



Australian Government



Inspector-
General of
Water
Compliance

Strategic Plan

2023–26



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Inspector-
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Foreword by the Inspector-General



As Basin-wide custodians of such a precious, finite, and contested resource, nobody gets to choose what part of the law does or does not apply to them. And nobody gets to flout the rules without consequence – including the agencies responsible for managing that resource.

I am pleased to share the first multi-year Strategic Plan for the Inspector-General of Water Compliance. This is an exciting step in building on both the strong achievements and foundational activities over the 2 years of operation. During this time, I have made it a priority to get out to the communities and understand their concerns around Basin water management. I have acted on the information provided to me and will continue to do so.

My focus to date has been on the performance of state and Commonwealth agencies operating under the *Basin Plan 2012* (the Basin Plan), and my intention to bring about transparency and accountability, to ensure there can be trust and confidence in the management of the Murray–Darling Basin and its water resources. I am also focussing on targeted compliance and enforcement actions through investigations, audits and publishing annual Sustainable Diversion Limit statements so everyone can see the status of water take across the whole of the Basin. This will remain my focus so people can see actions as real outcomes.

I'm working hard to address key risks to Basin Plan implementation. By lifting performance across the system to improve transparency, accountability, and integrity in Basin Plan delivery, I am ensuring Basin agencies are meeting their legislative obligations.

I have developed, and continue to develop, a strong evidence base which is helping to shift the dial towards regulatory compliance, transparency, and integrity. A strong evidence base helps me make decisions, undertake reviews, and call out bad behaviour when I see it.

The Strategic Plan marks a step-change in the maturity of the Inspector-General of Water Compliance as a regulator and makes clear my intention to play a strategic and influential role in this landscape, all while bringing my values of transparency, accountability, and integrity to the fore. It is preparing the ground for the opportunities and challenges that are ahead for the Basin Plan. I'm ready to engage with the upcoming statutory reviews of the Basin Plan, *The Water Act 2007* (Cwth) (the Water Act), and indeed the review of the Inspector-General role.

I have set myself ambitious targets, and equally strong performance measures to hold myself accountable. I will continue to report annually on progress and performance, and to update stakeholders when shifts in the external environment prompt a change in strategy. As a relatively small agency with finite resources, I will continue to monitor and adapt to developments in the Basin to focus effort where I can best deliver my purpose.

You'll see I am focussed on making a difference. I'm actually doing what I say I will do and, understand the importance of planning the right path forward to meet high community expectations and deliver outcomes that reflect the purpose and intent of the Basin Plan.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized, cursive name.

The Hon. Troy Grant

Inspector-General of Water Compliance

Strategic Plan Snapshot

VISION AND PURPOSE

- VISION** Water management and use within the Murray-Darling Basin is lawful, transparent, and accountable, and the Australian public is confident in the integrity of Basin Plan delivery.
- PURPOSE** The Inspector-General of Water Compliance ensures various government bodies, water managers and users in the Murray-Darling Basin comply with their obligations under *The Water Act 2007* (Cwth) (the Water Act) and *the Basin Plan 2012* (the Basin Plan) and drives governments and water managers to uphold high standards of integrity and performance.

VALUES AND BEHAVIOURS

- | INTEGRITY | ACCOUNTABILITY | TRANSPARENCY |
|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Upholds the role of an independent regulator and builds trust with Basin stakeholders Approaches all matters with impartiality and an intention to find the truth Is respectful and supportive of roles and responsibilities in water management Operates honestly, openly, and constructively | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Upholds water laws across the Basin Works hard and ensures they are accessible to stakeholders and the Australian public Makes decisions and undertake action supported by evidence Pursues efficiency and effectiveness, including by avoiding duplication | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acts consistently and professionally Undertakes compliance that is proportionate to the risk being addressed. Seeks opportunities to collaborate, consult and engage Provides transparency by sharing information to enable public scrutiny |

