



Nathan Rees MP
Minister for Emergency Services
Minister for Water

NEWS RELEASE

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NSW ISSUES EMBARGOS TO PROTECT WATER IN THE
MURRAY-DARLING BASIN

State Plan Priority E1: A secure and sustainable water supply for all users

NSW Minister for Water, Nathan Rees has taken further steps to protect groundwater and surface water supplies in the stressed Murray Darling Basin.

Mr Rees announced immediate state-wide embargos on;

- the conversion of general security to high security licences; and
- the issuing of any further groundwater entitlements in the NSW Murray-Darling Basin.

“These embargoes have been put in place to protect security of supply for existing users and the environment, said Mr Rees

“Climate science is now demonstrating that our water systems are changing and future inflows to rivers and creeks and recharge of groundwater aquifers may differ significantly from the past.

“As a precautionary measure, I am today placing an embargo on the conversion of all general security entitlements to high security or vice versa until the Department of Water and Energy has done further study on the effects of these conversions on both the environment and other users.

Mr Rees said the Basin's groundwater resources have been relied upon more heavily as the drought has continued.

“While we already have an embargo on new groundwater licences in the major alluvial systems in the Basin, today's announcement extends that embargo to include all the groundwater systems across the Basin.

“New data has indicated that hard rock and fractured rock aquifers in the Basin contribute to the base flows of our river systems,” said Mr Rees

“The Basin's water systems are currently under severe stress as a result of the ongoing drought. If the science tells us there is a direct relationship between groundwater extractions and the possible reduction of water in our rivers, we must act to halt that reduction.

“This embargo will apply to new licences for irrigation and other commercial uses to protect the reliability of water for existing users and for the environment, including groundwater-dependent ecosystems,” Mr Rees said.

“Exemptions will be allowed for water used for basic rights, town water supply and domestic and stock use, and also where failure to supply water would cause a prohibitively high social, economic or national security cost.” he said.

The use of saline groundwater for industrial purposes will be considered.

“The connection between surface water and groundwater is becoming increasingly important in the integrated management of water resources,

“Rivers contribute to the recharge of aquifers and aquifers contribute to river flow. Increased groundwater use is considered to be a major risk to the sustainability of the Murray Darling Basin.”

Minister Rees said that the embargo will reduce the potential for increased groundwater extraction and will contribute to improved surface water availability in future years.

The new embargo does not apply to areas where a water sharing plan is already in place, including the new Great Artesian Basin Water Sharing Plan area. New enterprises and those wishing to expand in those areas will be able to buy an existing water licences through the trading market.

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