

LTAAEL compliance assessment for NSW Border Rivers Regulated River Water Source

Executive summary

This report describes the methods used to assess if extractions in the NSW Border Rivers Regulated River Water Source comply with the limit described in the water sharing plan in the 2020/21 water year. The assessment has found that long term average annual extractions were not compliant in 2020/21. However, compliance action taken by the NSW Government in 2021/22 and the commencement of floodplain harvesting licences this year, will see extractions return to compliance. The NSW Border Rivers regulated river water sharing plan was amended on 29 July 2022 to include rules for floodplain harvesting and the licences became fully operational on 15 August 2022.

Background and purpose

The water sharing plan for the NSW Border Rivers Regulated River Water Source requires an assessment of compliance with a Long-term Average Annual Extraction Limit (LTAAEL). The LTAAEL is sometimes referred to as the 'plan limit'.

The assessment is to be carried out annually by the Department of Planning and Environment - Water (DPE Water) following the end of each water year. LTAAEL compliance requires two scenario models; one to represent the LTAAEL and one to represent current conditions. The long-term results from both scenario models are compared to assess compliance.

Each water sharing plan defines the LTAAEL, how the compliance assessment is to be completed, triggers for non-compliance and subsequent compliance action. The LTAAEL includes multiple types of water use. However, the compliance assessment is based on the total.

This report summarises a compliance assessment for the NSW Border Rivers Regulated River Water Source for the 2020/21 water year. The assessment was based on best available models, using climate data from 1895 to 2021.

Scenarios and agreed model version

Model scenarios for Cap, water sharing plan and current conditions were selected based on evaluation against multiple scenario model selection criteria, including whether these had been documented and independently reviewed, how appropriate the management and levels of development are and consistency of the hydrology. For the NSW Border Rivers regulated river water source, the selected model scenarios reported in Table 1 are the most appropriate for LTAAEL compliance purposes.

The scenarios are based on the floodplain harvesting scenario models, which has been documented and published on our website. There are two reports. The model build report describes the development of the river system model – its conceptualisation, construction and calibration. The

scenario report describes how the model was used to assess the LTAEL and current conditions, as well as other scenarios required for the floodplain harvesting program.

Table 1: Model scenarios selected for NSW Border Rivers Regulated River Water Source for LTAEL assessment purposes

Scenario model	System file	Input data set
Cap conditions	BorderRivers_2021_11_08.rsproj	Default Input Set.NSWPlanLimit.CAP.
WSP conditions	BorderRivers_2021_11_08.rsproj	Default Input Set.QLD_ROP.ROP_On.NSW_BDL
Current conditions	BorderRivers_2021_11_08.rsproj	Default Input Set.NSW_1516
Current conditions with floodplain harvesting licences	BorderRivers_2021_11_08.rsproj	Default Input Set.NSW_1516.NSW_1516_fphscale

LTAEL compliance results

LTAEL assessment

The LTAEL is the modelled long-term average annual extractions calculated over the duration of the available climate record using either the Cap or the water sharing plan scenario model, whichever is the lesser. For this assessment the modelling period 1895-2021 is used. The results of this analysis are reported in Table 2.

The LTAEL for 2020/21 water year for NSW Border Rivers Regulated River Water Source is 206.1 gigalitres per year (GL/y), based on the water sharing plan scenario model. There are also unmodelled extractions estimated at 8.0 GL/y, based on estimates in the water sharing plan. These unmodelled estimates have not changed and are not included in LTAEL compliance assessment.

Table 2: Modelled long term average annual extractions (1895-2021) for Cap and water sharing plan scenarios (GL/y)

Extraction category	Cap scenario model	WSP scenario model
General and high security	96.1	93.1
Supplementary access	76.3	67.9
Local Water Utility	0.6	0.6
Floodplain harvesting		
Overbank flow	28.3	34.8
Total rainfall runoff	8.0	9.7
Total modelled extractions	209.3	206.1

Unmodelled estimates		
Basic Rights	8.0	8.0

This water sharing plan will be revised to include all water take components, such as plantation forestry and harvestable right dams, to harmonise with reporting required under the Basin Plan. In this regulated river water sharing plan area, the water source boundary is defined by the bank of the regulated river and hence plantation forestry and harvestable rights dams are located within the adjacent unregulated river water source.

