



Department of  
Primary Industries  
Office of Water

AUDIT OF IMPLEMENTATION

# Inland groundwater water sharing plan audit report cards

Prepared for the period between 1 July 2008 and  
30 June 2013

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**More information**

[www.water.nsw.gov.au](http://www.water.nsw.gov.au)

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## Acronyms and abbreviations

AEW	Adaptive environmental water
AWD	Available water determination
BLR	Basic Landholder Right
GDE	Groundwater dependent ecosystem
LTADEL	Long-term average annual extraction limit
ML	Megalitre
SDL	Sustainable Diversion Limit (as established in the Basin Plan)
SWC	State Water Corporation
the Minister	NSW Minister for Natural Resources, Land and Water
WMA	<i>Water Management Act 2000</i> (NSW)

## Glossary

***Water sharing plan term review*** refers to the Minister’s decision to extend the existing plan or replace it with a new one at the end of its first 10 year term in line with CI 43A provisions of the WM Act.

***Amend water sharing plan*** refers to changes made to the plan during its 10 year term. These changes may be provided for in the original plan provisions or made by the Minister under s.45(1)(a) of the Act

## Introduction

This report card is one of two prepared by the Office of Water and refined by the Audit Panel appointed by the Minister under section 44 of the *Water Management Act 2000* (WMA). It was used by the Audit Panel in its review of the effectiveness of the implementation of the water sharing plan provisions of the three water sharing plans covered by the 2013 audit. This is the first audit of these plans and covers the five year period from 2008-2009 to 2012-2013.

The report card forms an attachment to the Audit Panel's final report to the Minister. More details on the audit process, membership of the panel, together with the findings and additional measures identified by the Audit Panel that are required to give effect to the current plans, and lessons for future water sharing plans and the Commonwealth Basin Plan (developed under the *Water Act 2007*), are included in the panel's report to the Minister.

This report card contains a summary and assessment of implementation activities (see below for classification) for the relevant water sharing plans and, where relevant, additional explanation for the level of implementation achieved from 1 July 2008 to 30 June 2013. This report card also contains recommended actions that the Audit Panel considers necessary to improve future implementation. See Table 1 for the names of the plans and the abbreviations used in this report card.

**Table 1: Inland groundwater water sharing plans**

Water sharing plan	Abbreviation used in report cards
Lower Lachlan Groundwater Source	Lower Lachlan
NSW Great Artesian Basin Groundwater Sources	GAB

Report cards are aligned with the sections in the water sharing plans. There are no report cards for plan sections that provide context, or those which only contain enabling provisions linking the plan to the WMA (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Water sharing plan sections that do not require report cards**

Plan section	Title
Part 1	Introduction
Part 2	Vision, objectives, strategies and performance indicators
Part 6	Bulk access regime
Part 13	Monitoring and reporting

Note: The *Water Sharing Plan for the NSW Great Artesian Basin Groundwater Sources 2008* does not include parts for monitoring and reporting or for amending the Plan.

Assessment of implementation is classified as follows:

- Always implemented: Always implemented when required, or not required to be implemented as triggers for action have not been reached, but everything is in place should action be required.
- Sometimes implemented: Required to be implemented and sometimes implemented.
- Not implemented: Required to be implemented but never implemented.

- Not required: Activities not yet scheduled to commence or Minister has not exercised her discretion to act.

Reflecting the requirements of the WMA and the terms of reference of the Audit Panel, the focus of the report cards is on the implementation of the provisions in the plans. They do not attempt to assess the outcomes or effectiveness of the plan in achieving its objectives.

The preparation of the report cards has required an examination of each individual clause in both plan covered by the audit. Consequently, the level of detail, wording and implementation activities for each plan area documented in the report cards mirrors the variations across plans.

Wherever possible, activities that have the same implementation requirements and classification across plans have been grouped together. Many of the report card entries assessed as “Always implemented” cover both water sharing plans and multiple years, whilst many of those classified as “Not implemented” cover one plan for only some of the past five years. This means that a simple tally of the number of activities in each colour coded category in the report cards is not useful in gaining an overall picture of the proportion of implementation activities required by the water sharing plans have been carried out. Recognising this, a separate quantitative analysis of implementation activities was conducted by the Office of Water staff for use by the Audit Panel. For more details, see the Audit Panel’s report to the Minister.

