# STRATEGIC PLAN 2023-2028

Australian Aid

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THE AUSTRALIAN WATER PARTNERSHIP

**Acknowledgements**

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The **Australian Water Partnership Strategic Plan 2023-28** is intended for use by the Australian Water Partnership's management, staff and Advisory Committee to guide planning, communications and activity and event management. It is a live document and will be revised as needed. The first review will align the Strategic Plan with changes in a possible design for AWP Phase 3.

# CONTEXT

Australia lies within a region experiencing a persistent water crisis. The Indo-Pacific has been enduring low rates of access to clean water and sanitation; increasingly unpredictable and severe droughts; floods and storms; loss of access to and quality of water sources including those important for Traditional Owners; and loss of biodiversity and damage to river systems that provide food to millions in our region.

In the Pacific, the total population with access to basic services is only 57% for water and 35% for sanitation. This is one of the lowest rates in the world and reflects challenges with remote and rural populations, lack of surface water sources, and high exposure to natural hazards. Of the Asian Development Bank's 49 developing member countries, 22 are rated water insecure. Competition for water is growing in South East and South Asia, as increasing development drives urbanisation, agriculture and manufacturing, all large water users. For individuals and communities, the human costs of failure to meet Sustainable Development Goal 6 are steep and include illness and premature death, food insecurity, reduced school attendance and increased household labour to secure water – a burden mainly on women and girls.

Climate change exacerbates the challenges and pressures through an increasing tempo of drought, flood and storms, and low ability to plan for the future based on climate patterns of the past. And failure to manage water sustainably under climate change has broad ranging risks, as the IPCC notes: *"Globally, the greatest risks to attaining global sustainability goals come from risks to water security."*

The Australian Government announced increases to aid in the 2022 budget, focussed on the Pacific and Southeast Asia, with thematic emphasis on climate change, gender, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI) and a recognition of the value of First Nations partnerships. The government also announced formulation of a new development policy to be complete in early 2023. AWP is making a unique contribution to the aid program that has a strong Australian identity, champions diversity and inclusion, and is highly valued by government counterparts across the region. As climate impacts are felt in Australia and across our region there will only be a stronger demand for opportunities to exchange knowledge to address complex climate and water management challenges.

While we do not have all the answers, Australia has valuable expertise in managing water scarcity, drought and floods. The Australian water community leads globally in demonstrating resilience to harsh climatic conditions, across urban, regional, agricultural and conservation domains. Australia holds valuable practical experience of engaging communities in complex water reform that balances many potential values of water. Australia is working alongside Indigenous water practitioners to understand cultural values of water, Indigenous water science, and the potential contribution by Indigenous people to adaptation and water security in Australia through their generations of knowledge and traditional practices.

# OUR APPROACH

The Australian Water Partnership was established in 2015 by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) to work with partner governments in the Indo-Pacific region to collectively improve sustainable and equitable water management. With growing climate risks, AWP's position in building bilateral and regional collaboration in water and climate experience is a vital part of the Australian aid program.

AWP was established to respond to requests for Australian expertise in water management from across the region. AWP places strong emphasis on working in partnership, drawing on the many strengths of the Australian water community, which underpins our theory of change and the ways we work and organise ourselves. AWP's network of partners and collaborators spans Australia, the Indo-Pacific region, and the rest of the world. The operating model anticipates that working in partnership will create the conditions for stronger and more sustainable development outcomes and contribute to Australian diplomatic objectives.

AWP has a geographic focus on the Pacific (including regional, Fiji and Papua New Guinea) and Southeast Asia (the Mekong, Indonesia and Timor-Leste), which aligns with the Australian aid program priority areas, and take our lead on engagement in South Asia and Africa as required by government. The majority of our programming will be in priority countries and regions, and we expect to support discrete activities in other places including South Asia.

