

Water Allocation Plan for the River Murray Prescribed Watercourse Sustainable Diversion Limits



Background

The Murray-Darling Basin Plan introduces new limits on how much water can be used within the Murray-Darling Basin system and each Basin state is required to make sure water use is within these limits.

Historically, total consumptive use across the Basin has been above environmentally sustainable levels of water use. Water has been recovered in each Basin state for the environment. This extra water will help support healthy rivers, wetlands and floodplains.

The Water Allocation Plan for the River Murray Prescribed Watercourse (the Plan) sets out how water from the South Australian portion of the River Murray is shared, and provides a transparent process for making allocation decisions.

Changes have been made to the water allocation framework in the Plan to meet the requirements of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan and to include sustainable diversion limits.

What are the sustainable diversion limits?

The Basin Plan sets long-term sustainable diversion limits (SDLs), about how much water can be used in the Murray-Darling Basin. This limit then ensures there is enough water remaining in the system to keep the River Murray in a healthy state. SDLs replace the former Cap on diversions set out in the Murray-Darling Basin Agreement.

The SDLs come into effect from July 2019, through water resource plans (WRPs) prepared by Basin States and accredited by the Murray-Darling Basin Authority. The WRPs must set out the state's rules for allocating and using water and show how these rules will keep water use within the SDL.

The Plan contains the rules for allocating and using water and now includes the SDL for the SA River Murray. The Plan forms a key element of the South Australian River Murray Water Resource Plan.



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Information about the WRP is provided in the South Australian River Murray Water Resources Plan fact sheet (available on the DEW website, details below).

How will sustainable diversion limits be applied?

The SDL is a long-term annual average - the amount of water that is actually used and that is allowed to be used varies from year to year because of climatic conditions, water availability and the rules in the WRP.

Each year, the amount of water used (actual use), and the amount allowed to be used (permitted use), is compared, and the difference is recorded on a register.

It is expected that there will be a difference between actual use and permitted use from year to year. The Basin Plan allows for this by maintaining a cumulative balance of debits and credits. Some years more water will be used than is allowed (resulting in a debit) and some years less water will be used than is allowed (resulting in a credit).

Non-compliance only occurs when the cumulative rolling debit is equal to or greater than 20 per cent of the SDL.

What does this mean for water users?

Compliance with the SDL is the responsibility of the South Australian Government, not individual entitlement holders. Entitlement holders are allowed to use the volume allocated to them, which will be calculated according to the rules in the Plan.

An extra provision has been included in the Plan to allow the Minister for Environment and Water to take action, in consultation with stakeholders, to address SDL non-compliance or risk of SDL non-compliance (Section 5.3.3 of the Plan). Any actions will seek to minimise adverse impacts for entitlement holders.

Historically, River Murray water use has been below that allowed under the existing Cap on diversions; however, levels of utilisation continue to grow.

Stakeholders will be consulted to identify options to address non-compliance with the SDL, if for some reason, an increase in water use is higher than currently estimated and causes non-compliance with the SDL.

Water recovery and the SDL

To help meet the SDLs, water has been recovered for the environment across the Murray-Darling Basin.

The South Australian River Murray has a water recovery target of 183.8 GL, but this does not affect water entitlements or water allocation.

Water entitlements have been recovered for the environment through water purchase and investment in water use efficiency programs. This has met approximately 75 per cent of South Australia's recovery target from the River Murray.

The remaining water recovery has been fully offset by South Australia's share of the 605 GL SDL adjustment arising from offset projects developed by Basin governments.

Offset projects (also called supply measures) are projects that use water more efficiently or achieve the environmental objectives in the Basin Plan using less water. This means that less water needs to be recovered and more water can remain in the system for other users. These projects will be completed in 2024 but the offset can be taken into account now.

More information can be found about the Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment Mechanism on the DEW website:

www.environment.sa.gov.au/topics/river-murray/basin-plan/adjustment-to-the-sustainable-diversion-limit

and on the Murray-Darling Basin Authority's website:

www.mdba.gov.au/basin-plan-roll-out/sustainable-diversion-limits-sdlam

I want to find out more about...

Sustainable Diversion Limits, please visit the DEW website:

www.environment.sa.gov.au/managing-natural-resources/river-murray/improving-river-health/basin-plan/sustainable-limits-on-water-use

The South Australian River Murray Water Resource Plan, please visit the DEW website:

www.environment.sa.gov.au/topics/river-murray/basin-plan/water-resource-planning

The Water Allocation Plan for the River Murray Prescribed Watercourse:

T: (08) 8463 6877

E: rmwap.feedback@sa.gov.au

Or visit:

www.naturalresources.sa.gov.au/rivermurraywap