The focus on implementation of water sharing plan provisions also means that the report cards do not summarise all of the water management activities that the government is involved in. Activities that complement the implementation of the plans or are undertaken to fulfil NSW requirements under the National Water Initiative, State Plan or other drivers are not reported on.

The considerable NSW Government effort and investment in the establishment, monitoring and review of performance indicators of water source condition changes are also not covered by the report cards. These performance indicators will be used to determine the performance of the plan against their objectives at the end of the 10 year term and so would be classified in the report cards as “Not required” (activities not yet scheduled to commence). Information on ecological, and social and economic performance monitoring is available in the progress reports for the relevant water sources and on the Office of Water website at [www.water.nsw.gov.au](http://www.water.nsw.gov.au)

## Part 3 – Basis for water sharing

Table 3: Recharge

Water sharing plan	Assessment	Explanation of assessment	Comment	Required action
Lower Lachlan and GAB	Not required	<p>Changes to annual recharge estimates have not been required in these plans.</p> <p>Change to the sustainable pressure estimate equivalent within the Surat, Warrego and Central groundwater sources in the GAB water sharing plan has not been required.</p>	<p>Recharge studies have not been undertaken to change recharge estimates in either plan.</p> <p>A regional groundwater flow model was completed for the Lower Lachlan in 2007 (Water Sharing in the major inland alluvial aquifers Progress report 2006-2008).</p> <p>The wording in clause 12(3) of the GAB water sharing plan is ambiguous and needs to clearly state that the volumes in 12(3) (a), (b) and (c) are the maximum volumes that can be extracted to maintain the sustainable pressure estimate equivalent in the Surat, Warrego and Central groundwater sources.</p>	<p>The Office of Water to amend the GAB water sharing plan to correct a drafting error in clause 12(3).</p>

## Part 4 – Environmental water provisions

Table 4: Planned environmental water

Water sharing plan	Assessment	Explanation of assessment	Comment	Required action
Lower Lachlan and GAB	Always implemented	<p>Planned environmental water provisions are implemented via limits to extraction. Limits have been complied with in both plans. All licences issued under the WMA contain conditions that, if complied with, limit use to the required levels and protect the planned environmental water.</p> <p>Changes to planned environmental water volumes have not been required.</p> <p>One hundred per cent of the water saved through the Cap and Pipe the Bores program from 1990 to 30 June 1999 and seventy per cent of the water saved through the Cap and Pipe the Bores program after 1 July 1999 was reserved as planned environmental water.</p>	<p>In November 2008 the Minister signed a Controlled Allocation Order for access licences in the Central, Warrego and Surat groundwater sources within the GAB water sharing plan area. The sale of the licences was made possible through water savings from the Cap and Pipe the Bores program.</p> <p>Additional compliance resources were requested in the Office of Water's submission for the 2010 IPART Determination and water charges by the Office of Water increased.</p>	<p>The Office of Water to continue to monitor installation of metering under its Water Use Monitoring Project.</p> <p>The Office of Water to consider results of any new or updated GDE studies as part of any amendment to the plan or upon review of the plan.</p>

Table 5: Adaptive environmental water

Water sharing plan	Assessment	Explanation of assessment	Comment	Required action
Lower Lachlan and GAB	Not required	No licences have been committed as AEW in any groundwater system in NSW.		

## Part 5 – Basic landholder rights

Table 6: Interference management

Water sharing plan	Assessment	Explanation of assessment	Comment	Required action
Lower Lachlan and GAB water sharing plans	Always implemented	In the absence of any indicators of interference issues, interference management strategies provided for in the plan have not been required.	A small number of telephone complaints have been received from groundwater users in the Lower Lachlan plan area about drawdown but no interruption to water supply was identified and no formal complaints were lodged. As such no action was required.	The Office of Water to ensure that domestic and stock use is limited in line with guidelines under development for the take and use of water for domestic consumption and stock watering, once the government approves them.
Lower Lachlan	Not required	The Minister has not made the reasonable use guidelines (provision under s.52 of the WMA and provided for in the plans).	The Office of Water is developing guidelines for the take and use of water for domestic consumption and stock watering. These will set limits on extraction of water for domestic and stock purposes.	

