Danswell) – Technical Support	
	Icon Water future water supply		
	Determine government process for development of Levels of Service targets and associated government/Cabinet process	Policy and Governance (Chris)	
	Due diligence - Levels of Service targets and associated government processes	Policy and Governance (Chris) – Lead Water Information Services (Danswell) – Technical Support	Due diligence - Model impacts of proposed level of services
	Develop potable re-use policy (and associated government/Cabinet process)	Policy and Governance (Chris)	
	Development of interstate water trade		
	- Cabinet agreement to trade and allocation frameworks in agreed timeframes including policy platform. - Update the disallowable instruments x3 (water resource determinations)	Policy and Governance (Chris) - Lead Water Information Services (Danswell) - Technical Support	Allocation approach Water Resource Assessment Water Resource Determination EPA to upgrade the water accounts information database (see supporting tasks table) TBD - other technical work
	Water accounts finalised and published annually (noting that next WAC review - preliminary work beginning 2026).	Water Information Services (Danswell)	Data collation and analysis, development of sustainable process for annual report generation
	Water Resource Assessment		
	Water resource assessment – determination of the source, extent, dependability of the water resource to inform Trade and water accounts, Basin Plan review and e-flow guidelines.	Water Information Services (Danswell)	IRMU program completion required for some model scenarios Climate data analysis

	1) Estimating urban runoff (complete) 2) Estimating ACT and NSW controlled surface water volume for each water management area, whole of ACT, and in paramount right areas, under historical climate (ongoing, ~80% there), 3) Estimating within the ACT controlled water, how much is protected, and how much is non-protected (eWater procurement SOR underway, expect to commence in May 2025); 4) #2 and #3, but under future climate scenarios (yet to commence, expect to complete by Dec 2025).		
	SWIOLD negotiations		
	Develop and present ACT negotiating position, support lead negotiators, and lead associated government processes	Intergovernmental (Hannah)- Lead Water Information Service (Danswell)- Technical Support	Finalise paper on negotiating position. Establish Challenge Panel Technical - Scenario development, data analysis and modelling to prosecute the ACT's negotiating position with regional stakeholders, and to participate in the process (structured decision making).
	Water Abstraction Charge and non-potable water pricing		
	- Non potable water – OoW is leading development of criteria for assistance in extreme conditions - Treasury is leading business case for 2025-26 mid-year budget relating to both WAC and non-potable charges	Policy and Governance (Maria)	Criteria need to be finalised before end June to inform Treasury business case.
High Priority	National water reviews and reforms (Basin Plan review, Water Act 2007 review)		
	Participate in the process including: Long term BDL and SDL determination Annual SDL accounting Note: the nature of the review parameters will dictate the magnitude of investment in technical work.	Intergovernmental (Hannah) Lead Water Information Service (Danswell) - Technical Support	IRMU project Water Resource Assessment Legal Advice – prosecute water take premise

	First Nations Water Interests		
	Lead engagement and associated government processes	Intergovernmental (Hannah)	Range of planning and policy documents developed across all areas of the Office.
	National Water Agreement		
	Participation in review of National Water Agreement, lead work to understand implications and costs for ACT, seek Cabinet endorsement to Agreement.	Policy and Governance (Chris)	Cabinet agreed (24/619) to defer approval of NWA until additional work undertaken on the implications for the ACT. Timeframe for advice to Cabinet is Q4, 2025.
	Environmental Flow Guidelines (statutory)		
	Finalise review of the guidelines, undertake consultation (statutory), prepare necessary Assembly papers	Policy and Governance (Maria)	
	Interim Yerrabi Pond Healthy Waterways Plan		
	Stakeholder engagement exercise – December 2025	ACT Healthy Waterways (Ralph)	GIS
	Metering policy		
	Finalise amendments to the policy (advice from Government Services is that these amendments do not need to go back to Cabinet), brief Minister. Note: EPA require these to inform compliance activities	Policy and Governance (Maria)	Near complete, brief provided to Minister June 2025
	ACT and Region Catchment Strategy Refresh		
	- Refresh the strategy to respond to the outcomes of the review, and undertake any necessary broader engagement process, along with associated government processes. - Delivery social expectation survey	Intergovernmental (Hannah), RCCG have an active role in the development	Consultant scheduled to have refresh finalised by September 2025.
	Lake Burley Griffin Catchment Plan		

	LBG Healthy Waterway Plan - develop plan informed by catchment model, pollution management options, in-lake modelling and equivalence study (anticipated release 4th quarter 2026).	ACT Healthy Waterways (Ralph) Water Information Service (Danswell) - Technical Support	Catchment model and analysis Pollution management options (outsourced) In-lake response modelling (outsourced) Equivalency study (outsourced)
--	--	---	--

