Rural irrigation price review 2025–29: final report
Lower Mary water supply scheme

February 2025

We were directed by the former treasurer of Queensland to recommend irrigation prices to apply from 1 July 2025 to 30 June 2029. This includes prices for irrigation customers in the Lower Mary water supply scheme (WSS) and distribution system.

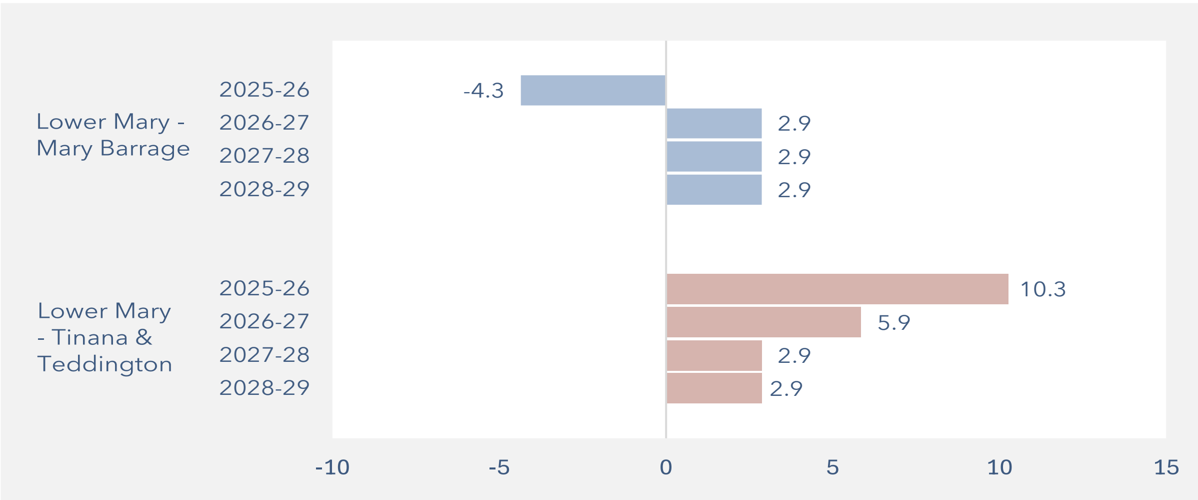
After extensive consultation with stakeholders, we have completed our review and published a final report for Sunwater's schemes on our website.[1]

Price recommendations

We applied the pricing principles in the referral notice to reach our price recommendations.[2] The pricing principles constrain the increases required each year to reach the relevant price target. The price target reflects a scheme's prudent and efficient costs but excludes allowances for capital expenditure (capex) incurred before 1 July 2000 and capex on dam safety upgrades.

Based on our price recommendations, we estimated the average change in irrigation prices for each year of the price path period from 2025–26 to 2028–29 (Figures 1 and 2). Price changes for individual customers would vary if their water usage differs from the assumed scheme usage.

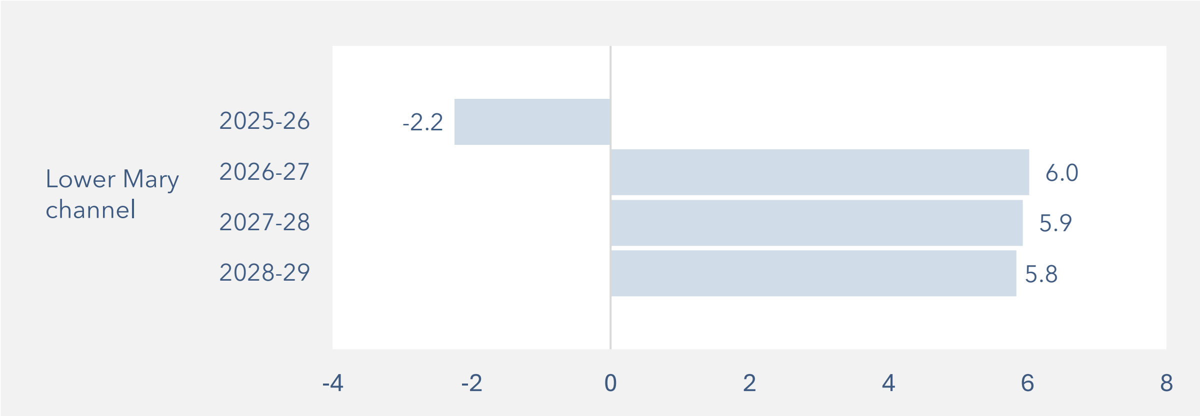
Figure 1: Annual changes in irrigation prices for bulk only customers, from 2025–26 to 2028–29 (% change)



