

What is changing in the Water Allocation Plan for the River Murray Prescribed Watercourse



Introduction

The South Australian Murray-Darling Basin Natural Resources Management Board (the Board) has amended the Water Allocation Plan for the River Murray Prescribed Watercourse (the Plan). A draft Plan is now out for public consultation and the Board is seeking feedback on changes made to the Plan.

The final adopted plan is a legal document that will manage and protect the River Murray water resource for current and future users. It will ensure sustainable use of this important resource for the benefit of all water users, including primary producers, industry, communities in the region and across the state, and the environment.

Why is the Water Allocation Plan for the River Murray Prescribed Watercourse being changed?

The changes to the Plan build on the amendment process that was finalised and adopted in 2017, after extensive consultation with the community. The 2017

Plan incorporated updated science and community values, but more changes are required to ensure we are fully compliant with the Basin Plan by 2019, and to improve on existing management arrangements.

The Plan is being updated to incorporate Basin Plan requirements, like the introduction of Sustainable Diversion Limits (SDLs), and the Board has also taken the opportunity to progress other areas of the Plan to make sure policies are working effectively.

The Plan will form a part of the South Australian River Murray Water Resource Plan, which is a requirement to demonstrate that we are managing the River Murray to Basin Plan standards.

The information sheet 'Overview of the South Australian River Murray Water Resource Plan' provides more information about water resource plan requirements.



What has been the process for developing the draft Plan?

The Board has worked with the River Murray Advisory Committee (RMAC), a community-based committee that assists the Board in water policy development, and communities directly impacted by the policy changes, to seek community input into policies in the Plan. The Board has worked with the Department for Environment and Water (DEW) and the Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) to ensure the proposed changes will address South Australia's obligations under the Basin Plan. The Board is now seeking broader community feedback on the changes being made to the Plan.

What changes have been made in the draft Plan?

The draft Plan proposes a number of changes to:

- address Basin Plan requirements through the introduction of new principles and background information, and
- improve existing policies based on policy development undertaken with RMAC and community representatives.

Summary of key changes

Basin Plan Requirements

Compliance with Sustainable Diversion Limits

Sustainable Diversion Limits (SDLs) are being introduced by the Basin Plan and will replace the Cap on diversions, set out in the Murray-Darling Basin Agreement. SDLs indicate how much water can be used in the Murray-Darling Basin and ensure there is enough water remaining in the environment to keep the River Murray in a healthy state.

The Plan now includes a principle that reflects South Australia's commitment to compliance with the new Sustainable Diversion Limits (SDLs) defined under the Basin Plan.

There is room for some growth in levels of water use within the SDL for the River Murray Prescribed Watercourse. A new principle has been included in the Plan that recognises that should water use approach the limit, action will be taken to address the issue. The Department will work with key stakeholders and the community to determine the preferred approach to address compliance with the SDL over the coming years.

Aboriginal interests

To meet Basin Plan requirements, and to better reflect Aboriginal water interests, new information has been included in the Plan. The Board has worked closely with

What is a water allocation plan?

A water allocation plan is a legal document that:

- sets out rules for determining water entitlements, water allocations, water trading, and approvals for the taking and use of a prescribed water resource to ensure the sustainability of that resource
- provides greater transparency for water users and also takes into account the needs of the environment
- includes an assessment of the capacity of the resource to meet current and future demands
- includes an assessment of the needs of water dependent ecosystems
- includes principles for water affecting activities
- sets out monitoring requirements for licence holders and the resource

Aboriginal nations along the River Murray to prepare the information. The Plan includes and promotes Aboriginal cultural values of land and waters, and recognises the interests and needs of Aboriginal people. The Board will continue to work with Aboriginal nations to ensure that Aboriginal cultural values are considered in water planning processes. The changes do not affect existing water users or entitlements.

