



Australian Government



Inspector-
General of
Water
Compliance

Sustainable Diversion Limit Compliance Statement for 2023-2024

August 2025

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Acknowledgement of the Traditional Owners of the Murray–Darling Basin

We pay our respects to the Traditional Owners and their Nations of the Murray-Darling Basin. We acknowledge their deep cultural, social, environmental, spiritual and economic connection to their lands and waters.

Aboriginal people should be aware that this publication may contain images, names or quotations of deceased persons.

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Compliance Statement by the Inspector-General on Sustainable Diversion Limits

This is my fourth independent assessment of Basin State agencies compliance with sustainable limits under the Basin Plan.

For the 2023-2024 water accounting year, all 78 SDL resource units assessed were found to be compliant.

Most SDL resource units appear to be trending toward higher water balance credits. This reflects a three-year, wetter-than-average period contributing to the accumulation of credits.

31 SDL resource units are unable to be assessed. This is an improvement since my last annual compliance statement where 54 were unable to be assessed. A further five groundwater resource plans in New South Wales have now been accredited by the Australian Government, commenced and eligible to be assessed for SDL Compliance.

However, I am unable to fully assess surface water and groundwater SDL compliance in New South Wales. Concerningly, there are still water resource plans in New South Wales that are yet to be submitted and accredited; specifically, the surface water and groundwater water resource plans for the Namoi and Gwydir catchments. It is uncertain when these water resource plans will be resubmitted or accredited, and therefore when SDL compliance will be enforceable.

The majority of water taken in the Murray-Darling Basin is yet to be included in SDL compliance assessment under the Basin Plan.

During the 2023-2024 water year, total surface water take (see Figure 1) across the Murray-Darling Basin reached 11,063.87 GL and groundwater take (see Figure 2) totalled 1,232 GL.

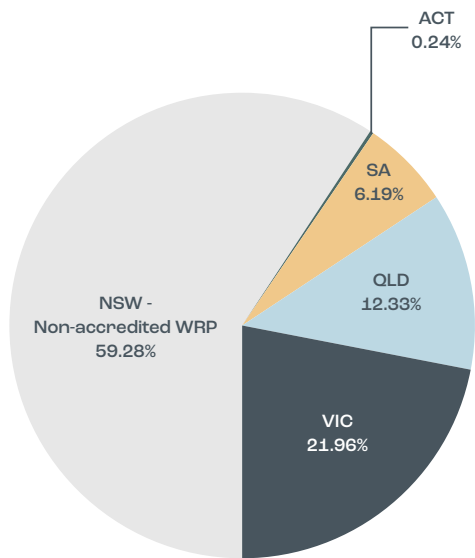


Figure 1: Proportion of Annual Actual Take (surface water) for the Basin by State.

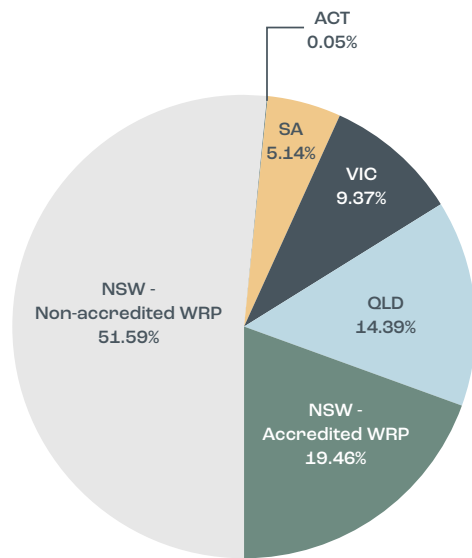


Figure 2: Proportion of Annual Actual Take (groundwater) for the Basin by State.

Changes to Baseline Diversion Limits are significant and risky.

At the start of the Basin Plan, baseline diversion limits were set. By basic definition, a baseline should be a starting point which does not change and can be used consistently over time for comparison. However, the Plan left open the possibility that baseline diversion limits for surface water could change. As implementation of the Plan continues, I am observing a willingness by state and commonwealth agencies to make changes to the baselines. This makes compliance, accountability and monitoring of outcomes very difficult as the goalposts are moving. It also has consequence for public trust and confidence which is an important consideration for me as the Inspector-General.

