

## Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. What is the NWQMS Water Quality Guidelines and why is it being revised?

The National Water Quality Management Strategy (NWQMS) was developed by Australian and New Zealand governments to provide a national framework to better manage water quality. Currently, the NWQMS comprises 24 documents, including Document 4: *Australian and New Zealand Guidelines for Fresh and Marine Water Quality*.

Feedback from the New Zealand central and regional governments, Australian state and territory jurisdictions, and other guideline users have indicated that the Water Quality Guidelines is an essential reference document that is used for multiple purposes in relation to water quality management. In most jurisdictions the guidelines have been incorporated into relevant environmental policies, plans, legislation, and/or regulations.

There is a clear need to keep the Water Quality Guidelines up-to-date to ensure it retains its value as a national best practice tool for water quality management. The Water Quality Guidelines has not been updated since it was published in 2000. In the past ten years substantial new data, information and methods have become available, while some errors in the document have also been identified but not corrected.

### 2. What is being revised?

The scope of the revision for the Water Quality Guidelines includes:

- update water quality guideline trigger values for toxicants – based on additional toxicity data published since the last revision
- update trigger values for physico-chemical stressors – based on more comprehensive regional ‘reference’ water quality data acquired since the last revision
- revise statistical procedures across all elements of the guidelines
- revise the guidelines for Monitoring and Reporting
- make the guidelines easier to understand and use.

To help minimise potential impacts on end-users the revision is focussed on the following elements of Document 4:

- introduction (Chapter 1),
- the framework for applying the guidelines, including processes for establishing Environmental Values (Chapter 2)
- technical data and trigger levels for aquatic ecosystems, stressors, toxicants, and sediment guidelines (Chapter 3 and 8)
- aquatic ecosystem types (Chapters 8), and
- Primary Industries, including irrigation and general water use, livestock drinking water, aquaculture, and human foodstuffs (Chapters 4 and 9).

The revision will also deliver text for consequential inclusion in a number of linked NWQMS Guidelines:

- monitoring and assessment guidance (for inclusion in Chapter 7), as well as linked text for consequential revisions to NWQMS Document 7: Australian Guidelines for Water Quality Monitoring and Reporting (2000),
- revised text for inclusion in the associated introductory document (NWQMS Document 4A: An Introduction to the Australian and New Zealand Guidelines for Fresh and Marine Water Quality (2000), and
- revised information and guidance relating to water quality management policies, approaches, frameworks, and application of the guidelines, for inclusion in other NWQMS Documents.

In addition, the review will also incorporate consequential revisions arising from recent changes to other associated NWQMS Guideline Documents:

- recreational and aesthetics water quality guidance (Chapter 5), as a result of recent revisions to the associated National Health and Medical Research Council's Guidelines for Managing Risks in Recreational Water (2008), and
- drinking water guidance (Chapter 6), as a result of recent and ongoing revisions to the National Health and Medical Research Council's NWQMS Guideline 6: Australian Drinking Water Guidelines (2004).

### **3. Who is undertaking the revision?**

Approval to revise Document 4 and consequently Document 7 has been provided by Australian and New Zealand Environment Ministers through the Environment Protection Heritage Council and Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council in consultation with the National Health and Medical Research Council. The revision is being overseen by a Joint Steering Committee with six Technical Working Groups focussed on particular aspects of Document 4. The six Technical Working Groups are:

1. Introduction and Framework
2. Biological Indicators/Assessment
3. Physical and Chemical Stressors
4. Toxicants and Sediments
5. Chapter 7 & Document 7 Monitoring and Reporting
6. Chapter 4 and 9 Primary Industries

As part of this revision indigenous cultural and spiritual environmental values are also being discussed and an approach for incorporating these values is being considered. There is indigenous representation from Australia and New Zealand on the Joint Steering Committee.

Australia, New Zealand, and the state and territory governments will share technical expertise, data and information to develop a new edition of these very important national water quality management guidelines.

### **4. What is the timing for the revision?**

The revision is being implemented using a three phased approach and is expected to take three years to complete. The indicative completion date is mid 2012.

### **5. How can I comment and participate in the revision?**

A stakeholder consultation process was held during 2008, involving detailed consultation with key user groups in both Australia and New Zealand, including government agencies, peak industry bodies, scientific and professional associations, research bodies, and non government organisations. Over 45 written submissions were received, including feedback during a stakeholder workshop held in Canberra, that identified a variety of reasons for the timely revision of the Guidelines. The stakeholder feedback formed the basis for defining the scope of the revision.

There will be a number of further opportunities for stakeholders to be engaged during the revision process and also to formally comment on the revised Document 4. There are a number of technical issues to be addressed which require targeted engagement with specific audiences. These stakeholders will be specifically targeted because of their expertise and will be identified by the Technical Working Groups as necessary.

A broader stakeholder engagement process will also be undertaken in Phase 1 and 2 to seek input on more general issues such as delivery and useability. A formal public consultation will also be undertaken and appropriately advertised to ensure all relevant stakeholders are adequately informed. Opportunities for stakeholder engagement will be communicated in a number of ways to ensure all

relevant stakeholders are included. This will include via websites, existing stakeholder networks (i.e. Australia Water Association Database and EnviroInfo) or direct contact.

#### **6. Where can I get more information on the revision?**

Regular updates on the revision process and opportunities for stakeholder engagement will be updated on the [Australian Government's](#) water quality web pages, or the [New Zealand Government's](#) water quality web pages and on this website <http://www.ephc.gov.au/taxonomy/term/102>.