

A new water sharing plan for the Lower Murray-Darling Unregulated area

A summary of proposed changes in the draft *Water Sharing Plan for the Lower Murray-Darling Unregulated River Water Source 2024*

Water sharing plans (WSP) are the primary legal framework for managing water access and sharing in NSW. The plans are valid for 10 years from their starting date.

The Natural Resources Commission (NRC) formally reviews a plan near the end of its 10-year term. The review identifies any changes necessary to deliver better outcomes for all water users, including the environment.

Under the *Water Management Act 2000*, the Minister may extend a water sharing plan for another 10 years or replace it with a changed plan, based on the recommendation of the NRC.

In 2022, the NRC completed its review of the *Water Sharing Plan for the Lower Murray-Darling Unregulated River Water Source 2011* (the 2011 plan) and recommended its replacement. The replacement plan is due by 1 July 2024. A copy of the NRC report is available from the [Publications pages of the NRC website](#).

The NSW Department of Planning and Environment has drafted a new water sharing plan – the *Water Sharing Plan for Lower Murray-Darling Unregulated River Water Source 2024*. When finalised, this will replace the 2011 plan.

This fact sheet summarises the key changes proposed to the plan.

We have updated the draft plan to align with the structure and wording of recent water sharing plans. This includes removing redundant clauses and notes, changing the numbering of parts and sections, and updating contact information.

These changes will improve consistency across all water sharing plans and align with current policy positions and administrative practices. In some circumstances, re-drafting was required to provide clarity or remove ambiguity associated with the existing rules. We have also updated the amendment provisions to allow us to change the plan if new information is available. We will consult the public before making any future changes that could affect water users or the environment's access to water.

Objectives, strategies and performance indicators

The department has revised the objectives, strategies and performance indicators to better reflect the principles of the *Water Management Act 2000*. The draft plan deals with similar matters to the current one. We have made changes to:

- make a stronger logical connection between objectives, the strategies of the plan and the performance indicators we will monitor

- distinguish clearly between the environmental, economic, social and Aboriginal cultural objectives of the water sharing plan.

Environmental water provisions

The environmental water provisions (legal conditions) remain in the plan but not in their own part. We have distributed them throughout the plan into:

- Part 4 – Limits to the availability of water
- Part 6 – Operation of water allocation accounts and managing access licences.

Estimated water requirements for basic landholder rights and licensed take

The draft plan gives updated:

- estimates of water requirements for basic landholder rights that take into account recent data sets for urban areas, number of houses and land use
- the total volumes or unit shares specified in the share components of all access licences to reflect current information.

Access Rules

Access rules are unchanged.

Total and individual daily extraction limits

We propose to remove references to total and individual daily extraction limits (TDELs and IDELs) from the plan and include an amendment provision that would allow us to introduce IDELs in the future, if necessary.

We cannot implement TDELs and IDELs now because of the lack of metering and flow gauging. However, we believe that TDELs and IDELs are an appropriate management tool in some areas where they can be implemented. We want to be able to introduce them in the future if required and if there is suitable infrastructure and metering.

Trading

Trading rules are unchanged. Trading is prohibited into or between identified lagoons and is prohibited into the Great Darling Anabranch, except if for an environmental purpose.

Protecting wetlands

The draft plan identifies significant wetlands in the plan area. It improves protection by restricting new surface water supply works and trade into these important areas. The draft plan proposes there will be no new works or trades allowed into or within 3 km upstream of Ramsar-listed wetlands or

within significant wetlands listed in Schedule 4 of the plan. The rules will not apply to replacement surface water supply works.

Schedule 4 of the draft plan includes a list and accompanying map of significant wetlands for the water sharing plan area using spatial data from:

- the Long Term Water Plans for the relevant water sharing plan area,
- Ramsar (internationally important) wetlands listing,
- the Directory of Important Wetlands of Australia,
- existing lists of wetlands already in water sharing plans,
- ecological assets listed in floodplain management plans in management zone D, and
- Endangered Ecological Communities of the plan area that are wetlands.
- regionally significant cultural wetlands (if known).

The proposed rules address the NRC's recommendations to improve protection for significant wetlands within the plan area.

More information

The draft water sharing plan and other fact sheets are available from [the Water pages of the department's website](#).