



OUT22/2512

The Hon. Dugald Saunders MP, Minister for Agriculture and Western NSW
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Dear Ministers

**Re: Delivering results under the Marine Estate Management Strategy
- WRL Coastal Floodplain Prioritisation Studies**

The Marine Estate Management Authority has endorsed the University of NSW's Water Research Laboratory (WRL) Coastal Floodplain Prioritisation Studies (WRL Studies, Attachment A) as a valuable and timely resource to inform the future management of coastal floodplains in NSW.

Recognising the current flood impacts on many local communities, the Marine Estate Management Authority recommends a staged release of the WRL Studies. Firstly, it is recommended that immediate access to the information is provided for use in the recovery phase and longer term decision making by local and state government agencies, the NSW Coastal Council and the NSW Agriculture Commissioner, to assist them in informing relevant Ministers on these matters. Secondly, taking into account the hardship and difficulties for flood affected communities at this time, a more gradual and nuanced approach to communicating the results with local industries and communities, and their elected representatives, is suggested as stages of flood recovery progress. Briefing relevant Local Members of Parliament on the WRL Studies and related issues is suggested, prior to any direct engagement with key industries, which would be planned for well after the immediate flood recovery phase. Only after these directly impacted stakeholders have been engaged should opportunities for a broader public media release highlighting the achievement of this important milestone under the NSW Marine Estate Management Strategy be considered.

The release of the WRL Studies does come at a time when our coastal systems are under pressure, including sensitivities around the current flood recovery efforts along the NSW coast. However, the Marine Estate Management Authority recognises that increasing community understanding and engagement in the stewardship of our coastal floodplains is important to rebuild community confidence and the resilience of the NSW marine estate. The WRL Studies deliver on the NSW Government's approach for a coordinated, holistic, quadruple bottom-line approach to the management of the NSW marine estate. They are meaningful contributions to the NSW Government's 10-year [Marine Estate Management Strategy](#) (2018–2028), the centrepiece of the NSW marine estate reforms program.

The WRL Studies do not include consideration of, or recommendations for, emergency flood risk management, but instead address floodplain management risks and opportunities during regular non-flood periods. The WRL Studies examined water quality and sea level rise risks and collated significant relevant floodplain management data for seven large coastal floodplains in NSW, including the Tweed, Richmond, Clarence, Macleay, Hastings, Manning and Shoalhaven catchments. The WRL Studies:

- identify high priority (high risk) areas for water quality and drainage vulnerability and provide long and short-term management options to reduce or adapt to these risks
- collate significant relevant information necessary for informed floodplain land use and infrastructure management decision making by agencies, councils and landholders
- support participation in climate change, blue carbon and land remediation initiatives being developed by multiple State and Commonwealth government agencies.

The draft WRL Studies were released for targeted consultation in April 2021. The feedback received from local councils and the interagency working group throughout the consultation period has been considered, actioned and incorporated within the final version of the WRL Studies.

The final WRL Studies provide an evidence-based resource to guide current and future floodplain infrastructure and land use management decisions. This information will assist landholders and decision makers at all levels to make informed decisions about coastal floodplain management and support the NSW marine estate and local communities. The Marine Estate Management Authority is working with multiple government agencies to balance land use and water quality, and support vulnerable low-lying land use transitions where necessary, into the near and far future.

A supporting Communications and Engagement Plan has also been endorsed to assist with managing key messaging during the staged release of these reports (Attachment B).

The WRL Studies have no regulatory bearing on floodplain managers and landholders. A related Coastal Floodplain Drainage Management project, also funded under the Marine Estate Management Strategy, has been considering the regulatory processes currently in place across multiple agencies for the management of floodplain drainage infrastructure. This project undertook an extensive consultation process with local government and industry stakeholders, with the results documented in a recent 'What We Heard' report (to be provided), prepared by the lead agency, Department of Planning and Environment - Water. Working together, agencies involved in the Coastal Floodplain Drainage Management project are using this information to explore a range of options to find solutions that are evidence-based and take account of social, cultural, economic and environmental interests.

The NSW Agriculture Commissioner has been briefed on the WRL Studies and stakeholder risks and is supportive of their external release and use in decision making. The NSW Agriculture Commissioner has advised the WRL Studies will inform the next version of State Significant Agricultural Land (SSAL) mapping.

The NSW Coastal Council has requested access to the WRL Studies for consideration in their advice to the Minister for Local Government to support the development of local government Coastal Management Programs.

If there are questions about the WRL Studies please contact Ms Sarah Fairfull, Director Aboriginal Fishing and Marine and Coastal Environments, NSW Department of Primary Industries on mobile: 0419 185 534 or email: sarah.fairfull@dpi.nsw.gov.au.

Yours sincerely



Dr Russell Reichelt AO FTSE
Chair
Marine Estate Management Authority

22 April 2022

Enc.

- Attachment A - WRL Coastal Floodplain Prioritisation Studies
- Attachment B - Communications and Engagement Plan

Copy:

- Minister for Planning and Homes, the Hon Anthony Roberts MP
- Minister for Transport, the Hon David Elliott MP
- Minister for Local Government, the Hon Wendy Tuckerman MP
- Minister for Lands and Water, the Hon Kevin Anderson MP