Suspension to Water Sharing Plan for the Belubula Regulated River Water Source 2012

This information was previously made available on the Water Group website and has been endorsed for publication as fact sheet in October 2026. The information may no longer be current but has been assessed as containing relevant or useful information.

Suspension notice

Water sharing plan suspension notice	Suspension to Water Sharing Plan for the Belubula Regulated River Water Source 2012
Water licences affected	No licences affected - suspension applies to end of system flow rules
Date suspension started	20 July 2020
Date suspensions ends	31 December 2020
Status	Expired

Reason for decision

Part suspension of the Water Sharing Plan for the Belubula Regulated River Water Source 2012

Clause 26

Background

The Belubula water source is currently in Drought Stage 3, exhibiting a severe water shortage.

Due to ongoing drought and very low inflows, Carcoar Dam is less than 17 percent total capacity. Evaporation and transmission losses are also very high.

Clause 26 of the Water Sharing Plan specifies an end of system flow target of 10 ML/day. The Belubula river receives a high proportion of its flow from tributary inflows downstream of the dam.

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On average, only ten per cent of total annual flow in the river comes from dam releases, the remaining 90 per cent is derived from inflows from the tributaries. In the lower reaches of the river, groundwater extraction also reduces the river flow as the systems are highly connected.

Attempting to fulfil environmental water provisions (end of system flow requirements) during the current drought could potentially consume all the water in Carcoar Dam by next summer.

On 1 July 2019 the operation of clause 26 of the *Water Sharing Plan for the Belubula Regulated River Water Source 2012* (**the Belubula plan**) was suspended due to drought conditions. This suspension expired on 30 June 2020.

To continue to preserve water for other high priority users it is necessary to reinstate the suspension of the end of system flow provision until water availability improves.

If the proposed amendments to the Belubula Water Sharing Plan commence later in 2020, new rules will negate the need for future plan suspensions dealing with the end of system flow rule.

Reasons for decisions

Water Sharing Plan suspension – section 49B

Section 49B of *the Water Management Act* 2000 (WM Act) enables all or part of water sharing plans to be suspended if the Minister 'is satisfied that there is an extreme event in relation to a particular Basin management area or part of the Basin water resources'. An extreme event includes an extreme dry period. The NSW Extreme Events Policy details how water should be managed during these extreme events. The priority is to secure critical human water needs (including non-human consumption requirements that would cause high social, economic or national security costs if not met).

The extreme events policy framework sets out 4 stages of operations – from normal operations in Stage 1 up to critical drought or water shortage in Stage 4. The suspension of parts of a water sharing plan is listed as a management tool for Stage 3 and Stage 4 events.

Before suspending the operation of all or part of a plan, the Minister must obtain the concurrence of the Minister for Energy and Environment. This has been obtained.

Belubula - suspension of planned environmental water provisions

The reinstatement of the suspension of clause 26 will reduce system losses and allow available water in Carcoar Dam to be used for other high priority water needs.

If the proposed amendments to the Belubula plan are made before 31 December 2020, the suspension order may be repealed with the concurrence of the Minister for Energy and Environment.

Benefits and risks

This suspension continues the operational arrangements for Carcoar Dam during dry periods.

The suspension of Clause 26 will ensure water is available for other high priority water users on the Belubula.

There will be concern that suspending this rule will impact aquatic ecosystems in the Belubula. Historically Cod, Macquarie Perch, Golden Perch and Blackfish have been found in the Belubula River. In the lower reaches of the river, downstream of Canowindra, there are also some wetlands which are generally in poor health.

To mitigate the impact of reduced end of system flows, a first flush rule has been adopted. This rule ensures that environmental needs of the system are satisfied before flows are made available to lower security water users from any future tributary inflow events.

The benefits of the proposed amendment substantially outweigh the risks.

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