

Available water determinations for groundwater

An **available water determination** sets the amount of water credited to the water allocation accounts associated with access licences. An available water determination applies to a category of water access licence, and there are various categories of water access licences in each groundwater source. Available water determinations are announced at the start of each water year (1 July), and further available water determinations can be made throughout the water year.

The available water determination for aquifer access licences is expressed as the number of megalitres (ML) per unit share, as these access licence share components are specified as a number of shares. For example, an available water determination of 0.8 ML/share means that a volume equivalent to 80% of a licence holder's entitlement is added to their water account at the start of the water year.

The available water determination for domestic and stock and local water utility access licences, and for other specific purpose access licences, is stated as a percentage of the share component of the licence, as these access licence share components are specified in megalitres. Domestic and stock and local water utility access licences will generally receive an available water determination of 100% of their share component. This reflects the priority of licence categories specified in the *Water Management Act 2000*.

Triggers for available water determinations less than 1 ML/share or 100%

An available water determination of less than the maximum of 1 ML/share or 100% can be triggered by the level of extraction in a groundwater source over preceding water years. This is compared to the long-term average annual extraction limit established in the water sharing plan.

All groundwater water sharing plans specify that a reduced available water determination for a groundwater source may be required when the average of annual extractions over the preceding five water years has exceeded the long-term average annual extraction limit by a specified amount (typically 5% or 10%).

If triggered, the available water determination for the following water year can be reduced by the amount required to return groundwater extraction to the long-term average annual extraction limit. Different available water determinations may be made for different licence categories, reflecting the priority specified in the Act and as specified in the water sharing plan.

In addition to these measures, groundwater water sharing plans are being progressively amended to provide for a reduced available water determination, should the New South Wales Government be required to reduce groundwater extraction to comply with sustainable diversion limits specified in the *Basin Plan 2012*.

Available water determination assessments

Groundwater extraction data is monitored and recorded by WaterNSW. Prior to the start of a water year (1 July) the NSW Department of Industry compares the average annual extraction in each groundwater source against the water sharing plan compliance triggers. If the extraction levels are close to the triggers outlined above, the department may ask WaterNSW to undertake additional monitoring and provide a more reliable estimate of the expected extraction for that current water year.

Where extraction has exceeded the water sharing plan's compliance trigger, the department makes an assessment to determine the available water determination necessary to bring extraction back down to the water sharing plan's extraction limit.

Assessments take into account requirements for basic landholder rights, and assume that high-priority categories of access licences will receive an available water determination of 100% in all but extreme circumstances. Available water determinations of less than 100% or 1 ML/unit share will generally only apply to access licences of lower priority categories.

There are a number of variables to consider when calculating the required allocation to bring usage down to the extraction limit. These include:

- extraction data for the current and previous years
- access licence account rules such as carry over and take limits
- past extraction and history of trading of water allocations from accounts of individual access licences.

The available water determination assessment considers the water available in individual accounts, which may include allocations carried over from the previous year. Any available water determination of less than 100% or 1 ML/unit share required to achieve compliance with water sharing plan limits needs to take account of the total water in accounts, and that in individual accounts prior to making the available water determination.

Available water determination announcements

Available water determinations are communicated through the department's website:

industry.nsw.gov.au/water/allocations-availability/allocations/determinations, and water allocations statements posted on the department's website.

Available water determinations can also be searched by water management area and water source in the 'Available Water Determinations Register', waterregister.waternsw.com.au/water-register-frame

Following the announcement of an available water determination, all water access licence accounts in the relevant water source are credited with the amount of water based on the available water determination.

Available water determinations are made initially at the commencement of the water year (1 July) based on an estimate of the preceding year's total extraction from a groundwater source. If the initial available water determination is less than 1 ML/share based on this estimate, then the available water determination will be reviewed when the final extraction data is released by WaterNSW and an additional available water determination may be made.

More information

More information is in the following fact sheets, available from industry.nsw.gov.au/water-resource-plan-consultation:

- *Lachlan Alluvium proposed changes to groundwater water sharing plans*
- *Groundwater-dependent ecosystems*
- *Sustainable Diversion limit compliance*
- *Water resource plans in NSW*

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