OUTCOMES & FOCUS ACTIVITIES

<p>1. Ensure it's lawful: Ensure Basin water managers and users meet their obligations under the Water Act and the Basin Plan.</p>	<p>Key activities to ensure it's lawful:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pursue accredited Water Resource Plans in NSW Measurement of floodplain harvesting take is implemented in NSW and Queensland Monitor state commitments to have accurate and timely metering of take by individuals across the Basin Implementation of the rules accredited by the Commonwealth in Water Resource Plans by all States assessed Ensure adjustments to sustainable limits are completed and closed by the Commonwealth Basin Plan Water Trading Rules are known, implemented, and enforced
<p>2. Ensure it's visible: Provide the Australian community with visibility over the integrity of Basin water management.</p>	<p>Key activities to ensure it's visible:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Publishing compliance performance reports that demonstrate how Basin water managers are performing Publishing the findings from audits and inquiries to enable public scrutiny. Having a network of field officers located across the Basin who speak directly with community and identify issues of public interest Reporting to government on findings from the Inspector-General's public engagements and matters of interest in the Basin
<p>3. Do it better: Raise performance, drive improvements in standards of Basin Plan delivery.</p>	<p>Key activities to do it better:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop standards to set expectations for effective performance Encourage a Basin-wide approach to the way Basin water is managed Promote collaboration and information sharing between Basin water regulators Stocktake of Compliance Compact at completion in 2025
<p>4. Make it better: Use knowledge, evidence and insights to input into the ongoing reform of water regulation.</p>	<p>Key activities to make it better:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inform improvements in state and territory systems maturity Inform the: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Water market law reform (2023) Review of Inspector-General (2023) Water Act review and changes (2024) Five-yearly review of Basin Plan (Productivity Commission, 2024) Basin Plan evaluation (2025) Basin Plan review (2026) Ministerial Council

Strategic Plan 2023–26

Since being established in 2021, the Inspector-General of Water Compliance has prioritised listening to and learning from the community and working with water managers charged with obligations under the Water Act and the Basin Plan.

Over the next four years, the Inspector-General will continue engaging – but will also increasingly act. Legislated compliance and enforcement, monitoring, oversight, and engagement functions provide the Inspector-General with the tools to make change, and with the benefit of a system-level perspective – the Inspector-General is uniquely positioned to know where to act.

This Strategic Plan (the plan) sets out a map for making change happen. It outlines the Inspector-General's vision, purpose, and the strategic impacts the role aims to achieve. The plan also shows how the performance of the Inspector-General will be measured – above all else, transparency will remain at the heart of everything they do.

Who is the Inspector-General of Water Compliance?

Established in 2021, the Inspector-General of Water Compliance is a statutory position with functions and powers defined in the Water Act. The Hon. Troy Grant was appointed inaugural office holder for a four-year term on 5 August 2021, following a period as interim Inspector-General. His independent and impartial role is supported by employees of the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW).

Given increasing public scrutiny and interest in water management across the Basin, the Inspector-General was established as an **independent** regulator with inquiry, audit, enforcement, and investigative powers.

The Inspector-General has a requirement to 'engage with the Australian community in relation to the management of Basin water resources' – this is foundational to the Inspector-General's approach.

The Inspector-General has oversight of the performance of state and Commonwealth agencies operating under the Basin Plan, and intends to drive transparency and accountability, to enable trust

and confidence in the management of the Murray-Darling Basin's water resources.

In addition, the Inspector-General is identified as a designated Commonwealth integrity agency under the *National Anti-Corruption Commission Act 2022*.

The operating environment

The Inspector-General operates in a dynamic Basin environment, with many global, regional and local trends impacting water management activities and shaping the lives and livelihoods of all involved. By understanding, monitoring, and adapting to this environment, the Inspector-General can better achieve their vision and purpose by taking advantage of opportunities and minimising risks.

