

Amendments to northern Murray–Darling Basin unregulated water sharing plans to facilitate active management to share flows

The Water Management Amendment Bill 2018 will amend the following water sharing plans to enable active management to share flows:

- *Water Sharing Plan for the Barwon–Darling Unregulated and Alluvial Water Sources 2012* (the Barwon–Darling WSP)
- *Water Sharing Plan Macquarie–Bogan Unregulated and Alluvial Water Sources 2012* (the Macquarie–Bogan unregulated WSP)
- *Water Sharing Plan Gwydir Unregulated and Alluvial Water Sources 2012* (the Gwydir unregulated WSP).

The change

An additional clause is added to Part 12 (Amendments) of the Barwon–Darling WSP, the Macquarie–Bogan unregulated WSP and the Gwydir unregulated WSP to authorise future amendments to Part 8 (Rules for managing access licence) of those plans to establish rules to facilitate the active sharing of flows.

Key reason for change

Active management to share flows between consumptive and other uses has been identified as a potential enduring solution to better manage environmental water, especially in circumstances where both held environmental water releases and other inflows are present.

Active management in its basic form involves determining what volume of flows can be accessed and when, under defined rules. Under a managed system, the portion of flow that is available for extraction and the portion of the flow being managed in-stream for the environment will be identified. Demand for extraction will be considered (for example, through an expression of interest or water ordering process) in sharing the portion of flow available for extraction and licence holders will be notified so they know when they can take water and what volume can be taken.

An amendment provision in these water sharing plans will allow sufficient time to develop the rules and tools for active management to share flows before they are implemented. It will also allow for the specific circumstances in each of the unregulated water sources to be considered and for us to consult with relevant stakeholders. Work is needed to better determine daily water balances so that the in-stream held environmental water components of flows can be more accurately identified. This will involve improving monitoring of in-stream flows and measurement of extractive use, enabling improved flow forecasting. In addition, an announcement, expression of interest and notification system for unregulated water sources will be required to identify the demand in a given event and to notify licence holders of their share in real-time.

What this means for licence holders

There will be no immediate change to access or licence conditions arising from this amendment. Active management to share flows will be further explored and licence holders will be consulted on options before any specific rules are included in water sharing plans.

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