

Flows for the Future Program

Frequently Asked Questions

Is Flows for the Future about supporting agriculture or the environment?

It's both. We all know water is valuable. Without it, we will not survive and our animals and land will suffer. In the Eastern Mount Lofty Ranges (EMLR), we are relying on water to sustain businesses, industries and lifestyles and we can't produce food using an unhealthy system.

Productive and profitable businesses need healthy catchments and this program seeks to ensure the Angas and Bremer systems are sustainable for all uses. The provision of low flows also allows water allocations for production to be maximised.

Why should I participate?

The Flows for the Future (F4F) Program is a great opportunity for eligible landholders to have the supply and installation of low flow devices paid for by the program. This means that if you have a priority site and do take up the program, you will definitely be meeting your requirements as a water user at no out of pocket cost for installing the device. Ownership of this asset will then pass to you. You will be responsible for any ongoing operations and maintenance which, in most cases, will be minimal.

Will my property have to have a low flow device?

Scientific modelling has identified the minimum set of dams and watercourse diversions within a management zone needed to pass low flows to maintain natural processes and catchment health. This strategic approach will achieve the required outcomes in less time and using less taxpayer money.

If your licensed dam or watercourse diversion is located at one of these priority sites, the requirement to pass low flows may be placed as a condition on your licence in the EMLR Prescribed Water Resource Area in the future. For unlicensed users at priority sites, low flows may also need to

be passed, as outlined in the [EMLR Stock & Domestic regulation](#).

Securing low flows at licensed dams and diversions and unlicensed dams of 5 ML or more was discussed during consultation on the EMLR water allocation plan. The need to secure low flows was noted in the covering letter when licences were issued and is noted as a future requirement on the water licences themselves.

Will the way my dam fills change?

Passing on low flows is not a constant flow of water from dams. These low volumes only pass when there is flow in the catchment. Using low flow devices shifts the timing of consumptive water capture - the low flows are passed and the medium and high flows fill the dam as per usual. This also means water can't be taken when there is no flow, such as pumping water from watercourse pools when there is no flow.

This is the first I've heard about passing low flows.

Passing low flows has been a requirement for most new dams and diversions in the EMLR for almost 10 years. The concept of passing low flows at existing dams and watercourse diversions was discussed with the community during consultation on the EMLR water allocation plan in 2011. This consultation included licensed users and landholders with unlicensed dams of 5 ML or more.

The Minister for Sustainability, Environment and Conservation, the Honourable Ian Hunter MLC decided to support primary production in the area by adopting water taking limits that allowed allocation volumes for the majority of existing users to reflect their reasonable requirements. This was on the premise that low flows would be secured for catchment health, ensuring these volumes were sustainable. The need to pass low flows was noted in letters when water licences



were first issued, and is noted as a future requirement on the licences themselves.

I don't have a licence, I only use water for stock and domestic purposes.

Why does this affect me?

Surface water in the EMLR is part of a catchment system which has been degraded over time. What the water is being used for is not a factor.

Dams and watercourse diversions for stock and domestic use impede the natural water flow pattern in the same way as dams that are used for other purposes. Including unlicensed dams with a capacity of 5 ML or more in this program means that the surface water taking limits and dam capacity limits are considerably higher than they would be if the program to return low flows only included licensed dams and watercourse diversions.

Consultation with stock and domestic dam owners was undertaken in 2011 during development of the EMLR WAP.

Who will install the device?

There are two options, depending on how involved you wish to be in the process. Low flow devices can be installed by you, via a program grant, or by a contractor managed and paid for by DEWNR.

Field Officers will tailor a 'Site Action Plan' for the device and installation with you. This will be assessed by engineering experts to ensure the suitability of the device and method of installation for each site.

How much will a low flows device cost me?

If you take advantage of the F4F Program, you will not have to pay for a low flows device or its installation. You will, however, be responsible for any ongoing operations and maintenance.

Recipients of grants through F4F may choose to make these payments non-assessable non-exempt (NANE) income, with expenditures matched by those payments non-deductible and to disregard

any capital gain or loss from related transfers of water rights.

Eligible participants should seek professional legal or accounting advice in applying the amendments to their individual circumstances. For more information relating to this tax measure, see the [ATO website](#).

What if I sell my property?

Once the installation of your low flow device is complete, you will own the device. If you sell the property, the device will be an added asset and remain with the property for the next owner.

How will you be able to tell if the device is working?

After the device is installed, Field Officers will follow up with you to make sure that it is working correctly. A wider monitoring, evaluation and reporting program will be put in place in order to measure the catchment-wide environmental changes resulting from passing low flows.

Who will maintain the device or fix it if it stops working?

The device will now be part of the assets on your property and, as with any dams or watercourse diversions you have, you will be responsible for its maintenance. In the majority of flow situations, maintenance will be minimal.

What if I want to remove the device?

Removing the device is not recommended given not passing low flows may mean that you are not fulfilling your responsibilities as a water user.

Why is this happening now?

