

Restrictions on River Murray water allocation trade into SA



Transfers from upstream of the Barmah Choke

The Barmah Choke is a narrow and shallow stretch of the River Murray (upstream of Echuca in Vic) that can carry relatively low rates of flow before the water level in the river channel rises and spills over the banks and onto the surrounding floodplain. During hot, dry weather, demand for water downstream of the Choke can exceed the river channel's water carrying capacity (~10,000 ML/day)

Water allocation transfers from upstream of the Choke (Zones 6 and 10) to any zone below the choke (including SA, Zone 12) can exacerbate the problems of the Choke because it increases the volume of water to be delivered through the Choke.

This can lead to:

- Competition for the limited channel-capacity, in which case existing entitlement holders downstream of the Choke could miss out on some delivery; and/or
- Increases operational 'losses' to evaporation and seepage, flooding of surrounding areas, and potential environmental damage depending on the time of year of the flooding.

Upstream to downstream water allocation transfers are therefore only permitted if there has been an equivalent or greater volume of trade from downstream to upstream of the choke. Downstream trade opens automatically to the extent of the volume of any net upstream trade i.e. "no net trade downstream".

Note that the Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) may, in special circumstances, allow downstream allocation trade if the risk of exceeding the available channel capacity or causing downstream third party access issues is deemed to be manageable.

The MDBA may deem the risk of exceeding the Barmah choke channel-capacity to be manageable if they are able to complement or otherwise meet Murray water demand downstream of the choke from water sources other than Hume Reservoir.

More information on the Barmah Choke trade restriction and how it is managed is available in the [**Permissible Transfers between Trading Zones Protocol 2010**](#) and on the [**MDBA website**](#).

Allocation trade from the Lower Darling River

Allocation trade from the Lower Darling River to the Murray River is generally only permitted when the Menindee Lakes Storages are controlled by the Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA), which is when the volume in storage, after falling to 480 GL, has exceeded 640 GL and has not again fallen below 480 GL.

NSW has advised that the transfer of water allocation would generally not be allowed when the Menindee Lakes are under NSW control because the limited water available in the lakes must be conserved for drought management measures, including to ensure water supply to Broken Hill.

You should contact **Water NSW** to confirm allocation trade opportunities into and out of the Lower Darling (Zone 14). *Note that it is possible to transfer water allocation from the Lower Darling (Zone 14) to SA (Zone 12) when the MDBA has operational control of the Menindee Lakes, and this trading opportunity has been identified as an accidental omission from Table 1 of the **Permissible Transfers between Trading Zones Protocol 2010**, which is to be amended/clarified in the future.

Allocation trade from the Murrumbidgee River

Allocation trade into and out of the Murrumbidgee River (Zone 13) is tracked using an Inter-Valley Trade (IVT) account. A positive IVT account balance means there is currently net trade out of the Murrumbidgee valley that is yet to be delivered by the Murray-Darling Basin Authority. That is, water currently sits in the upper Murrumbidgee River storages for later delivery to the Murray. The MDBA draws water from the Murrumbidgee when required for Murray system operations, and the IVT account is debited accordingly.

NSW advises that a maximum (fixed) net balance of +100 GL applies to the Murrumbidgee IVT account because this is the apparent volume of water that can be physically transferred out of the Murrumbidgee via Balranald in one year without incurring excessive transmission losses.

A negative IVT account value would mean net trade into the valley from downstream. A negative balance is not allowed since water cannot be physically delivered upstream from the Murray into the Murrumbidgee.

NSW advises that proposed transfers that take the IVT account beyond the range 0 GL to 100 GL will not normally be approved, but may be considered on a case by case basis.

Murrumbidgee IVT account status

The MDBA provides guidance about its planned use of IVT account water in its **Annual River Murray Operations Plan**, which is updated towards the end of October each year after the period of winter/spring rainfall and snowmelt.

