

Proposed amendments to the Peel Regulated River water sharing plan

A summary of proposed changes to the *Water Sharing Plan for the Peel Regulated River Water Source 2022*

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 NSW Government may amend plans within that 10-year period under certain circumstances, including if the changes are in the public interest.

The NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (the department) is proposing amendments to the Peel Regulated River plan and is informing stakeholders of these proposed changes. The changes are in the public interest as they relate to securing water for town water supply. This fact sheet summarises the changes proposed to the plan.

Increasing the reserve in Chaffey Dam set aside for town water supply

In 2016 Chaffey Dam was at 100% capacity. Over the following 3 years the Peel Valley experienced the worst drought on record, setting records for the worst 12, 24, and 36 month periods ever recorded. During this time Chaffey Dam dropped from 60% to 30% in under a 12-month period and reached a record low of 14% in July 2020. With the wet and dry cycles of inland northern NSWs we need to be prepared for droughts of this magnitude to avoid Tamworth being placed in this situation again.

To improve Tamworth short term security and ensure the town is more prepared for a severe drought, the department is seeking to implement a temporary increase to the water set aside in Chaffey Dam for town water needs. This will help reduce the time Tamworth spends in water restrictions as well as extend the duration of water supplies in an extreme event.

The *Water Sharing Plan for the Peel Regulated River Water Source 2022* (the Plan) requires town water to be set aside in Chaffey Dam on a two-year rolling basis. This means, in average non drought years, at the start of a water year 100% of town water needs is held for year 1 and 70% is held for following year 2. Once other high security water needs are met, the remaining 30% of the town

water supply is allocated and then lower security water, including general security (GS) licences, is allocated based on what remains in the dam.

A 7.1 GL increase would effectively mean holding 100% of Tamworth entitlement in the dam for two consecutive years at the start of each water year.

Permitting the Environmental Water Allowance to carry over unused water into the following year

Environmental water is provided in the system through planned environmental water, with a daily release volume of 3ML/d unless orders are being met, and an Environmental Water Allowance (EWA) of 5,000 shares.

The Plan currently does not allow unused EWA to be released in the following water year. We propose that the EWA would be able to carry over 100% of unused water into the following water year up to a maximum account limit of 200%. The EWA would forfeit any water carried over from the previous year in the event Chaffey Dam spills.

What do these changes mean for existing licence holders?

Both proposed changes are likely to impact available water determinations (water allocations) for existing water users in the Peel Regulated River.

Town Water Supply

Modelling shows this action would extend Tamworth's water supply by up to 8 months during severe droughts. It would also reduce the amount of time the town spends in water restrictions from 14.21% of the time under the base case scenario to 8.22% of the time. Level 5 restrictions would not occur under this scenario.

General Security Licence Holders

These changes are expected to have an impact on GS reliability, with the average GS Available Water Determination (AWD) in June decreasing from 73.8% in the base scenario to 68.9% when the reserve is increased.

The reserve increase will have minimal impacts on average annual flows at both Carroll Gap (end of system) and Piallamore (mid system). The measure is not intended to be a long-term solution. This measure could remain in place until 2032 when the Water Sharing Plan is reviewed, or until other longer-term water security solutions have been secured. The department and Tamworth Regional

Council are currently investigating several initiatives to secure Tamworth's long-term water supplies and ensure they can meet the future needs of the town.

Important: Impacts to average GS AWDs are expected to be offset through irrigator access to uncontrolled flows which would not be affected by these changes.

Stakeholders are encouraged to provide feedback on whether the use of uncontrolled flows typically offsets reduced GS AWDs.

Details on how to provide feedback are available below under **More information**.

Environmental Water Allowance

The department's modelling shows an increased reserve will result in a slight reduction in water for the EWA share component. However, in drought conditions the minimum daily flow will last longer. This action will help to avoid emergency measures like suspending environmental water releases, which negatively impacts ecosystems. Permitting the EWA to carry over unused water into the next water year enables a greater degree of flexibility for the NSW Environmental Water Manager. The EWA can be used more strategically during non-dry periods leading to improved environmental outcomes, including building resilience as the system moves into drought.

More information

Information on how water is allocated in NSW is available on the department's [website](#). Detailed information about water allocations in the Peel Regulated River Water Source is available in the [Peel water allocation method guide](#).

If you have questions or comments about the proposed amendments, please contact the water planning team at water.enquiries@dpie.nsw.gov.au by **COB Friday 21 March 2025**.