

Reconnecting River Country Program: Flow options



Focus on flows

Healthy rivers supply water to homes, farms, schools and businesses. Along the way, they nourish ecosystems and provide important habitat for native plants and animals.

At present, a range of constraints (physical, policy and operational) limit the flow of water for the environment along river systems in the southern-connected Murray-Darling Basin.

The timing, frequency, extent and duration of these flows has a powerful effect on the landscape and the thousands of species that call it home.

Smaller flows stay within the river channel. Slightly higher flows reach higher up channel banks, and in some areas, spread into floodplain creeks and billabongs; reconnecting the wetlands and providing important habitat for local wildlife.

Current managed flow limits in the southern-connected basin are capped at relatively low levels. This means rivers and floodplains are connecting less often than they once did and need to be.

The Reconnecting River Country Program is an opportunity to consider a broader range of operational flow limits to provide greater flexibility in the Murray and Murrumbidgee River systems.

By allowing more flexibility in the delivery of flows, water managers will be able to:

- reinstate some natural flow patterns
- trigger breeding and movement of native fish, waterbirds and other water-dependent animals
- release and transfer carbon and nutrients underpinning the aquatic food web
- enhance native fish populations and support healthy river and wetland ecosystems
- improve the health of forests, woodlands and shrublands along river corridors and on low-lying floodplains.



Darlington Point, Cookoothama.

Flow limits being assessed

Flows of different sizes and duration will achieve a range of outcomes for river and wetland health, connectivity and wildlife.

In collaboration with stakeholders, the program is assessing a range of flows to investigate benefits, costs and risks to ensure evidence-based decisions are made on preferred flow limits across the program areas.

The flow options being investigated will be used as the basis for:

- modelling inundation footprints
- assessing community benefits and impacts
- assessing environmental benefits and risks
- measuring outcomes for First Nations people
- identifying opportunities and mitigation measures.

This phase of the program involves collaboration with landholders participating in case studies, First Nations people, public landholders, reference groups and other stakeholder groups across the Murray and Murrumbidgee Valleys.

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Through this process, stakeholders will have the opportunity to provide feedback on flow limit options and mitigation measures.

The following flows are currently being assessed in the Murray and Murrumbidgee program areas, noting other flows within these ranges could be explored in the future.

Murray - Hume to Yarrawonga (flows reported at Doctors Point gauge).

- 25,000 ML/d – current operational limit in the Water Sharing Plan (WSP)
- 30,000 ML/d – flow limit option
- 35,000 ML/d – flow limit option*
- 40,000 ML/d – flow limit option.

Murray - Yarrawonga to Wakool Junction (flows reported at downstream of Yarrawonga Weir)

- 15,000 ML/d (current temporary operational limit)
- 25,000 ML/d – flow limit option
- 30,000 ML/d – flow limit option
- 35,000 ML/d – flow limit option*
- 40,000 ML/d – flow limit option
- 45,000 ML/d – flow limit option.

Murrumbidgee River (flows reported at Wagga Wagga)

- 22,000 ML/d (current temporary operational limit)
- 32,000 ML/d – flow limit option option (current operational limit at Gundagai in the WSP)
- 36,000 ML/d – flow limit option
- 40,000 ML/d – flow limit option.

*35,000 ML/d flow options were added for both Hume to Yarrawonga, and Yarrawonga to Wakool Junction in early 2023, to enable a more robust assessment of the change in impacts and benefits across the range of flows being investigated.

Stakeholder feedback will be considered in the impact-benefit assessment and evaluation, which will inform flow option recommendations to the Australian Government for further consideration.

For more information about the frequency, timing, and duration of flow options, contact us or get in touch with your local engagement officer. You can contact us by phoning 1300 081 047.

Acknowledgement

The Department of Planning and Environment and the Department of Regional NSW's Local Land Services acknowledge we stand on Aboriginal land. We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land and we show our respect for Elders past, present and emerging through thoughtful and collaborative approaches to our work. We seek to demonstrate our ongoing commitment to providing places in which Aboriginal people are included socially, culturally and economically.

Find out more

You can find out more or contact the program by:

- visiting dpie.nsw.gov.au/reconnecting-river-country-program
- calling **1300 081 047**
- emailing admin.rrcp@dpie.nsw.gov.au