Note: The analysis is based on the total price per megalitre of the water access entitlement (WAE) for each tariff group, which is derived as the total fixed price plus the total volumetric price multiplied by the assumed scheme usage as a percentage of the WAE (25.7% of WAE for the Mary Barrage tariff group and 33.1% for the Tinana & Teddington tariff group).

1 A separate final report covers Seqwater's schemes.
2 The referral notice is available on our website.

Figure 2: Annual changes in irrigation prices for distribution system customers, from 2025–26 to 2028–29 (% change)



Note: The analysis is based on the total price per megalitre of the water access entitlement (WAE) for this tariff group, which is derived as the total fixed price plus the total volumetric price multiplied by the assumed scheme usage as a percentage of the WAE (29.7% of WAE for this tariff group).

More information about price impacts is provided in Chapter 11 of the final report.

In Figures 3 to 5, we compare the recommended prices with:

- the prevailing 2024–25 prices (before the 15% discount that Sunwater was directed to apply to irrigation prices)
- the price targets for each year of the price path period.

Figure 3: Recommended prices – Lower Mary – Mary Barrage ($/ML)

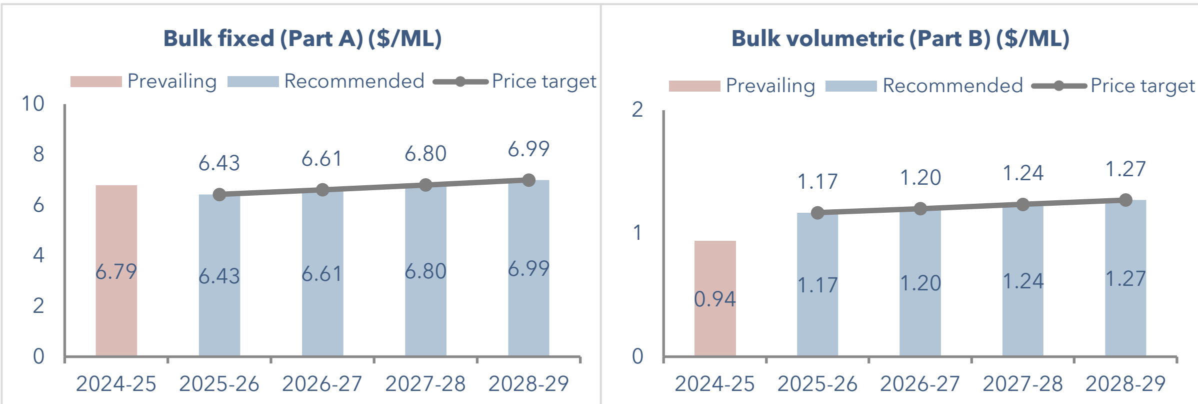


Figure 4: Recommended prices – Lower Mary – Tinana & Teddington ($/ML)