The EMLR Water Allocation Plan outlines an acceptable level of low flows that must be passed to ensure the water catchments are in a healthy state. When announcing water allocations to existing users, it was the Minister for Sustainability, Environment and Conservation, the Honourable Ian Hunter MLC's decision to keep allocations as high as possible with the condition that low flows would be passed on to support environmental outcomes.



Since then, Natural Resources SA Murray-Darling Basin has been working on a funding bid to the Australian Government to ensure low flow devices could be installed at no cost to the landholder. The bid was successful and, as part of Murray-Darling Basin Plan implementation, the Australian Government has provided \$12.1M to DEWNR to help landholders install low flows devices bringing total program funding to \$13.48M.

Are there devices anywhere else in SA?

Installing low flow devices is not new. There have been a number operating in the Clare Valley for the past 20 years and interstate as well. Passing low flows has been a requirement for most new dams and watercourse diversions in the EMLR for almost 10 years.

In the Mount Lofty Ranges, there are 11 trial sites where different devices are currently in operation. Installation of low flow devices on existing dams and watercourse diversions is currently underway in the Carrickalinga catchment.

My dam doesn't fill and spill every year – will passing low flows affect how much water I have?

If your dam does not regularly fill then you are probably in a low yielding catchment. Returning low flows may reduce the yield of your dam but this depends on your location, rainfall patterns, upstream water capture and relative size of the dam compared to upstream runoff. F4F Field Officers will be able to provide information specific to your property about flow rates and patterns.

Why do I have to pass low flows while other landholders do not?

Every property is part of a catchment system. The water held up in some dams interrupts natural flow patterns in a more significant way than others. The F4F Program is taking a strategic approach to get the best outcome for resources invested. Some dams and watercourse diversions have more influence on the pattern of flow than others, so are the best places to secure low flows.

In periods of high flow, dams will fill as per usual. Passing low flows will help to increase the overall condition of the waterway ecosystems and catchment.

Can I still trade water?

Yes. Passing low flows has no impact on current trading rules and arrangements.

I heard there would be an auction process for accessing grant money

Community feedback during the planning process showed that the auction process was somewhat confusing. Considering this feedback and the opportunity to achieve the required flow outcomes through passing low flows from fewer dams and watercourse diversions, a more targeted approach was adopted.

What if I do not want to pass low flows?

Under the F4F Program, staff will work closely with you to ensure that the low flow device to be installed best suits your property. The device and installation will be paid for by Natural Resources SA Murray-Darling Basin as part of the Flows for the Future Program.

Landholders with priority sites in the program area that decide not to take up funding from Flows for the Future may be required to pay for the device and installation themselves in the future.

I'd like to explore the options for my property further. What do I do next?

Get in touch with us via email, our [website](#) or phone 8204 1673 and we will see whether your property contains priority dams or watercourse diversions meaning you are eligible to take advantage of the F4F Program. If eligible, we will start to work on a Site Action Plan with you for your property.

Securing low flows

What is securing low flows?

Securing low flows, or passing low flows as it is sometimes referred to, is a key element of water



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management in the Mount Lofty Ranges which is intended to support healthy catchments and the communities and businesses which rely on them. Technically, low flows below a certain threshold flow rate will need to be not taken or to be passed downstream of some dams and diversions in order to maintain catchment health, flushing salt and pollutants out of the catchment system and supporting the ecosystem in and around creeks.

What is the current state of catchment health in the EMLR?

While the past few months have experienced higher rainfall, the catchment ecosystems in the EMLR have deteriorated over many years before this through over-extraction and dam development. Many areas in the catchment are in poor condition. It was clear that management of the water resource was required so the EMLR was prescribed and a Water Allocation Plan was developed. The reduction in low flows as a result of interception by thousands of dams and watercourse diversions has been identified as a key driver of catchment degradation.

What are the impacts of water capture by dams and watercourse diversions?

A traditional dam needs to fill and overflow before any water flows into the watercourse below the dam. In a catchment where there are many dams, this delays the time when creeks start to flow and brings forward the time when flow stops for the year. These effects are exacerbated by diverting water from watercourses. This shortens the flow season and has a significant impact on the plants and animals that depend on water, particularly in relation to their breeding cycles. It also lengthens the time that refuge pools stay isolated, increasing the risk that water quality in the pool becomes too poor, or that the pool dries up altogether.

How is this actually measured? How do we know it's true?

The impacts of water resource development have been observed through monitoring of flow gauging stations across the catchment, together with flow modelling that simulates what the flow regime (or pattern) would have been without

dams and diversions. Using this information, it has been possible to assess the effects of water use and flow patterns across the whole Mount Lofty Ranges.

The main impacts experienced under the current flow regimes are:

- Shorter flowing season: the flow season starts later and ends sooner
- Zero flow days: times of zero flow happen more often and last longer
- Low flows: low levels of flow, when they occur, are smaller throughout the year
- Freshes or small pulse flows: happen less often and are shorter outside the high flow season.

All of this combines to degrade the catchment and water-dependent ecosystems, cause accumulation of salt and pollutants and reduce water quality. Productive and profitable businesses need healthy catchments and Flows for the Future seeks to make the Angas and Bremer systems sustainable for all uses.

For further information on the evidence of the need for low flows, visit our [website](#).

For more information

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