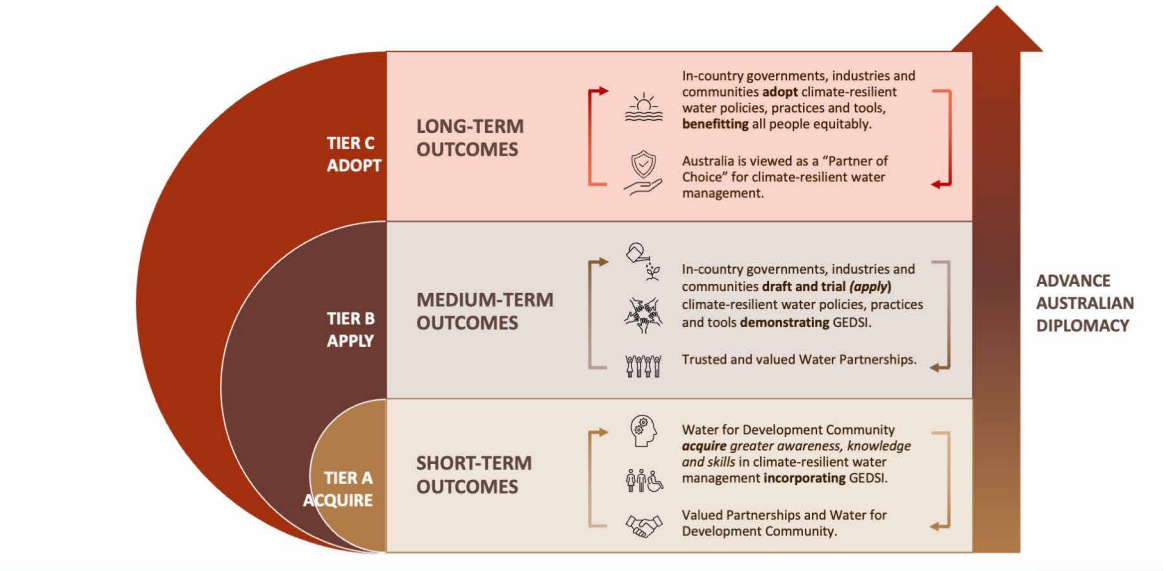
AWP also plays a role in supporting Australian water diplomacy through engagement with regional and international forums. Our role is to highlight Australian and Indo-Pacific voices and experience, particularly where we are working in partnership towards sustainable and climate-resilient water resource management. AWP engages with regional and multilateral partners and processes in close collaboration with Australian government partners.

This strategic plan coincides with the design of AWP's third phase and describes our vision of the future to 2028 – based on seven years of learning, a year-long process of consultation with many partners and stakeholders, and our understanding of the strongest contribution we can make to help achieve Australia's objectives of sustainable and climate-resilient water resource management in our region.

# THEORY OF CHANGE

**Mission:** Through trusted partnerships, mobilise Australian water sector expertise to address demand from the Indo Pacific and beyone

**Vision:** Enhanced sustainable and climate-resilient management of water in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond



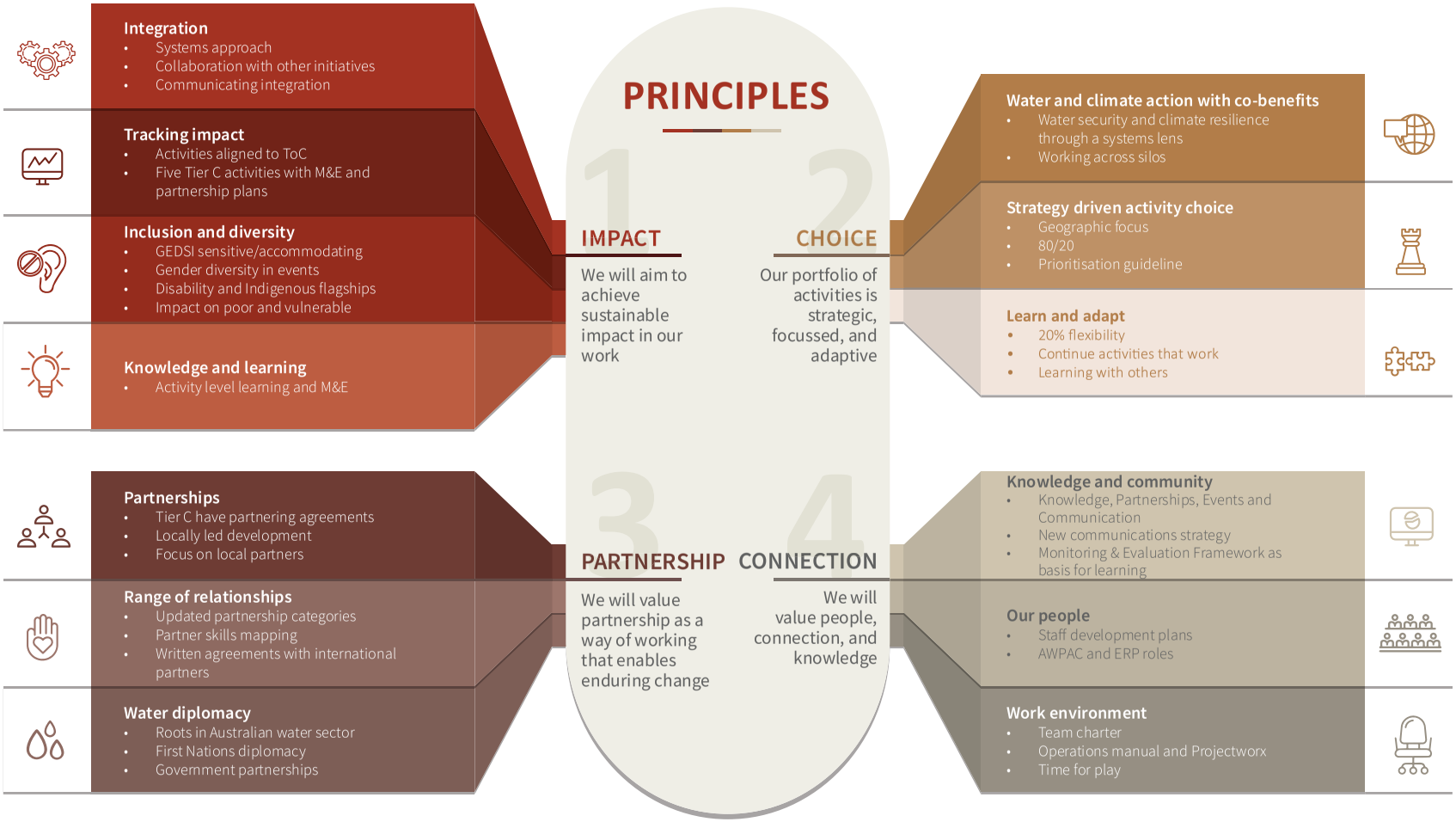

***Our value proposition – how Partnership makes us different***

*AWP works through partnering, which means we broker and sustain relationships with certain attributes: mutual trust, respect, reciprocity, exchange of ideas and information, co-design (with partner governments and DFAT) and joint problem solving. A partnership is qualitatively different from an advisory or consultancy relationship.*

*Through our partnerships, we continue to learn and innovate so that we can improve our co-developed strategies for improving sustainable and equitable water management. We cultivate a Water for Development Community to grow and strengthen partnerships, and communicate the learning and knowledge from partnerships back to our community.*

The core of our strategy is our theory of change, which articulates how AWP will work with partners to achieve our objective of long-term development outcomes. It is built around three tiers of engagement with in-country partners, each with different levels of expectation around outcomes, ambition and impact reflecting the reality of our modest budget and ability to influence complex water systems. Over the course of the strategy, we will aim to focus time and effort in a limited number of Tier C (adopt) activities where we expect to see strongest development and diplomatic outcomes through adoption of climate sensitive water management policies, practices and tools. These will be supported by a variety of Tier B (apply) and Tier A (acquire) activities, which will support development and diplomatic goals through valued and trusted partnerships and building a water for development community. GEDSI and climate expectations are woven into each of the tiers, with most investment in Tier C.

# STRATEGY


Integration
• Systems approach
• Collaboration with other initiatives
• Communicating integration
Tracking impact
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• Five Tier C activities with M&E and partnership plans
Inclusion and diversity
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• Time for play

## *Principle 1: We aim to achieve sustainable impact in our work*

> *We will know we are successful if every year we add to our evidence of sustained positive change in partner countries and communities.*

AWP is a water for development initiative, and we measure our success by the impacts we achieve in partner countries. The contexts in which we work are increasingly complex – escalating geopolitics, climate change, disasters and other donor activity are all important factors – and we have a modest budget and ability to influence. We define impact through our contribution to both development outcomes and diplomatic outcomes, which must be kept realistic and proportional to our ability to influence. AWP will find ways to enhance impact by increasing our focus on inclusion and adding to the store of knowledge about what works in our context.

AWP will pursue **IMPACT** through the following objectives and strategies:

### 1.1 We will identify opportunities for integration to improve the effectiveness and sustainability of outcomes

- AWP activities will focus on a systems approach, where water is a key part of larger interconnected food, energy, environmental and social systems.
- AWP will cooperate closely with related initiatives (including DFAT-funded programs) on events and programming to enhance synergies, coordinate and emphasise integrated approaches.
- AWP's communications highlights interconnectedness including water's role in climate mitigation and adaptation, and underpinning achievement of all the SDGs.