TABLE 2: Priority Tasks - Programs

Priority Tasks – Programs and Data			
High Priority	Priority Task	Responsibility	Related task (need to be completed to inform delivery of the priority task)
	Develop and deliver plan to improve water quality in Lake Tuggeranong (election commitment)		
	Undertake consultation on draft plan (Your Say), review as appropriate, and prepare Cabinet documentation for final; plan (end 2025)	ACT Healthy Waterways (Ralph)	
	Prepare 26/27 budget business case for implementation of the plan	ACT Healthy Waterways (Ralph)	
	Upper Murrumbidgee Restoration Program		
	Deliver in accordance with funding agreement/project plan and facilitate government processes 1FTE funded, considering additional FTE and possibility of using funding from E-Flow MERI and Science Plan (this needs to be considered in context of alignment with original Office business case).	ACT Healthy Waterways (Woo) – on groundwork Water Information Services (Danswell) – science and monitoring	Science and monitoring activities Seek authorisation to augment Cwlth funds with Science Plan, Healthy Waterways Plans and MERI 25/26 funds.
	Water Efficiency Program		

	Design and implementation – delivery activities in line with 25/26 budget	Water Efficiency Project (Cameron)	Various
	IRMU		
	Runoff dams project	Water Information Services (Danswell)	
	Groundwater Monitoring network		
	- Groundwater monitoring stations – funds need to be spent in 24/25 - Statutory requirement under S68 of <i>Water Resources Act</i>	Water Information Services (Danswell)	Review existing groundwater monitoring information to inform fit for purpose monitoring program design and undertake monitoring (outsourced).

TABLE 3: Tasks to be delayed or efforts minimised

Tasks – Efforts Minimised or Delayed		
Task	Responsibility	Proposed action and why?
Long Term Watering Plan		
Finalise the Long-term watering plan (LTWP), reconsider structure, consider adding targets, undertake necessary consultation and prepare necessary government/Cabinet documentation	Policy and Governance (Maria)	Minimise effort –Timeframe for submission to Cwlth not yet agreed. Timeframe linked to Commonwealth release of the Basin Wide Environmental Watering Plan (BEWP). LTWP needs to respond to BEWP.
Inland waters targets (<i>Note - Priority of this work is currently being reassessed</i>)		
Progress inland waters target	Intergovernmental (Hannah)	Minimise effort -attend working group meetings First nation engagement Water Resource Assessment Trade and Allocation frameworks
Inter-government committees/working groups that are not strictly necessary		
Participation on non-critical committee/working groups	Various	Nil participation on non-critical committee/working groups ceases.

Water Strategy Refresh		
Release listening report	Policy and Governance (Maria)	Minimise effort - Potential exists to release listening report from broader consultation and then add an addendum to the report to include First Nation engagement outcomes. EPSDD Communications supportive of this approach.
Update to include outcomes of consultation, undertake First Nations Engagement, consider merits of implementation plan vs action plan. Note: Some effort to be invested in May 2025 to make ready for first nation engagement in June 2025.	Policy and Governance (Maria)	Minimise effort: Undertaking first nation engagement – this is key to finalising the Strategy. Once engagement complete Strategy will be updated to reflect engagement outcomes.
Refreshed Strategy document, supported by either an action plan or implementation plan Note: WIS does not have capacity to input on monitoring and evaluation.	Policy and Governance (Maria)	Minimise effort aim to finalise by December 2025 rather than earlier as previously planned.
Review of EPA/Office relationship		
Work with the EPA to clearly define roles and responsibilities.	Policy and Governance (Maria)	Delay – reconsider post MOG outcomes
Review of water fees and charges (fee determination)		
Consider resource fees and possible admin fees (admin fees only if work being undertaken by Access Canberra is not progressed).	Policy and Governance (Maria)	Delay – reconsider post MOG outcomes
Review of Water Resources Legislation		
End to end review of the Act (budget business case required – currently not funded).	Policy and Governance (Maria)	Discontinue - Not budget funded, reconsider in 2026/27 as part of budget cycle.

