

REVIEW OF THE MERSEY WATER MANAGEMENT PLAN 2005

SUMMARY OF CHANGES IN THE DRAFT AMENDED MERSEY RIVER CATCHMENT WATER MANAGEMENT PLAN 2023

The key changes proposed in the Draft Amended Mersey River Catchment Water Management Plan 2023 (Draft Amended Plan) include:

1. A simplified contemporary Plan format

A modern Plan format, improved clarity and the inclusion of an Acknowledgement of Country.

2. Removal or amendment of unnecessary provisions

Removal of provisions which duplicate existing requirements outlined within the *Water Management Act 1999* (the Act). For example, assessments have shown that groundwater and metering provisions are not required in the Draft Amended Plan as groundwater and metering requirements in place under the Act provides effective management at the current level of risk.

3. Specific, strategic and measurable objectives

The objectives have been reviewed to ensure that they are measurable, and specific to the risks to water resources that the Plan's provisions are aiming to manage. The Tables in Part 3.3 of the Draft Amended Plan explain the links between the Objectives, management provisions and the values they support. Part 6 of the Draft Amended Plan specifies the key performance measures related to the Objectives.

4. Defined take periods and allocation limits

The Draft Amended Plan defines take periods and more clearly quantifies allocation limits for water at different surety levels in each take period as follows:

Take Period

The Draft Amended Plan defines one take period for new allocations.

- 1 May to 31 October

Allocation Limits

Allocation Limit - 1 November to 30 April: Limited to current levels of allocation - no change compared to current Plan.

- Take periods on existing licensed allocations that authorise takes within this period will remain unchanged.

Allocation Limit - 1 May to 31 October is 96,811 ML

- No new Surety 5 allocations will be available in the 1 May to 31 October take period.
- The Surety 6 allocation limit is 78,782 ML of which 77,071 ML currently remains available for allocation.

5. Improved minimum environmental releases from Lake Parangana during low flow periods

The environmental release conditions will be implemented through an amendment to Hydro Tasmania's Special Licence Agreement and are not included in the Draft Amended Plan.

The proposed improvements to environmental releases from Lake Parangana during dry conditions include:

- Applying a minimum environmental release of 160 ML/day (measured at the outlet to Lake Parangana) as an updated condition on Hydro Tasmania's Special Licence Agreement.
- Removing the provisions in the current 2005 Plan that allows the minimum environmental release from Lake Parangana to be reduced based on inflows to Lake Parangana.

The intent of the minimum 160 ML/day environmental release from the outlet of Lake Parangana is to provide a minimum flow of 173 ML/day at the Liena stream flow gauge (identified in the 2005 Plan). A minimum environmental release is operationally simpler to implement and supports more effective management of restrictions during low flow periods.

6. Consistently applied catchment wide cease-to-take thresholds

The Draft Amended Plan is proposing monthly cease-to-take thresholds that are applied consistently across the Plan area. For a direct comparison of changes to the cease-to-take rules and thresholds in the current 2005 Plan versus the Draft Amended Plan refer to Table 1.

December to May cease-to-take thresholds

The cease-to-take threshold (measured at Shale Road gauging station) is proposed to be 195 ML/day between 1 December to 31 May.

As environmental releases from Lake Parangana are no longer reduced during dry conditions, there is no longer a requirement to adjust the cease-to-take threshold below 195 ML/day.

The threshold of 195 ML/day (December – May) maintains highly reliable access for irrigation and other commercial water use at similar levels to the current plan rules i.e., based on hydrological assessments of historic flow records, access to surety level 5 allocations under the Draft Amended Plan rules are likely to be available greater than 94% of the time.

June to November cease-to-take thresholds

The monthly cease-to-take thresholds (June to November) have been reviewed and adjusted to provide a more consistent level of access in each month. The access thresholds are largely set based on flows that are exceeded 95% of the time. This approach applies a contemporary approach to setting cease-to-take flow thresholds in high flow months to balance access and protect other values from risks of extraction during low flow conditions.

Based on this assessment the June to September monthly cease-to-take thresholds have been reduced, while the October and November thresholds remain the same (refer to Table 1).

