Tallowa Dam fish lift upgrade

November 2026

A major upgrade to the Tallowa Dam fish lift was completed in mid-2026. Since then, WaterNSW has been testing the upgraded system and preparing it for operation. During testing, some additional components were identified for replacement before the fish lift can return to regular service.

What work has been completed

- Upgrade of the access track, stairs, ladders and building a new crane pad so workers can safely reach the site and maintain the fish lift.
- Upgrade of the electrical system needed to run the fish lift. This includes replacing old cables, electrical boards and control systems so the lift can operate reliably.
- Installation of cranes to safely lift and move heavy equipment, such as valve and sections of pipe during maintenance works.
- Replacement of pipes, valves and screens. These components play an important role in helping water flow properly, adding oxygen into the water and guiding fish into the fish lift.
- Commissioning of the new electrical system and automation system that drives this fish lift.

Testing and preparing the fish lift for operation

As part of testing the fish lift after an extended period of inactivity, several components were identified that required replacement.

The striker arm is a key component that opens the hopper door and allows fish to be released upstream of the dam.

Testing identified damage to the striker arm, preventing it from opening the door correctly. Repairing and testing the mechanism was particularly challenging because it operates underwater and could only be tested under real operating conditions.

Underwater cameras were used to inspect the system, while a series of adjustments and trials helped confirm the component was correctly positioned and operating as intended. Divers also replaced several deteriorated components as part of this work.



Left: The striker arm (circled) on the hopper door mechanism was repaired as part of testing and commissioning works. The striker arm opens the hopper door, so fish can be released upstream of the dam. The hopper is a 2,500-litre bucket that is winched along a 100-metre track to carry fish over the dam wall.

What's next

- Over the coming months, WaterNSW will continue testing the fish lift to confirm that the upgraded systems, controls and monitoring equipment are working as intended under normal operating conditions. Performance testing is expected to be complete by early 2027, weather permitting.
- An additional section of the environmental flow pipework will be replaced while the crews are onsite. Completing this work now will reduce the need for future outages and minimise disruption to environmental water releases. This work is expected to be completed by early 2027, weather permitting.
- Once performance testing has been successfully completed, we will engage with key stakeholders to finalise arrangements for operating the fish lift throughout the year.

Tallowa Dam closure due to road repairs

Tallowa Dam Road is closed to the public until mid-2027 for major repairs. For more information about the road closure, visit www.environment.nsw.gov.au/tallowa-dam-road-repair

There is no vehicle access for launching or retrieving paddle craft from Tallowa Dam. Paddlers must exit the river at Beehive Point or Bendeela.

Please visit waternsw.com.au/Tallowa Dam before you leave home for the latest updates regarding access to Tallowa Dam.

Happy 50th, Tallowa Dam!

Tallowa Dam celebrated its 50th anniversary in October this year. For 50 years, Tallowa Dam has been an important part of the Shoalhaven landscape, supporting water security, local communities and the surrounding environment.

Thank you to our community who help care for the dam and its surrounds.

Below left: Tallowa Dam 1976, before recharging. Below right: Tallowa Dam in 2026
Photo credit: Sydney Water/WaterNSW Historical Research Archive





The Tallowa Dam fish lift upgrade aims to restore natural fish migration routes in the Shoalhaven River. This project holds profound cultural importance for Jerrinja peoples, whose connection to the Shoalhaven River and its ecosystems runs deep.

The river is a living part of their cultural heritage, embodying connection to Country, ancestors, and the Dreaming. This project will help heal Country and reflects the shared commitment to preserving cultural values and the natural environment.