Cross Directorate Advisory Committee		
Secretariat	Intergovernmental (Hannah)	Pause meetings – reconsider post MOG outcomes
Review of the Catchment Code and assoc. regulations		
- Working group established and review of code predominately completed. Outcomes need to be written up, tested with Minister, and engagement undertaken. - Consultancy finalised re EP Regulation (Sch 3 and 4). Further work required to consider necessary amendments.	Policy and Governance (Maria)	Minimise effort – significant cross directorate investment already, some work still required, no agreed deadlines with Executive.
Water Information Hub		
Scoping project is complete. Next step is to develop business case - time consuming but needs to be done before the information from the DDTS consultancy becomes dated.	Water Information Services (Danswell)	Delay: - Option 1: delay - until mid-year budget (November) - Option 2: delay 6 months until early Jan. - Option 3: delay and align with either a water trade or water efficiency business case (as unlikely to supported as an independent business case - offsets would need to be identified).
Review of monitoring programs		
- End to end review of monitoring need relative to existing monitoring. Identification of gaps/opportunities. - Develop a fit for purpose monitoring program which will inform future monitoring contracts. Note: Lakes and River Monitoring Contract and AUSRIVER Contract – terms end late 2025	Water Information Services (Danswell)	Delay – 12 months Note: This work is important in context of determining the efficacy of a range of policy and programs. The delay risks effective evaluation.

Other Healthy Waterways Catchment Plans		
Develop healthy waterway plans – Lake Ginninderra	ACT Health Waterways (Ralph) – Lead Water Information Services (Danswell) – Technical Support	Delay – technical work commencing in 2026. Plan identified for delivery in 2027.
Develop healthy waterway plans – other areas	ACT Health Waterways (Ralph)	Delay – not budget funded.
Environmental Flow Guidelines MERI framework		
Preliminary draft MERI prepared inhouse – review required to determine if it's fit for purpose Note: Next budget bid for the 'Office' should further prosecute the need for recurrent monitoring funding to ensure statutory and policy requirements are met.	Policy and Governance (Maria)	Delay – next review of the EFG in 2029, however, monitoring gaps need to be bridged before this time to inform next review (and inform reporting on LTWP). Sufficient data required to inform review – monitoring to commence 25/26 Note: Funding implications – funding received across two years for development and implementation. 24/25 funding forfeited s document prepared in house. 25/26 implementation funding (300K) available. Seek authorisation to reallocate to the UMR noting that there is a level of confidence that data collected in UMR will support bridging the monitoring gaps for E-flow (see Table 2 UMR Project).

TABLE 4: Tasks where the Office has a supporting role

Supporting Role		
Office supports delivery of:	Responsibility	Office task that informs delivery
Cross-border agreement for supplying water to NSW townships		
Office to provide technical input (CMTEDD have overall responsibility. Agreement to be finalised by end June 2025)	Policy and Governance (Chris) – Lead Water Information Services (Danswell) – Technical Support	Trade and allocation framework Water Resource Assessment SDL/BDL assessment SWIOID
Trade Allocation Framework		
Consultation on Allocation framework (EPA has indicated that they would like to run the consultation process)	Policy and Governance (Chris)	Allocation framework
EPA to upgrade the water accounts information database	Policy and Governance (Chris)	Required to inform the allocation framework and trade processes.
WAC and non-potable water business case		
Inform development of the WAC and non-potable water business case	Policy and Governance (Maria)	Criteria – extreme conditions
Citizen science program support		
Support for WaterWatch, FrogWatch and other citizen science programs (0.6FTE within the Team)	Water Information Services (Danswell)	Required to support delivery of CHIP and citizen science programs.
Environmental policy and program development		
Input into Directorate and cross-directorate policy and programs e.g. nature conservation strategy review, climate change strategy	Various	Various
Science Plan - Grants		
Science Plan - Procurement framework to establish a grant scheme	Water Information Services (Danswell)	Possibly remove as funds will be subsumed into UMR project – (see Table 2 UMR Project)

