

Amending the Water Allocation Plan for the River Murray Prescribed Watercourse

River Murray Salinity Management



This paper outlines the changes made to salinity zoning policy included in the water allocation plan. The paper sets out background information about salinity management, why the policy has been updated and what the changes mean for authorisation holders.

Background

The availability of low salinity water from the River Murray is vital to the health of the environment, supports the productivity of the Murraylands and Riverland food and wine industry, and is necessary to provide high quality and affordable drinking water to approximately 90% of the state's population.

The River Murray Salinity Zoning Policy is a key element of South Australia's approach to reducing salt entering

the River Murray. Site use approvals control the maximum volume of water that can be applied to land for the purpose of irrigation. The River Murray Salinity Zoning Policy helps manage salinity impacts from irrigation development through rules related to the granting and variation of site use approvals.

The draft Water Allocation Plan for the River Murray Prescribed Watercourse (the Plan) includes changes to



the salinity management provisions in Chapter 6 to reflect the 2018 River Murray Salinity Zoning Policy, to reduce the number of salinity zones, and to remove the expired prior commitment sections.

Why were the changes developed?

The policy was reviewed in 2017 in response to feedback that businesses needed more flexibility to support irrigation development while still managing salinity.

In 2018, amendments were made to the policy to help facilitate new irrigation development and make it easier to change to higher water use crops.

Information about the new River Murray Salinity Zoning Policy is available from

<http://www.naturalresources.sa.gov.au/rivermurraywap>.

How were the changes developed?

The policy review involved a review panel made up of key stakeholders and technical experts with experience in irrigation and salinity management; engagement with key stakeholders; and two rounds of community consultation on issues and options in 2017.

The feedback received helped to shape the policy changes.

Consultation on the Plan provides an opportunity for further feedback on these proposed changes.

What does the 2017 Water Allocation Plan say?

The 2017 Plan specifies that the Minister may not grant or vary a site use approval where it will result in an increase to the total volume of water that is authorised to be used for irrigation purposes on a site use approval, except where:

- in the high zone, the applicant can demonstrate that any potential salinity impacts of the water use will be appropriately offset, or
- an application was lodged prior to 4 April 2018 that demonstrated that the applicant was legally or financially committed to a development between the period 1 July 2001 and 30 June 2003, or
- development is proposed in the Low Salinity Impact Zone, the Bookpurnong High Salinity Impact Zone (salt interception) or the Loxton High Salinity Impact Zone (salt interception), and South Australia has sufficient salinity credits available to offset the potential salinity impacts.

What are the proposed changes?

The proposed changes will update the Plan to remove the prior commitment provisions, which concluded on 4 April 2018. Other proposed changes include:

- simplify the salinity zones and provide for easier exchange of site use approval volumes by merging the High Salinity (salt interception) Zones at Bookpurnong and Loxton into the High Salinity Impact Zone
- enable the salinity zoning policy to apply in the Qualco Sunlands Scheme Area, to align rules for irrigation development along the South Australian River Murray, and
- include an additional condition that enables the Minister to vary a 30 year site use approval if it is not used within ten years. This will help to ensure that access to new 30 year site use approvals is maximised for genuine irrigation developments and speculative applications are avoided.

What are the key elements of the proposed salinity zoning policy?

The key improvements to salinity management include the ability to:

- expand irrigation development through 30 year site use approvals for new or increased irrigation water use, and
- increase volumes on existing site use approvals to enable conversion to higher water use crops.

Varying site use approval volumes through an exchange of volume still exists. The exchange of volumes cannot result in an increase in the combined total volume of water authorised to be used for irrigation in the High and Low Salinity Impact Zones (556 GL), or an increase in the total volume of water authorised to be used for irrigation in the High Salinity Impact Zone (523 GL).

This allows for the exchange of volumes to take place as follows:

- between authorisation holders within the High Salinity Impact Zone,
- between authorisation holders within the Low Salinity Impact Zone,
- from authorisation holders within the High Salinity Impact Zone to the Low Salinity Impact Zone.

Exchange cannot occur from the Low to High Salinity Impact Zone, to avoid approval volumes moving to the high zone where salinity impacts are greater.



The proposed policy in the Plan has a number of review triggers. These are outlined in Chapter 9 of the Water Allocation Plan.

You can access a fact sheet on the policy at <http://www.naturalresources.sa.gov.au/rivermurraywap>

How do the changes affect water users?

The proposed changes to the Plan do not impact on the rights of existing site use approval holders who can continue to use the maximum volume recorded on their site use approval. The ability for water users to exchange permanent site use approval volumes in order to support new irrigation is still available. These approvals are ongoing.

Merging the High Salinity (salt interception) Zones at Bookpurnong and Loxton, and application of the salinity zoning policy within the Qualco Sunlands Scheme Area, will increase the total site use approval volume available for exchange between site use approvals in the High Salinity Impact Zone and simplify the policy.

The proposed changes to the Plan will enable water users to apply for a 30 year site use approval for new developments, and to increase the volume on an existing site use approval to accommodate higher water use crops.

How can I provide feedback on the water allocation plan?

The Board will be consulting on the draft Plan until 5pm on Friday 14 September 2018. The Board is inviting written responses about the content of the draft Plan from all interested parties. Feedback on the draft Plan will also be gathered at a series of drop in sessions during the consultation period at locations along the River Murray. The dates and locations of these meetings will be advertised, and provided on the Natural Resources SAMDB website.

Where can I find out more?

For information about the changes to the salinity zoning policy, the following information is available:

- 2018 River Murray Salinity Zoning Policy – background to the policy

For more information about the other changes in the draft Plan, the following information sheets are available. They provide details about the key policy areas that are changing and why.

- What is changing in the Water Allocation Plan for the River Murray Prescribed Watercourse?
- Sustainable Diversion Limits
- Aboriginal Water Interests
- Allocating water from the River Murray
- Upper Pike River Anabranch
- Private Carryover
- Water Level Variability & Pumping Infrastructure
- ELMA

Copies of the information sheets and the draft Plan are available on the Board's website, www.naturalresources.sa.gov.au/rivermurraywap, or at Natural Resources offices located in Murray Bridge, Berri and Mount Barker.

Feedback

The period for feedback on the draft Water Allocation Plan for the River Murray Prescribed Watercourse closes at 5pm on Friday 14 September 2018.

Provide your feedback online:

<https://yoursay.sa.gov.au/river-murray-water-allocation-plan-18>

Written submissions can be directed to:

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