

Water Accounting in the Lachlan and Belubula Rivers

High security licences (towns, stock and domestic and HS irrigation entitlements) in the Lachlan and Belubula Rivers operate under annual accounting and general security licences operate under continuous accounting.

High security licences will generally receive 100% allocation at the start of the water year, unless there are severe drought conditions. High security licences cannot carry over from one water year to the next, so any water allocation unused at the end of the water year is forfeited.

The Water Sharing Plan (WSP) requires that enough water is reserved to run the river, supply high security needs and deliver replenishment flows through a repeat of the worst drought on record up to 2004 (when the WSP was introduced) before any water can be distributed to general security licences. This means there must be approximately 2 years supply in reserve to meet these essential requirements before an Available Water Determination (AWD) can be made to general security.

Under continuous accounting Available Water Determinations are made to general security licences when water surplus to the essential requirements becomes available. There is no forfeiture of water in GS accounts at the end of the water year, and water can be carried forward indefinitely, subject to account limits.

In the Belubula the general security account limit is 130% of entitlement.

Lachlan

In the Lachlan the general security account limit is 200% of entitlement, but when all storages are full the general security share of the storages is equivalent to 136% of entitlement, therefore any water held in general security accounts above 136% will be spilled if there is an account spill and reset.

Usage is controlled by way of the Use Limit, and is limited to no more than 100% of entitlement in a year, regardless of how much water has been allocated. The general security account is split into a Take sub-account to hold the water that can be used in the current year, and a Hold sub-account to hold the water that must be used in a future year. The Take account cannot be more than 100% of entitlement unless Take water from another licence is transferred in during the current year.

The Use Limit is set each year by DPI Water based on whether the usage in previous years has been above or below the long term baseline diversion limit. Since the end of the millennium drought the Use limit in the Lachlan has been 100%.

There is no limit to the volume of water that can be transferred into a general security account in any one year, but the account balance cannot exceed 200% of entitlement at any time. Any water held in the account above 136% is at risk of spill.

The WSP states that if there is a physical storage spill OR if airspace operations are commenced, the water in general security accounts will be spilled and reset. The maximum account reset is 136% but the reset may be at a lower level if, for example, the account spill has been triggered by airspace operations and Wyangala Dam is not full.