TABLE 5: Tasks that are well advanced or complete

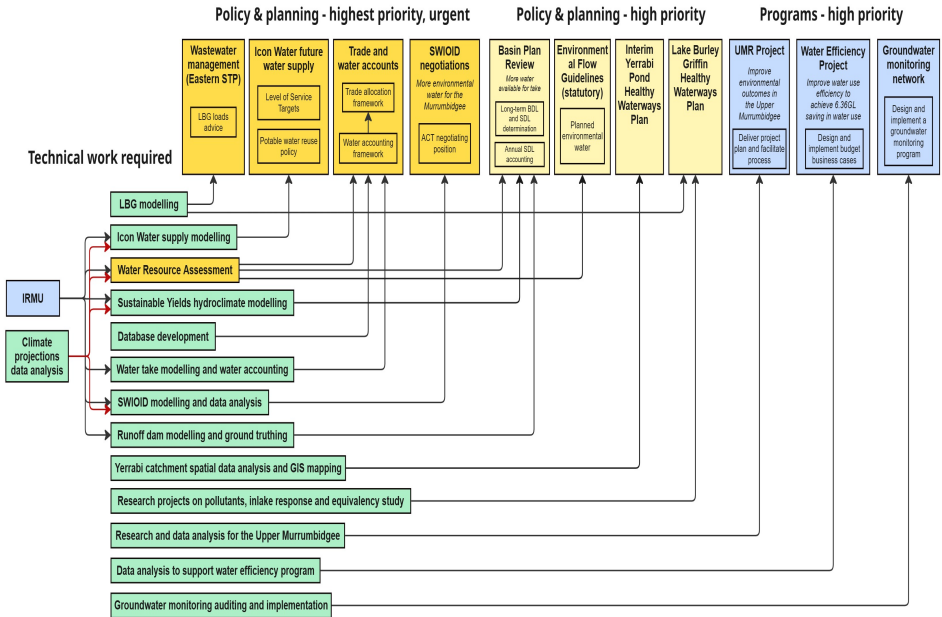
Tasks that are well advance or complete		
Task	Responsibility	Status
WAC and non-potable water review	Policy and Governance (Maria)	Reviews complete. Treasury leading development of a business case – drafting commencing August 2025.
Vulnerability Assessment	Water Information Services (Danswell)-	Assessment complete. Noted by Cabinet June 18. To be published online.
Strategic Review of the Office of Water	Policy and Governance (Maria)	Was considered by ERC on 19 May and Cabinet on 11 June 2025
Queanbeyan Sewage Treatment Plan Environmental Authorisation advice	Policy and Governance (Maria)	Advice provided to EPA.
ACT and Region Catchment Strategy review	Intergovernmental (Hannah)	Review complete. Efforts now focussed on refresh.

OoW short-term priorities (6 months)

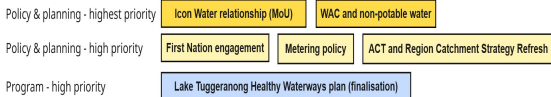
OPPORTUNITIES		CHALLENGES	
- National water reforms, including reviews of Basin Plan and <i>Water Act 2007 (cth)</i>. - Heightened awareness of upper Murrumbidgee vulnerability - Snowy Water Inquiry Outcomes Implementation Deed		- Climate variability and change - Growing population (ACT and regional) - complex urban water systems - Ongoing water quality issues in Canberra's lakes - Cross-sectoral, cross-jurisdictional stakeholders	
SOLUTIONS – SHORT TERM DELIVERABLES			
Water supply and security		Environmental health	
- Lead ACT Gov representation in Basin Plan review (advocate for increased ACT water resource) - Embed Levels of Service targets into regulations and update as required to provide certainty for Icon - Develop water trade and allocation framework, and water accounts - Finalise cross-border supply agreements for NSW townships - Lead ACT Gov engagement with Icon on supply options - Design and implement Water Efficiency Program - WAC and non-potable water review – financial assessment - Re-use – develop potable water reuse policy to assist Icon enhanced water supply options - Finalise amendments to metering policy with EPA		- Lead ACT Gov engagement with Icon and QPRC on sewage upgrades in eastern ACT and Queanbeyan – provide advice on discharge limits into the Molonglo - Progress Lake Burley Griffin and Yerrabi healthy waterways plans - Publish Lake Tuggeranong plan and progress implementation - Implement the Upper Murrumbidgee Restoration Program - Support Catchment Coordination Group - ACT and region catchment strategy refresh - Lead ACT Gov in SWIOID negotiations - Finish Environmental Flow Guidelines	
STRONG EVIDENCE BASE AND GOVERNANCE – SHORT TERM DELIVERABLES			
- First Nations engagement project - Groundwater monitoring project - Water Resource Assessment		- IRMU run-off dams project - LBG catchment modelling and analysis - Develop MOU ACT Gov /Icon Water - Complete water information hub discovery project	