### 1.2 We will track our impact through tiers of activity towards sustainable and climate resilient water management.

- New activities will be aligned to our ToC and to a specific tier (acquire, apply or adopt) to clarify scope, intent and realistic level of change expected.
- AWP will develop at least five Tier C (adopt) activities by December 2023, supported by comprehensive M&E and partnership plans.

### 1.3 We will value and promote inclusion and diversity, prioritising those most poor and vulnerable

- All new activities will have a meaningful GEDSI analysis resulting in clear implementation plans, so they are at least GEDSI sensitive/accommodating.
- AWP-organised and supported events will reflect diversity and inclusion with at least 40% women speakers.
- AWP will develop concepts for flagship activities on disability and Indigenous/traditional water management under Phase 3.
- As part of concept development, we will have a clear line of sight on how new AWP activities will impact the most poor and vulnerable people.

### 1.4 We will reflect on learning from activities on sustainable and climate resilient water management

- AWP activities will use monitoring, targeted evaluations and learning to adapt programming.

## *Principle 2: Our portfolio of activities is strategic, focussed, and adaptive*

> *We will know we are successful if our activities are aligned with our principles, providing a mix of long and short-term activities across key geographies, with identified pathways to impact.*

Choice is vital for AWP as we must prioritise modest funding towards the most impactful activities. Careful and considered trade-offs must be made to ensure a balanced portfolio that achieves impact. We must balance:

- Australia's current geographical focus with countries where we have established ongoing partnerships and trust; continuing current successful activities with new work in emerging areas of interest;
- working with experienced partners with providing opportunity for new partners; multilateral against bilateral;
- and a selection of larger longer-term (and more impactful) activities against smaller ones

Based on learning since 2015, we have developed strategies to strike this balance through strategic choices.

AWP will pursue **CHOICE** through the following objectives and strategies:

We will **prioritise water and climate action** that supports equity, and multiple levels of impact

- AWP will select new activities based on their ability to contribute to water security and climate resilience, defined as the "capacity of social, economic and ecosystems to cope with a hazardous event or trend or disturbance" (IPCC).
- AWP will seek to bridge silos, including between WASH and WRM, to holistically support achievement of SDG6 in our region.

We will program activities based on **Australian and partner country strategy**

- AWP will focus new programming in the Pacific, Mekong, Indonesia, Timor-Leste and regionally, in South Asia.
- From Phase 3, approximately 80% of AWP funds will be programmed through a structured and transparent annual process.
- By June 2023, AWP will develop a prioritisation checklist to guide selection of activities with the highest impact potential.

We will continue to **learn and adapt to changing priorities** and to what is, or is not, effective

- AWP will retain flexibility by setting aside approximately 20% of activity funds annually for response to emerging opportunities.
- AWP will build on successful activities, based on in-country partner feedback, reviews and evaluations, and staff monitoring.
- We will facilitate learning across national, regional and international contexts, on key issues where Australia has particular strengths or relevant experience to share.

## *Principle 3: We value partnership as a way of working that enables enduring change*

> *We will know we are successful if AWP supports a range of different partnerships with Australian, international and local organisations, through which we work together to achieve objectives.*

In our theory of change, partnership is seen as a condition that contributes to development and diplomatic outcomes. AWP will support and enable a range of partnerships in water for development, between our in-country, Australian and international partners. AWP plays various roles to deliver this function- a facilitator, connector, trusted advisor, knowledge sharer, incubator, information hub and capacity builder. Over time, we will deepen our evidence base around how partnership – a way of working characterised by trust and reciprocity, and mutual benefit – can support change towards more sustainable and climate-resilient water resource management.

AWP will pursue **PARTNERSHIP** through the following objectives and strategies:

### 3.1 We will invest in partnerships as the basis for sustainable impact

- AWP Tier C activities will progressively introduce co-design and partnering agreements.
- AWP activities will deliberately learn from, and integrate, locally-led development approaches.
- AWP will strengthen our in-country partnerships in key countries and regions, through collaboration on activities, events and research.

### 3.2 We will value a range of partnerships and modes of engagement

- AWP will work with active and prospective Australian and in-country Partners on activities; and community members in our knowledge, events and communications.
- AWP will complete a mapping of partner skills and profiles and identify gaps against key themes by December 2024, to ensure the partner pool reflects new thematic priorities.
- AWP will develop written agreements with international partners that identify opportunities to bring Australian expertise into larger investments.

