

**QUESTION WITHOUT NOTICE**  
**SENATE**  
**RURAL AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS AND TRANSPORT REFERENCES**  
**COMMITTEE**

**INTEGRITY OF THE WATER MARKET IN THE MURRAY-DARLING BASIN**

In reply to **Senator HANSON-YOUNG** (2 November 2017):

*“Would it be a concern if the Murray-Darling Basin Authority didn’t have officers in place to look at those types of things (ref – modelling compliance)”*

**RESPONSE:**

South Australia is not aware of any deficit in the numbers and knowledge of Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) staff in regard to modelling compliance.

South Australia’s understanding is that the MDBA has resourced a compliance team to varying degrees since 2010, reflecting its growing compliance responsibilities. The MDBA has advised that in 2017, the MDBA’s compliance function moved into the Chief Executive’s Division and in late November 2017, following the Basin Wide Compliance Review, the MDBA established a standalone Office of Compliance. In addition to this dedicated compliance unit, other staff in the MDBA work on compliance-related activities (such as managing the Basin-wide water accounts).

The MDBA maintains the accounts for the historic Cap on diversions, as part of agreed transitional arrangements to the commencement of the new Sustainable Diversion Limit accounts under the Basin Plan in 2019. The Cap requires Basin States to limit the volume of surface water diverted from designated valleys so that the relevant long-term Cap limit is not exceeded. States must report annually to the MDBA on the volumes of water that were permitted to be taken under annual Cap targets and the volumes that were actually taken.

This will continue until at least 2019 when the Sustainable Diversion Limit (SDL) framework comes into effect. Under both the Cap and the more comprehensive SDL arrangements, the accounts are based on comparing actual reported take with modelled estimates of the amount of water that should have been taken in a given water year. This will be used to ensure that take does not exceed relevant limits.

The Basin Plan SDL water accounting and compliance framework expands the Cap accounting to cover all forms of water take defined in the Basin Plan. That is, for surface water, water take from watercourses and regulated rivers, by runoff dams, by floodplain harvesting, by commercial plantations (net take) and under basic rights. The SDL water accounting and compliance framework also includes all groundwater use in the Basin which was not included under the Cap.

Under the Basin Plan, State water regulators will continue to be responsible for ensuring that the level of take is within the relevant diversion limits for each water resource unit. If these limits are exceeded, the MDBA will have powers to remedy this.

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In reply to **Senator GALLACHER** (2 November 2017):

*“We really want to get some evidence as to what technology is used in South Australia in order to monitor the water usage. Do you use satellite in-ground sensors and daily electronic watering monitoring? Is any of that in use?” “Can you give us the complete picture (of what you do) on notice?”*

**RESPONSE:**

The South Australian non-urban metering population is characterised by substantial diversity in make, model, type/technology and size.

Whilst there is a significant number of different meter sizes, the majority of meters are relatively small in size (less than 200 mm in diameter).

The majority of meters in South Australia are mechanical, however, electromagnetic and ultrasonic meter technology is also used (generally by larger water users).

A detailed review previously undertaken in 2008 of the make, model and type of meters indicated the following:

- at least nine different types of meters had been installed within irrigation districts;
- meters had originated from at least 36 different manufacturers or suppliers;
- there appeared to be at least 30 different models (many of different sizes);
- approximately 93 percent of the meters that record water taken from the River Murray Prescribed Watercourse are mechanical types;
- approximately 89 percent of the meters that record water taken from the underground water resources in the South East Region of the State are mechanical types; and
- approximately 98 percent of the meters that record water taken from all other prescribed areas are mechanical types.

This information is still considered to largely reflect the current make, model and type of meters currently in use in South Australia.

Satellite in-ground sensors or live/regular electronic water monitoring are not commonly used in South Australia. Whilst water licence holders are not required to use satellite technology, the [South Australian Licensed Water Use Meter Specification](#) requires that all

meters shall be capable of being fitted with an electronic output device (EOD) to allow for transmission of information to distant points. This may be by way of an EOD included on/in the supplied meter or by the availability of an optional and fully compatible EOD device that can easily be retrofitted to each meter at a future date.

The Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources is using online technology to allow water licence holders to submit an online meter reading at any time. Should a customer submit a meter reading and provide contact details, an automatic water usage advice statement is supplied (like a bank statement for a water account). This functionality allows water users to more closely monitor their water usage against the available allocation as well as make business decisions more readily.

The Department is currently exploring the potential benefits of utilising satellite technology (such as the internet of things or virtual water meter technology) to enhance compliance monitoring programmes, as well as gain insight into crop/industry based irrigation practices.

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In reply to **Senator GALLACHER** (2 November 2017):

*“What would be the prohibition on making an individual irrigator's data public?”*

**RESPONSE:**

Typically, Government agencies should not disclose private information unless required to do so by law, such as under the *Freedom of Information Act* or by a Court. Providing personal information in absence of a legal requirement to do so may expose the agency to legal liability as a result of the disclosure.

The collection, use, storage and disclosure of personal information by South Australian Government agencies is governed by the [Information Privacy Principles Instruction](#). The Information Privacy Principles are intended to manage privacy in South Australia by regulating the conduct of South Australian public sector agencies.

Where the use or disclosure of personal information is requested, the Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources (the Department) assesses the request on a case by case basis and seeks specific legal advice regarding the use or release of the information.

The Department maintains a publically accessible [Water Licence and Permit Register](#) on its website. This register allows someone to view information associated with a water licence, such as the water allocation and water source details (such as a well number), provided that they can supply either the water licence number or relevant title details. This register does not include water usage information.

In addition, the Department undertakes annual public reporting of compliance actions from the previous water use year and the compliance focus for the current water use year on our [‘Water Compliance Reporting’](#) Web page.

Where a successful prosecution has been undertaken, a media release is issued by the Department, including the offender's name, details of the offence(s) and the judgement handed down. This information is also publically available on the relevant Court's website.