Table 7: Domestic and stock rights

Water sharing plan	Assessment	Explanation of assessment	Comment	Required action
Lower Lachlan and GAB	Always implemented	<p>A revised method for the calculation of BLR has been developed and is being used in the development of new water sharing plans.</p> <p>Using this methodology, estimates of domestic and stock rights in the Lower Lachlan and Southern Recharge Water Source may have increased.</p>	<p>The new method for estimating BLR incorporates factors such as the area of land, land use (e.g. rural and urban) and the reliance on groundwater.</p> <p>There remains some uncertainty with estimating BLR using state wide mapping and survey information.</p>	The Office of Water to review and update BLR figures when plans are reviewed or replaced.

Table 8: Native title rights

Water sharing plan	Assessment	Explanation of assessment	Comment	Required action
Lower Lachlan and GAB	Not required	No native title rights for water have been established in these plan areas during their first five years of operation.		

Note: No report cards have been prepared for Parts 6 (Bulk access regime) of the water sharing plans as they do not contain any provisions requiring action by the government.

## Part 7 – Requirements for water for extraction under access licences

Table 9: Changes to share components

Water sharing plan	Assessment	Explanation of assessment	Comment	Required action
GAB	Not required	Share components in the Eastern and Southern Recharge groundwater sources have not been reduced.	The Office of Water now manages sustainable extraction of groundwater through AWDs, not by reducing share components.	The Office of Water to correct estimations of share components contained in these water sources at the review and replacement of the plans.
Lower Lachlan	Always implemented	<p>The date to cancel supplementary water access licences has not been reached. AWDs for supplementary water access licences have been reduced gradually in line with the plan's staged approach to cancelling these licences by 1 July 2018.</p> <p>Extraction of water by supplementary water access licence holders has reduced in line with plan rules to reduce overall extractions in this groundwater source.</p>		

## Part 8 – Rules for granting access licences

Table 10: Granting access licences

Water sharing plan	Assessment	Explanation of assessment	Comment	Required action
Lower Lachlan and GAB	Always implemented	Licences granted in line with plan provisions.		

Table 11: Granting or amending water supply work approvals

Water sharing plan	Assessment	Explanation of assessment	Comment	Required action
GAB	Sometimes implemented	<p>Some water supply works for BLR bores constructed after the implementation of the Cap and Pipe the Bores program do not meet the definition of 'replacement' bores and do not meet distance criteria for GDEs in the GAB.</p> <p>Two GDE's have been removed from Schedule 4 of the plan because the springs were reported to be getting water from other sources.</p>	<p>Under the Cap and Pipe the Bores program, free flowing uncontrolled bores are capped and new efficient bores are drilled. The replacement bore is not always drilled near the old bore, and thus does not meet the 'replacement bore' criteria of being within 20 metres of the original bore and gets treated as a new water supply work approval. The approval is assessed favourably as there is a net environmental gain to the groundwater source</p>	<p>The Office of Water to consider amending the distance rules in the GAB Plan and other relevant water sharing plans where bores have a net positive pressure impact (or env) at Plan replacement.</p>

## Part 9 – Limits to the availability of water

Table 12: Long-term average annual extraction limits

Water sharing plan	Assessment	Explanation of assessment	Comment	Required action
Lower Lachlan and GAB	Always implemented	The LTAAELs are being implemented and complied with in both plans.	The wording of the annual extraction for the Surat, Warrego and Central groundwater sources in the GAB water sharing plan is incorrect and results in the LTAAEL being a negative number. However, the intent of the clause is being implemented as per the intent of the plan and the annual extractions in these groundwater sources are below the LTAAEL.	The Office of Water to amend the description of the annual extraction limit in the GAB Plan for the Surat, Warrego and Central groundwater sources as soon as possible to correctly describe the calculation of the LTAAEL.