The Murray-Darling Basin is a precious water resource that crosses four states and one territory (ACT, NSW, SA, Vic, and Qld). It contributes to the economic, environmental, and cultural wellbeing of this region and the nation. As a finite water resource, demands in the Basin from agriculture, human consumption and enjoyment, and sustaining environmental needs must be balanced.

Adding to this complexity, each of the Basin's jurisdictions applies water management legislation, policies, and tools differently, and responds to geographic, political or procedural challenges that are local and sometimes unique.

In 2012 the Basin Plan was introduced to support effective management of the Basin as a whole, connected system – regardless of state or territory borders. The Basin Plan is supported by legislated requirements on water users and managers (including Commonwealth and state-level agencies) to deliver improved water management outcomes at a whole-of-Basin scale.

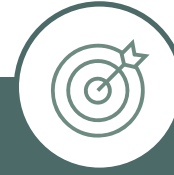
Water management in the Basin is both a crowded landscape and subject to a significant amount of 'noise' about whether and how Basin Plan outcomes are being delivered. In this context, the Inspector-General aims to be a trusted, impartial, and evidence-based voice for the Basin, using their compliance and enforcement powers, and providing the clarity and transparency on water management where this helps to build community confidence that Basin Plan outcomes are being delivered.



The Inspector-General's vision

Water management and use within the Basin is lawful, transparent and accountable, and the Australian public is confident in the integrity of Basin Plan delivery.

The Inspector-General's vision identifies the kind of Basin water management that the Australian community wants to see, where values of **transparency, accountability** and **integrity** are clearly shown in the work being done. This vision requires commitment from all water managers with a role to play in Basin Plan implementation – and this strategy clarifies how the Inspector-General can contribute to making this happen.



The Inspector-General's purpose

The Inspector-General of Water Compliance ensures various government bodies, water managers and users in the Murray-Darling Basin comply with their obligations under the Water Act and the Basin Plan and drives governments and water managers to uphold high standards of integrity and performance.

The purpose statement describes why the Inspector-General is here and how the Basin community can expect to benefit from the impacts the role delivers. It is shaped by the Inspector-General's legislative role and informed by what has been heard from stakeholders about the Basin landscape, which continuously sharpens the Inspector-General's understanding.

How does the Inspector-General decide when to act?

As a relatively small agency with clear vision, purpose, and legislated remit, the Inspector-General must prioritise where, when, and how to apply the functions and powers of the role.

The Inspector-General is evidence and risk-based and will be agile in decision-making, so that they can pivot effectively in response to evolving priorities or issues.

The Inspector-General has developed and published a Regulatory Policy that sets out the principles applied to decision-making. The Regulatory Policy can be found at on the website at www.igwc.gov.au

How will the Inspector-General measure impact?

Delivering impact is at the centre of what the Inspector-General does, connecting daily activities and milestones to the high-level vision and purpose. Transparency is central to the vision and leading from the front in ensuring this is not just something the Inspector-General says, but something they do.

The performance measures are clear and accessible, meaning the public can see what the Inspector-General is trying to do and how they are going.

Outcomes

OUTCOME 1

Ensure Basin water managers and users meet their obligations under the Water Act and the Basin Plan.

These are fundamental activities to increase accountability and meet the Inspector-General's legislated remit and drive improvements in the compliance with obligations under the Water Act and the Basin Plan.

Ensure it's lawful



The Inspector-General will do this by:

- Assurance of state regulators through continued improvement in water take data and reporting:
 - » Measurement of floodplain harvesting take is implemented in NSW and Queensland.
 - » Monitor state commitments to have accurate and timely metering of take by individuals across the Basin.
 - » Monitor and compare state compliance performance.
- Basin Plan foundations are delivered to enable compliance with sustainable limits:
 - » Pursue accredited Water Resource Plans in NSW.
 - » Implementation of the rules accredited by the Commonwealth in Water Resource Plans.
 - » Ensure adjustments to sustainable limits are completed and closed by the Commonwealth.
- Basin Plan Water Trading Rules are known, implemented, and enforced.
- Using investigation and enforcement powers where necessary.