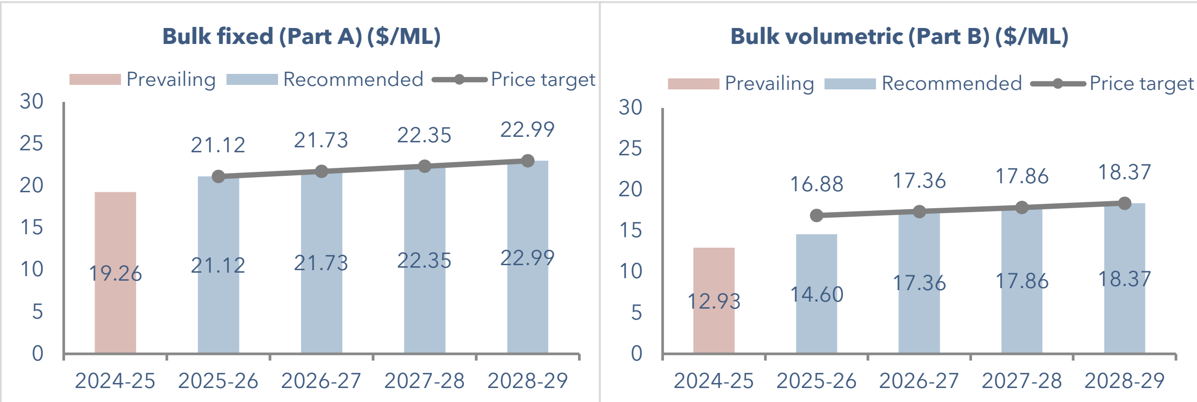
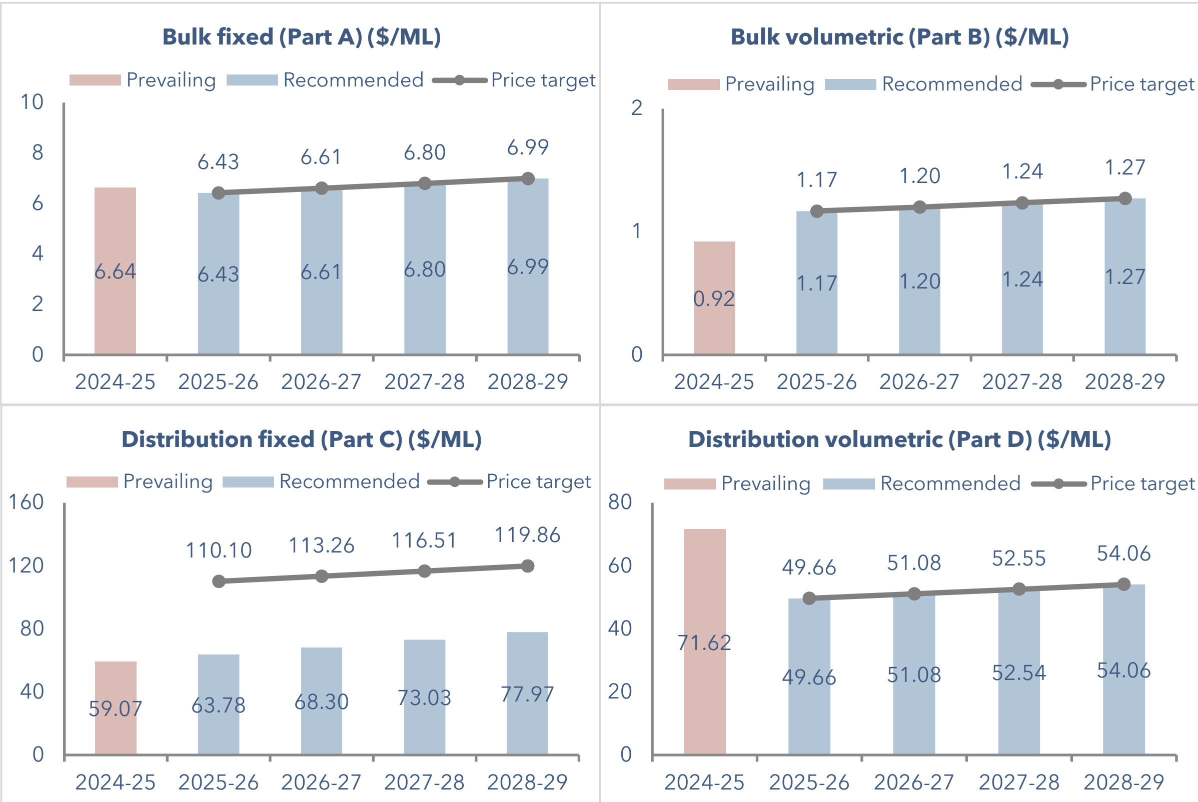