In addition, water taken under a basic landholder right has been excluded from the compliance assessment. This is because any unmodelled estimates are excluded if no assessment of change has been made.

Compliance assessment

Compared to the LTAEL model scenario, the modelled long term average annual extractions from the current conditions model scenario are reported in Table 3.

Table 3: Modelled long term average annual extractions (1895-2021) for LTAEL and current conditions model scenarios (GL/y)

Extraction category	LTAEL scenario model	Current conditions scenario model
General and high security	93.1	93.8
Supplementary access	67.9	69.1
Local Water Utility	0.6	0.6
Floodplain harvesting		
Overbank flow	34.8	39.2
Total rainfall-runoff	9.7	10.6
Total modelled extractions	206.1	213.3

The key reason for differences between LTAEL and current scenario model results are:

- 13% growth in floodplain harvesting attributable to development of farm infrastructure, such as additional pumping and on farm storage capacity. Detailed summary of changes to farm infrastructure can be found in published Border Rivers [scenario report](#).

The current water sharing plan specifies that there is non-compliance where:

- Current condition extractions exceed LTAEL by 3% or more

The results show non-compliance as current total modelled extractions exceed LTAEL extractions by 3.5%.

As an outcome of comparable results for the 2019-20 LTAEL compliance assessment, which produced a similar result, an Available Water Determination (AWD) of 0.75 megalitre (ML)/share was applied to Supplementary Access entitlements to reduce Current Conditions’ extractions to LTAEL for the 2021/22 water year. This AWD is not included in the 2020-21 assessment.

Compliance actions

This assessment report is for the 2020-21 water year with the water sharing plan rules at the time.

The NSW Government took compliance action for the 2021-22 water year by reducing the available water determinations for Supplementary Access entitlements in the Border Rivers Regulated Rivers Water Source to 0.75 ML / share to return extractions to LTAEL.

Floodplain harvesting licences have now been issued and given legal effect in the NSW Border Rivers Regulated River Water Source. Rules for floodplain harvesting licences are defined in amendments made to the NSW Border Rivers Regulated River Water Sharing Plan made on 29 July 2022. These licences became fully operational on 15 August 2022 and are able to restrict water taken through floodplain harvesting and to return extractions to LTAEL. Future LTAEL compliance assessments will examine this further.

The floodplain harvesting licensing and accounting framework provides for a partial exemption for runoff into tailwater drains. This exempt rainfall-runoff volume is excluded from the definition of floodplain harvesting and from the definition of LTAEL with the amended water sharing plan.

Compared to LTAEL, the modelled long term average annual extractions from the current conditions with FPH licences model scenario are reported in Table 4.

Table 4: Modelled long term average annual extractions (1895-2021) for LTAEL and current conditions model scenarios (GL/y)

Extraction category	LTAEL scenario model	Current conditions with FPH licences scenario model
General and high security	93.1	94.3
Supplementary access	67.9	70.2
Local Water Utility	0.6	0.6
Floodplain harvesting		
Overbank flow	34.8	34.1
Non-exempt rainfall runoff	4.4	4.4
Exempt rainfall runoff	5.3	5.5
Total modelled extractions excluding exempt rainfall-runoff	200.8	203.6

The results show extractions under current conditions with floodplain harvesting exceed LTADEL by 1.4%. The Border Rivers Regulated River Water Source is expected to be compliant under the rules of the water sharing plan of 15 August 2022.

No further compliance action is required.

Supporting information

Results over Basin Plan assessment period

The results over the Basin Plan assessment period of 1895-2009 (Table 5) are included for reference only. These results will be used to track significance of future model updates.

Table 5: Modelled long term average annual extractions (1895-2009) for LTAAEL scenario model and Current with floodplain harvesting licences scenario model (GL/y)

Extraction category	LTAAEL scenario model	Current with floodplain harvesting licences scenario model
General and high security	93.9	95.2
Supplementary access	69.5	71.8
Local Water Utility	0.6	0.6
Floodplain harvesting		
Overbank flow	33.6	33.0
Non-exempt rainfall runoff	4.3	4.4
Total modelled extractions, excluding exempt rainfall-runoff	201.9	205.0