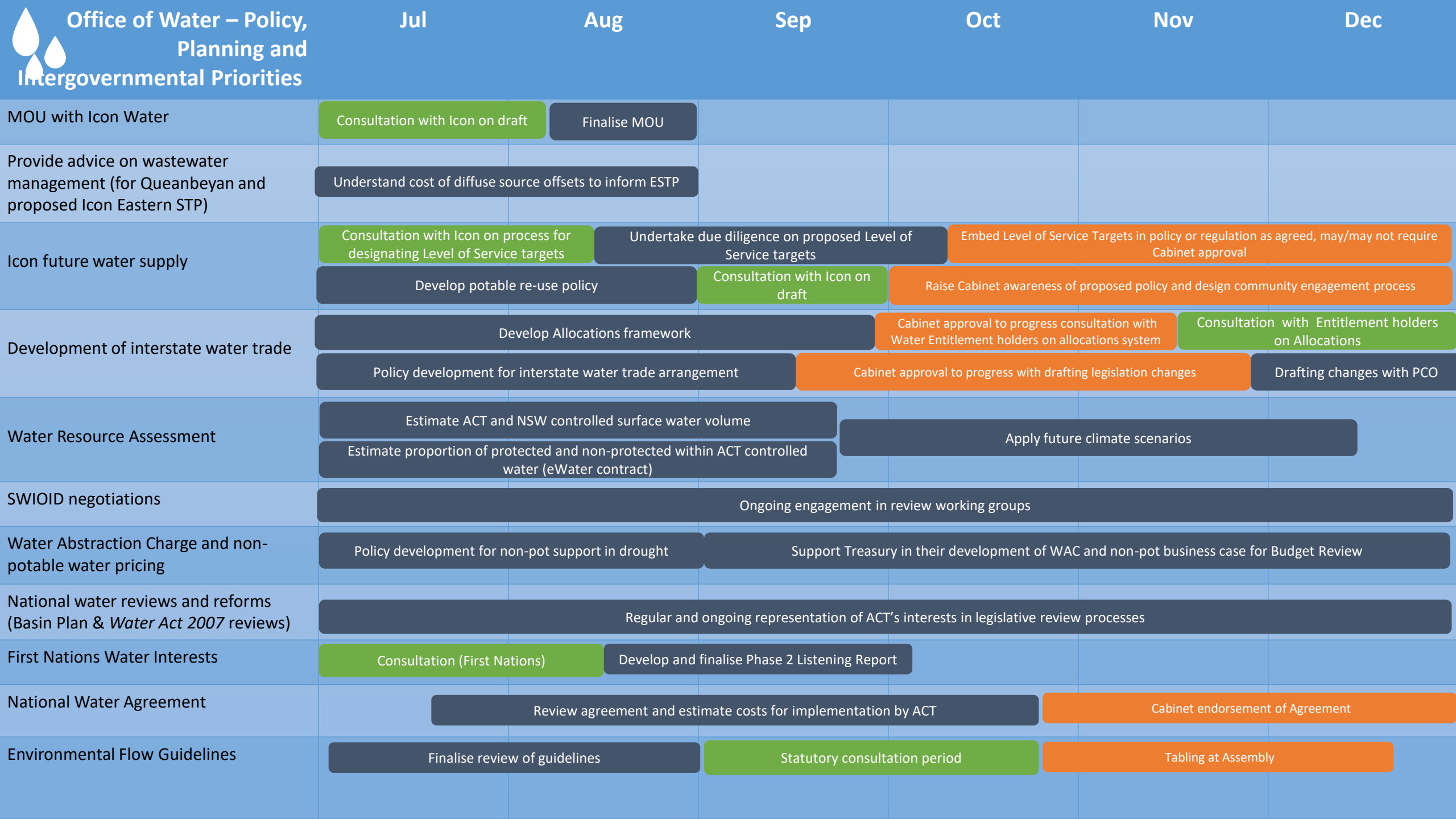
Office Priorities

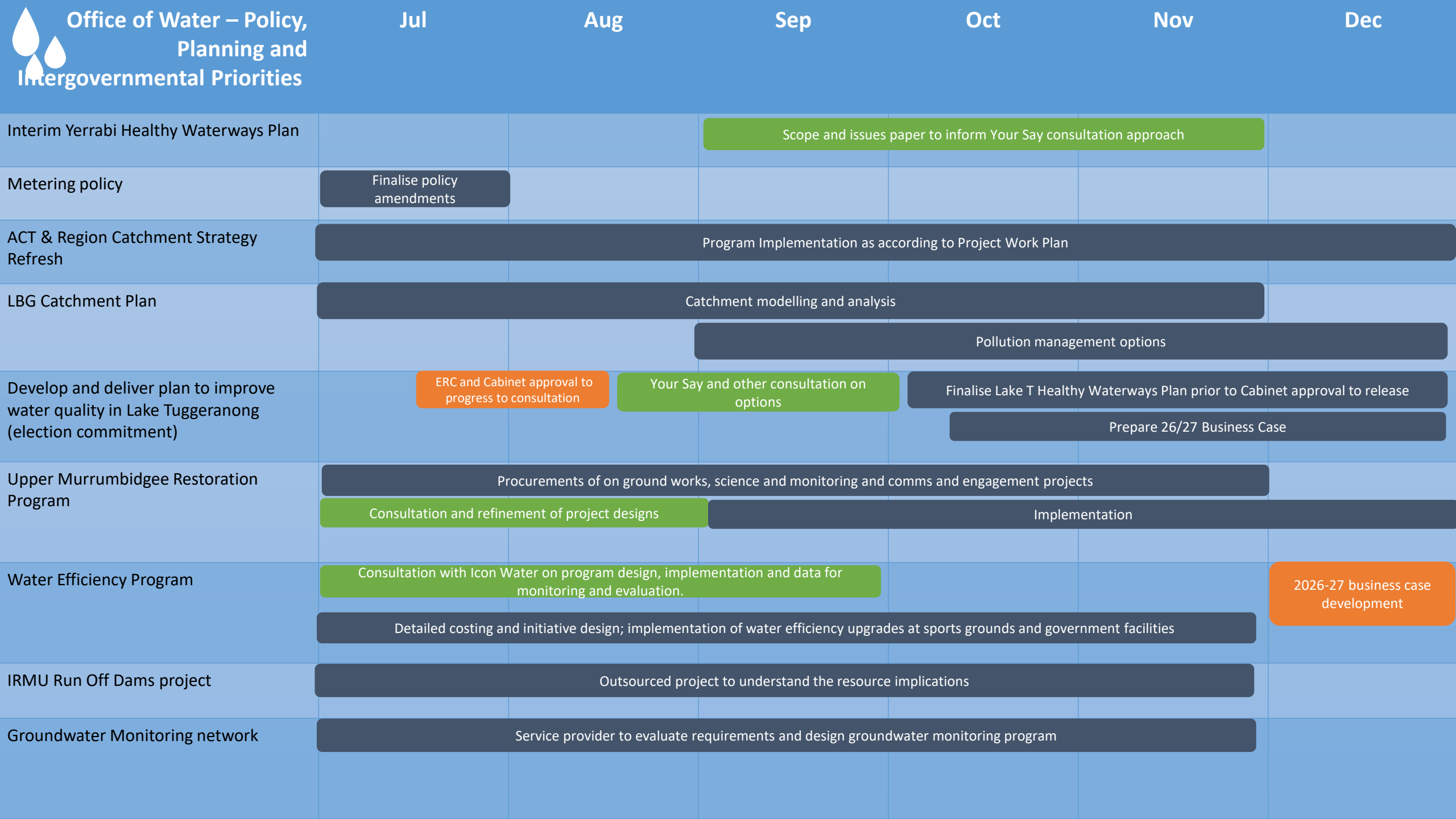
1. Technical inputs into priorities



2. Priorities that do not require significant technical inputs

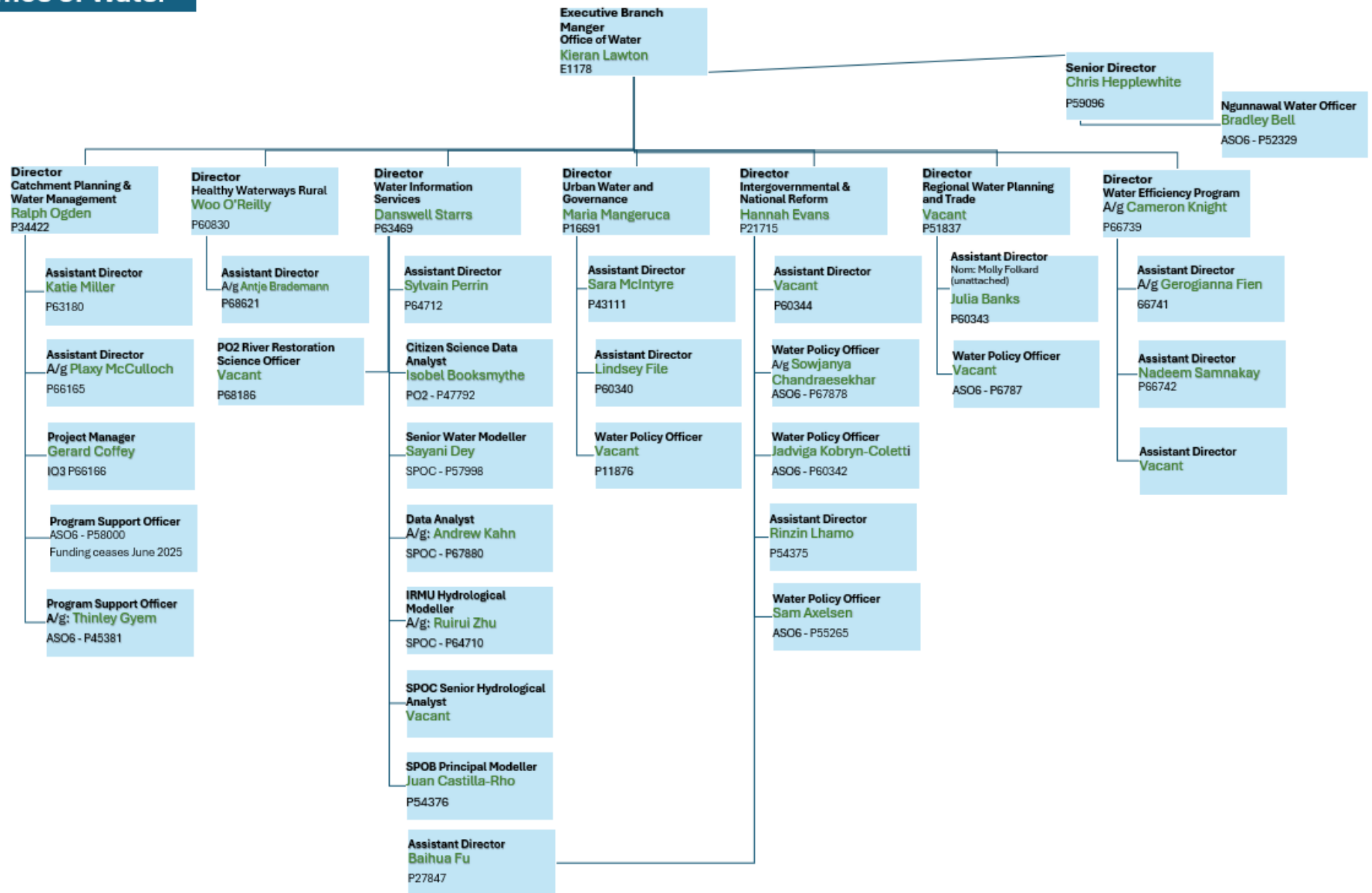






 Office of Water – Healthy Waterways Program sub projects	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Restoration of Tuggeranong Creek anabranch	Pending Minister approval to proceed with final Stage 2 capital works project (approved). Works will involve procurement of construction contractors, construction of the asset, establishment of plantings and handover to owners					
Waterway-friendly gardening program	Program development	In-house delivery of community education and behaviour-change program				
	Stakeholder consultation to develop Love the Lakes direct outreach program, community grant stream/program and local leaf drop-off points concept for 2026-27					
WSUD asset performance evaluation	Monitoring					
						Evaluation paper due by June 2026
Feasibility study into sand extraction from ACT rivers for environmental benefits	Procurement	Assessment conducted				
