

## Proposed amendments to Basin Plan groundwater water quality management plan provisions

The Ministerial Council noted that there is a need to incorporate further technical amendments to provide separate requirements for groundwater water quality management plans. This is because the current requirements for water quality management plans apply to both groundwater and surface water (Part 7 of Chapter 10 of the Basin Plan), but were written in a surface water context. The Authority has been working with Basin governments on such amendments to better reflect current groundwater water quality issues and state management practices.

The proposed amendment has been altered on this basis. The requirements under section 10.21 of the Basin Plan have been moved to a new section for groundwater (section 10.35A) in Chapter 10, Part 7 - Water quality objectives. The separation of these requirements from those for surface water based on SDL resource unit type is intended to reduce administrative burden for the states by eliminating requirements for groundwater water quality management plans that are not applicable.

The revised groundwater water quality section retains a number of mandatory requirements:

- identification of the causes, or likely causes, of water quality degradation in the water resource plan area, and
- the water quality targets in the water resource plan area.

The revised section still meets the requirements of the Water Act 2007 (Cth), and reflects a number of the provisions in Chapter 10, Part 7. The changes do not diminish the protection of groundwater resources nor any connected surface water resources, or change the intent of the Basin Plan.

## Proposed amendments to reasonable excuse provisions

The Ministerial Council also noted that there is a need to incorporate further technical amendments in relation to the method for determining compliance with the long-term annual diversion limit. The aim of the changes requested is to reduce administrative burden for the states by separating out the two steps that Basin states need to take to make a claim for a reasonable excuse. The two steps are:

- the reasons for the excess taken (section 6.12(3)(a) and section 6.12C(3)(a)) and
- the steps the Basin State will take to reduce the cumulative balance of the register to zero or less (section 6.12(3)(b) and section 6.12C(3)(b)).

The Authority has worked with Basin governments on amendments to reflect these changes for both surface water and groundwater. The proposed amendment has been altered on this basis.

The proposed amendment does not change the policy intent of the provision. It is also consistent with section 71(2) of the Water Act, which allows for an extension of time for a jurisdiction to provide the information required under section 71(1).