



**Natural Resources
Access Regulator**

Pilot campaign closure report

Barwon–Darling compliance audits – Operation Yadhala Mil

August 2021

Natural Resources
Access Regulator



Published by the Natural Resources Access Regulator

dpie.nsw.gov.au/nrar

Title: Pilot campaign closure report

First published: August 2021

Department reference number: DOC21/201453

© State of New South Wales through Department of Planning, Industry and Environment 2021. You may copy, distribute, display, download and otherwise freely deal with this publication for any purpose, provided that you attribute the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment as the owner. However, you must obtain permission if you wish to charge others for access to the publication (other than at cost); include the publication in advertising or a product for sale; modify the publication; or republish the publication on a website. You may freely link to the publication on a departmental website.

Disclaimer: The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing (August 2021) and may not be accurate, current or complete. The State of New South Wales (including the NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment), the author and the publisher take no responsibility, and will accept no liability, for the accuracy, currency, reliability or correctness of any information included in the document (including material provided by third parties). Readers should make their own inquiries and rely on their own advice when making decisions related to material contained in this publication.

Contents

About the Natural Resources Access Regulator	4
Monitoring water usage in NSW	4
High-level findings	4
Why we undertook this campaign	4
Scope of work.....	5
What we found.....	5
Action we took	5
Outcomes	5
Recommendations and next steps.....	6

About the Natural Resources Access Regulator

The Natural Resources Access Regulator (NRAR) is an independent government body established under the *Natural Resources Access Regulator Act 2017 (NSW)* (NRAR Act). NRAR delivers effective, transparent and accountable enforcement of NSW's natural resources management legislation, helping water users comply with legislation to ensure fair and lawful access to water across the state.

Monitoring water usage in NSW

NRAR's investigators and compliance officers travel throughout NSW, visiting areas covered by the state's 57 water sharing plans. They inspect properties and assess landholders' compliance with their water access licence, water supply works approval and the provisions of the *Water Management Act 2000 (NSW)*. Proactive monitoring of water usage allows NRAR to detect instances of non-compliance, track compliance trends and respond appropriately to non-compliance to avoid or mitigate harm.

High-level findings



21 property inspections completed



14% of properties compliant



21 desktop audits completed



21 water access licences audited



49 water supply works approvals audited



21 compliance audit reports prepared and sent to water users



3 referrals for enforcement action

Why we undertook this campaign

With every drop counting during one of the state's worst droughts on record, ensuring fair access to water for regional communities, water users and the environment was critical. So, in September 2019, NRAR officers piloted a campaign in the Barwon–Darling region to audit 21 properties for compliance with water use rules.

Named Operation Yadhala Mil, the campaign's objectives were to:

- investigate and address 12 potential cases of non-compliance with metering requirements identified by WaterNSW in the Barwon–Darling system between Mungindi and Bourke
- engage with and help educate stakeholders in the region, including providing information about the recently implemented NSW non-urban water metering framework

- audit properties and associated approvals to verify that groundworks correspond to information recorded within the water licensing system
- ensure the orderly, efficient and equitable sharing of water from water sources.

Scope of work

Operation Yadhala Mil comprised 2 parts.

The first looked at 12 properties identified by WaterNSW in the Barwon–Darling system. These were potential cases of non-compliance with metering requirements.

The second component included properties with works above 500 mm, as these are the first group of properties to be captured by the non-urban water metering framework.

Officers completed a pre-inspection desktop audit for each property. This allowed officers to review landholders' licences and approvals and identify regulatory priorities they would include in the compliance audit.

What we found

During the week-long campaign, NRAR's officers found that only 3 of the 21 audited properties were 100% compliant. The other 18 properties were marked as non-compliant, mostly because of administrative, reporting and/or monitoring issues.

These issues included:

- not having a logbook or meter, or not keeping accurate logbook records
- having inactive works that had not been in operation for many years, with no pump on site and no meter
- the absence of seals on meters
- using stock or domestic rights for a commercial feedlot
- having works that weren't installed in accordance with the statement of approval
- unauthorised controlled activity approval.

Action we took

After the property audits, NRAR gave each landholder a report detailing the findings and confirming compliance obligations. NRAR also sent them additional information and application forms – such as applications to amend approvals – as required.

Outcomes

NRAR plays an important role in educating landholders and irrigators about their obligations and responsibilities as a holder of a water access licence and/or water supply work approval. We encourage landholders to raise issues relating to water usage with us and to seek advice from us on how they can comply with water use regulations. This cooperative and collaborative approach helps to maximise voluntary compliance.

Operation Yadhala Mil was the first campaign carried out in the Barwon–Darling area where the approach was to monitor and audit compliance against conditions on water access licences and approvals. The campaign also had an educational component, with officers informing licence and approval holders of their rights and obligations. This allowed NRAR to build public confidence by reassuring water users that we are monitoring the equitable use of water resources.

Recommendations and next steps

Based on the outcomes of this campaign, NRAR recommended that:

- With the support of NRAR WaterNSW should run an education campaign for landholders about inactive works.
- The NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment's Water Group and WaterNSW's working group should review unworkable or outdated conditions on licences and approvals.
- NRAR should hold educational drop-in days for landholders in the Barwon–Darling region.