Restoration Jerrabomberra Ck & Matina Wetland	Engage design consultant to undertake detail design utilising Disaster Ready Fund and CED funding					
Healthy Waterways WSUD provisions	Engage consultant to review/recommend improvements to water quality and flow outcomes from WSUD provisions					
Cost effective WSUD asset operation and maintenance			Scope and issues paper to inform Program design and delivery			

Office of Water



City and Environment Directorate

To:	Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water	Tracking No.: 25/0235077
Date:	20/06/2025	
From:	Executive Group Manager, Climate Change, Energy and Water	
Subject:	2025-26 Priorities for the Office of Water	
Critical Date:	23/07/2025	
Critical Reason:	To inform you of the policy and program priorities Office of Water and the associated workload for the 2025/26 Financial year.	

Recommendations

That you:

1. **Note** the policy and program priorities Office of Water Office for the 2025/26 Financial year;
Noted / Please Discuss
2. **Note** the number and scope of national, regional and ACT level projects, reviews or commitments that the Office will be involved with in 25/26;
Noted / Please Discuss
3. **Note** that new tasks must be undertaken within existing resources and resource constraints may delay delivery of some items, and that these risks will be communicated ahead of time in the Climate Change, Energy and Water (CCEW) status report; and
Noted / Please Discuss
4. **Agree** the Office of Water 2025/26 Priorities.
Agree / Please Discuss

OFFICIAL

Suzanne Orr MLA

28/11/25

Minister's Feedback

Background

- 1) The Office of Water (OoW) is responsible for coordination of water policy and management for the ACT government, including policy development and the planning and delivery of major urban and rural waterway restoration programs.
- 2) The OoW also coordinates, or has a key role in, the ACT's involvement in National and Regional level water programs such as the Basin Plan, the National Water Initiative, the Upper Murrumbidgee Catchment, and the development of a Water Trade Framework to support cross border water supply with NSW regional communities.
- 3) The OoW plays a leadership role in bringing together the data and scientific evidence to inform policy and management options. This evidence base is used to ensure you are aware of emerging risks and the opportunities to respond.

