

Answers to frequently-asked questions

There has been a significant increase in the development of infrastructure that is capable of floodplain harvesting across many parts of the NSW Northern Basin. This increase in infrastructure is likely to have caused a growth in water diversions above statutory limits. Where this is the case, this growth will need to be offset in order to comply with water sharing plans and Murray-Darling Basin Plan limits.

In 2013, the NSW Government introduced the Floodplain Harvesting Policy to stop unconstrained floodplain harvesting by bringing it into a licensing framework that complies with the statutory limits. The policy is currently being implemented in the designated floodplains of the five northern NSW valleys. It will then be rolled out across the state on a risk basis.

What is floodplain harvesting?

Floodplain harvesting is the collection, extraction or impoundment of water flowing across floodplains that is not already catered for by an existing access licence, a basic right or a licence exemption.

The floodplain flows can originate from local runoff that has not yet entered the main channel of a river, or from water that has overflowed from the main channel of a stream during a flood.

How has it been managed to-date?

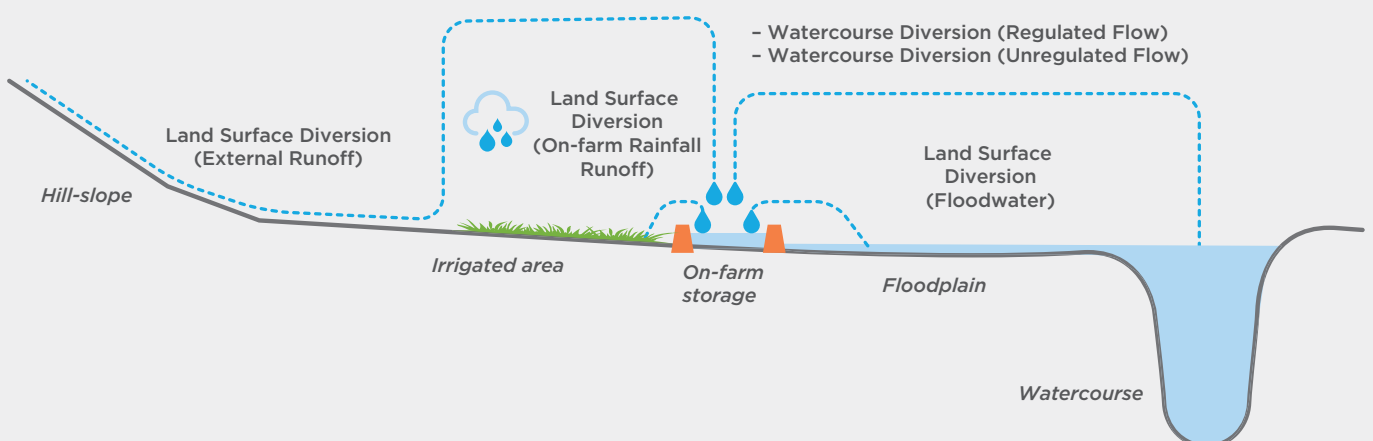
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Why are we now regulating floodplain harvesting?

If floodplain harvesting is allowed to grow unconstrained, it will reduce the volume of water available for downstream users and the environment. There is strong evidence to suggest that floodplain harvesting has increased in the Northern Basin in recent times. Regulating floodplain harvesting is the most appropriate way to ensure that all users get their fair share.

What is floodplain harvesting?





Why is the Northern Basin the priority area for implementing the NSW Floodplain Harvesting Policy?

Although floodplain harvesting can occur on any floodplain, the most significant volumes are associated with the regulated rivers in the Northern Basin.

In contrast to the Southern Basin, the Northern Basin has long rivers with small public dams. This has meant that irrigation industry in the Northern Basin has had to invest heavily in private on-farm dams to improve water reliability and efficiency. This infrastructure is used opportunistically to capture and store floodplain water, it is also used to capture and store other forms of surface and groundwater. Floodplain harvesting is currently estimated to account for more than 25% of total water use in the Northern Basin.

The regulation of floodplain harvesting in other areas of NSW will be considered on a risk basis after we complete the Northern Basin rollout.

How are we building confidence and trust?

We are using complex hydrological modelling to determine floodplain harvesting entitlements. This is pioneering work and of interest to many stakeholders.

The department has commissioned an independent peer review to work along stakeholders to understand their issues and concerns. We will publish the peer review findings and an action plan to address any recommendations made.

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NSW Department of Industry | PUBXX/XX



While floodplain harvesting in the Northern Basin supports irrigated agricultural production, having adequate flood flows are important to maintain the health of floodplain vegetation and wetlands, and to recharge groundwater systems. Flood flows are also critically important for downstream water uses such as irrigation, town water supplies, dryland cropping and grazing.

Flood flows connect all of these environments and keep them healthy for present and future generations.

What does the NSW Floodplain Harvesting Policy do?

The NSW Floodplain Harvesting Policy describes the process for regulating and managing floodplain harvesting to keep it within existing limits. The policy was first announced in 2008 (and launched in 2013) and specified that only licences with legitimate floodplain harvesting works as at 1 July 2008 would be eligible for a future floodplain harvesting licence. Works carried out after this date would not be eligible.

The capability of these eligible works, in conjunction with water sharing rules, will be used to define floodplain harvesting entitlement shares. Together, these entitlements and water sharing rules will ensure that total diversions remain at or below existing limits. Across the Northern Basin, this will mean an effective decrease in floodplain harvesting in order to curb growth above existing limits.

Implementing the policy involves amending water sharing plans, which we will do in consultation with all stakeholders to ensure we get the balance right.

More information

You can find more information on floodplain harvesting, the policy and the consultation process on the department's healthy floodplains webpages at www.industry.nsw.gov.au (search for 'healthy floodplains project')