Planned environmental water

The Plan includes new principles to protect planned environmental water (water preserved for environmental outcomes), to meet requirements of the Basin Plan. If South Australia receives additional flows above Entitlement or unregulated flows that cannot be used under the Murray-Darling Basin Agreement, they will be preserved for the environment, unless required in emergency circumstances (consistent with the *Water Act 2007* (Cth)). In practice, there is no change to how additional flows and unregulated flows are treated and no impact on consumptive water users..

Other policy changes

Upper Pike River anabranch

To protect the health of the Pike floodplain and to protect existing users, an Upper Pike River Extraction Management Zone has been established. Inside this zone, an upper limit has been set on the volume of water that can be taken from the system. The volume is equal to the volume that currently is endorsed on site use approvals held in the area. A trigger for further review of this limit on take is also in the Plan; when the trigger is reached then a review will be undertaken and any action that is required will be developed in collaboration with the local community.

Salinity zoning policy

The salinity zoning policy has been updated to help facilitate new irrigation development and make it easier



to change to higher water use crops. The updated policy provides for 30 year site use approvals for new or increased irrigation water use, and allows for increases to the volumes on existing site use approvals to enable conversion to higher water use crops (conditions apply). The changes do not affect existing site use approval volumes held.

Environmental Land Management Allocations

No changes are being made to the Plan at this stage. A review of Environmental Land Management Allocations (ELMA) has identified a number of issues with the use and administration of ELMA - the Board proposes to undertake further investigations and consultation with landholders in the Lower Murray Reclaimed Irrigation Area (LMRIA) before making any changes.

The Board would like to discuss the findings of the review and next steps with ELMA entitlement holders after the consultation period. There will be occasions to engage with the Board beyond the consultation period, as the Board continues to explore opportunities to improve outcomes for LMRIA landholders.

Private carryover

Changes have been made to the policy to make it clearer when carryover will be granted, and how it will be calculated and made available.

The changes mean that carryover will be announced as early as possible and will be based on opening allocation announcements. If projected opening irrigation allocations are at 40% or lower, then carryover will be granted.

Combined allocations from Entitlement and carryover have been capped at 100% to manage the risk of breaching SDLs in years where carryover is granted, and to make sure water is available in storage when it is most needed – in dry times.

Clarity has been provided that once carryover is granted to an authorisation holder, it will not be reduced due to a spill from upstream storages.

Evaporative losses from storage will now be calculated at a bulk level, meaning that once the carryover volume is announced, 100% of that volume will be made available to eligible authorisation holders.

In addition to the water stored upstream for carryover, volumes of water traded into South Australia for carryover purposes as late-season trade will now be included in the volume that can be made available for carryover.

Water level variability (formerly pumps on backwaters)

The management of the River Murray is changing to introduce more variable water levels to improve the

health of the environment. Raising and lowering the river level to enable wetland wetting and drying activities is becoming more frequent. The water level variability policy has been updated to support the introduction of variable water levels along the River Murray, and also to ensure pumping infrastructure is in a location where water quality and quantity is more reliable.

Changes have been made to ensure that pump owners are aware of their responsibilities in relation to variable water levels, and also to ensure that the Plan supports the implementation of projects that introduce more variable water levels.

Pumps on backwaters and anabranches will no longer be limited to their existing capacity, which means greater flexibility for pump owners to update their infrastructure when required. If a backwater or anabranch is impacted by too much extraction, the Minister can vary a water resource works approval to manage the issue.

New water resource works approvals may be accessed in the upper Pike River anabranch in recognition that there is more certainty about water levels in this area. Community members may access stock and domestic water supplies with conditions that minimise the impact of pumping equipment on the operation of the Pike environmental regulator.

Principles are included for water resource works approval holders, downstream of Lock 1, to make sure that their pumping infrastructure can operate within the levels outlined in the Barrage and Water Level Management Policy.

This is to provide pump owners below Lock 1 with certainty in regard to the variable water regime in this part of the River Murray.