Figure 5: Recommended prices – Lower Mary channel ($/ML)



For the Mary Barrage tariff group, the recommended prices cover allowable costs over each year of the price path period. For the Tinana & Teddington tariff group, the recommended prices will cover allowable costs by the end of the price path period. For the Lower Mary channel tariff group, the recommended prices (in total) will not cover allowable costs by the end of the price path period, because the Part C price remains below the price target for the whole period.

Recovery of allowable costs for the:

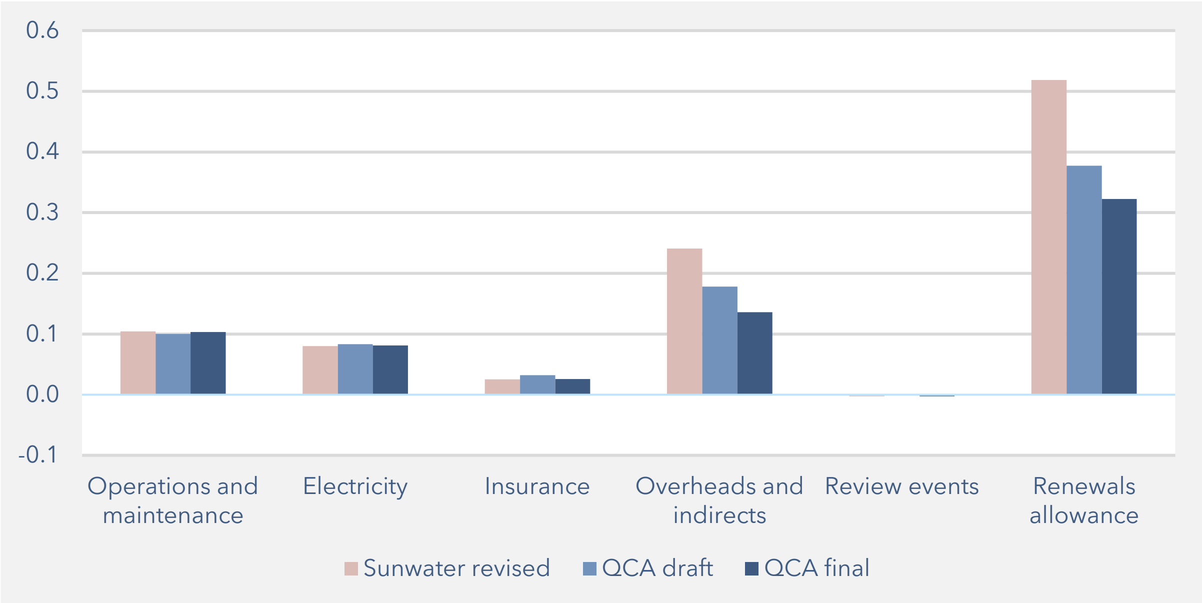
- Tinana & Teddington tariff group will increase from 97% in 2025–26 to 100% from 2026–27 onwards
- Lower Mary channel tariff group will increase from 65% in 2025–26 to 71% in 2028–29.

Assessment of Sunwater's proposed costs

Our position is that total allowable costs[3] for Sunwater over the price path period should be set at $424.9 million, which is $40.8 million (or 8.8%) lower than Sunwater's total revised (annuity-based) allowable costs.[4] Our position is largely unchanged from our draft report, with the key changes being due to updated estimates provided by Sunwater for electricity, insurance and renewals expenditure. Other changes include allowing for increased labour costs and local overheads relative to our draft report.

For the Lower Mary WSS, we reduced Sunwater's revised costs by 31.2% over the price path period (Figure 6).

