

Use of LTDLE factors for unregulated river systems

There were many similar themes and commonly asked questions during the recent call for submissions relating to amended long-term diversion limit equivalence (LTDLE) cap factors. The responses below are provided in relation to the issues raised.

Both the Barwon–Darling and the intersecting streams are unregulated systems that have historically behaved very differently to regulated catchments. Factors for these areas have to be determined differently from those in other catchments. In the short term they will be estimated.

NSW is working with the Commonwealth and the MDBA to review the information that was originally used to agree on a recovery volume in these unregulated systems. This review will allow us to estimate factors on a case-by-case basis before the commencement of the water resource plans on 1 July 2019.

Why are these systems different from other river systems?

In the past, NSW did not require water take in unregulated systems to be tracked through meters. While water take was measured, the scale of diversions in these catchments was much lower than in a typical regulated system, and was thought to pose a lower degree of risk to the environment.

The relatively small scale of diversions also meant there was limited interest in more active management of water. Water sharing between users was managed by low-intervention rules, and there were few reasons to build models of long-term diversions in these systems and develop more active rule sets. Collectively, this has meant we have no models and no recorded diversion data that can be used to calculate the LTDLE for these systems.

Proposed requirements for metering in NSW mean that water take in unregulated water sources will be metered. Further, there are trials of new remote sensing techniques that have made it possible to build models for smaller unregulated valleys. In the future, this data will be used to calculate LTDLE factors for unregulated systems.

However, the Commonwealth has bought very few entitlements in the unregulated catchments, and it has relatively small entitlement shares. This means that the associated factors don't significantly affect the overall water recovery balance. As a result, the NSW Government has decided there is no reason to delay the release of all other factors while waiting for Commonwealth factors for unregulated systems to be calculated.

What factors are we using in the meantime?

For the Barwon–Darling, factors were developed to reflect the unique nature of entitlements, which represent an individual share of the cap.

Within the intersecting streams, the National Parks and Wildlife Service are reconfiguring existing structural works at the Toorale property to meet environmental objectives. The water rights for this property were previously purchased for the environment, and the works have given new insight into how productive water was formerly used at Toorale. This information is being reviewed for use by NSW and the MDBA. This process will directly produce a new estimate of the baseline diversion limit (BDL) for the intersecting streams, which will inform the recovery volume for the area.