

Replacing the Water Sharing Plan for the Barwon–Darling Unregulated River Water Source

The Water Sharing Plan for the Barwon-Darling Unregulated River Water Source 2025 will replace the previous 2012 plan. This document answers frequently asked questions about proposed changes to the plan.

What is a water sharing plan?

Water sharing plans are statutory plans made under the *NSW Water Management Act 2000*. The rules in the plans allow equitable sharing of water for all water uses, including the environment. The plans have a statutory timeframe of 10 years. The purpose of a water sharing plan is to:

- provide water users with a clear picture of when and how water will be available for extraction
- protect the fundamental environmental health of water sources
- ensure our water sources are sustainably managed in the long term.

The plans clearly define the rules for sharing in the available water in a water source. They also provide irrigators and farmers with continuing or 'perpetual' licences that have a title separate from the land, enabling better water trading opportunities. In addition, plans set out requirements for basic landholder rights – domestic and stock rights, harvestable rights and native title rights.

Water sharing plans support the long-term health of rivers and aquifers by making water available specifically for the environment.

Why is the Barwon–Darling Unregulated River plan being replaced?

NSW water sharing plans are valid for 10 years and are subject to a review by the NSW Natural Resources Commission (NRC). The responsible minister may extend or replace a plan on consideration of the recommendation of the NRC.

In 2019, the commission completed its review of the *Water Sharing Plan for the Barwon-Darling Unregulated and Alluvial Water Sources 2012* and recommended the plan be replaced. In 2020 and 2023, the NSW Government amended the 2012 plan to address priority NRC and other review recommendations, including amendments to better manage water for environmental outcomes. The Upper Darling Alluvial Groundwater Source was also moved out of this plan in 2020 to facilitate

development of NSW's surface and groundwater water resource plans to meet Basin Plan requirements. The department has now prepared a draft replacement plan for consultation – the draft *Water Sharing Plan for the Barwon-Darling Unregulated River Water Source 2025*. (the draft plan).

The draft replacement plan includes several changes including some recommended by the NRC.

How will the department consult on the replacement water sharing plan?

Stakeholder input is critical to the development of water sharing plans in NSW. We are consulting the community through:

- public information and consultation webinar session
- face-to-face information sessions
- one-on-one sessions on request
- public submissions.

The draft plan will be on public exhibition from **11 November to 20 December 2024**.

You can have your say by attending the public online meeting on **28 November 2024** and completing the submission form available from the department's website. A public information session will be held in Bourke on **25 November 2024** for stakeholders to discuss the proposed changes with department staff, share local knowledge and provide feedback as part of the community consultation process.

Is there a limit on how much water I can take with my licence?

Water access licences show the amount of entitlement that you have – called the share component. This share component can be expressed as ML/year or a number of 'unit shares' in the available water resource. The amount of water you can take is based on your licenced share component, the available water determination (AWD) and your account management rules and any relevant conditions on your access licence.

An AWD is made at least on 1 July each year. The AWD sets out a volume of water per share that will be placed into your water allocation account at the start of a water year (1 July) or a % of the entitlement volume if share component is expressed in ML/year. This is called an allocation. You can only take the volume of water that is in your water account, in accordance with the rules in the water sharing plan and any relevant conditions on your access licence and linked water supply work approval(s).

Unregulated river A Class, B Class and C Class licences in the Barwon-Darling water source can carry over water each year and are subject to an annual take limit of 3 ML/unit share, unless total extractions from the water source exceed the long-term average annual extraction limit (LTAAEL).

Individual daily extraction components (IDECs) limit the amount of water that can be taken each day from an unregulated river A Class, B Class or C Class licence in the Barwon-Darling water source.

Are changes proposed to rules governing when I can take water?

The flow reference point for the Collarenebri to Upstream Walgett Weir Pool Management Zone has been changed from the Barwon River at Tara gauge (422025) to the Barwon River at Caloola gauge (422035). No changes are proposed to the flow thresholds.

For more information about when you can take water and when you can't, go to the report card on the department's website.

Are changes proposed to rules governing trading licence shares or water allocations?

There are no changes proposed to trade rules for water shares and allocations. For more information about trade opportunities, go to the report card on the department's website.

How can I obtain a licence or additional water for a commercial enterprise?

Information about how to obtain a licence is provided on WaterNSW's licensing webpage: www.watarnsw.com.au/customer-services/water-licensing/licences

New or additional licence shares or allocations may be acquired through the water market. The plan establishes rules governing buying and selling shares, allocations and IDECs within the Barwon-Darling water source.

Does the draft plan propose changes to the estimated water requirements for basic landholder rights and licensed take?

We have updated the estimated water requirements for basic landholder rights. We have also updated the total volumes or unit shares specified in the share components of all access licences to reflect current information.

Questions on related work

The below questions are about work underway that may affect Barwon-Darling water users and communities. The outcomes of these projects may result in changes to the plan outside of the replacement process.

What is happening with the pump recalibration project?

The pump recalibration project has been delayed due to poor data availability and quality. The department is determining a suitable approach using the data that is available and will consult with all licence holders through a separate process when a proposed way forward is identified. Both the 2012 and draft replacement plan include provisions to enable amendments following the recalibration work.

What is happening with temporary trade of IDECs?

The 2012 plan was amended in 2023 to allow temporary trade (assignment) of IDECs. The department and WaterNSW are working on ICT system upgrades to operationalise these provisions. In the meantime, permanent trade of IDECs is and has been available since IDECs were introduced in 2020.

What is happening with the Northern Basin Connectivity Program?

In July 2024, the Connectivity Expert Panel provided their independent report to the Minister for Water. The report outlines its final findings and recommendations. The 'Building the pathway to improved Northern Basin connectivity' document outlines what the department will do to consider the Panel's findings and recommendations and determine next steps.

For more information see the department's Northern Basin Connectivity Program webpage at www.dpie.nsw.gov.au/water/our-work/projects-and-programs/northern-basin-connectivity-program.

More information

The draft plan, report card and other fact sheets are available on the [department's Water website](#).