Water allocation framework

The 2017 Plan introduced an allocation framework that set out how water should be prioritised, including during dry years when there may not be enough water to meet the needs of all water users and the environment. The framework was developed through extensive consultation with key stakeholders and the community, and it is maintained in the draft Plan. Minor changes have been made for clarity, for example the framework has been restructured in the Plan to make it easier to follow.

The changes also recognise that the framework applies under any water availability conditions regardless of whether it is a wet season or a dry season.

The framework now incorporates a principle setting out that the Adelaide desalination plant (ADP) may be used in dry times to supplement allocations from the River Murray.



This allows the release of an additional 50 GL of River Murray water to irrigators when they are on allocations of less than 100 per cent. This is worth an extra 8 percentage points to irrigators in dry years.

In line with the position taken by the State Government in 2017, the 50 GL increase for irrigators is also subject to an allowance for demand growth in Adelaide over time.

However, unlike the 2017 position, the draft Plan no longer *requires* the Minister to make an allowance for Adelaide's growth.

Rather, the draft Plan gives the Minister the *option* to make an allowance for actual demand growth in Adelaide – but no more than once every four years.

What do the changes mean for my water licence?

The 2017 Plan is currently being implemented and your water licence will be reissued after 1 July 2018 to reflect the changes to the Plan, and the new consumptive pools. Your additional authorisations may also be reissued if you are affected by other changes.

You may be affected by the additional changes set out in this information sheet, and further updates to your authorisations may be required. You will be notified if this is the case. Your entitlements will not change as there are no proposed changes to the consumptive pools. The changes being made aim to improve on current management of the River Murray.

The Basin Plan and water resource planning

Water Resource Plans are required to be prepared by all Basin States to ensure that the water resources within the Murray-Darling Basin region are being managed consistently and to the standard set by the Basin Plan. The Water Allocation Plan for the River Murray Prescribed Watercourse will form a part of the South Australian River Murray Water Resource Plan.

The water resource plan is a road map of South Australia's management of the River Murray, that collates together all other plans, policies and procedures regarding management of the river. The water resource plan will not alter how people currently take and use water for their businesses. This is determined by the water allocation plan.

More detail is available in the 'South Australian River Murray Water Resource Plan' information sheet, available at www.environment.sa.gov.au/wrp.

How can I have my say on the draft water allocation plan?

The Board will be consulting on the draft Plan until 5pm on Friday 14 September 2018. The Board is inviting written responses about the content of the draft Plan from all interested parties. Feedback on the draft Plan will also be gathered at a series of drop in sessions during the consultation period at locations along the River Murray. The dates and locations of these meetings will be advertised, and provided on the Natural Resources SAMDB website.

More information on the draft water allocation plan and water resource plan

For more information about the changes in the draft Plan, the following information sheets are available. They provide details about the key policy areas that are changing and why.

- Sustainable Diversion Limits
- Aboriginal Water Interests
- Allocating water from the River Murray
- Upper Pike River Anabranch
- Private Carryover
- Water Level Variability & Pumping Infrastructure
- Salinity Zoning Policy
- Environmental Land Management Allocations (ELMA)

Copies of the information sheets and the draft Plan are available on the Board's website, www.naturalresources.sa.gov.au/rivermurraywap, or at Natural Resources offices located in Murray Bridge, Berri and Mount Barker.

For more information on the water resource plan, please visit www.environment.sa.gov.au/wrp

Feedback

The period for feedback on the draft Water Allocation Plan for the River Murray Prescribed Watercourse closes at 5pm on Friday 14 September 2018.

Provide your feedback online:

<https://yoursay.sa.gov.au/river-murray-water-allocation-plan-18>

Written submissions can be directed to:

Peta Brettig
Senior Project Officer River Murray Water Allocation Plan
Natural Resources, SA Murray-Darling Basin
GPO Box 1047
Adelaide SA 5001
T: (08) 8463 6877
E: rmwap.feedback@sa.gov.au

www.naturalresources.sa.gov.au/rivermurraywap