### 3.3 We will foster partnerships that support Australian water diplomacy

- AWP will value its roots in the Australian water sector.
- AWP will support Australia's First Nations Diplomacy strategy, providing a platform for Indigenous water practitioners to share knowledge with the Indo-Pacific region.
- We will build partnerships with Australian state, territory and Federal government agencies and provide a mechanism for sharing their knowledge and expertise.

## *Principle 4: We value people, connection, and knowledge*

> *We will know we are successful if we are a learning organisation that fosters a supportive learning environment for our staff, partners and others.*

Under the shadow of climate change, community resilience through local assets and solutions is becoming increasingly important. AWP has access to world-class technical knowledge in water management through our partners, but change in water systems is dependent on people with different backgrounds – urban, rural, professionals, users, knowledge holders, academics, and government officials at all levels – working together successfully, sharing knowledge and learning. AWP as an organisation will model valuing different types of knowledge in the way we work with partners, the way we communicate, and in how we organise ourselves as a multidisciplinary team. We value our staff and invest in them to deliver on the principles in this strategy.

AWP will pursue **CONNECTION** through the following objectives and strategies:

### 4.1 We will achieve development outcomes by investing in knowledge, community, and learning.

- We will support the exchange of Australian and international water for climate resilience knowledge through our activities, events and communications.
- AWP will develop a new communications strategy by July 2023, linked to our Theory of Change, to build and contribute to a water and climate development community across the Indo-Pacific.
- We will increase the rigour and accountability of our own learning through implementation and ongoing adaptation of the AWP Performance Framework.

### 4.2 We will invest in our people, and the people we work with

- All AWP staff have development plans that enable them access to opportunities to build and share their skills and knowledge, represent the organisation, and access mentoring.
- AWP's Advisory Committee and Expert Review Panel have clear roles and responsibilities, focussing on their expertise being best used to support AWP's work.

### 4.3 We will create a work environment that is supportive, creative, joyful, and smart/hard working

- AWP will develop a Team Charter by June 2023 that illustrates our values of respect, accountability, inclusivity, and adaptability.
- We will pursue further efficiencies in approval and administration through completing updates to our Operations Manual and program management software by June 2023.
- Our team will regularly take time to celebrate achievements, reflect on learning and contribute to improvements in the way we work.

# MONITORING, EVALUATION, ACCOUNTABILITY AND LEARNING

Our theory of change and performance approach guides how AWP will evaluate whether we are achieving our objectives. We will work alongside partners to continually improve our approach and adjust our M&E framework as we learn what works. Producing clear, high-quality reports about our impact is one way to provide accountability to our donor and also to the partners and communities we are working with; but we recognise that localisation challenges us to think about accountability in new ways.

Our commitment to being a learning organisation involves appreciation of the value of lessons learned – positive and negative – in improving our own operations; and in the approach we take to sharing Australia's water story with partners in the Indo-Pacific and beyond.

AWP's governance is also an important element of accountability – through testing ideas and activity approval, and reporting and ensuring our risk management is appropriate. We are grateful to the eWater Board, the AWP Advisory Committee, the Expert Review Panel and DFAT for their thoughtful and rigorous contributions to AWP operations.

# PUTTING THE STRATEGY INTO ACTION

The principles, objectives and strategies in this Strategic Plan are linked to a series of actions which are summarised in the table at the Annex. AWP will review annually how we are tracking against the actions specified. One key action is the update of our operations manual and templates which will take place in early 2023 to embed the strategy into the way we work.

The Strategic Plan is intended to be adaptive and will be reviewed periodically. AWP will do the first review within six months of the commencement of Phase 3 to reflect any changes in scope or scale.

| Principles | Objectives | Strategies | Actions | Timing |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Impact** | Integration | Systems approach | Identify adjacent sectors in all templates for all new Tier B and C activities – food, energy, urban etc | Jan 2023 |
| | | Collaboration with other initiatives | Work closely with Water for Women, WaterAid, World Bank, ADB and other partners. Liaise closely with Posts in focus countries to ensure coherence | Jan 2023 |
| | | Communicating integration | Theme for new communications strategy | July 2023 |
| | Tracking impact | Activities aligned to ToC | All new activities to be allocated a Tier; and to have climate resilience in their objectives | Jan 2023 |