Office of Water Priorities

- 4) The Office of Water has undertaken a review of its workload for the 2025/26 Financial year and prioritised tasks based on the value of the outcomes and the effort required. These priorities are detailed in Attachment A. A one page 'placemat' summary is at Attachment B. The connections between the data and modelling work and the priority work outputs are summarised in Attachment C. A visual of the 6-month forward work plan for the delivery of these priorities is provided in Attachment D.
- 5) Note that there are four important 'once in a generation' reviews that are taking place concurrently at the national level that will draw on OoW resources in the coming 12- 24 months:
 - the Murray Darling Basin Plan review,
 - the Commonwealth Water ACT (2007) review,
 - endorsement and implementation of the National Water Agreement,
 - the Snowy Water Inquiry Outcomes Implement Deed review.
- 6) You have requested a Cabinet subcommittee submission on this national level review.
- 7) The Water Ministerial Council and Murray Darling Basin Water Ministerial Council meetings are likely to be scheduled in July-August. The Water Act review, Basin Plan review and National Water Agreement endorsement and implementation are likely to be significant agenda items for these meetings.
- 8) There are three large, resource-intensive regional initiatives underway:
 - the establishment of Water Trade and Accounting,
 - negotiation on agreements for cross border water supply to NSW townships,
 - the Upper Murrumbidgee Restoration program to be delivered in collaboration

with NSW and the Commonwealth.

- 9) Further, there are two major time-critical decisions that Icon Water needs to make on
 - a) future sewage treatment options, and
 - b) enhanced drinking water supply options. The Office is helping progress both decisions on several fronts.
- 10) On future sewage treatment options, the Office has prepared advice on the impacts of the proposed Queanbeyan Sewage Treatment Plant and the potential Icon Water Eastern Sewage Treatment Plant on the water quality and ecology of Lake Burley Griffin. OoW is preparing advice on the potential cost of offsetting through reducing diffuse source pollutants elsewhere in the catchment to inform Icon's decision on a future Eastern STP. This advice will be shared both with the regulator Environment Protection Agency and Icon Water.
- 11) On enhanced drinking water supply, the two highest ranked options for Icon Water are
 - a) transfer of water from Tantangara in the Murrumbidgee River, which is co-dependent of the SWIOD Review and interstate water trade, and
 - b) indirect potable reuse (recycling).
- 12) On the latter, while the recycling of sewage to drinking water has been proven to be effective in many other jurisdictions it remains contentious with the community. Introducing potable reuse in the ACT will also have approval implications with NSW Health as the water will be supplied to NSW under cross-border water supply agreements. To have the best chance of getting community support, the ACT government should consider developing a potable reuse policy and engaging the community ahead of the Icon Water decision. The Office is developing a position paper on potable reuse to inform next steps.

Financial Implications

- 13) Any additional resourcing will be sought under future business cases.
- 14) There are options for the ACT Government to generate revenue through interstate water trade. However, the Office has not been tasked with developing revenue options and would require additional resources to do so.

15) Consultation

Internal

- 16) The staff in the Office of Water contributed to the workload prioritisation.

External

- 17) The Office of water consulted with the Environmental Protection Agency, Utilities Technical Regulator, Chief Minister Treasury and Economic Development Directorate, and Icon Water.

Work Health and Safety

- 18) There are Work Health and Safety issues related to the range and load of work being undertaken by the Office of Water. The prioritisation process was initiated to ensure that the workloads for staff are manageable. Having approved priorities provides

support to staff to manage work effectively.

Benefits/Sensitivities

19) Benefits of completing the prioritised work include:

- a) Compliance with Commonwealth regulation and commitments;
- b) Increased Sustainable Diversion Limit and water available for take to support growth in the ACT and region;
- c) Recognition of the importance of releases from Tantangara to support cultural and environmental flows as well and water for human critical need;
- d) Streamlining reporting requirements across Commonwealth agencies, in particular to MDBA and the Bureau of Meteorology, and
- e) Increased climate resilience of the water supply, for environmental, cultural, economic and social needs including drinking water security.

20) Sensitivities:

- a) Recycling of sewage to drinking water is still contentious with the community and communication regarding it will need to be carefully managed;
- b) Progression of the Eastern Sewage Treatment Plant option could necessitate the development of an offsets policy for the management of diffuse source phosphorus pollutants entering Lake Burley Griffin, and
- c) The implementation of cross border water supply agreements for Bungendore, Murrumbateman and Yass may create a precedent for developers elsewhere in surrounding NSW to expect access to ACT drinking water infrastructure.

Communications, media and engagement implications

21) Nil.

Signatory Name: Kieran Lawton Phone: 0466 389 760

Action Officer: Chris Hepplewhite Phone: 0482 117 150

Attachments

Attachment	Title
Attachment A	OoW 2025/26 Priorities detail
Attachment B	OoW priorities on a page
Attachment C	OoW priorities and data interconnections
Attachment D	OoW 6-month deliverables plan July to December 2025
Attachment E	OoW org chart June 2025