Table I Existing and proposed cease-to-take thresholds and conditions

	Monthly cease-to-take thresholds in the 2005 Plan	Monthly cease-to-take thresholds in the Draft Amended Plan
	<p>Part 3.9 Cease-to-take conditions</p> <p>Surety 4 to Surety 7 water allocations may not be taken from any stream within the Plan area when the flow at the Latrobe gauging site is less than or equal to the cease-to-take flows given in Table I below.</p> <p>The Department may introduce restrictions when the flow at the Latrobe gauging site is within 30 ML/day of the cease-to-take flow, with reference to the allocation sureties at the start of Part 4 of the Plan. Any such restrictions will apply to all catchment streams.</p>	<p>4.4.1 Monthly cease-to-take thresholds</p> <p>The monthly cease-to-take thresholds for the Mersey River catchment are specified in Table 3.</p> <p>When flow falls to, or below, the cease-to-take threshold (as measured at the Mersey River at Shale Road stream flow gauging station), full restrictions on the taking of water by holders of water licences, from watercourses within the Plan area, will be assessed and implemented by an Authorised Officer.</p> <p>The implementation of staged restrictions before the cease-to-take is reached is based on surety levels (priority of access) and will be specified and implemented in accordance with the Mersey River Catchment Water Management Protocol (see Section 5.1).</p>
Month	Table I Cease-to-take flows (ML/day)	Table 3 Monthly cease-to-take thresholds (ML/day) for the Mersey River catchment, as measured at the Mersey River at Shale Road stream flow gauging station.
Dec - May	195*	195
Jun	370	330
Jul	570	540
Aug	680	660
Sep	680	580
Oct	370	370
Nov	260	260
	<p>* The 'cease-to-take flow' for December to May is equal to the Hydro release from Lake Parangana for environmental purposes, plus 22 ML/day contribution from the tributaries downstream of Lake Parangana. The cease-to-take flow will typically be 195 ML/day but may be reduced when the estimated natural inflow to Lake Parangana is less than 173 ML/day.</p>	<p>While these thresholds are measured at the Mersey River at Shale Road stream flow gauging station, when flow falls below these thresholds it is indicative of low flows across the whole Plan area.</p> <p>The cease-to-take thresholds set out in Table 3 do not consider water conveyed according to approved Watercourse Authorities issued under Part 6A of the Act. The relevant conveyance volumes must be fully accounted for and deducted from flow at the gauge in interpreting the access threshold.</p>

7. An opportunistic take threshold to support opportunistic access to flood flows

The Draft Amended Plan applies a new opportunistic take access threshold of 15,000 ML/day, above which licensed water users can opportunistically take additional water above the amount allocated on their licence. Based on flows in the Mersey River between 1973 and 2021, this flow was exceeded, on average, once every 1.4 years.

Once this threshold has been reached, licence holders will be able to take water in accordance with a temporary authorisation that the Department will issue under the Act. Permission will remain in place until flow falls below 15,000 ML/day and authorisation is revoked. Volumes of water taken must be authorised, measured and accounted for in a licensee's water use records.

8. A provision that requires the approval and publishing of a Water Management Protocols document

Part 5 of the Draft Amended Plan includes provisions that require the approval and publishing of a Water Management Protocols document (The Protocols) for the Mersey River catchment by the Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania.

The Protocols are separate to the Draft Amended Plan and can be updated and amended over the life of the Plan to support changes and improvements to operational arrangements, so long as they are consistent with the Draft Amended Plan rules. For example, the protocols include the currently applied staged restriction management protocol. Restrictions are staged (applied incrementally based on surety levels, from lowest to highest priority) during low flow conditions before the cease-to-take thresholds in the Draft Amended Plan are triggered. The staged restrictions support fair and orderly sharing of water during times when there is not enough flow available above the cease-to-take threshold to maintain access to all of allocations.

The Protocols also provide information on a range of other relevant management arrangements and how policies and provisions of the Act are applied in the Draft Amended Plan area. The Protocols will support operational review, learning and improvement (adaptive management) and transparency regarding how water is managed over the life of the Plan.