

# *Smartrivers*



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## **Submission to the MDBA Sustainable Diversion Limit Issues Paper**

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### **Introduction**

Smartrivers represent a dedicated group of irrigators from the Lower Balonne in South West Queensland, who several years ago formed an Association called Smartrivers. This was done so we, as a concerned irrigation community, could be pro-active in the areas of water allocation, management, sharing and health.

We welcome the opportunity to have input into the development of the Murray Darling Basin Plan, in particular the issue of Sustainable Diversion Limits (SDLs).

*We strongly urge the MDBA to come to the Lower Balonne to evaluate our environmental assets, and then form discussion with local community and stakeholders, prior to the release of the MDBA Basin Plan.*

## Issues

### 4.1 Which Water Resource Plan areas should be used?

Smartrivers concurs with the proposed approach of using existing state boundaries for WRPs and as such, thinks that the Condamine Balonne Water Resource Plan (Lower Balonne) Aug 2004, is the appropriate Plan for the Lower Balonne.

### 4.2 Which forms of "take" should be limited by the SDLs?

All forms of take consistent with the Condamine Balonne Water Resource Plan, including overland flows, water harvesting and allocation.

- Condamine Balonne Water Resource Plan, Aug 2004:
  - <http://www.legislation.qld.gov.au/LEGISLTN/CURRENT/W/WaterReCoP04.pdf>
- Condamine Balonne Draft Resource Operations Plan, July 2007:
  - [http://www.derm.qld.gov.au/wrp/con\\_bal\\_draft\\_rop.html](http://www.derm.qld.gov.au/wrp/con_bal_draft_rop.html)

### 4.3 How should SDL provisions be determined in a way that optimises economic, social and environmental outcomes?

The Condamine Balonne Water Resource Plan, Aug 2004, and the Condamine Balonne Draft Resource Operations Plan, Jul 2007, have been developed over the last fifteen years in order to optimise environmental, social and economic outcomes. "A whole of community approach should be taken with regard to engagement and problem solving, and irrigators, environmentalists, graziers, small business, banking and indigenous interests have actively participated." (The Lower Balonne Measures Up, Smartrivers Assoc. Inc. March 2007).

- The Lower Balonne Measures Up Smartrivers Assoc Inc., Mar 2007:
  - <http://www.smartrivers.com/private/documents/TheLowerBalonneMeasuresUp.doc>

It is essential that if any extra reduction in take occurs, the economic cutbacks to the community must be compensated for. The PriceWaterhouseCoopers Socio Economic Impact Assessment Study, Condamine Balonne, Nov 2000, states that cutbacks in take would mean that "Qualitative social impacts will be significant. The critical mass achieved in the size of the regional economies will be quickly dissipated as reductions in population and incomes accompany reduced economic activity."

Finally, we accept the need to review Condamine Balonne Water Resource Plan from time to time, and that local communities need to be involved in the reviewing process. Currently we believe the Condamine Balonne Water Resource Plan is working well.

- PriceWaterhouseCoopers Socio Economic Impact Assessment Study, Condamine Balonne, Nov 2000:
  - <http://www.smartrivers.com/private/documents/SocioeconomicreportPwC.PDF#PWC>

#### 4.4 How should surface water-groundwater connectivity be dealt with?

Surface water-groundwater connectivity is not applicable to the Lower Balonne catchment, however where appropriate, it should be dealt with in a scientific and quantitative manner.

#### 4.5 How should SDLs be set and expressed?

Smartdrivers concurs with the proposed approach of using existing state boundaries for WRPs and as such, recommends that the Condamine Balonne Water Resource Plan (Lower Balonne) Aug 2004, and Draft Resource Operations Plan July 2007 (ROP), are the appropriate Plans for the Lower Balonne, as they were developed over several years with considerable involvement by all interested parties. This includes the Queensland Government, indigenous representation, environmental groups, Local Government, flood plain graziers, irrigators representing regulated and unregulated allocations, and local business representatives.

Hydrologically, in the Lower Balonne, our Nominal Volumes (NV) and Average Annual Diversions (AAD) have been calculated as per the Condamine Balonne Water Resource Plan.

The current diversion limits are set in the ROP, and have been developed with reference to the Lower Balonne's environmental assets. These include the biota of the rivers and distributary channels and their associated wetlands, the internationally recognized Narran Lakes, the National Parks of the Culgoa floodplain, and the Darling River.

When setting and expressing SDLs, detail must be paid to noting the extent of the impact to individual water licence holders.

Methodology used in the current ROP and WRP for determining nominal volume per licenced holder and aggregate basis per catchment, i.e., nominal volume equivalent to average annual diversion. This is the most appropriate form of SDL for our catchment – given the variable nature of the flows.

##### *New Science:*

During the construction of the Condamine Balonne Water Resource Plan, it became clear that there was a need to properly measure the end of system flows for the Condamine Balonne rivers.

This is further highlighted in the CSIRO's "Murray Darling Basin Sustainable Yields Project" report under Section 5.3.3, page 91. We've also attached the link to a hydrology study of the Lower Balonne by Dr John Porter, SKM 2002:

- o CSIRO Report: <http://www.csiro.au/files/files/p13s.pdf>
- o Lower Balonne Hydrology Checks, Dr John Porter, Sinclair Knight Merz 2002: [http://www.smartdrivers.com/private/documents/SKMHydrologyChecks\\_000.pdf](http://www.smartdrivers.com/private/documents/SKMHydrologyChecks_000.pdf)

We would urge that before any more reductions in diversions take place, that there is accurate measurement of end of valley flows, so we are basing the SDLs on objective information.