

# A new water sharing plan for the Belubula River area

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## A summary of proposed changes in the draft *Water Sharing Plan for the Belubula Regulated River Water Source 2025*

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Water sharing plans (plans) are the primary legal framework for managing water access and sharing in NSW. The plans are valid for 10 years from their start 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* (WM Act), the Minister for Water may extend a plan for another 10 years or replace it with a changed plan, based on the recommendation of the NRC.

In 2023, the NRC completed its review of the *Water Sharing Plan for the Belubula Regulated River Water Source 2012* (the 2012 plan) and recommended its replacement. The replacement plan is due by 1 July 2025. A copy of the NRC report is available from the [Publications pages of the NRC website](#).

The NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (the department) has drafted a new water sharing plan – the *Water Sharing Plan for the Belubula Regulated River Water Source 2025* (the draft plan). When finalised, this will replace the 2012 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.

This fact sheet summarises the key changes proposed to the 2012 plan.

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## 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.

New provisions have been added to ensure a monitoring, evaluation and reporting (MER) plan for this water sharing plan is published by December 2026. The implementation of the plan, including progress against the MER plan will be publicly reported on annually. In Year 9 of the plan, we will publicly report on the results of the monitoring and evaluation undertaken.

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## Environmental water provisions

The environmental water provisions (legal conditions) remain in the plan but not in a stand-alone 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
- Part 7 – Rules for major utility and other storages

In the draft plan, the rules which specify when the end of system environmental flow rule is not required to be met has been slightly changed to account for water extracted from Cadia mine above the Beneree gauge on Flyers Creek if the average flow over 120 days has been less than 10 ML/d. The intent is to ensure the end of system flow rule is being delivered regardless of authorised take by Cadia Mine in the unregulated Flyers Creek.

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## 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, numbers of houses and land use
- the total volumes or unit shares specified in the share components of all access licences to reflect current information.

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## Review of the Long-Term Average Annual Extraction Limit (LTAAEL)

### Establish a numeric LTAAEL

The draft plan includes an editorial note providing a numerical estimate for the Long-Term Average Extraction Limit based on conditions described under clause 16(1)(a).

### Review the numeric LTAAEL to ensure a sustainable level of take

It is proposed that at year 5 the LTAAEL will have been reviewed to determine a sustainable level of take. This review will build on the work currently being undertaken by the department to investigate how water sharing plans can consider and adapt to climate change. Any changes to the extraction limit will need to be considered within the context of the Basin Plan's sustainable diversion limits. The review will also consider cultural, social and economic outcomes.

The department has commenced a major program of integrating climate change and climate variability considerations into the plans. The work has commenced with a review of the minimum inflows to inform maintenance of water supply in inland regulated river systems. This is a key piece of work in relation to climate considerations within plans.

The draft plan includes provisions to consider the outcomes of this review and to allow the plan to be amended.

The department will seek the advice of the NRC during the review.

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### Amendment provisions:

Added an amendment provision to review and amend the end of system flow rules in 5 years to ensure they are delivering the intended environmental benefits. This review will consider the frequency with which the rule is delivered or suspended, as well as any impact of the proposed end of system amendment to include Cadia Mine extraction on water users or storage volumes in Carcoar Dam.

An amendment provision to facilitate the Belubula Water Security Project and establish rules relevant to the ongoing management of water infrastructure constructed as part of the project, if it proceeds.

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### More information

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