Table 13: Variations to extraction limits

Water sharing plan	Assessment	Explanation of assessment	Comment	Required action
Lower Lachlan and GAB	Not required	No change to the LTAAEL has been required in any groundwater source.	There is no intention to vary the recharge estimates, the sustainable pressure estimates or the planned environmental water in these plans.  A controlled allocations auction in 2009 increased water access licence entitlement in the Surat, Warrego and Central groundwater sources in the GAB.	Upon expiry of the Lower Lachlan groundwater plan the NSW Office of Water will manage extractions in the Lower Lachlan groundwater source to a Sustainable Diversion Limit (SDL) of 117 GL as required in Basin Plans.

Table 14: Compliance with long-term average annual extraction limits

Water sharing plan	Assessment	Explanation of assessment	Comment	Required action
Lower Lachlan and GAB	Always implemented	Compliance with LTAAELs has been managed according to plan rules.	<p>All extraction in the Lower Lachlan, Eastern and Southern Recharge groundwater sources are being monitored annually.</p> <p>Extraction in the Surat, Central and Warrego groundwater sources are now recommended to be metered. Extractions have not yet approached the LTAAELs set in these groundwater sources. Reading of meters in the Surat, Central and Warrego Groundwater Sources by State Water is scheduled for this water year.</p> <p>On 14 February 2014 an amendment order for the GAB water sharing plan modified the growth in use trigger from five per cent over a three year rolling average to 10 per cent over a five year rolling average.</p>	

Table 15: Available water determinations

Water sharing plan	Assessment	Explanation of assessment	Comment	Required action
Lower Lachlan and GAB	Always implemented	All AWDs were announced when required. Media releases announcing AWDs expressed them in the correct units in the first year of the plans. Subsequent AWDs were calculated as specified in the plan.	A slight error on the Office of Water's Public Register, which lists that the AWD for the GAB for Local Water Utility Water Access Licences in the first two years of the Plan as 80 per cent; however archived media releases indicate 100 per cent were announced as per plan rules.	The Office of Water to correct error on Public Register for AWDs in the first two years the GAB Plan was in effect.
Lower Lachlan	Always implemented	AWDs for supplementary licences were gradually reduced, in line with the water sharing plan as part of the staged phasing out of this licence category and the ultimate cancellation of licences by the deadlines set out in the plan		

## Part 10 – Rules for managing access licences

Table 16: Water allocation accounts

Water sharing plan	Assessment	Explanation of assessment	Comment	Required action
Lower Lachlan and GAB	Sometimes implemented	All access licences were regularly debited against access licence water allocation accounts. However some rules relating to annual accounting for water extraction were not always implemented in line with the water sharing plan rules.	<p>The majority of accounts were managed in line with plan provisions. However, a small number of accounts for aquifer access licences carried over more water or had more water in their accounts than permitted. This occurs in some cases following a permanent transfer in the middle of the water year.</p> <p>Implementation of metering is not complete in all groundwater sources within the GAB water sharing plan area,</p>	<p>The Office of Water to continue to work with SWC to ensure that water accounting systems are working correctly in accordance with the water sharing plan water account provisions.</p> <p>Implementation of metering in all groundwater sources within the GAB water sharing plan area is imminent. The Office of Water to continue to work with SWC as metering is introduced.</p>

Table 17: Accrual of water allocations

Water sharing plan	Assessment	Explanation of assessment	Comment	Required action
Lower Lachlan	Always implemented	All accounts were credited following AWD determinations.		

Table 18: Annual account for water extractions

Water sharing plan	Assessment	Explanation of assessment	Comment	Required action
Lower Lachlan	Sometimes implemented	The annual accounting rules for water extraction were mostly implemented in line with the plan's provisions.	The majority of accounts for aquifer access licences were managed in line with plan provisions. However, in some years, a small number of accounts for aquifer access licences carried over more water and held more water in their accounts than is permitted in the plan.	The Office of Water to continue to work with SWC to ensure that water accounting systems are working correctly in accordance with the water sharing plan water account provisions.