Figure 6: QCA position – total costs over the price path period, Lower Mary WSS ($ million)



Notes: 1. Revenue offsets are not included in these figures. 2. Overhead and indirect costs include QCA fees.

For the Lower Mary distribution system, we reduced Sunwater's revised costs by 10.5% over the price path period (Figure 7).

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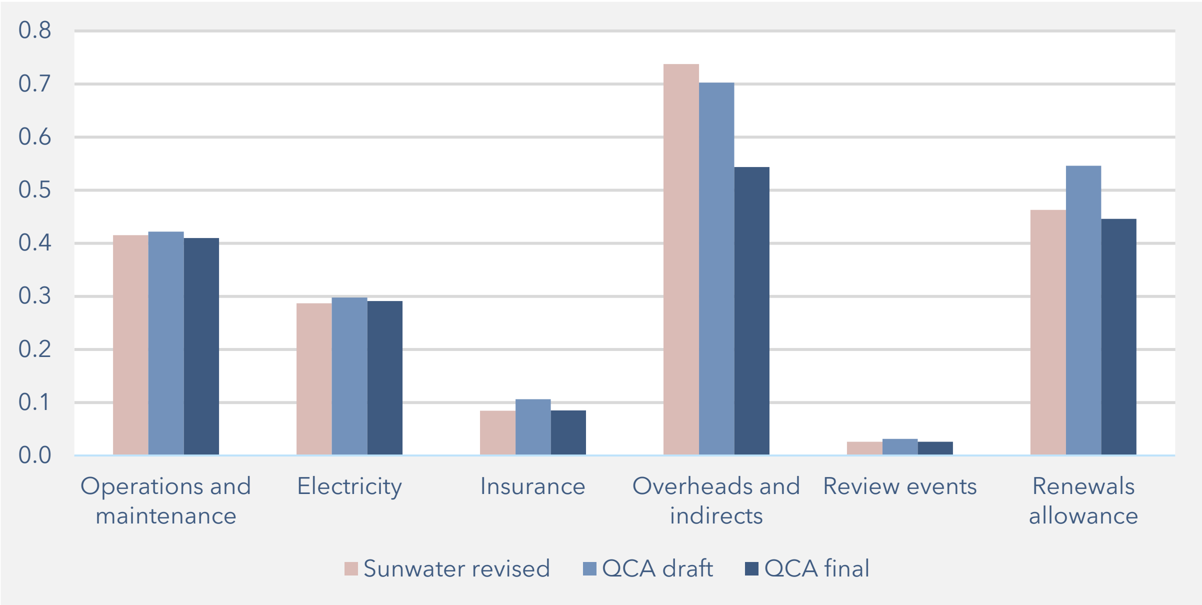
3 Includes costs allocated to irrigation and non-irrigation customers in regulated schemes.

4 Revised costs include updates provided by Sunwater for insurance, electricity and review event adjustments, as well as actual 2023–24 renewals expenditure, a revised proposal for its customer and stakeholder project (CASPr) and an addendum for dam safety management costs, since its November 2023 proposal.

Figure 7: QCA position – total costs over the price path period, Lower Mary distribution system ($ million)



Notes: 1. Revenue offsets are not included in these figures. 2. Overhead and indirect costs include QCA fees.

More information about our assessment of Sunwater's proposed operating expenditure and renewals expenditure is provided in Chapters 4 and 5 of our final report.

Approach to recovering renewals expenditure

We assessed Sunwater's proposed regulatory asset base (RAB) approach for recovering renewals expenditure against the existing renewals annuity approach.

While we support an appropriately designed RAB approach, we are not satisfied that Sunwater's approach is sufficiently robust and well developed to support moving to a RAB approach at this time. We therefore reached our price recommendations using a renewals annuity approach.

See Chapter 7 of our final report for further information.

Next step

Our final report and price recommendations have been provided to the government. The government will consider our recommendations before determining irrigation prices to apply from 1 July 2025.