



Northern Region Sustainable Water Strategy

Fact Sheet 5

Groundwater and upper catchment water users

Northern Victoria has more than 120 unregulated rivers spanning thousands of kilometres – rivers that sit upstream of major storage dams, or those that have no major storages on them. The region also has a number of aquifers which have provided considerable groundwater supplies. These rivers and aquifers have traditionally provided a very reliable water resource to the many farmers and surrounding towns that depend on them for their livelihood, and are important ecological habitats.

After 12 years of below average rainfall, unregulated rivers have not been as reliable for water supply, with more rationing and bans. The resulting increase in people turning to groundwater has also put more pressure on that resource. This has been coupled with declining groundwater recharge.

Key actions to safeguard our future

The Strategy is providing more certainty to farmers and towns who rely on groundwater and unregulated systems.

- the rules that manage licences will be clearly documented
- sharing arrangements governed by local management rules and plans including the setting of groundwater trigger levels and minimum flow rates for unregulated river systems
- limits will be set on all available water resources to protect the reliability for existing users, and the environment

To provide flexibility, trading water within groundwater and unregulated river systems will be easier and carryover (see Fact Sheet 6)

will be introduced for licensed volumes in suitable groundwater systems.

There will be a transparent approach to licensing arrangements. Licence-holders will know how water will be shared in times of shortages in all systems at a local level.

What happens if we do nothing - a future with less water

The past 12 years shows us that there has been a considerable decline in groundwater levels, and unregulated systems have been drying up, especially in summer.

Under any climate change scenario, it is likely unregulated rivers and groundwater will experience a reduction in reliability.

The management of unregulated river and groundwater systems has developed in response to changing conditions, but more certainty is required in a future with less water.

Without changes, licence-holders will have less certainty about available water and how it will be shared.