Table 19: Management of local impacts

Water sharing plan	Assessment	Explanation of assessment	Comment	Required action
Lower Lachlan and GAB	Not required	Declaration of local impact areas has not been required.  <i>Note: Local impact areas may be established in all water sharing plans but are done so for specific management issues such as water quality, water level and aquifer integrity (see below).</i>		The Office of Water to continue to monitor extraction, changes in water levels and water quality in the Lower Lachlan Plan area to assess the need for local impact areas and interference management strategies.  The Office of Water to continue to monitor extractions and changes in water levels in the GAB plan Area.  The Office of Water to source funds and resources to implement a water quality monitoring program in the GAB Plan area.

Table 20: Extraction interference between neighbouring bores

Water sharing plan	Assessment	Explanation of assessment	Comment	Required action
Lower Lachlan	Always implemented	Licences for new and replacement bores have been issued in line with the rules for minimum distance between neighbouring bores	Distance requirements are included as a condition on new and replacement bore licences. Licence holders and licensed drillers are required to comply with these conditions.	

Table 21: Water level management

Water sharing plan	Assessment	Explanation of assessment	Comment	Required action
Lower Lachlan and GAB	Not required	The establishment of local impact areas has not been required in the plan areas.	A status report drafted by the Office of Water in 2012 indicated that water level declines in the Lower Lachlan Groundwater Source have stabilised in recent water years and impacts remain within acceptable levels (Draft - Lower Lachlan Groundwater Source Management Area 012 Groundwater Status Report 2012).	The Office of Water to continue to monitor groundwater level fluctuations and assess the need for ongoing and/or further management strategies to manage impacts on groundwater levels associated with extraction.

Table 22: Water quality management

Water sharing plan	Assessment	Explanation of assessment	Comment	Required action
Lower Lachlan and GAB	Not required	No local impact areas for water quality management have been required or declared by the Minister.	<p>The NSW Office of Water commissioned Parsons Brinckerhoff to characterise the hydrogeochemistry and investigate the risks posed by groundwater pumping on groundwater quality. The project was funded by National water Commission and included the Lower Lachlan Alluvium. A report on characterisation and risks to groundwater quality was published in 2011.</p> <p>Available data is geographically sporadic and collected over a large time range. Generally, salinity in this groundwater source is low with TDS generally below 1,500 mg/L east of the Cobb Highway. West of the Cobb Highway salinity has been reported as moderate to high. Samples collected in 2013 from a bore located near Oxley reported TDS up to 5,800 mg/L.</p> <p>Apart from data collected under the NWC funded project and from pumping bores during 2002 -2008 no scheduled sampling is currently occurring in the Lower Lachlan.</p> <p>The NSW Office of Water has since developed a strategy for water quality monitoring and is in the process of determining environmental value classifications (or beneficial use category), undertaking risk assessments and developing an implementation strategy for priority groundwater sources.</p> <p>The Lower Lachlan plan requires a baseline of electrical conductivity to be set in year 6 of the Plan.</p>	<p>The Office of Water to source funds and resources to implement water quality monitoring program.</p> <p>The Office of Water to investigate reported changes in water quality.</p> <p>The Office of Water to finalise report on water quality results for data collected 2002-2008 in the Lower Lachlan groundwater source.</p> <p><i>Note: Water quality is seen to decline to unacceptable levels when it has declined to a lower beneficial use class as identified in the Australian and New Zealand Environment and Conservation Council, "Water quality guidelines" 2001 and the National Health and Medical Research Council, "Raw water for drinking purposes guidelines".</i></p>

Table 23: Protection of groundwater dependent ecosystems and Aboriginal cultural heritage values

Water sharing plan	Assessment	Explanation of assessment	Comment	Required action
Lower Lachlan	Not required	No GDEs have been identified in the Lower Lachlan plan area.	<p>Individual studies of GDEs within the plan areas have not been undertaken. Instead, the Office of Water has conducted state-wide identification of potential groundwater dependent terrestrial vegetation, aimed at developing a map of such GDEs which includes information on location of sites in existing and proposed water sharing plans and provides guidance for future investigations for mapping GDEs (this work remains ongoing). GDE work for the Lachlan is anticipated to be completed in 2014.</p> <p>Pilot studies for identifying additional GDEs (see Macro water sharing plans – the approach for groundwater. A report to assist community consultation) in plan areas has also commenced.</p> <p>The Aboriginal Water Initiative program is investigating and identifying groundwater dependent culturally significant sites.</p>	<p>Following completion of GDE studies, the Office of Water to include additional GDEs in plans as a plan amendment as required.</p> <p><i>Note: Changes to GDE schedules included in plans will be done annually, to avoid continual amendments.</i></p>