For example, in the Barwon-Darling Watercourse, the Baseline Diversion Limit and Sustainable Diversion Limit have both increased through the recent water resource plan accreditation process. The sustainable limit is now higher than the original baseline of take in 2012.

When baselines change, this has implications for the assumptions made in 2012 which underpin important areas of the Basin Plan such as sustainability and recovery volumes. The volume, frequency and consequence of changes to baseline limits are issues which should be examined and publicly ventilated by the MDBA in the review of SDLs in the Basin Plan in 2026.

Accounting for floodplain harvesting is a significant ongoing concern.

Both permitted take and actual take for floodplain harvesting are modelled in water accounting. As a result, permitted take for this class of water will equal actual take. The figures in the Basin Plan accounting for actual take are disconnected from the reality of water taken on the ground. This approach renders SDL compliance ineffective for managing floodplain harvesting take under the Basin Plan.

Reforms are currently introducing measurement devices onto farm dams which floodplain harvest, however implementation is slow to deliver. Concerningly, there is no clear pathway or timeline to complete roll out of devices and include on-ground measurement of floodplain harvesting take in the SDL accounting process. This must be addressed by the MDBA, NSW and Queensland agencies. The Basin Plan review appears to offer a timely opportunity for all parties to address this longstanding issue.

Water recovery is an ongoing and important element of the Basin Plan.

When water is under recovered by the Australian Government, this increases the availability of water for consumption under the Basin Plan. If left unaddressed, large volumes of under-recovered water will undermine sustainable levels of take and ultimately the delivery of environmental outcomes. Currently, under-recovery levels associated with the 'Bridging the Gap' program are relatively low and decreasing.

Multi-agency processes for SDL compliance are inefficient.

The annual provision of data from the basin states to the MDBA, and subsequently from the MDBA to the Inspector-General is too slow. Delays are affecting timely compliance assessment. This is now a recurrent issue over a number of years.

Design of the SDL compliance system continues to be improved to support confidence.

In 2023, the Restoring Our Rivers Act (formally the *Water Amendment (Restoring Our Rivers) Act 2023* amended the *Water Act 2007* and the *Basin Plan 2012*. These amendments enabled provisions within the Basin Plan that allow the MDBA to adjust surface water SDL balances for water resource plans delayed past July 2019. This change partly addresses issues associated with widespread delays to accreditation of water resource plans. These changes help maintain confidence in SDL compliance by equitably accounting for water use from a consistent starting date.

SDLs are central to the successful implementation of the Basin Plan. I am pleased to note SDLs are a priority focus area for the MDBA in the review of the Basin Plan in 2026. The effectiveness of SDLs in achieving environmental outcomes across the Basin demands thorough assessment.

The Inspector-General is building trust into SDL compliance.

I announce that I have established an SDL Compliance Advisory Panel (the Panel) to ensure I have access to the highest level of expertise available on matters related to SDL compliance. The Panel will provide independent guidance on best practice and continuous improvement for SDL compliance. I have appointed Mr Anthony (Tony) Slatyer as Chair of the Panel. Mr Slatyer brings extensive water policy and strategy experience to the Panel. I am currently in the process of appointing the other members of the Panel in consultation with the Chair so that the full Panel will be available to provide advice on the next annual SDL compliance process and statement.

I am committed to making the SDL compliance assessment process clearer and more transparent. Accompanying this Statement is a detailed report designed to support that objective. By taking an active approach to compliance monitoring my aim is to highlight patterns, identify emerging areas of concern, and provide meaningful insights into Basin State adherence to agreed limits of water take. This Compliance Statement is part of that effort, to build understanding, promote accountability, and ensure that the Basin's water resources are managed responsibly and transparently.

While I am encouraged by the ongoing strides toward sustainable water management across the Murray-Darling Basin, there remains an extensive amount to do in implementation of the Basin Plan to achieve lasting impact and outcomes.



The Hon. Troy Grant

Inspector-General of Water Compliance