This helps to achieve:

- An independent evidence-based assessment of compliance systems.
- System level accountability for individual and aggregate water use.

The Inspector-General will measure performance through:

KPI 1: Community and stakeholder confidence in Basin water compliance.

OUTCOME 2

Provide the Australian community with visibility over the integrity of Basin water management.

Ensuring the Australian community can see and understand outcomes in Basin water management, understand the role of the Inspector-General, and be confident there is appropriate oversight of the integrity of Basin water management.

Ensure it's visible



The Inspector-General will do this by:

- Providing the community with information about the role and powers of the Inspector-General.
- Having a network of field officers located throughout the Basin, who speak directly with community and identify issues of public interest.
- Publishing information and reports about Basin Plan implementation and compliance to provide transparency on Basin water management.
- Reporting to government and other stakeholders on outcomes from the Inspector-General's public engagements and matters of interest in the Basin.

This helps to achieve:

- Improved awareness of the role of the Inspector-General and a greater confidence in the oversight of Basin water management.
- A two-way conversation with the community about the matters that are important to them and the outcomes of the Inspector-General's work.
- Increased transparency against obligations under the Water Act, the Basin Plan, and associated agreements.

The Inspector-General will measure performance through:

KPI 2: Community perceptions demonstrate an awareness of the Inspector-General.

OUTCOME 3

Raise performance and drive improvements in standards of Basin Plan delivery.

Pursuing continuous improvement in the performance of Basin water managers to embed integrity, transparency, and accountability in the delivery of Basin Plan outcomes.

OUTCOME 4

Use knowledge, evidence and insights to input into the ongoing reform of water regulation.

Engaging actively to identify opportunities to embed integrity, transparency, and accountability in the design of the Basin Plan.

Do it better



The Inspector-General will do this by:

- Delivering a performance monitoring program that shows where things are being done well and where there is need for improvement.
- Promoting collaboration, consistency and continuous improvement in the way Basin water managers conduct their work and work together.
- Developing standards and guidelines to underpin improvement and set expectations for performance.

This helps to achieve:

- Improved standards with more consistent and comparable Basin-wide information on performance.
- A foundation for greater collaboration across the Basin, to share insights, best practice and barriers to Basin Plan implementation.
- An independent Basin-wide perspective to promote greater accountability, transparency and integrity.

Make it better



The Inspector-General will do this by:

- Inputting evidence and insights into significant regulatory review, inquiry and law reform processes including;
 - » the independent review of the Inspector-General of Water Compliance.
 - » the water market reform roadmap.
 - » the 5 yearly review of the Basin Plan by the Productivity Commission.
 - » the Basin Plan Review by the MDBA.
 - » the review of the Water Act by the department.
 - » independent advice to the Ministerial Council.
- Inputting evidence and insights into Basin Plan evaluation.

This helps to achieve:

- Evidence based policy and decision making.
- Effective and enforceable rules.
- Joined-up approaches to managing basin water resources.

Strategy Review

The Inspector-General will review progress against this plan in early 2026, and where required, amend priorities, or establish new ones to respond to emerging issues in the operating environment.

Contact information and office locations



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The Inspector-General of Water Compliance has offices located throughout the Basin. In addition to an office in Canberra, there are 5 regional offices in the Basin:

- Goondiwindi
- Dubbo
- Albury
- Mildura, and
- Loxton.

For more information, please visit the website:

[Contact Us | Inspector-General of Water Compliance \(igwc.gov.au\)](#)

Where to learn more about the Inspector-General's work

The Inspector-General regularly publishes reports and information on the website.

In addition, the Inspector-General produces the Water's Edge podcast. The podcast discusses recent reports, audits, and investigations, and aims to make complex information easy to understand. A range of different discussion topics are available to listen to now.

For more information, please visit:

Website:

[Water's Edge Podcast | Inspector-General of Water Compliance \(igwc.gov.au\)](#)

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