Table 24: Protection of aquifer integrity

Water sharing plan	Assessment	Explanation of assessment	Comment	Required action
Lower Lachlan	Not required	No local impact areas for aquifer integrity management have been required.	The integrity of the Lower Lachlan groundwater source will continue to be protected through the implementation of the water sharing plan rules.	The Office of Water to continue groundwater level monitoring and investigate reports of land subsidence (aquifer compaction) or reduction in bore yields.

Table 25: Extraction restrictions and group registration

Water sharing plan	Assessment	Explanation of assessment	Comment	Required action
Lower Lachlan	Not required	Restrictions on pumping rates and times by the Minister have not been required to manage local impacts of extraction.		The Office of Water to continue groundwater level monitoring and investigate reports of reduction in bore yields.

Table 26: Infrastructure failure

Water sharing plan	Assessment	Explanation of assessment	Comment	Required action
Lower Lachlan and GAB	Not required	There have been no requirements to set up monitoring bores to managed local impact restrictions.		The Office of Water to continue to maintain a network of monitoring bores across the groundwater sources, with emphasis on areas of high stress / competition for water.

## Part 11 – Access licence dealing rules

Table 27: Access licence dealing rules

Water sharing plan	Assessment	Explanation of assessment	Comment	Required action
Lower Lachlan and GAB	Always implemented	All dealings have been in line with the Minister's dealing principles, the WMA and the water sharing plan provisions.	All dealings that have taken place have been within groundwater sources in both these plans.	

## Part 12 – Mandatory Conditions

Table 28: Mandatory conditions on access licences

Water sharing plan	Assessment	Explanation of assessment	Comment	Required action
Lower Lachlan and GAB	Always implemented	All mandatory conditions for access licences have been placed on licences.		

Table 29: Mandatory conditions on works approvals

Water sharing plan	Assessment	Explanation of assessment	Comment	Required action
Lower Lachlan and GAB	Always implemented	All mandatory conditions for water supply works approvals were placed on approvals in 2008.		

Note: No report cards have been prepared for Part 13 (Monitoring and reporting) of the water sharing plans as they do not contain any rules which must be implemented. Details of monitoring activities can be found on the NSW Office of Water internet site [www.water.nsw.gov.au](http://www.water.nsw.gov.au) and in the Implementation Progress Reports for each plan

## Part 14 – Amendments of this Plan

Table 30: Amendments to recharge figures

Water sharing plan	Assessment	Explanation of assessment	Comment	Required action
Lower Lachlan	Not required	There was an amendment to the average annual recharge figure prior to commencement of the plan.	The plan was amended in January 2008 following gazettal, but prior to commencement, to reduce the recharge volume from 120,000 ML/year to 108,000 ML/year.	

Table 31: Amendments to the extraction limits

Water sharing plan	Assessment	Explanation of assessment	Comment	Required action
Lower Lachlan	Not required	There has been one amendment to the LTAAEL in this plan.	The amendment made to the recharge figure in 2008 affected the figures used to determine the LTAAEL. Therefore the LTAAEL set in 2008 was amended from 96,000 ML/yr to 108,000 ML/yr plus water allocations made to supplementary water access licences, plus the requirements for basic landholder rights.	

Table 32: Amendments to high priority GDEs

Water sharing plan	Assessment	Explanation of assessment	Comment	Required action
Lower Lachlan	Not required	There have been no amendments listing high priority GDEs in this plan.	Identification of additional GDEs in the Lower Lachlan Groundwater Source is underway and should be completed in the next 12 months.	<i>See comments in Part 10 (Protection of groundwater dependent ecosystems and Aboriginal cultural heritage values)</i>

Table 33: Amendments relating to planned environmental water

Water sharing plan	Assessment	Explanation of assessment	Comment	Required action
Lower Lachlan	Not required	There have been no amendments to planned environmental water.		