| Principles | Objectives | Strategies | Actions | Timing |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Five Tier C activities with M&E and partnership plans | Identify activities; communicate expectations with partners; update planning and reporting templates | July 2023 |
| | Inclusion and diversity | GEDSI sensitive/ accommodating | Update AWP's GEDSI action plan | March 2023 |
| | | Gender diversity in events | AWP-organised events<br>Influence events where we participate | Jan 2023<br>Incrementally |
| | | Disability and Indigenous flagships | Develop new concepts for Phase 3 | July 2024 |
| | | Impact on poor and vulnerable | Integrate poverty analysis into new concept and activity templates | Mar 2024 |
| | Knowledge and learning | Activity level learning and M&E | Annual Tier C learning and reflection from Phase 3 | October 2024 |
| **Choice** | Water and climate action with co-benefits | Water security and climate resilience through a systems lens | For Tier C, trial use of socio-ecological approach to identifying climate and water risk | Mar 2024 |
| | | Working across silos | Track progress of activities working across WASH/WRM; collaborate with WASH community to introduce WRM ideas | Jan 2023 |
| | Strategy driven activity choice | Geographic focus | Stay with identified countries/ regions until given different direction by government | Jan 2023 |
| | | 80/20 | From Phase 3, program 80% of activity budget annually | Jan 2024 |
| | | Prioritisation rubric | Develop checklist to help prioritise activities | December 2023 |
| | Learn and adapt | 20% flexibility | Retain flexibility to program as DFAT requirements per financial year until March; then program remainder | Jan 2024 |
| | | Continue activities that work | Annual partnership review of longer-term activities to determine whether to continue; extend or close the activity. | October 2023 |
| | | Learning with others | AWP present and contributing to at least 4 regionally or internationally important events per year;<br>as AWP or Water Partners for Development. Focus on Australian and Asia-Pacific voices and experience. | Jan 2023 |

| Principles | Objectives | Strategies | Actions | Timing |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Partnership | Partnerships | Tier C have partnering agreements | Collaboratively develop agreements between in-country, Australian, International partners and AWP outlining how we will work, how we will determine success; attributes of the partnership; review processes. | Dec 2024 |
| | | Locally led development | Starting with one pilot in the Pacific: identify local partners; work in culturally appropriate ways and seek opportunities for their substantial engagement in AWP activities. | Dec 2024 |
| | | Focus on local partners | Gather performance and partnership data from local partners; target communications to local partners in focus countries. | Dec 2023 |
| | Range of relationships | Updated partnership categories | For Phase 3 design: introduce different categories of partners; some of whom will not bid for AWP contracts.<br>Update contacts database to reflect different interests. | Dec 2023 |
| | | Partner skills mapping | Map partners skills against current and any future skills required under Phase 3 design | Dec 2024 |
| | | Written agreements with international partners | As MOUs expire, replace with more specific statements of how we wish to work together, drawing on different partners' strengths | As current MOUs expire |
| | Water diplomacy | Roots in Australian water sector | Contribute to Australian water sector events and initiatives.<br>Highlight Australian expertise in partners and AWPAC through communications. | Jan 2023 |
| | | First Nations diplomacy | Support Australia's new strategy when it is released, building on current partnerships | July 2023 |
| | | Government partnerships | In 1-2 states or territories, work to align staff development plans and policies with opportunities to contribute to AWP work | Dec 2023 |

| Principles | Objectives | Strategies | Actions | Timing |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Connection | Knowledge and community | KPEC | Finalise current knowledge products and plan for 1-2 new knowledge or policy brief pieces per year; link events and communications to existing or new knowledge work through Annual Plan. | June 2024 |
| | | New communications strategy | Draft new strategy | July 2023 |
| | | Monitoring & Evaluation Framework as basis for learning | Through operations manual update - implement MEF in activities, supported by KPEC work, and plan for longer term learning and evaluations. | Dec 2023 |
| | Our people | Staff development plans | All staff to have development plans as part of their existing performance agreements (change when eWater shifts to new HR system) | June 2023 |
| | | AWPAC and ERP roles | Propose changes to simplify project approvals and reinforce AWPAC and ERC roles, for consideration in Phase 3 design. | July 2024 |
| | Work environment | Team charter | Draft and print team charter for display in our office. | June 2023 |
| | | Operations manual and Projectworx | Projects to be complete | Dec 2023 |
| | | Time for play | Use team stand-ups to highlight and celebrate successes; cake for birthdays; semi regular team lunches | Jan 2023 |

# Australia

## water partners for development

*The Australian Water Partnership is an Australian Government international cooperation initiative helping developing countries in the Indo-Pacific region, and beyond, work towards the sustainable management of their water resources.*

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