Allocation trade from Victorian tributaries

Allocation trade into and out of the Goulburn, Campaspe and Loddon Rivers is tracked using an Inter-Valley Transfers (IVT) account. A positive IVT account balance means there is currently net transfers out of those tributary rivers to the Murray that is yet to be delivered. That is, water currently sits in Goulburn, Campaspe and Loddon storages for delivery to the Murray. The MDBA draws water from those storages when required for Murray system operations, and the IVT account is debited accordingly.

Victoria advises that a maximum balance of +200 GL applies to the IVT account to prevent undelivered water from one water year spilling from the upstream storages in the following water year (which would reduce the water available to the Murray). The net 200 GL trade-out limit is more likely to be reached in wet years.

A negative IVT account value would mean net allocation trade into the tributaries from the Murray. A negative balance is not allowed since water cannot be physically delivered upstream from the Murray into the tributaries.

Factors that may contribute to the +200 GL IVT account limit being reached include:

- water still owed to the Murray from last year
- seasonal allocations leading to an increase of water owed to the Murray to supply water rights transferred there in the past (up to ~105 GL)
- the volume transferred out this season

Factors that may contribute to increased trade-out opportunities in relation to this limit include if i) the MDBA uses water from the inter-valley trade account, ii) any of the inter valley trade carryover balance spills, or iii) there is back-trade of allocations from the Murray into the tributaries.

Click [here](#) for more information about this restriction. Click [here](#) for more information about existing Victorian trade opportunities and limits.

Orders for allocation under 'tagged' entitlements in regulated systems

Orders for River Murray water allocation that is 'tagged' under an entitlement in another state for extraction in SA may be subject to the same restrictions that apply to standard water allocation transfers between those two places. The determining factor is when the tag was established.

If the date of establishment was:

- on or before 22 October 2010: then orders for the delivery of tagged allocation cannot be restricted;
- between 22 October 2010 and 24 November 2012: then orders for the delivery of tagged allocation cannot be restricted until 1 July 2019; and
- after 23 November 2012: then orders for the delivery of tagged allocation must also be restricted

Click [here](#) to see the legislation.

Note that a 'tag' on a water entitlement is not permitted to be established where delivery of the water allocation made available under the tag could be subject to back-trade situations.

This rule accords with clause 6(2) of the Schedule D Permissible Transfers Protocol.

End of year closure dates for interstate and intrastate transfers

New South Wales

NSW typically closes inter-state transfers with SA and Vic on 30 April. Intra state and intra valley transfers in the region closes 31 May.

Click [here](#) for additional information on NSW season closing dates.

South Australia

All inter-state and intra-state transfers close on 30 June each year. However, it is recommended that transfer applications are submitted to the Department by the third Friday in June, which represents a new cut-off date for the guaranteed processing and determination of transfer applications by 30 June (i.e. 16 June 2017, 15 June 2018, and 21 June 2019).

Click [here](#) for more information on allocation applications.

Victoria

Interstate allocation transfers and paper-based intra-state allocation transfers that must be manually processed are to be submitted around mid-June each year, to ensure that they are processed and determined by 30 June. Otherwise, electronic transfer forms can be submitted up until 30 June.

Restrictions on River Murray allocation trade out of SA

At the end of each water use year, if you have excess water allocation that you believe will not be able to be carried over, you may look to transfer that excess allocation to a willing buyer within SA or interstate. Interstate trade is normally achievable if the buyer is in within a zone of the River Murray in NSW or Vic. However, if the buyer is in a NSW/Vic tributary zone you need to be aware of any restrictions that may apply such as in relation to back-trade. You can check transfer opportunities into:

- **Vic tributaries**
- **NSW Murrumbidgee**
- **Darling River**
 - Note that there is no IVT account tracker for the Darling River.
 - You should contact Water NSW to confirm transfers opportunities into and out of the Lower Darling (Zone 14).

Want more information?



Search online for
'DEWNR water allocation and trade'



Call the DEWNR water licensing team
at Berri on (08) 8595 2053



Government of South Australia
Department of Environment,
Water and Natural Resources